

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/01

Paper 1

General comments

The improvement in the structuring of essays, which was commented on in the previous report, has been maintained by the majority of Centres. Introductions now usually set the scene for what is to follow quite clearly and succinctly. In too many instances however, conclusions are not well written. They tend to repeat the main points of the essay, often in a list-like fashion, without sufficient recourse to the most significant points and without drawing the threads of the argument together to present the personal view of the candidate. There were some welcome signs again this year that candidates in some Centres had checked and corrected their English thoroughly and systematically before handing in their work. This ensured that they did not lose marks for careless, avoidable errors. This systematic checking of the English should be prioritised by all Centres in a drive to improve the standard of the written English. Many candidates still need to consider very carefully the exact wording of any essay title before finalising their choice of which essay to attempt. The attached notes on candidates' answers indicate the questions where a substantial number of candidates did not study the essay title with sufficient care. This led to their essays being only partly or marginally relevant because they ignored key words and did not address the essay as set, which resulted in an unnecessary loss of marks. Likewise, an essay question on the examination paper within a topic area, which may have been anticipated and rehearsed in lessons, does not necessarily indicate that this is an obvious, easy option for the candidate. The candidate may have a good, overall knowledge of the topic, which obviously could be utilised, but it is absolutely vital to read the question with the utmost care to pick out the key words. The precise wording of the question needs the closest scrutiny so that the candidate can respond to it in a direct and precise manner without digression and irrelevance and without simply recording everything which has been learnt about the topic area. The skill lies in the ability to tailor one's knowledge to the specific demands of the question. It is a skill that needs to be acquired and practised by a not insignificant number of candidates.

As has been the pattern for many years, a wide range of ability was seen again this year, particularly in the fluency and accuracy of the English. Weaker scripts are sometimes so full of errors that the meaning of the content is difficult or even impossible to deduce.

Examiners saw a number of poorly presented scripts this year. Deficiencies included scarcely legible handwriting, no margins on the answer paper and no question numbers being provided. Rough work was sometimes not crossed out.

This year Examiners noted more 'short' answers (under 250 words) and more 'shortish' answers (251-450 words) than usual.

There were a few incidences of rubric infringement, mostly where two questions were attempted from one section.

Use of time

Most candidates experienced few problems coping with the time allowance on this syllabus. However, as in recent sessions, a number of candidates spend too much time on one essay to the detriment of the second essay. The second essay is often rushed and sometimes incomplete. This also means that little or no time is left to check for careless errors in the English.

Some candidates need to apportion sufficient time to a clear lesson plan to ensure that they have sufficient material to answer a question in full and then to organise a clear structure for the development of the essay.

Use of English

As previously mentioned in the report and in recent sessions, Examiners see evidence of a wide range of candidates' ability to write English fluently. Some candidates have virtually full operational command of the language and therefore score highly in the Use of English mark but the weakest candidates are unable to express themselves with any real accuracy which often leads to the content being obscured. However, in most cases, even if the English is not totally accurate or the idiom is sometimes not fully appropriate, there is no real problem following the points that the candidate is attempting to make.

Some candidates often have a wide range of vocabulary at their disposal but are not always able to use these words in the correct context.

It is regrettable that the same errors occur every year. A systematic eradication of these rudimentary errors in the following list is the quickest route to higher marks for the use of English element.

- subject/verb non-agreement
- missing endings on plural nouns because of carelessness and/or poor checking
- frequent incorrect use of definite and indefinite articles
- confusion between their/there, to/too, here/hear
- incorrect use of apostrophes
- incorrect comparative forms, such as more easier/more richer/more harder
- incorrect use of commas, leading to loss and/or ambiguity of meaning
- words not separated e.g. 'alot' 'infact' 'aswell'.

Candidates need to be more aware of the value of a systematic check in the last few minutes of the examination. There is some evidence that a number of Centres have made noticeable progress in this direction and it is to be hoped that others will guide and aid their candidates in this way.

Comments on specific questions

1 Not a very popular question. There was little direct reference to 'your' country and very few examples were offered. Any threat was identified in very generalised terms and usually linked to increasing materialism and westernisation. There was surprisingly little discussion of religious influences or of the social importance of marriage and family in the raising of children.

2 Quite a popular question. Almost half the responses were competent or above average. Many answers were perhaps understandably focused on the younger generation and seemed influenced by technological innovation, westernisation and increasing affluence. The better answers included traditional games and pastimes enjoyed by parents and grandparents with direct reference to and examples from their own country.

3 This attracted few responses. Most candidates were simply unaware of the range of historical evidence available and not familiar with means of verification which meant that reliable and unreliable sources could not be adequately discussed. Few examples were offered apart from archaeological remains. However, a sizeable minority of budding historians were able to discuss the range of sources and issues in some depth and were able to support their main points with relevant illustration.

4 A popular question which tended to produce rather generalised answers and to over-praise government for providing even very basic services. Some answers hinted at all kinds of corruption with tax money disappearing into the pockets of those in power but little evidence was supplied to support this point. Better answers knew the various channels through which different taxes flow and were able to give detailed and concrete examples of how their particular government had spent tax revenue wisely, and in some cases unwisely, on identified and democratically agreed priorities.

5 This was a topic which was quite popular, particularly with male candidates some of whom were very knowledgeable about the financial excesses of the Premier League in England. Not surprisingly, candidates tended to deal with negative issues such as grotesquely high wages and transfer fees, profit focused club owners, performance enhancing drugs, cheating, winning by whatever means and by match fixing and gambling. Most felt that many sportsmen were not good role models, although better responses picked out examples to illustrate the opposite, thus balancing the picture to some extent. They were also able to point to sports where amateur ideals still thrive and amateur sportsmen are active in raising money for charities.

6 Not a popular question and not generally well answered because a number of candidates attempting this question did not really properly understand the concept of alternative medicine. However, a few responses were very good with excellent knowledge shown and examples given of a range of accepted alternative therapies from different parts of the globe.

7 A very popular question. This produced a many good responses from candidates who knew how to put their subject knowledge to best advantage. They used detailed examples to underline their main points and looked in some depth at how present and potential dangers are being addressed. Weaker answers were not really evaluative and offered little assessment of whether cyber crime represents an ever-increasing danger. They also included very few examples of media reported cyber crime.

8 Another popular question which produced few poor answers. The average responses tended to be limited to the obvious points about human/plant life etc. being totally and irrevocably dependent on water while oil, although being useful for fuel and derivatives such as plastic, can pollute and harm life. These answers tended to lack a considered balance as the positives about oil were often underplayed. Better answers, which were not uncommon, dealt with more sophisticated issues such as renewability and ownership of water as a possible flashpoint between neighbouring countries.

9 Also a popular answer tackled by many who did not possess the scientific knowledge to argue for and against the proposition with any conviction and who demonstrated little awareness of how human activity could have or did in fact cause global warming. The best responses showed how the planet's natural cycle could have been affected by increasing industrial emissions and, above all, what measures can be taken to slow down, arrest or mitigate its effects. Such answers also stressed the need for global research and cooperation at all levels to predict and address any potential future dangers to the planet and its inhabitants.

10 Not very popular. Candidates outlined basic needs and development priorities of developing countries in general terms but often did not include environmental concerns. A few better answers showed that economic growth and environmental safeguards could co-exist, given careful planning. This was illustrated by such developments as eco-tourism, sustainable agricultural projects and 'sensitive' land reclamation.

11 Reasonably popular. Usually quite well done with examples offered mainly from TV, cinema, sport and fashion. Negative aspects were focused on extravagant lifestyles leading to various excesses and antisocial behaviour. Candidates also identified an obsession with the 'perfect' body and image in general and other forms of egocentricity to the detriment of more fundamental and lasting human values. Although candidates did admire some of the celebrities for different reasons such as looks and/or sporting skills, the general consensus was that most were not good role models. Some pitied the celebrities for being pursued by newshounds and paparazzi but few realised that many celebrities relish being constantly in the headlines. Better answers were not confined to negative aspects and were thus better balanced and gave examples of celebrities lending support to charitable work and supporting various humanitarian causes. They evaluated clearly the features and extent of contemporary celebrity culture which is fuelled by sections of the media.

12 Moderately popular but not usually answered very well. Most responses were limited in scope, with scant reference to technology in libraries and the variety of services modern libraries offer. Most answers tended to be limited to school or local libraries, with hardly a reference to specialist collections or the conservation of historic texts. Similarly, the role of libraries in supporting education and culture received little attention.

13 A reasonably popular topic which produced a wide range of quality in the responses. Weaker answers drifted into generalised comment on music and failed to show the particular appeal of the chosen genre and there was too often a lack of illustrative examples. Better answers were understandably dominated by those who actually played an instrument, were brought up in a musical family and who had been exposed to music from the earliest age. They made the reasons for the appeal of their chosen music abundantly clear and major points were supported by naming specific composers and appropriate pieces of music.

14 Few takers for this question. 'Art' was neither well defined nor discussed with any conviction. There was also a lack of supporting examples. Weaker answers concentrated on the 'eye of the beholder' indicating that opinions can differ considerably on 'beauty', but a link was seldom made to art or particular artists.

15 A moderately popular topic which produced some reasonable if unexceptional responses. Most answers focused on demonstrating that television has broadened horizons, mainly via news programmes and documentaries. Very few candidates ventured a look at the limitations or possible downside of television's world-wide coverage. Again opportunities were missed to consolidate major points with relevant examples.