

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/11

Paper 11

General Comments

In this examination session there were some very perceptive, balanced answers that made use of a range of illustrative examples to develop thoughtful positions on an issue.

Candidates who spent time planning their essays wrote with the coherence and cohesion that is the hallmark of a well-constructed essay. A few minutes spent in planning would reveal what is known about the topic in question and if little is written in the few minutes of planning a candidate ought to reconsider his or her choice. The constant recycling of the same idea throughout an answer can, therefore, be avoided. By far the most common reason for lower marks on content was not organising material to meet the needs of the question.

All the essay topics require evaluation and there was plenty of evidence this year that candidates saw the need to discuss rather than assert. However there are still instances where declaration or even exhortations serve as a substitute for assessment. An issue here was the presence of “token” counter-arguments; a candidate would argue in detail for a particular position (in the case of many questions, quite appropriately) but insert a late paragraph giving an overview of some counter-arguments. Such arguments were then rarely discussed or developed. On other occasions there was a tendency to keep to an over-rigid structure which saw the candidate giving roughly equal space to arguments on both sides and declaring allegiance to both, prior to finishing on a conclusion that declared a point of view. The best answers, and there were many of these, developed a point of view throughout the course of the response, developing arguments and discussion of potential counter-arguments as the answer progressed.

It is important that candidates make reference to and discuss relevant illustrative material where appropriate. A few answers suffered from a lack of such material or in some cases examples that led the candidate away from the main thrust of the question and into sometimes lengthy digressions. Another concern was the tendency to invent information and statistics, presumably in order to add authority to the position taken as well as provide illustrations. Candidates need to be advised that should they be tempted to devise “on the spot” illustrations, they can weaken their argument considerably and therefore they risk being penalised for factual inaccuracies. Many of these “on the spot” illustrations were anecdotal. There is nothing wrong with anecdote where it serves to enrich analysis but it can never be a substitute for debate and discussion of the broader issues.

Use of English

The majority of the candidates wrote in an appropriately academic style. Introductory paragraphs were usually informative and concluding paragraphs, in the better responses, offered more than a mere summary of what had gone before. Readers enjoy confident conclusions, those which affirm succinctly the results of the preceding debate.

A few candidates adopted a knockabout style, employing slang terms which are inappropriate in an academic essay. An easily avoided weak feature was the use of casual discourse markers at the opening of paragraphs; for example, ‘and more’, ‘to go on’, ‘to continue’, ‘for starters’, ‘to wrap it all up’ and so on. A fresh, lively style was a feature of many essays but candidates need to be reminded they are writing for a specific audience, the Examiner. Due formality is required in an academic essay.

It is pleasing to note that candidates organised their time well, in most cases writing essays of equal and acceptable length.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section 1

Question 1

This was a minority choice and was handled well by those candidates who have a rich store of relevant historical knowledge. Some did not respond to the invitation to discuss empires and wrote about unpopular governments or brutal regimes, which inevitably led to less well focused and, at best, tangential answers. To gain a high mark candidates could not afford to ignore the second part of the question about “today’s world”. Several interesting answers referred to economic imperialism as a feature of today’s empire building.

Question 2

This was another minority choice. The better answers focused on issues like the development of motor skills and the importance of self-expression and individuality. A few very good responses talked about the demise of calligraphy and the potential loss of valuable art forms should handwriting no longer be taught. The fact that not everyone possesses a computer was also recognised.

Question 3

This was one of the most popular questions on the paper and it generally produced reasonably successful answers. Some candidates wrote persuasively about the moral and social influence of parents and the need for close relationship between parent and child on the matter. Others wrote of the greater knowledge and specialisms of teachers and the education system. Many of the convincing responses opted for a dual role of parents and School and referred to different ages at which children mature. A number of sensitive answers considered religious affiliation, the difficulties faced by single parents, and the problems posed by inadequate parenting.

Question 4

This was another very popular question which elicited a wide range of responses. Some candidates spoke in an intelligent and reasoned way about the importance of balancing the needs of the indigenous population with the economic benefits that immigrants bring to a country. Some less successful answers took a position that immigration was a bad thing and then talked about the alleged results of crime, prostitution and pollution, frequently assuming a link without explaining why.

Question 5

This was a reasonably popular question and one that attracted a large number of well-argued responses, arguing either that the great strides forward made by feminism meant that women were winning the ‘wars’ or that, despite this, men still held the upper hand in politics and business and that wage disparities continued to persist. Others recognised that cultures continued to exist in the world where women’s rights were an undeveloped concept, at most. The question did not prove to be the battleground for the sexist minority.

Section 2

Question 6

Generally this question was thoughtfully answered though a few candidates saw older age as no more than a vale of tears. Some candidates gave convincing arguments in favour of living longer, including the benefits of spending more time with loved ones, accumulating greater experiences and living through fascinating changes. Others saw the reverse side of such benefits and adopted a doom laden approach, foreseeing a world in which one was left alone with all loved ones dead, alienated in a technological world, riddled with disease and infirmity. Answers which only gave details of the debilitating effects of old age did less well.

Question 7

Very few candidates responded to this question. Of these, many did not grasp the importance of mathematics in our everyday lives. The pleasures of mathematics and its complexities were seldom mentioned.

Question 8

This was a fairly popular question and the majority of those who did select it wrote very well about prospects for an impending apocalypse but either gave scant reference to writers or neglected to mention them at all. Those who did tended to write very good, interesting answers. They included in their answers reference to Huxley, Orwell, and Bradbury, for example.

Question 9

A large number of candidates responded to this question. The old adage “Read the question carefully” always applies but in this instance the question was about **information** technology not technology in general. Also several candidates ignored the “over-reliance” aspect of the question and simply wrote paragraphs about how computers had changed the world. Some, unfortunately, assumed “reliant on” meant “reliable” so producing irrelevant discussions on the reliability of their computers. Those who took a global view did well.

Question 10

This was another minority choice but most of those who selected it wrote very well, balancing breakthroughs in science with moral concerns from humanists, religious groups and other scientists.

Section 3

Question 11

Only a few attempted this question and not always very successfully, writing about photographs in general and having little to say about political or social awareness. A minority of respondents wrote about the role of photography in war reporting, the potential for its use for propaganda purposes and how easily images can be manipulated out of context, and scored very well. Some stretched the notion of photography too far, referring, for example, to television news bulletins.

Question 12

Inevitably a very popular question and those that chose it had celebrity knowledge and often good judgement. Candidates considered the negative moral messages of a host of rappers and supermodels against the valuable charity work some celebrities do. In addition, a few thoughtful candidates discussed celebrity culture and how its very existence encouraged excess.

Question 13

This was a fairly popular question. Lengthy accounts of famous orators or writers lead to a loss of emphasis on whether it was easier to communicate in writing or speech. Simplistic responses which asserted one over the other did not score well. Those who considered tone and emphasis gained higher marks.

Question 14

Most of those who answered this question made a thoughtful attempt to justify their choice of book whereas some merely gave the plot of a book, or characterisation, without the required reasons. Nevertheless some candidates wrote very perceptively about style and features that raised their chosen novel above the rest and some concentrated on the social or cultural impact of a particular novel. There were a few extremely compelling answers about how a book had completely changed attitudes towards other people and society; these were very honest and powerful articulations of the transformative power of literature.

Question 15

Where this question was answered well, candidates wrote about the power of cartoons to educate, to introduce children to important moral messages, and to address serious issues about prejudice. Those who offered examples of cartoons and cartoon characters linked to serious ideas provided the evidence without which a good mark was impossible to achieve.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/12

Paper 12

Key Messages

Content

- Answer the **set** question and focus on the key words
- Support your main points with appropriate examples
- Keep anecdotal/personal evidence to a minimum.
- An introduction should immediately address the question and show understanding of it.
- A conclusion should be a reasoned assessment of the arguments made.

Use of English

- Leave time to check your English thoroughly to avoid basic errors
- Concentrate on using appropriate vocabulary so expression is fluent and precise

General comments

There were many detailed and thorough responses which answered the question as set and utilised a variety of examples to illustrate the main points of the essay. There were other examples which offered few or no examples at all, resulting in vague and generalised arguments which either lacked conviction or were unconvincing. When the set question demands it, candidates should focus on aspects of their own country; if this is not the prompt then a broader focus is required. Stronger responses demonstrated good topic knowledge and included local, regional and global examples to support points. Weaker responses wrote on topics with which they were insufficiently familiar and provided little or no evidence to support points made.

Most candidates used the time reasonably efficiently and were able to produce two clearly structured essays of around the recommended length. Introductions were often too long and unfocused; key words should always be addressed to show understanding. Less effective conclusions merely listed points from the essay rather than arriving at a reasoned, personal assessment.

Despite the rarity of Rubric infringements and 'short' essays (less than 375 words), the quality of the Use of English was variable. A substantial number of candidates have acquired a wide-ranging English vocabulary but need to improve putting these words in an appropriate context. Similarly, candidates could improve their English mark by checking for basic errors, as outlined below. A thorough and systematic checking for such slips would greatly improve the standard as well as clarifying content.

Use of English

Basic errors need to be checked and corrected in order to improve English marks. Typical examples are listed below:

- Subject/verb non-agreement
- Frequent incorrect use of definite/indefinite article (the society)
- Omission of apostrophes
- Confusion between their/there, to/too, your/you're
- Incorrect comparative forms
- Missing endings on plurals because of poor checking
- Incorrect use of vocabulary

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was quite popular with some detailed, well-structured responses. Some candidates did provide a balance between Eastern and Western dominance, with a range of exemplification. There was a tendency to refer to 'the East' as a generalised term for Middle East, Far East, Japan. Responses were mostly about India/China and the re-location of Multi-Nationals for cheaper production. A minority of candidates just described Eastern trade, culture and influences with little reference to the West.

Question 2

Not popular, but most candidates did offer a description of particular individuals in history (Mandela, Hitler, Jinnah). More successful responses began to evaluate the individuals' impact on changing history through personality, style of leadership, political attitudes or significant discovery. Often there was insufficient emphasis on the political/economic/social context in which they were operating.

Question 3

Generally these were balanced appraisals which largely focused on British colonisation of the Indian sub-continent. Broader references were made to the New World, slavery and Africa. Most praised the colonisers for the benefits they brought the local people (infrastructure, education, trade). Occasional responses misinterpreted colonisation as globalisation.

Question 4

A popular question with most candidates focusing on the advantages of university as essential for a professional career and better paid job. Nearly all candidates mentioned 'not essential' in terms of Bill Gates/Steve Jobs as successful 'university drop-outs' but often with little development. Some references were made to the importance of work experience with occasional examples. Better responses did examine university life and its contribution to 'character building' but there were usually insufficient details.

Question 5

This was a question which required secure knowledge and understanding. Most responses were hesitant about the U.N.'s function, with some inaccuracies/generalisations when evaluating the U.N.'s effectiveness in resolving conflict situations. Often there was awareness of the wider role of the U.N. in humanitarian issues and disaster relief, but also confusion when attempting to examine its level of achievement, either resorting to a series of negative assertions or just describing the plight of various countries. Better responses did consider its various agencies (W.H.O., U.N.E.S.C.O., F.A.O) and gave a balanced assessment of the question's 'achieved little'.

Question 6

This was a popular topic with a very wide scope, requiring the candidate to select material appropriately and present it within a well-structured framework. Most candidates showed knowledge of specific resources in their countries but some became confused between prioritising basic needs and the provision of services and utilities. Usually there was an awareness of basic problems (clean drinking water, power cuts, unwillingness/lack of funding to exploit raw materials), but responses were limited in examining reasons for the government's ineffectiveness in utilising them. A minority of candidates did cover a range of natural and man-made resources and assessed whether they met the needs of local people.

Question 7

A popular topic, some responses did examine specialist and leadership skills as part of a doctor's remit or were particularly perceptive in the evaluation of qualities required. Many candidates simply listed qualities, with little assessment, but managed to provide an overview.

Question 8

Not a popular topic. A majority of candidates emphasised the impact of Global Warming with little reference to other issues like prediction, protection/defence, evacuation, hurricane-proof shelters, air-conditioning. There was some confusion/exaggeration but mainly responses did not address the question. Some candidates did provide balance and examples, emphasising the utilisation of certain climatic features (e.g. Irrigation/dam systems to utilise rainfall)

Question 9

Not a popular topic but one which produced balanced responses from most candidates. There was limited reference to balance of power as candidates tended to concentrate on national defence but were also aware of the threat of terrorist acquisition and indiscriminate shootings.

Question 10

Quite popular but too many responses focused just on nuclear weapons development. Better answers used nuclear weapons as part of a wider argument against nuclear power generation and then balanced them with arguments supporting nuclear power. Many candidates were familiar with the processes and benefits and almost without exception quoted Chernobyl and Japan as examples of potential dangers. The strongest responses considered the expensive set-up costs for third world countries establishing this form of energy generation, examining such difficulties in the context of alternative products.

Question 11

Surprisingly few candidates attempted this question. It produced more limited responses when references were made to 'traditional arts' only. 'Performing' was sometimes implied through references to festivals but there were few examples. This was a question which required examples to strengthen the content. Only a few candidates managed to do this, using examples to show regional variations and placing them in the context of 'preservation' and disinterested attitudes.

Question 12

This question was attempted by very few candidates. Architectural examples were listed with brief comments about the obvious functions of each. One or two candidates did evaluate aesthetic appeal as distinct from functional purpose and argued that both were necessary, as part of a reasoned conclusion.

Question 13

Quite popular, with good responses providing positive support for artistic endeavours, and including a range of appropriate examples. The best responses provided balance against the idea of 'useless' and gave examples. Sometimes there was too much description of artistic works but some candidates did refer to Oscar Wilde's own work as a challenge to the question.

Question 14

Not very popular. Most candidates tended to generalise about culture and identity and referred to the dominance of English as taking away culture. One or two responses did acknowledge their historical/cultural validity and uniqueness. It was a question which required specialist knowledge although some candidates did mention their own language, but without development.

Question 15

Very few responses. Most of the candidates generalised about heroic qualities, often providing biographical details of real life 'heroes'. Part of the question referred to 'reading' and when this was not addressed responses were limited. Some candidates identified one reading source with one type of heroism. The strongest ones identified several reading sources, including newspaper articles, and compared different heroic qualities. A reasoned conclusion evaluated which one illustrated 'heroism' most effectively.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/13

Paper 13

Key messages

Content

- Focus on the keywords in the question
- Choose your two questions carefully, making sure you understand them fully and have sufficient knowledge/examples to produce meaningful content.

Use of English

- Check your English thoroughly to avoid careless errors
- Avoid writing in a 'chatty', informal style

General Comments

There were many detailed and thorough responses which addressed the question, focusing on the keywords and supplying a variety of relevant examples to illustrate the main points. A number of responses contained few or no examples, resulting in vague and generalised arguments; credible evidence, not just anecdotes, is needed to support points.

Candidates should focus on their own country when prompted to in the question; if this is not the case then a broader focus is required. Many candidates did possess good knowledge of the topic, and provided balanced answers to the question.

Quite a few candidates wrote their answers in informal, colloquial English which was inappropriate for a serious, formal examination. Often this reduced the impact of important statements. Some candidates did adapt the tone to match the requirements of the question and writing was often accurate with appropriate vocabulary.

Most candidates managed their time wisely and completed both essays but there was evidence that some candidates rushed the second one, leaving insufficient time to conduct a thorough and systematic check of the English.

Introductions should focus on the key words of the question, to show understanding of it rather than be a lengthy pre-amble. Conclusions should not simply list the points made in the main body of the essay but should be a reasoned assessment of previous arguments.

Although there were very few instances of rubric infringement, a number of essays were 'short' (below 375 words) and lost marks for the Use of English, as a result. Also, this would not be of sufficient length to develop a meaningful argument.

It is important to emphasise that candidates need to answer the actual question set and not offload everything they know about a topic area.

Use of English

Use of English marks can be needlessly lost through basic errors and informal expression, examples of which are listed below:

- Subject/verb non-agreement

- Informal vocabulary such as 'kinda', 'gotten', 'awesome' and 'Right!'/ 'Yeh' as one word sentences to emphasise a point.
- Words not separated e.g. 'a lot', 'infact', 'aswell'.
- Confusion between there/their, to/too, hear/here, crisis/crises
- Incorrect use of apostrophes.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Quite a popular choice and reasonably well answered. Whereas some candidates just listed the advantages of living in America, better ones considered the advantages of wealth, class and race with reference to ability and achievement. Often there was a discussion of 'the American Dream' but with varying degrees of understanding; as 'the land of the free' and 'opportunity', America was often considered completely 'meritocratic'. The best responses concluded that hard work resulted in success and idleness in failure but only after considering a variety of examples and balanced arguments.

Question 2

This was popular and required coverage of all three aspects of the question. Many candidates tended to concentrate on 'nationalism'/'commercialism' but ignored 'sport'. Better responses did cover all aspects with examples. Michael Phelps was placed in the context of patriotic fervour (award ceremonies) and sponsorship details. This integration, using a specific example, did characterise the best responses.

Question 3

Not a popular question. Some candidates misinterpreted the question, as having to pay extra taxes on what they were already paying and, therefore, tended to respond negatively. The best responses considered the future value of graduates to both the economy and society, suggesting subsidies would encourage poor candidates, with ability, to apply and that this would be beneficial to everyone.

Question 4

Only one or two did this question and showed little understanding of 'ethical'. They used the example of cars consuming too much oil but without stating possible alternatives. Consequently responses were vague and 'list-like.' Better essays were not available.

Question 5

Not popular and some candidates misunderstood 'positive', suggesting that all discrimination was wrong. Some did understand but argued that, in a society which prided itself on equal opportunity, minorities should not be given any advantages. Better candidates considered the question carefully and gave balanced responses with examples. The key to the question was not only understanding 'positive discrimination' but also being able to look at both sides of the argument in the context of 'fairness to all'.

Question 6

Not popular and most candidates tended to over simplify, limiting their response to 'sun-bathing' and 'snow shovelling'. There was minimal awareness of world geography and a tendency to ignore 'live and work'. The best responses covered climate and weather patterns and the effect on work, lifestyles, economies and politics.

Question 7

It was reported that not one candidate did this question.

Question 8

This was a popular choice but few candidates fully answered the question. Some misinterpreted 'cyberspace' as meaning 'space wars' but most ignored 'cyberspace' and just focused on arguments supporting the idea that 'armed forces' should be present in all countries. The best ones focused on

'sufficient', balancing 'armed forces' with the dangers of hacking/computer viruses. Reasoned conclusions tended to acknowledge that physical defence of a country would always be necessary.

Question 9

Quite popular but some responses were one-sided, expressing fears of terrorism and linking to anti-immigration; often arguments were in the form of a series of assertions. The best ones considered the value of tests, detailing what their content might be and suggesting they were unfair because Americans would be unlikely to pass them, concluding that they were discriminatory. This was balanced against the possibility that they could deter terrorists and concerns that jobs might be taken by immigrants.

Question 10

Not a popular choice. Responses considered a variety of uses (paternity, identity, medical, forensic). They tended to be descriptive rather than arguing 'for and against'. The most emphasis was on forensic and the improvement in crime detection, often with little reference to DNA.

Question 11

This was quite popular and did cover a range of examples. Most tended to describe celebrities and relate them to film awards and 'purposes' (charity work, promotion, acknowledgement of talent). Better responses covered both film and book with a reasoned conclusion that awards are for profit in the film industry but are more for excellence/publicity in the book industry. It was often argued that such awards recognised newcomers and enabled them to flourish.

Question 12

Quite popular. This question encouraged personal responses and, therefore, candidates usually listed any form of art which they liked, linking to their own attitudes and personality (doodling/boredom, drawing/creative, painting/emotions). The best responses gave a range (music/drama/dance) with specific detail and examples. Some interesting responses considered web designing and video games with good detail and knowledge. Essays tended to be either too generalised or very specific.

Question 13

Quite popular. On the whole this question was well understood and answers were relevant, if not necessarily very well developed and exemplified. Celebrity news was approached with great enthusiasm and seen as 'fluffy' compared with serious news. Better responses addressed both aspects of the question and concluded that balance was needed in the news if it was to appeal to everyone. It was suggested that celebrities could be role models and, therefore, their influence/behaviour could be 'in the public interest' just as much as political events or crime stories could be interesting to the public.

Question 14

Quite popular. Candidates tended to focus on their local area, wildlife and the beaches. Some responses moved to the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone but most limited themselves to the beaches. Better responses focused on the irony of tourism (being vital but the main reason for destruction). Also, a range was considered and then 'greatest need' was addressed. Good knowledge was shown of the natural attractions.

Question 15

Quite a few chose this question but many gave personal anecdotes of friends having accidents and learning to cope through laughter. This question did require a good understanding of satire and how comedy can be a sharp focus on society's failings. Some responses did recognise the various ways in which a society can laugh at itself, describing satirical comics and programmes on television.