

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.

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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

