

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/01

Paper 1

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General comments

There are four important aspects of examination technique to which far too many candidates pay insufficient attention.

When candidates have selected a question, they should read and re-read the question very carefully. They must be absolutely certain of the meaning of every word in it and of the particular demands and emphases of the question. To write in general, descriptive terms on the topic area with little or no reference to the question as set, will mean low marks for content.

The next stage is to draw up an essay plan which sets out the points in logical sequence with appropriate paragraph headings. It is not a good idea to write an essay of two distinct parts where the points made in the second section would seem to contradict those in the first part, rather like a reversed mirror image. Major points need not be 'black and white'; they can contain provisos or some acknowledgement of other viewpoints.

When writing the actual essay, candidates should make their major points all the more credible and convincing by supporting them with illustrative examples, drawn where appropriate from local, national and/or international sources.

The final aspect is to leave a good amount of time to run a thorough and mechanical check of the English in each sentence so that careless errors do not limit the mark that can be awarded for Use of English.

The content of many essays this session was too descriptive, and many candidates missed opportunities to be analytical. A common fault across the whole ability range was not answering the actual question on the examination paper by simply writing in very general terms about the particular topic area.

Many candidates present themselves for the examination armed with over-learnt material on selected topics. This is only advisable if candidates possess the necessary skill to tailor that material to the particular demands of the set question. An inability to do this satisfactorily was seen in many essays, especially responses to the question on technology in the workplace. Many candidates simply presented rehearsed answers on modern technology; the vital link to the workplace, which the question requires, was frequently lost or even totally ignored.

Candidates should use only quotations which are apt and appropriate to the topic and acknowledge their source. The widespread practice of producing a dubious quotation of unattributed origin brings no reward, especially when it does not really fit the context.

Use of time

A small number of the second essays were clearly rushed and sometimes incomplete.

Rubric errors

It is pleasing to note that these were very rare indeed.

Use of English

A considerable number of candidates failed to obtain good marks in the Use of English element because of frequent mistakes in punctuation, grammar and, to a lesser extent, in spelling. Clearly, this is sometimes due to lack of knowledge but, in many cases, it is because of simple carelessness which can be relatively easily avoided by a final, mechanical check, sentence by sentence. Common basic errors included

- non-agreement of subject and verb incorrect tenses
- missing endings on plural nouns; incorrect comparatives e.g. more easier
- inconsistent use of 'one' (not followed by his/her/their)
- inappropriate use of the definite and indefinite article
- arbitrary use of 'the latter'
- spelling errors of commonly confused words e.g. there/their, to/too, here/hear and practise/practice.

This year, examiners felt the use of vocabulary was generally satisfactory. However, there are still quite a number of candidates who are absolutely determined to use favourite or newly acquired words in their essays and end up using them inappropriately, thus achieving the opposite of what they intended. The use of idiom remains a problem. Candidates should not be tempted to be unnecessarily ambitious in this area. They should only use idiom when they are absolutely sure of its linguistic accuracy and appropriate tone in the relevant context. Candidates should acquire, learn and then use vocabulary and idiom in context. This also helps learners to have accurate recall. Lists of words and collections of sayings and idioms are of little benefit if candidates do not know how to use them correctly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Not a popular choice. Some answers described 'bad' laws, but made scant reference to the lawmakers or their interests. Better answers looked carefully at how particular groups might be disadvantaged in society. Weaker responses referred to laws which affected the candidate or to other legislation of relatively minor importance and some wrote off the point.

Question 2

This was quite a popular question which attracted positive and negative responses depending on circumstances in the relevant home country. Some candidates wrote harrowingly about the bleak prospects in their country and doubted the relevance of the question as official statistics indicated that most of the population would be dead by their late thirties. By contrast, cultural respect for older people, more common in some countries than others, did suggest a comfortable and comforting old age in the family bosom, even if state support was felt insufficient. More able candidates commented on varying attitudes across class divisions.

Question 3

This was not overly popular but the candidates who opted to answer it were able to draw on a reasonable range of historical knowledge but were often more descriptive than analytical. Many candidates chose to ignore 'folly' and their responses lacked convincing detail. The 1914-18, 1939-35 and Iraq wars figured quite prominently in many answers but the thrust of the question was often neglected.

Question 4

This was a fairly popular question with some strong views expressed, usually in favour of nationalisation. However, some candidates seemed to think that the state could pump huge sums of money into nationalised industries for the welfare and benefit of its citizens without worrying about cost and efficiency. Better candidates made good use of local examples but very few discussed the past experience of capitalist and socialist economies with state-run industries. Some explored how private industry is subject to state control in areas such as taxation, employment legislation, environmental issues and Health and Safety regulations.

Question 5

This had very few takers and almost all who chose it failed to grasp the core of the question and did not relate 'control' to 'react' to any meaningful extent. Answers lacked illustrative examples.

Question 6

This was a popular question and many who chose it demonstrated good knowledge of such relevant areas as genetic engineering, DNA, stem cell research and cloning. Many questioned terms such as 'perfect' 'soon' and 'human being.' Better answers weighed up the practical ability and capability to develop a branch of science against its desirability. Doubts were expressed as to whether emotions and spontaneous reactions could be programmed. Some candidates took a narrower interpretation of the question and discussed how cosmetic surgeons were able to create a perfect exterior piece by piece.

Question 7

This was a very popular question. Many candidates focused mainly on diet, exercise, hygiene and cleanliness of the environment and avoiding tobacco, alcohol and exposure to disease, but fewer considered broader issues of mental attitude and well-being. Many concentrated on lifestyles and paid little attention to medicine(s) assuming that a healthy lifestyle would make medicine(s) redundant. Better answers contrasted lifestyles with reliance on medicine(s) and stated that certain medical conditions cannot be prevented or ameliorated by healthy living. They quite rightly saw medicine(s) and a healthy lifestyle as complementary.

Question 8

This question also enjoyed considerable popularity. Many candidates were able to produce numerous points for and against technology and were able to illustrate them convincingly. Unfortunately, some promising openings to this essay drifted into generalisation and the necessary link to the 'workplace' was lost or, in some cases, never established. Better answers maintained the 'workplace' link by discussing employment, RSI issues, state of the art equipment, training and general communications.

Question 9

This was not at all popular, and answers to it were usually weak. The few candidates tackling it tended just to describe the evolution of weapons from caveman times to the present day at unnecessary length. Even fewer attempted to deal with 'justify', but a handful did sense that politicians could be just as accountable as scientists, and there were some relevant discussions of the role of the nuclear deterrent during the Cold War.

Question 10

This had surprisingly few takers. Some related 'issue' to 'fault' and tried to examine to what extent other nations could be blamed for the causes of famine. Others discussed possible international solutions. Some weak candidates misinterpreted 'famine' as 'feminine'.

Question 11

This was a relatively popular question. A few knowledgeable musicians stood out from the mass whose limitations were glaringly obvious, with attempts at description far outweighing analysis and very few illustrative examples, if any, from any genre of music. Beethoven and Mozart were occasionally mentioned but no specific piece of music named. A few candidates did realise that meaning could be discovered without lyrics but could not provide convincing examples to prove the point.

Question 12

There were very few answers to this question. Less able candidates were completely obsessed by globalisation and the domination of English in the world. Better answers recognised the cultural significance and local identity of local languages and saw every reason why both minority languages and a generally accepted world language, such as English, should co-exist. Apt examples of this dual approach from various countries around the world were given.

Question 13

This was a fairly popular question. Many candidates were stronger on 'promise' than 'deliver' and provided some interesting local examples which often became too descriptive, rather than weighing the claims for a product against consumer findings. Much work on the topic of advertising had clearly preceded examination in many centres and candidates were thus able to provide a detailed picture of both persuasive and informative advertising. Unfortunately, a significant number failed to find the relevant examples to answer the question as set.

Question 14

This was not very popular and generally not well handled, with a few noticeable exceptions, particularly on political satire and cartoons. Some were able to demonstrate how comedy can convey serious messages and how comedy can engender support for certain views by making people laugh.

Question 15

There were very few answers to this. Some were able to demonstrate knowledge of certain works but again, it was description rather than analysis which prevailed. Most candidates were unable to identify and develop the aesthetic criteria by which art can be judged. Meaning and impact were too vague and non-specific to be of any real value.