

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/11

Paper 11

Key Messages

Content

- Answers should keep their focus firmly on the question actually set.
- Evidence to support opinion is essential.

Use of English

- Thoughtful paragraphing is essential for an effective essay.
- Informal, conversational style can achieve a reasonable mark, but good responses require a formal style.
- Where one word will do, use only one.
- Break up long involved sentences with appropriate punctuation.
- The use of the apostrophe is poorly understood.

General Comments

Many essays started and ended well. Introductory paragraphs usually set out the candidates' intentions. For example, one essay in response to the role of films/movies began like this: 'If you want proof that films do more than entertain, go and see *Hotel Rwanda*'. Immediately the reader is aware both of the direction that the writer is going to take and of a sense of style.

The end, of course, is just as important as the beginning. Good essays focused on the key issue(s) of the question, and their conclusions were more than merely a summary of what had gone before. This is not an easy idea to convey to candidates, but it is good practice to keep back a vital issue for the final paragraph, so that the reader completes reading the essay with the sense that the question has been fully addressed.

Many candidates reviewed issues successfully and demonstrated a wide range of knowledge of their chosen topic. There were some who simply listed what they knew, rather than using their knowledge effectively to answer the question. Better answers had clearly selected a few examples at the planning stage, which were then clearly related to the question set and supported the flow of the argument.

The best answers across the paper had breadth and depth, deploying as appropriate not just regionally-specific cultural, economic, social and scientific knowledge, but then going on from that point to consider these dimensions using examples from other parts of the world as well.

Anecdotes, using personal experience to illustrate an idea related to a developing argument, can give colour and life to an essay. Many candidates who employed this technique did so in a measured way while a few allowed themselves to get carried away. Candidates would be best advised to exercise restraint when it comes to anecdotal material.

The majority of candidates wrote full, detailed essays. The knowledge of local and international issues was very impressive. Responses from a wide range of Centres showed an awareness of the opportunities and problems that people encounter in different parts of the world. Essays requiring evaluation need conclusions that are based on assessments of the arguments proposed in the essays.

Short scripts, which incur a mark deduction, were uncommon. In fact, there were very few rubric infringements of any kind, but in a few instances a candidate wrote both of their responses from only one section of the paper. In such cases, the candidate can only be awarded the better of the two individual marks.

Comments on Use of English

While most candidates used a formal written style, some wrote in a language more appropriate to chat or informal conversation. Connected to this is the use of abbreviations such as 'etc.' and 'e.g.'. These should always be avoided in a formal academic essay. Although there were very few scripts where candidates made grammatical errors, the aspect of writing where an improvement would really benefit candidates is style. Where one word will do, use only one. It is a good idea to break up long involved sentences with appropriate punctuation. In that regard, the use of the apostrophe was insecure. Questions without the question mark were rare and the use of the exclamation mark was usually appropriate.

The vocabulary at the disposal of most candidates was wide and sophisticated. There were few instances of inappropriate use of words and only occasionally were words used purely for effect, regardless of the context and their appropriateness.

Comments on Specific Questions

1 How justified are the high salaries and bonuses paid out in some professions?

There were responses that very positively pointed out the value to companies and, most particularly, to society of having highly competent well remunerated professionals. The most perceptive essays commented on those who have to work unsociable hours for scant reward, while nevertheless pointing out that firms depend upon funds/profit to reward their employees. Candidates should be aware of the word 'justified' in the question and of the need to separate 'salaries' from 'bonuses'. Those who only opted to discuss media and sports personalities could not be awarded marks in the higher bands.

2 To what extent should a nation try to forget its past?

Candidates must decide upon the thrust of their argument when considering how they will answer questions of this kind. This was a popular question and the majority of answers followed a common pattern. Weaker responses stuck to narrative and anecdote instead of a discussion. However, there was often a range of illustrative examples, such as the Holocaust, Stalin, Pol Pot, the Armenian Genocide and colonialism. Candidates are to be commended on their knowledge, but must remember that essays, while needing examples, also need to explore opinions. In addition, there were a number of very interesting essays which discussed the significance of ancient rituals and the possible loss of culture were these to be forgotten. As far as forgetting is concerned, candidates need to recognise that it is perfectly possible for a nation to make progress and remember a past, however shameful aspects of that past may seem.

3 Should women be more prominent in the public life of your country?

Only a few answers were seen on this question and, of these, several were very informative. All candidates agreed that women should be more prominent in their nation's public life and supported this view by reference to those women already doing important work, mainly in the political sphere. Successful candidates considered various walks of life, such as the arts, education and business as well as politics and administration.

4 'Elections are meaningless as many voters have no real knowledge of national and international issues.' Discuss.

There were some good answers to this fairly popular question, even if not enough candidates made sufficient reference to both national and international issues. Among these, good answers often focused on the effects of corruption on voters' attitudes. By doing this, they offered an explanation for voter apathy that rang truer than a denunciation of voter 'laziness'. Other good answers discussed the power of the media to distort, the influence of family upon voting habits, and the failure of a nation and its education system to encourage literacy.

5 How far do you agree that an hereditary monarch as Head of State is preferable to a President?

This question was attempted by only a few, and successfully, when the key words were understood and defined. Candidates should only attempt questions of this sort when they are sure of their ground, of the system that prevails in their own country and in possession of a sure knowledge of how most modern monarchies operate. Good answers knew about current affairs and could provide thoughtful, accurate comparisons between those countries which still have a monarchy and those which have elected presidents. Fortright opinions were often expressed on the electoral system in the candidates' own countries and, where these responses were balanced, the resultant essays were usually successful.

6 How true is it that most of the pleasurable things in life are bad for you?

This was a very popular question and those candidates who argued for moderation in all things usually did quite well. Those who recognised the dangers of addiction, but also recognised the pleasure in potentially dangerous activities, struck a note that could achieve a mark in the higher bands. Loss of objectivity and a tendency to be too personal detracted from the impact of some essays. There were, encouragingly, a number of essays that examined drug use which brings pleasure as a relief from pain, but also can be abused. The need for evaluation was indicated by the first two words of the question, 'How true ...?' Consequently, candidates who offered a simple list of food, sex, drugs, and alcohol, could only gain a limited mark.

7 Should obesity be regarded as a serious health concern?

This was the most popular question of all. All who attempted this question had knowledge of obesity and why it is of concern. Those who did well put aside their personal knowledge of the topic and paused to consider the wording of the question. The best answers undertook an evaluation of the extent to which obesity should be regarded as an issue of public as well as personal concern. These candidates considered how far the government and other agencies, such as schools, should be involved. A few answers suggested that obesity was a serious issue, but not the only serious issue, confronting society. Several candidates responded very sensitively to this question and included discussion on mental health and mobility issues. One essay contained the observation 'there are simply men who cannot afford to be obese' – a humbling thought.

8 Is the theory of evolution nothing more than a theory?

This question produced some interesting discussion and most answers were well organised. Knowledge and opinion were used to advantage, despite the polarised nature of the debate. Nearly all the candidates acknowledged the claims of science and many of those that did saw no inevitable denial of the religious view of creation. There were few dogmatic responses on either side of the debate.

9 How far is it true to claim that pesticides have done more harm than good?

This question produced some excellent responses and illustrated the virtue of candidates choosing a question about which they were knowledgeable. Responses were wide-ranging, discussing in enthusiastic detail the balance of nature from bird life to animals and plants. Other good answers examined the appalling effects of pesticide use in wartime. Most, but not all, responses recognised the good that pesticides can do; such answers, of course, had taken note of the need to recognise that 'How far ...?' questions require consideration of both sides of an argument and a judgement.

10 To what extent is it correct to claim that modern technology enables businesses to be located anywhere?

This was quite popular. Good answers recognised that the command 'To what extent ...?' required an evaluative answer. Too many candidates relied upon the listing of 'modern technology' without relating it to the matter of 'location', which is a key word in the question. Such essays would have benefited from a few minutes of initial, focused planning. Where candidates did plan their answer first, candidates discussed, for example, the advantages/disadvantages of location, transport issues and the universality of the Internet.

11 'A play can be read, but to be truly appreciated it must be seen.' How far do you agree with this view?

'How far ...?' gave scope for thoughtful opinion. Although examples of actual plays were few, candidates realised the importance of stage directions and actors' interpretations. A number of good answers argued with conviction that the imagination can be stirred either by reading the play or by seeing it. One interesting theme that emerged in some answers was the pleasure of seeing a play in areas of the world where there is widespread illiteracy.

12 'Nothing today compares with the masterpieces of previous generations.' How far do you agree with this judgement?

This question was not attempted by many, and only a few of those that answered it really engaged with what a 'masterpiece' actually is. Without such a definition, an essay lacked critical focus and tended to rely upon the mere mention of older or, indeed, current artists to try and sustain any argument.

13 'If we all spoke the same language, the world would be a better place.' How true is this?

This was a very popular question and produced a range of interesting answers. More thoughtful responses explored the cultural significance of language in different societies. Most candidates argued in favour of a plurality of languages – out of respect for their speakers and the traditions represented by them. As a general rule, those answers that simply agreed with the quotation in the question did not make their case convincingly.

14 Are films or movies only for entertainment and nothing else?

This was amongst the more popular of the questions. Answers that were focused on the question and well supported by examples reached appropriate conclusions regarding, for example, propaganda and social/historical issues. Such answers did not simply narrate the story of a film, but explored how the themes in a film can, in some cases, both educate and entertain. Good responses also saw that film takes many forms – for example, documentary and 'blockbuster' – and the argument in favour of the latter often recognised that what is superficially 'entertaining' can also present a powerful moral message.

15 How far do you agree that young people usually reject the music enjoyed by their elders?

Some candidates were aware of how music, in the widest sense, is not limited to time and place. They gave recognition to music and musicians that have gone before and, therefore, produced essays which were balanced. Those who opted to dismiss all that had gone before them, giving the generation gap as an adequate reason for such a dismissal, did not, by and large, write convincingly; most were unthinking rejections of the tastes of previous generations. If nothing else, they should have realised that such an answer would be poor because it ignored the requirement for evaluation in the command 'How far ...?'.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/12

Paper 12

Key messages

Content

- Each essay should be planned at the start of the examination.
- Answers should keep their focus firmly on the question as set.
- Evidence to support opinion is essential.

Use of English

- Leave sufficient time at the end of the examination to check the English so that careless errors can be rectified.
- Learn vocabulary in short phrases/idioms/expressions so the correct meaning and its appropriate context is understood.
- Avoid writing in slang and colloquial language. Good responses require a formal style.

General Comments

Marks ranged widely from the very high to the very low. More able candidates concentrated fully on the requirements of the question and did not wander off the point. Their essays were logically and systematically structured, demonstrating clear evidence of thoughtfulness and mature reflection as well as careful planning. Introductions provided definitions where appropriate and set the scene for the main arguments of the essay. Conclusions fully reflected the findings in the essay (not just a summary list of points). Coverage of the topic was comprehensive and knowledgeable, with local, regional and international examples used to support and emphasise key points.

Mid-range answers were largely competent and workman-like, remaining focused on the question as set with little or no digression. They revealed reasonable knowledge of the set topic and developed their main points adequately and made use of some examples to support them. Counter-arguments were, however, sometimes given scant attention so that opportunities for a more evenly balanced discussion were missed. Lower scoring answers in this range contained too much generalised comment. Others became too assertive, not always supporting their claims with evidence (or credible evidence). Sometimes, too much background information and unduly long introductions used up time which should have been devoted to answering the essence of the question.

Less satisfactory responses did not address the question properly, offered little or no substance and often drifted off the question. Relevance was sometimes implicit or only tangential. Ideas were often vague and generalised and did not demonstrate adequate development and illustration. The range of points made was often very limited and the essays lacked analysis and convincing detail. The weakest answers were often very brief with severely limited content. In many cases, very poor English obscured the meaning. There were a considerable number of very weak scripts containing very basic mistakes, especially of agreement, tense and expression. Short scripts, frequently the second of the two essays, did not give candidates the opportunity to show their ability to write well. Similarly, the content of such short responses lacked the substance and depth which the question demanded.

Few candidates misinterpreted a question completely but quite a number paid too little attention to the keywords in the set question. Some just wrote down everything they knew about the topic without relating it in any way to the question. Others did not answer the set question but, rather, the question they wish had been set or the question that they had prepared for. If the actual question set is not answered directly, the mark gained will be very low.

Candidates need to label their essays with the relevant question number.

Comments on Use of English

The very best scripts showed a full operational fluency. In most cases, the quality of the English prevented the content from being understood. In the very weakest essays, however, the grasp of language was so poor that the meaning of the candidate was impenetrable. The tone of most essays was usually in keeping with the subject matter and the formal academic environment of a public examination, although some did switch to an inappropriately “chatty” and colloquial style.

A minority went to great lengths to write in very flowery prose and/or to use a very ambitious range of vocabulary. This ambition is admirable, but the effort needed to acquire such vocabulary can only earn its reward if the candidate understands the words and can use them in the appropriate context. The easiest route to achieving higher marks for English is by avoiding the most basic errors such as those outlined here:

- mismatches in subject/verb agreements, e.g. ‘most people has experienced’ and ‘one of the main difficulties are’
- singular and plural mismatches, e.g. ‘every individuals’ or ‘all man and woman’
- non-agreement, such as ‘one of the difficulty’ or ‘one of the chance’
- incorrect use of definite and indefinite articles.
- misuse/omission of commas, leading to loss of meaning and/or disruption of flow.
- incorrect use of apostrophes, e.g. ‘Its not a problem’ and ‘our nation has neglected it’s moral duty’
- incorrect use of the apostrophe when denoting possession.
- incorrect comparative forms, e.g. ‘more easier’ or ‘more richer’
- incorrect joining of words, e.g. ‘infact’, ‘inturn’, ‘donot’, ‘a lot’, ‘inorder’, ‘aswell’, ‘eventhough’, ‘atleast’
- incorrect separation of words, e.g. ‘now a days’, ‘no where’, ‘any body’, ‘with out’, ‘more over’
- confusion between to/too; there/their
- omission of ‘d’ on the past participle, e.g. ‘this was cause by a problem’
- misspelling of ‘opportunity’ (usually ‘oppurtunity’ or ‘oportunity’) and ‘furthermore’ (usually ‘furtermore’) and ‘accommodation’ (usually ‘accomodation’)
- confusion between ‘affect’ and ‘effect’, between ‘amount’ and ‘number’, between ‘economic’ and ‘economical’, between ‘lose’ and ‘loose’ and between ‘alternate’ and ‘alternative’.

Such rudimentary errors should be rare at AS/A Level. Some Centres have taken steps to reduce such errors over the past few sessions. Their candidates now write with much improved accuracy - and so gain higher marks for Use of English. In other Centres, however, scripts show little or no progress in rectifying these very avoidable errors. Vocabulary should be learnt and assimilated, not in lists of one to one word equivalents but rather in a short phrase/idiom/expression in an appropriate context. In this way, it is easier to recall the word/words and to know how to use it/them correctly.

With regard to style, “In a nutshell” was ubiquitous, but this does not an appropriate in tone for any part of an academic essay, especially the concluding paragraph. Children were inappropriately labelled as ‘kids’, ‘gonna’ appeared quite a few times instead of ‘going to’ while ‘for sure’ was used instead of ‘certainly’.

Comments on Use of Time in the Examination

Most candidates wrote two essays of recommended length, but some wrote unnecessarily long answers. No essay should be longer than 600 words. Quality is much more important than quantity.

At the opposite end, a number wrote short answers for their second essay. No essay should be shorter than 500 words, but quite a few were 250 to 350 words long. Whether this was caused by poor management of time or by a lack of knowledge is not known but the quality of such second answers cannot be good for Content – and usually was much weaker also for use of English.

Alternatively, some wasted precious time by writing substantial passages of their essay only to cross everything out and start to re-write it. A few even abandoned it completely and began to answer a different question. That show very poor planning at the start of the examination, or no planning at all.

Every candidate should leave a few minutes at the end to make a thorough check of the English so as to eliminate careless mistakes. Even able candidates lose marks through not checking such rudimentary points of grammar as subject/verb agreement, correct use of tenses and the matching of pronouns to nouns.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section 1

1 How valid is it to claim that war cannot be avoided?

This was not a very popular question. Several good answers recognised the significance of alliances and treaties, such as NATO and the EU, in safeguarding the peace. Satisfactory and better answers made appropriate reference to mediation, peace-making and peace-keeping activities and roles. Weaker responses focused mainly on the pros and cons of war and paid little attention to 'avoiding' it.

2 'Superpowers do more harm than good in the world?' How far do you agree?

Quite a number of responses were submitted. The term 'superpowers' was not always defined so the arguments that were offered often lacked a clear focus. The USA was identified as the only or most important superpower in economic and military capabilities; the rise of China or India or groupings such as the EU or the BRIC nations seemed not to have been noticed. US interventions worldwide were often criticised (using relevant evidence) but occasionally, with unsupported hostility. Some candidates took the question to mean 'possessing superhuman strengths and abilities'. Examiners accepted this as a valid interpretation of the wording of the question, but most of these answers were superficial and contained little substance.

3 Should there be any limits to freedom of expression?

This was not an overly popular question. Better answers extended their range to encompass the arts, media and elements of social behaviour and attitudes. Most pointed out the inherent dangers in absolute freedom and also in no freedom at all. The majority of candidates were in favour of some restriction, but were rarely able to explain who should introduce the limits and where/when/how these limits should be imposed.

4 Can child labour ever be justified?

This question was reasonably popular and was generally well answered. Most felt there was no justification for child labour and pleaded for the relevant authorities, where necessary, to take immediate action to introduce and implement strict legislation to prevent it, as has long been the case in some countries. However, a fair number of balanced answers argued quite persuasively that the income from child labour may be the only way to keep family members free of poverty-linked disasters in developing countries. This view was not infrequently supported by good local/regional examples.

5 'A society suffers if it fails to educate its women.' How far do you share this view?

This proved to be very popular. Many candidates included the names of successful women in various walks of life, but few tackled the complex social and economic issues which can arise when mothers and wives pursue a dual role as housewife and career woman. While few considered the benefits that might derive from educated women going out to work while their husbands looked after the home and children, or of the benefits to a society and an individual family if both partners are educated and share work and domestic responsibilities, many answers did acknowledge that working women made significant contributions to enhance a nation's GDP and improve a family's living standards. A common viewpoint taken was that it would be a good idea to educate women so that they could make a better job of their domestic function. Very few taking this line showed, however, any awareness of the limiting implications of such an attitude. Many sweeping generalisations were made about uneducated women having no morals and being incapable of passing on good manners and socially acceptable values to their children. They were also considered as unemployable outside the home because of a lack of qualifications. By contrast, educated women were considered to be proficient at all these things thanks to their educational experience and qualifications.

Section 2

6 Assess the ability of technology to ensure human happiness in the present century.

This was a very popular question and many candidates displayed a strong knowledge of technology. Better answers included references to negative aspects of technology to demonstrate how, for example, the Internet and social networking sites can take control of us and cause unhappiness. Unfortunately, far too many overlooked the key word 'happiness' or simply mentioned it with no clear linkage to the particular piece of technology. User-friendliness, speed, efficiency, convenience, novelty and status were all offered as

evidence of the 'happiness' bestowed on us by technology, but without offering any examination of why these things make us happier.. A minority paid no attention to 'this century' and brought in evidence of old technology such as cars and washing machines. Some essays were no more than list-like responses.

7 How far is mathematics 'the true universal language'?

Very few answers were offered. The point of this question was frequently misunderstood, i.e. the universal validity and recognition of mathematical negotiation although different languages are spoken. Rather, the majority of responses focused on the general importance of mathematics and the role it plays in a selection of different disciplines. By contrast, a handful of effective responses contrasted the universal applications and use of mathematics with the worldwide usage of English.

8 'In order to progress we need to be in harmony with nature.' How true is this claim?

This was not an overly popular question and the issue at the heart of the question - progress linked to harmony with nature - was rarely discussed. Instead, answers tended to analyse environmental damage of various kinds caused by man when exploiting natural resources. Few candidates got to grips with the idea that progress in harmony with nature is possible using affordable and sustainable technologies. None examined the other side of the claim to consider the arguments of those who claim that, since man is master of nature/the planet, harmony with nature is not a relevant consideration for further human progress.

9 Is it really important to respect even the most insignificant of species?

This question was moderately popular and produced some interesting answers which stressed how all organisms, however insignificant they may seem, are vitally interdependent to maintain the food chain and to preserve an ecological balance. Human pursuits such as hunting and deforestation were identified as major threats which are capable of disrupting the interdependence of species.

10 'Fears about global warming are often exaggerated and alarmist.' Do you have any sympathy with this view?

This was quite a popular question. Too many candidates took a very one-sided view and did not even acknowledge the existence of other opinions. They produced next-to-nothing in the way of concrete evidence, either way, and often based their claims on a single source (such as the film *An Inconvenient Truth*). A few excellent answers took full notice of the warnings and predictions about global warming, but were aware of recent findings and did not fall prey to exaggeration and inaccuracy. They proposed a moderate and well reasoned argument, noting the differences between global warming and climate change.

Section 3

11 How important is it for individual cultures to maintain their own art forms?

This was not a very popular choice. Some candidates embraced the word 'cultures' and most of their essays offered basic reasons for supporting indigenous cultures. At the same time, almost every answer tended to overlook the key words 'own art forms.' While candidates discussed the need to preserve traditional styles of dress, food and ceremonies, other relevant art forms were almost totally ignored.

12 To what extent should the media lead or follow public opinion?

This question was not too popular. Better answers dealt with a range of media and were aware of the role of the 'government watchdog' in informing and responding to public opinion. Weaker answers did not distinguish well between 'lead' and 'follow' and this made their responses often rather confusing and generalised as they stated what the media should or could do. Many candidates confined themselves to examining newspapers with reference to bias and the reporting of inaccurate information.

13 Is cooking more than a mere necessity?

This question was quite popular, but many candidates were not clear about 'necessity.' Before departing to look at various aspects of cooking food, many did not point out the obvious fact that we do have to eat to survive. That being the case, some candidates did not grasp what the question was interested in probing: what does cooking offer us in addition to the essential wish to stay alive and healthy. Better answers did refer to cooking being an art form, particularly on its presentation and mingling of flavours. Reference was also made to it being a thriving business catering both for familiar and more exotic tastes. Cooking was also

recognised as a source of pleasure and social interaction, a hobby, a career prospect and entertainment with a variety of TV programmes focused on aspects of cooking. Unfortunately, arguments were not linked closely to 'necessity.'

14 'Without storytellers, we would understand neither ourselves nor the world about us.' How far is this true?

This was a reasonably popular question. More successful candidates grasped the opportunity to present storytellers in an historical context before the advent of universal access to the printed word. It was also noted that such storytelling could contain at least some fictional material. A broader interpretation of storytelling introduced cave paintings and, in modern times, films to complement literary sources and the oral tradition. Storytelling to children was seen as fundamental to encourage listening, speaking, comprehension and, later, reading skills to stimulate the imagination – as well as to pass on to the next generation a cultural identity and belonging. However, a few argued with some validity that we can understand ourselves and the world around us by the personal experiences we encounter from earliest days onwards, with special reference to our families, friends, education and environment.

15 To what extent should the arts aim to awaken our political and social awareness?

This question was not popular and the few who picked it answered it well. 'To what extent ...?' and 'aim to awaken' (key words in the question) were not heeded by many candidates. 'Political and social awareness' was often picked up in answers, but was not always related to the arts. Most responses were generalised with very little exemplification or illustration.

Comments on the Administration of the Examination by Centres

Centres should provide candidates with paper/answer books with margins on the left and the right.