

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/11

Paper 11

General comments

While it is inevitable that some questions are relatively more popular than others, it was pleasing this year that most of the questions attracted a significant response. This, of course, sharpened the interest of examiners, which had already been whetted by the distinct improvement, this session, in the quality of written expression, allied to cogency and cohesiveness in argument. Answers which displayed the latter qualities were not uncommon, as were answers which went beyond the call of duty by dealing very fully with the topic in question. There were a few short scripts, ranging from anything from 200 to 350 words in length, but these were not a common feature, and Centres are to be commended for drawing their candidates' attention to the very important minimum word expectations. In addition to this commendation, many Centres and individuals should take heart from the improvement that has been noted in written expression. Only a handful of scripts were so littered with English errors as to render communication impossible. In fact, felicitous expression was more the order of the day and several examiners were impressed by candidates' ability to vary sentence length and structure, and employ a sophisticated range of vocabulary.

This sophistication in expression was often allied to sophistication in argument. Many Centres have obviously encouraged their candidates to evaluate, present a case and come to a conclusion. This session, there were far fewer of those essays which argue vigorously in one way and then proceed, almost in the same breath, to argue equally vigorously in quite the opposite direction. The unthinking use of prepared material – a regrettable feature in previous years – was rarely detected. In fact, the opposite was the case; in the scripts from several large Centres the experience of examiners was of having a dialogue with individual candidates and not simply reading tailor made responses. Candidates would be well advised, however, to remember that evaluation / assessment is the key requirement in all questions, especially in those questions where the temptation might be to compile a list or catalogue rather than engage in debate. In this context, particular attention should be paid to the specific comments on questions 7, 9, and 11.

With certain questions we write key words in bold lettering. If there was any general disappointment this session, it occurred when candidates ignored phrases like **“your country”**, **“your society”**, **“your part of the world”**, and proceeded instead to write essays of a very discursive sort. One characteristic of good responses was their vivid use of local examples / conditions in supporting their arguments.

Use of English

Some candidates need to consider their audience and write in the correct tone. **Conversational / colloquial English is usually inappropriate**, especially when it results in incorrect grammar and unsuitable vocabulary. A fair number who could write well often placed redundant prepositions / qualifiers / phrases at the beginnings of sentences, rendering a good sentence a non-sentence, e.g. *“Due to environmental negligence is costing our local economy dearly”*, instead of *“Environmental negligence is costing our local economy dearly”*. A common punctuation mistake, apart from misuse or no use of the apostrophe, was omission of the question mark. Several candidates who were developing a persuasive argument reduced the effectiveness of their rhetorical style by failing to clinch a debating point with a question mark.

Examples of inappropriate usage encountered this session included: *Yeah ... sure ... kinda ... now a days ... what so ever ... it blows my head ... you had better believe this ... wanna ... of off (the sea was kind of off colour because of the oil slick) ... I'm gonna tell ya ... the reason for why this happen ... they would of succeeded were it not for.*

Other common errors included:

- omission of the definite or indefinite article, e.g. *Internet for The internet.*
- omission of 'd' on the past participle, e.g. *“Economic migrants have cause distress to host countries”.*



Overall, however, grammar and spelling was reasonably secure, and the range of vocabulary deployed by candidates was often quite sophisticated. Examiners did note, however, overuse of the word *plethora*.

Comments on specific questions

1 To what extent is there equality of opportunity in your country?

This was widely attempted. A number suggested the country in question was a heaven on earth, a veritable Utopia! Strong responses focused on a range of issues (race, gender, class, age, voting, employment) while others, which focused exclusively on education, were limited in impact.

2 To what extent are economic migrants a problem for their host countries?

This was widely attempted. A few answers put little emphasis on “*extent*” and there was some confusion of “*economic migrant*” with “*illegal immigrant*”. There were, however, several excellent answers; these invariably demonstrated a sensitive understanding of the various facets of the question, both from the migrant’s and the host country’s perspective.

3 Assess the influence of globalisation on the family unit in your society.

This was fairly popular. Responses illustrated the benefits of reading the question. Any fears that might have been entertained about candidates ignoring the key phrase “*the family unit*” were soon dispelled and while essays varied in quality they did not suffer from irrelevance or misconstrual.

4 In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of democracy?

This was widely attempted. A few did not only consider democracy as political, but also wrote about the workplace or school or a religious group. This was relevant. A significant number of candidates on this topic did not paint a rosy picture of their country’s democratic record. These responses were not only balanced but also courageous. Although a few concentrated solely on free speech the majority drew the reader’s attention to the efficiency, or otherwise, of governance.

5 How far would you agree that written history is as much fiction as fact?

This was quite popular and most who attempted it showed a keen awareness of what the question is getting at: the influence of bias, the perspective of the victor in any account of national or factional triumph, together with other viewpoints that human interpretation can impose.

6 How far does scientific knowledge undermine religious beliefs?

This was a fairly popular question. This question elicited a wide range of interesting answers from an equally wide range of standpoints. Good responses drew an intelligent distinction between faith and fact. Discussion of Darwin usually revealed knowledge and understanding. Creation accounts, both scientific and religious, were given equal airing and, by attending to this, candidates could not be accused of proselytizing. The key word here is “*undermine*”. When that was ignored, problems arose.

7 What are the main environmental problems in your part of the world, and how effectively are they being tackled?

This was widely attempted and most candidates had some definite knowledge. Good responses followed the pattern of: problem, effect, and solution, and how effective. The Gulf oil disaster was a sadly fortuitous event but only if attempts to solve were evaluated. Other candidates mentioned relevant further problems, including within their range of reference the Everglades, Amazonian forests, hurricanes, and the disaster which overtook Haiti.

8 Of all the advances and discoveries in medicine in the last fifty years, which two do you consider will prove to be of greatest significance in the twenty-first century and why?

This was not widely attempted, but those who responded had sound knowledge of, for example, stem cell research, cancer drugs and drugs for dealing with HIV. Some very technical terminology was evident here, clearly giving the scientist/biologist a chance to shine.

9 To what degree is access to the internet absolutely necessary in the modern world?

This was the most popular question on the paper and showed a wide range of quality in responses. Sadly, when some candidates saw “*internet*” they offload everything known with inadequate reference to key words. They chose to write an essay for or against the internet, so the content was not always related to the terms of the question. Those who described the scenario of a world without the Internet, and how we would cope, provided thoughtful answers.

10 How important is fresh water as a global commodity?

This was not widely attempted. The term ‘*commodity*’ was not always understood and few dealt with implications for world peace. Successful answers needed to focus on ‘*global*’ and refer to implications of shortage for nations, particularly the poorest. The question was not about general uses of water.

11 What kind of music do you most dislike, and what is it about this music that makes you feel as you do?

This question, while very popular, saw many write badly and discursively but, equally, there were some enthralling responses. There is a clear message for Centres and candidates here not to indulge personal enthusiasms or dislikes unless these have something of substance to say and support an answer with a substantiated argument. For example, it was no use lambasting RAP without giving a single example. There were some entertaining diatribes / indictments directed at various genres, but only those candidates who could name performers and cite lyrics had a chance of impressing the reader. Candidates should also be aware that, even when writing about contemporary and popular musical forms, their own expression must remain academic and not descend into the *patois* of Hip-Hop, with its colloquial tone and sloppy vocabulary.

12 ‘A good film should reflect real life.’ To what extent do you agree?

This was a popular question. A number of essays were lacking in definition, planning and focus, failing even to mention the name of a single film. Those that did were far more successful and were normally able to explore the difference between a real life film – *Titanic* being a popular choice - and one that is made up, *Avatar* being a recent popular choice. Issues raised in *Avatar* related to real situations, allowing students to explore how fantasy can reflect reality. A few referred to documentaries, contrasting those showing war footage with films such as *Apocalypse Now*. A few made the point that feature films such as the latter could surpass the documentary in its depiction of reality. Candidates who grappled with such ideas impressed examiners. Inevitably, perhaps, too many saw the ‘success’ of a film as more important than any argument or message that it might be trying to convey.

13 What, in your view, are the most significant advantages of being proficient in more than one language?

This proved quite popular. There were no misinterpretations or confusions. Candidates understood the value of language proficiency, very often based on their own experience. Few, however, considered whether knowledge of another language enriches appreciation / understanding of ones own.

14 Discuss the idea that reading printed books is a thing of the past.

The few who attempted this question evinced very little, if any, appreciation for books let alone literature. They struggled to make sense of what they were trying to say. Those with technological expertise and knowledge were able to explore the world of *iPads*, *Kindles*, computer books, etc. These answers tended to be the most successful, weighing up the extent to which this technology is taking over from the printed book. Others, perhaps expressing personal experiences, dismissed all books as boring and believed that a good film replaced the book, or that it was better to listen to an audio book.

15 How effectively does the government of your country support and encourage visual and performance arts, e.g. dance, drama, film, music?

The few who answered opted for an uncritical either/or approach; either the government was doing everything possible to support the arts or it was totally ignoring the arts. Answers tended to be rather vague. Only a few candidates supplied detail, evidence and evaluation.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/12

Paper 12

General comments

Marks ranged widely from the very high to the very low. The proportion of high quality responses was approximately the same as it was last year. However, Examiners also saw a considerable number of weak scripts which suffered from English errors of all kinds which often impeded and diluted the impact of the content. It was often impossible to understand what the candidate was attempting to say. Some very short scripts were seen (i.e. fewer than 250 words), which made it virtually impossible for candidates to demonstrate any proficiency in English and to present any substantial content in response to the question. It was however noted that there were fewer short scripts this year than in recent years. Few candidates misinterpreted the question completely but a small number attempted, with varying degrees of success, to adapt the question to include prepared material. Such candidates tended to ignore the wording of the question partly or occasionally completely. Candidates must focus on the precise wording of the question in order to be able to meet the specific demands of the question.

More able candidates concentrated fully on the requirements of the question and did not drift off into tangential issues. Their essays were logically and systematically structured with ample evidence of mature reflection. Introductions provided definitions where appropriate and set the scene for the main content of the essay, while conclusions were to the point and reflected, rather than listed, the findings in the essay. Coverage of the topic was comprehensive, knowledgeable, detailed and often interesting. Local, regional and international examples were often appropriately utilised to support and underline key points. The highest scoring essays revealed impressive levels of maturity, sensitivity and sophistication.

Mid-range answers were largely competent and workman-like with only minor digression here and there. Candidates revealed a measure of common sense and developed their main points adequately using apt illustration for reinforcement. Counter arguments were sometimes glossed over so that opportunities for a more evenly balanced discussion were missed. Lower scoring answers in this range contained too much generalisation. Others became very assertive but could not always support their claims with credible evidence. Too much background information occasionally was sometimes needlessly offered to the detriment of focusing on the essence of the question.

Less satisfactory responses did not really address the question with any substance and often wandered off the question. Relevance was sometimes implicit or only tangential, ideas were often too vague and generalised and lacked adequate development. The range of points was often restricted and essays lacked any meaningful analysis and convincing detail. The weakest answers were often very brief and offered very little in the way of substance. In many essays in this category, very poor English diluted the impact of the content.

There were very few rubric infringements. The use of nothing but capital is not recommended and candidates are asked to discontinue this practice. Centres are also requested to ensure that invigilators comply with the instructions to sort scripts into numerical order and to fasten script pages securely.

Use of time

Most candidates coped well with writing two essays within the permitted time. However, a number of candidates wrote short answers for the second essay but it was not always clear whether this was caused by mismanagement of time or by a lack of knowledge. The quality of the answers on second choice questions was not infrequently lower both in terms of English and content. Some candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers because of needless repetition. Others wasted time by writing substantial passages of their essay only to cross everything out and start afresh. Such practice is an unproductive use of examination time which could be far better used to make a thorough and systematic check of the English so as to eliminate careless and avoidable mistakes. Even more able candidates can squander marks sometimes by being careless about such basics as subject/verb agreement.

Use of English

The standard of English ranged from full operational fluency to a very weak knowledge of the language which made it very difficult at times to follow the content. However, the content of the vast majority of essays could be understood without too many problems. The tone of most essays was usually in keeping with the subject matter although some candidates did, occasionally, switch to an unnecessarily “chatty” style that was not in keeping with the topic. A minority of candidates went to great lengths to write in very flowery prose and/or to use an unusually extensive and ambitious range of vocabulary. This ambition is praiseworthy but the effort obviously invested in acquiring such vocabulary is not rewarded when candidates are unable to use these words in the appropriate context. Candidates should focus more strongly on avoiding the most basic errors such as those outlined below. This is the quickest and easiest route to achieving higher marks for the Use of English.

Common errors seen in the English in recent years were still present this year including

- frequent incorrect joining up of words, e.g. infact, inturn, donot, alot, inorder, aswell, eventhough, atleast
- frequent incorrect separation of words, e.g. now a days, no where, news papers, with out, more over
- numerous mismatches in subject/verb agreements, e.g. “most people has experienced ...” and “one of the main difficulties are ...”
- numerous singular and plural mismatches e.g. every individuals, all man and woman
- much confusion between to/too; there/their
- 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
- misspelling of opportunity, usually oppurtunity or oportunity. furthermore, usually furtermore and accomodation rather than accommodation
- incorrect comparative forms such as more easier; more richer
- confusion between affect/ effect, amount/number, economic/economical, lose/loose and alternate/alternative
- unnecessary overuse of etc.
- problems with the appropriate use of definite and indefinite articles
- omission of ‘d’ on the past participle, e.g. “this was cause by a problem”
- misuse /omission of commas leading to loss of meaning and disruption of flow.

Many of these points crop up every year. Some Centres have clearly taken due notice so that their candidates are now writing with improved accuracy and enjoying the benefit of higher marks for Use of English. However, other Centres have made little or no progress in rectifying these avoidable errors. It is often not lack of knowledge but simply carelessness that causes such basic errors to reoccur time and time again. Rudimentary errors should be rare not commonplace at AS/A Level, It is therefore vital for candidates to leave sufficient time at the end of the examination to make a thorough and systematic check of each sentence so that obvious errors can be identified and corrected.. However, it is pleasing to see by the alterations on scripts that some candidates have heeded this guidance and are therefore not losing marks unnecessarily.

With regard to style, the ubiquitous “In a nutshell” still persists. It is not an appropriate start in tone for the concluding paragraph of essays.

Similarly, candidates should not refer to themselves impersonally using author/writer in such statements as “the author, however, begs to differ” and “this writer is not of the opinion that ...”

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

This was quite a popular question and was usually reasonably well answered. Weaker responses went into unnecessary detail on the causes of crime such as poverty, illiteracy and unemployment but failed to focus sufficiently on tackling crime successfully. Rampant bribery and corruption amongst police and the judiciary was often mentioned. Better answers contained credible and convincing personal examples to support and illustrate such allegations.

Question 2

Few answers were submitted on this. Candidates presented a clear definition of rogue states but were occasionally hazy on international communities. Better answers included relevant examples of where internationally imposed sanctions had produced, or failed to achieve, the desired effect. However, a few answers questioned the 'domineering' influence of Western countries on the work of international bodies.

Question 3

This was the most popular question of the paper. Better answers pointed out that fewer people are affected around the world by terrorism than by climate change and these candidates often struck a reasonable balance between climate change and terrorism. Climate change was recognised as a natural phenomenon which has produced warmer and cooler periods over thousands of years to which man has successfully been able to adapt. Weaker answers focused almost exclusively on global warming within an unsubstantiated doomsday scenario and a lack of credible examples. Many claims made of imminent climatic disasters for many parts of the world were at best questionable because of unfounded exaggeration and at worst, totally unsupported by any objective data or evidence.

Question 4

This was not an overly popular question, but it did attract a considerable number of good quality answers. Most candidates were able to describe and evaluate how face to face interaction, including eye contact and body language, is likely to lead to less misunderstanding than the more impersonal forms of electronic communication.

Question 5

This was a reasonably popular question. Less convincing answers simply stressed the huge talent of leading sports personalities, their dedication to their sport and the years of coaching and practice required from a young age to reach the top. These answers were virtually totally positive and chose to overlook such negative elements as performance enhancing drugs, other forms of cheating and excessive lifestyles, including questionable behaviour. Better answers acknowledged the hard work put in by leading sports personalities in their chosen sport but were able to draw parallels with other professions dealing, more importantly, with issues of life and death such as the police, the military, the fire service and medicine. Pay in these and other sectors which are vital to society were judged to be far too low in comparison to sports people and whilst the entertainment value of sport was recognised, the rewards were generally seen as being unjustifiably high.

Section 2

Question 6

This was a fairly popular question overall, and very popular with certain countries. Weaker answers did not seem to understand conservation and discussed environmental issues in general. Better responses showed good local knowledge about recent and current conservation projects and were able to illustrate the progress, or lack of it, in safeguarding specific plants and animals.

Question 7

Very few answers were offered. Many Examiners saw no answers at all to this question. Better answers analysed a good range of number and word puzzles with appropriate examples and offered credible reasons for their broad appeal and popularity. Weaker responses tended to focus on just one example.

Question 8

This was not too popular a question, but generally was answered quite well. The majority of candidates felt such a venture to be unfeasible and impracticable at present. To consolidate their argument against such a huge undertaking, they pointed to the immense overall cost, the difficulties of sustaining life as we know it in an alien and extremely hostile environment and the technical problems of travelling vast distances through space.

Question 9

This proved quite popular with a few Centres, but not with the majority. Responses were mostly mediocre because of excessive generalisation and a tendency to ramble and lose focus. No clear case was made in favour of theories or practical applications. Better answers showed how the two elements are interdependent and demonstrated this fact via examples gained by personal observation and experience stemming from science classes at School.

Question 10

This was quite popular. Weaker answers focused almost entirely on environmental pollution from exhaust emissions and decided therefore that electrically powered cars were an excellent idea. Better answers included environmental considerations but also discussed the shortcomings of these vehicles with regard to range, performance and the scarcity of charging stations. They also discussed the available hybrid cars as a useful partial solution to depleting stocks of oil. There were also some relevant and perceptive comments about electrically powered vehicles being adversely affected by power cuts in some developing countries and about additional pollution from 'dirty' power stations when meeting the demand for more electricity.

Section 3

Question 11

This was a popular choice at both ends of the ability range. There were very few low marks awarded for content as the vast majority made the more obvious points. However, there were many low marks given for poor English containing basic errors of all kinds and where a good command of written English was sadly an illusion. Better answers discriminated between spoken and written English, they distinguished between varieties of English such as 'Franglais' and 'Singlish', they discussed the growing influence of American English in the wake of the second World War and demonstrated how the advent of computers and the Internet had reinforced the global dominance of English. Due reference was also made to cultural dilution and the all pervading influence of English on young people.

Question 12

This question was not too popular. Weaker answers dealt in vague generalities about architecture and sometimes dealt with structures rather than buildings. Specific examples were often missing. Better answers analysed buildings in terms of aesthetic appeal, unique design, status, cultural heritage and national significance. Their assertions were supported by a range of relevant examples.

Question 13

This proved quite popular. Better answers focused on consumer behaviour and attitudes and the link with social status. The very best answers recognised the irony of exclusivity and luxury with the reality of mass marketing and mass production in some instances. Weaker answers stressed the high quality of such goods, which is not always the case, but overlooked the design factor. Many desired to possess designer labels because they wished to imitate their favourite celebrities.

Question 14

This question was fairly popular. More successful candidates grasped the opportunity to write about their own interests with full detail of the work of the relevant artist, musician or writer and also of the nature of the resulting influence. Weaker answers often offered potted biographies of the person chosen with scant reference to his/her work and only a fleeting mention of any influence felt. Very weak answers chose to ignore the wording of this question and wrote paragraphs on an artist and a musician and a writer.

Question 15

This was reasonably popular. The wording of the question was intended to attract responses to painting, drawing and sculpture but it was agreed at the coordination meeting, prior to the commencement of marking, to allow and therefore credit answers that referred to the arts. However, candidates who adhered closely to the exact wording of the question were slightly more generously rewarded for having been more discerning in their interpretation of the set question. Almost all responses rejected the proposition in the question with better answers illustrating the main points with apt examples. Weaker answers were often generalised and vague and broadened the question too widely by interpreting art, for example, as tantamount to the beauty of nature. Weaker answers were short of convincing examples.