

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8001/01

Paper 1

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

Having sufficient time to finish essays was not a problem, although some candidates used much of their time rewriting large sections more neatly. This time could have been put to far more rewarding use by trawling mechanically through the English and rectifying careless errors.

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

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 was a popular question and many who chose it demonstrated good knowledge of such relevant material 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 this 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 6

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 7

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 8

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 9

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 10

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 11

This was a fairly popular question. Many candidates were stronger on 'promise' than 'deliver' and produced some interesting local examples which often became too descriptive, rather than weighing the claims made for a product against consumer findings. Much work on the topic of advertising had clearly preceded the 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 12

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.

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Paper 8001/02

Paper 2

General comments

Overall, **Question 14**, turned out to be the least popular with candidates, with roughly the same higher proportion of candidates choosing either **Question 13** or **Question 15**.

Whatever the exercise chosen, relatively few candidates were unable to make any kind of headway at all apart from those who resorted to slavish copying from the text. In such instances, they secured few marks since they had not demonstrated that they had understood the original material or that they could write sentences of their own composition in which not too much went wrong. Selective 'lifting' was much more commonplace, especially in answers to **Question 13(b)** and **(d)**, **Question 14(b)** and **(c)** and **Question 15(a)**. This frequently took the form of the entire wording of a question being copied out as an integral part of an answer. More faulty examination technique was evident when candidates wrote with commendable fluency and accuracy but lacked the insight or discipline to wrestle with the nuances of the more demanding exercises. Again and again, competent summaries were produced rather than arguments that were characterised by analytical skills. When this happened, candidates did themselves full justice when asked to explain or outline something, but came to grief whenever they were called upon to evaluate or differentiate. As always, Examiners noted with grave concern the large number of candidates who insisted, despite eleven injunctions to the contrary, on writing far more than was required and, in so doing, penalised themselves needlessly. By way of contrast, it was pleasing that there were more candidates than usual who responded with alacrity to the legitimate challenges of the Paper and could write answers of excellent quality in examination conditions.

Whatever their ability, all but a handful of candidates were able to complete the Paper in the time allowed without any obvious signs of haste. There were hardly any instances of more than one assignment having been attempted, although one or two candidates did swap horses in midstream. When little credit was given for written expression, it was, as often as not, on account of highly derivative rather than fatally flawed English.

Comments on specific questions

Question 13

Questions based on four contrasting points of view have been set before. In recent times, candidates have been asked to consider various opinions on smoking or on the Internet. In the circumstances, therefore, candidates were not faced with an entirely new kind of exercise at the outset. Hence, there was a temptation for candidates to rush into what seemed familiar to them without fully ascertaining what was involved and this is what many of them did. This was particularly noticeable in responses to **Question 13(b)** and **13(d)** but the wrong approach was also sometimes apparent in responses to **Question 13(c)**.

- (a) All that was required in this assignment was for candidates to skim through all the views expressed, note the particular issues that cropped up, and from these produce a list of five concerns of a much more general nature. So, for example, the exaggerated claim that all the farms would become golf courses and the pessimistic assumption that the canneries would remain closed were both specific aspects of the wider debate on the future, or otherwise, of the local agricultural and fishing industries. In the event, most candidates were able to present some of the relevant material in the right perspective but almost all, on occasion, could not see the wood for the trees. Where the word length was exceeded, candidates should have either dispensed with a long preamble or moved on from one consideration to another more smartly.
- (b) As already observed, few candidates made much of a showing at this juncture. Picking up on the significance of 'how far' in 'How far do you think Jacqueline Azavour makes a good case...?', they should have objectively assessed her contribution to the Commission of Enquiry, duly noting perfectly valid reservations, such as those relating to noise pollution, but also picking holes in the argument whenever appropriate, as when she makes sweeping generalisations or fails to take viable alternatives into account. What, however usually materialised was no more than a grocer's list of her objections to the extension of the runway at Zilda. Worse still, many answers never went further than the problems that might be caused by large jets and coaches before they reached well over 100 words. A fair number of candidates also got hold of the wrong end of the stick when they became obsessed with wasps and light aircraft.
- (c) This question was answered reasonably well in that most candidates managed to select two or three relevant issues that preoccupied Ken Meldrun and Louis Bartelan though, as a rule, any contrasts in their attitudes remained implicit. The weakest candidates dwelt too much on minor details such as Louis Bartelan's proneness to seasickness, while few perceived that the strategy of the one speaker was progress and change from the outside while that of the other was development and refurbishment from within. Only the most astute identified the self-interest that lay at the heart of Louis Bartelan's reasoning.
- (d) Most candidates competently summarised Melanie Troit's sales-pitch but often one could not tell whether candidates approved or disapproved of what she was offering and how she offered it, despite the clear instruction to 'argue strongly in favour of or against.' Hence, Melanie Troit's proposals were catalogued rather than enthusiastically supported or torn into shreds. The unwarranted assumption was sometimes made that the speaker was the owner of the company she represented. It was also noticeable that candidates who had previously used their own words with great facility fell back on 'lifting' in this final question, phrases such as 'tourist paradise' or 'resident-friendly' featuring with monotonous regularity. A few outstanding candidates, however, relished the opportunity to sabotage the public relations exercise, which they did via a series of extremely shrewd asides.

Question 14

Faulty examination technique was far less in evidence in the answers to this exercise, although it surfaced, once in a while, in **Question 14(a)** and, more commonly, in **Question 14(d)**. At every stage, the candidates' own stance on such matters as dress codes, opposition parties or the possession of drugs was taken at face value.

- (a) Many candidates did well to seize on a key factor such as Paul Estrade's low boredom threshold and prove that it had a direct bearing on the Ramaf Arts Festival and, therefore, should be investigated further. Less successful candidates selected an obviously relevant consideration but failed to work on it effectively and link it with a specific invitation. Thus, there were few imaginative responses that, for example, explored the reasoning behind the poet's support of so many protest movements in the light of how Paul Estrade might behave whilst reciting his own poetry or reacting to the verse that the contestants had composed. Those who carelessly read the question dealt with more than one point about which more information was needed.

- (b) Considerations of length apart, few candidates went badly wrong when it came to choosing the most appropriate role for Paul Estrade. Those who might well have floundered elsewhere managed to identify a number of relevant pieces of information but then simply strung them together without reaching a convincing conclusion. Others wrote sensibly enough but, in fact, never stated what they had in mind for Paul Estrade. A fair number claimed that he had actually won the Nobel Prize for Literature as opposed to having been nominated for it. At the other end of the spectrum, many candidates produced comprehensive and structured arguments based on rough work in which the relative strengths and weaknesses of Paul Estrade in each of the three roles had been spelt out. In the event, the most popular choice was Chairman of the Judges of the Schools' Poetry Competition.
- (c) When deciding what Paul Estrade would be least fitted for, virtually every candidate showed the same kind of aptitude as in the previous assignment except that misapprehensions were more prevalent. Quite a few candidates, for instance, thought that 'strong language' was words that were difficult to understand; some imagined that the poet was Leader of the Opposition instead of a close friend of the same; others, despite any evidence to that effect, presumed that the Festival was being held on the premises of the school from which Paul Estrade had been expelled thirty years previously. There were, on the other hand, some very persuasive arguments that the firebrand poet would be ill at ease as Patron and also wasting his talents in that capacity.
- (d) Some of the more rewarding responses concentrated on the more obvious worries concerning Paul Estrade's likely attitude and behaviour during the Festival. In such instances, the anxious Organiser, however, often resorted to telling his guest what and what not to do rather than diplomatically talking things over with him. Other capable candidates dwelt on the logistics of the week and on what changes could be made to suit Paul Estrade's temperament and preferences. On occasion, though, too much emphasis was laid on the poet's career and creativity and too little on the forthcoming event. The weakest candidates either thought that no invitation had yet been issued or believed that they were supposed to introduce their distinguished visitor at the beginning of the Festival. In both scenarios, fulsome flattery was much in evidence.

Question 15

Candidates are advised to choose the comprehension question only if they have:

- adequate linguistic ability and experience to cope, without having recourse to wholesale 'lifting', with the sophisticated vocabulary that is used to convey complex ideas and contexts;
- sufficient reading and intellectual skills for them to be prepared and able to interpret and react to whatever is set before them without automatically reverting to straightforward paraphrase or summary;
- enough stamina to work out the structure of an argument and to match text with questions, bearing in mind that there may well be long sentences or even paragraphs that seem out of sequence or irrelevant to any answer that is required.

As matters stand, the passage that featured on this occasion gave the candidates ample opportunity to display all the desiderata mentioned above but they were seldom in evidence.

- (a) The candidates were invited to make comparison between two eras of refugees, between the situation in 1945 and that nowadays. Those who understood what was required concentrated on the first, third and fifth paragraphs in their quest for similarities and differences and rightly ignored the rest of the passage. All too often, however, candidates wrote at great length about one crisis without reference to the other or introduced heterogeneous material concerning, for example, the part played by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in 1951.
- (b) Once again, relatively few candidates answered this question on its own terms. Instead of identifying the many factors that had recently contributed to the loss of credibility and effectiveness of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the all too common approach was to detail what UNHCR had done or could do for the various types of refugees that sought its assistance. In this, as in the earlier question, confused chronology was all too apparent.

- (c) In this assignment, candidates were expected to go beyond the text and discuss two options that might alleviate the current refugee crisis. What most failed to take into account was that practicability rather than morality was the issue, 'can' rather than 'ought', 'easier' rather than 'better'. Even when answers seemed to be proceeding on the right lines, the justification that emerged was often facile as in the commonly expressed assertion that wealthy nations would certainly change their negative attitude towards refugees if told to do so.
- (d) Freed from the constraints of word-length and the use of 'own words', the vast majority of candidates successfully discriminated between asylum seekers and economic migrants whether by quoting directly from the text or by illustrating the distinction beyond all doubt. Some candidates, however, wrote a great deal to secure a mere two marks.
- (e)(i) Whereas 'trafficking' and 'status' caused no problems for most candidates, few had any idea of what 'groundbreaking' meant, 'shocking' or 'causing an earth tremor' being given as definitions quite frequently. As regards some of the other words, near misses abounded as when 'reminiscent' and 'similar', 'aftermath' and 'outcome', 'empathy' and 'sympathy' or 'obligations' and 'rules' were regarded as synonymous.
- (e)(ii) Many candidates whose definitions turned out to be inaccurate contrived to use the same words correctly in sentences of their own devising. As in the previous exercise, marks were forfeited when the wrong grammatical form featured. Whereas comparatively few candidates wrote two sentences when they should have written one, more than usual used the word that they had chosen in a context that was not significantly different from the original one in the passage. It was pleasing to note that bald six-word sentences were a rarity.