

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/11

Paper 11

General Comments

In this examination session there were some very thoughtfully and cogently-argued responses that showed both a keen awareness of what was being asked and an ability to provide the evidence and experience that makes for a convincing answer.

Some candidates needed to ensure they included material that was more tightly focussed on the question set. The coherent shaping and ordering of material requires extensive practice. Candidates who had something of consequence to say did well, especially as two essay-length responses are required on this paper. Consequently it is vital that candidates choose to write on topics that they really know something about. Those questions which appeared on the surface to present simpler options did not in fact do so. Every question in the examination is of equal difficulty and responses of equal sophistication are required.

Time spent reading the questions and thinking about them is time well spent. Every question requires evaluation and debate and invariably there are questions on topics of current relevance and controversy. Such questions are occasionally seized upon by candidates in order to give vent to uninformed opinion and prejudice. It is important that candidates demonstrate to their readers that they have subjected what they think to examination and perhaps re-evaluation.

The 'good' essay establishes a connection between the writer and the reader providing that what is written, matters. Whatever the prevailing culture it is always important for a candidate to produce responses that are spirited and thoughtful, devoid of the second-hand opinions that characterise the acceptable but dull. There are candidates who know more than just the names Gandhi, Mandela, Tolstoy, and it is such as these who are able to enrich their essays with the experience of life touched by writers, philosophers, scientists, musicians, and poets. People, hoping to do well in this examination and not just scrape through, must do some reading, thinking, and listening.

All the examination questions require evaluation, reflection, and debate. This session the majority of the candidates appreciated that simply listing all they know about a topic inevitably attracts a very average content mark. In addition there were only a few essays that seemed to have no coherent point of view. Candidates have grasped that evaluation requires judgement and that acknowledgement of other points of view does not necessarily mean agreement with them.

Essays which challenge cherished or inherited ideas often gained high marks. Those who sit the General Paper are invited to explore and question, not just come up with answers.

Use of English

There were strengths and weaknesses in style and accuracy of responses this session, but the majority of the candidates wrote in an appropriate academic style. The range of vocabulary at their disposal was at times sophisticated. Remarks in previous years' reports on linguistic accuracy still hold true but there was a marked improvement in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, though more attention could still be given to correct tenses and agreement. Informal and casual expressions were and almost all candidates employed the appropriate language register for an academic essay. Most candidates employed brief introductions. Longer introductions simply get in the way; purposeful introductions constructed on the day with a clear end in view are a joy to read. Moreover this session conclusions were succinct and clearly related to the purpose of the question.

There were very few rubric infringements and most candidates used their time well, ensuring that their essays were of sufficient length. Preparation and practice are critical for ensuring that candidates utilise the time in the examination efficiently.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

This was a popular question and many candidates responded passionately and bravely to it. A high proportion of answers exhibited candour and focus. All parts of the question were addressed, although a few candidates simply listed a range of problems without identifying 'the most important political challenge'. Candidates could have been further rewarded had they made comparisons with how other countries deal with similar problems.

Question 2

Many responses to this question demonstrated maturity and were nuanced. The difficulties and demands of day-to-day governance were recognised and several examples of 'failed' revolutions were given. Only a few candidates chose to highlight the challenges that revolutionaries face. Revolutionary ideals were commented upon but only rarely did candidates attempt to discuss what happens after a 'successful' revolution. Nevertheless the majority of the answers were both knowledgeable and non-partisan.

Question 3

A fair number of responses were seen to this question and there was clear evaluation in all of them. That aid per se is not harmful was recognised by all and several answers distinguished themselves by detailing how the rich countries were giving back what they had already taken from the poorer nations. There were no answers which could be described as patronising or insensitive.

Question 4

This question was attempted by several candidates across the Centres. Candidates wrote essays which were both informative and vivid, and sought to raise the consciousness of the reader. Many candidates showed great insight and were able to focus on the dramatic disparities in their own countries.

Question 5

There were very few strident responses to this question. Candidates took the trouble to define 'rights' and most of the ensuing discussions recognised the need for restorative justice and rehabilitation. What should happen to those responsible for the most heinous of crimes featured in all the essays but even in this context candidate's responses were thoughtful.

Section 2

Question 6

This was a reasonably popular question and candidates were well informed on the topic; every form of green technology was touched upon, and the question of affordability was not subsumed in a general account of what green technology offers. Many candidates were able to identify key words from the passage and centre their discussion around these areas. In this case 'affordable' was the key word and it was given due weight.

Question 7

This topic appealed to candidates who excel in mathematics, but the 'delights' of mathematical study were sometimes not addressed by candidates, as many responses focussed on mathematics' usefulness. In this instance the key word was not always embraced. A few candidates were keen to show just how much is encompassed by mathematics, and the examples provided were illuminating and apt, ranging from the Pyramids to present-day pace travel. Successful responses to this question had to focus on 'delights' and not simply provide statements on the utility of mathematics.

Question 8

There were only a small number of responses to this question and those that attempted it were well informed. Local examples were used to support arguments and the possible economic and social benefits of a census were considered.

Question 9

This was quite a popular question but it did require some specific knowledge. Many responses inveighed against drug trafficking, but candidates needed to discuss more examples and evaluation. A large number of candidates could have attained more credit had they included more factual references and examples. Candidates should be wary of questions upon which they have plenty of opinions but scant knowledge.

Question 10

This proved to be a very popular question. Few answers gave catalogues of scientific achievement; most of the essays were selective in content and firmly related to the phrasing of the question, the extent to which we are fortunate to live in an age of scientific discovery. Topics of a potentially broad sweep are best answered in a restrained way. Candidates who were less inclined to list everything they know about science, preferring instead to explore in some depth judiciously chosen examples that serve to crystallise their arguments, gave good responses.

Section 3

Question 11

Candidates responded enthusiastically to this question, demonstrating detailed knowledge of instances of press intrusion. While the negative aspects of this practice were roundly condemned, several responses spoke about the mutually advantageous nature of the journalist/celebrity relationship.

Question 12

This was a popular question and generally well answered by the e-reader generation. Better answers considered aesthetic questions; the beauty of books, their dust jackets, illustrations, their tactile quality, the joy of building a collection of well-loved books. A few candidates misunderstood 'E-reader' to mean 'the Internet'.

Question 13

Most of the responses to this question agreed that most people are too smart to be manipulated by advertising. The answers were competent but not especially analytical, though a few candidates profitably explored the psychology at work in advertising. There were plentiful illustrations.

Question 14

In order to answer this question well, candidates needed to give examples of art galleries, ideally in their community. Only a few candidates who answered this question were able to manage this, and a few candidates seemed unclear as to what an art gallery is. This is a good example of the type of question that candidates need to be wary of attempting if they cannot draw upon genuine, specific knowledge.

Question 15

Fortunately only those who knew about and could offer examples of royal and celebrity weddings attempted this question. The responses were interesting and varied. Several responses commented critically upon the amount of attention given to such events in the media compared to the attention given to the challenges and problems faced by so many in the global community.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/12

Paper 12

Key Messages

Content

- Answer the **set** question and focus on the key words.
- Support your main points with appropriate examples.
- Keep anecdotal/personal evidence to a minimum.
- An introduction should immediately address the question and show understanding of it.
- A conclusion should be a reasoned assessment of the arguments made.
- Ensure that all aspects of the question are addressed.
- Re-visit the question after each paragraph.

Use of English

- Leave time to check your English thoroughly to avoid basic errors.
- Concentrate on using appropriate vocabulary so expression is fluent and precise.
- Basic sentence structure/grammar needs to be accurate to ensure clear communication of content.

General comments

More successful responses answered the question as set and included a variety of examples to illustrate the main points of the essay. There were many examples which offered few or no examples at all, resulting in vague and generalised arguments which either lacked conviction or were unconvincing.

When the set question demands it, candidates should focus on aspects of their own country; if this is not the prompt then a broader focus is required. Stronger responses demonstrated good topic knowledge and included local, regional and global examples to support points. Weaker ones wrote on topics with which they were insufficiently familiar and provided little or no evidence to support points made. Candidates need to spend time studying the chosen question to make sure they understand what is being asked and then re-visit after every paragraph to check that key words are being addressed. This would help further develop the considerable skills that candidates already possess.

Most candidates used the time reasonably efficiently and were able to produce two clearly structured essays of around the recommended length. Introductions were often too long and unfocused; this is where the candidate should begin to address the key words, to reassure themselves that, from the beginning, they understand the question. Less effective conclusions merely listed points from the essay rather than arriving at a reasoned, personal assessment.

Despite the rarity of Rubric infringements and 'short' essays (less than 375 words), the quality of the Use of English was variable. A substantial number of candidates have acquired a wide-ranging English vocabulary but need to improve putting these words in an appropriate context. Similarly, candidates could improve their English mark by checking for basic errors, as outlined below. A thorough and systematic checking for such slips would greatly improve the standard as well as clarifying content.

Use of English

Basic errors need to be checked and corrected in order to improve English marks. Typical examples are listed below:

- Subject/verb non-agreement
- Frequent incorrect use of definite/indefinite article (e.g. the society)

- Omission of apostrophes
- Confusion between their/there, to/too, your/you're
- Incorrect comparative forms
- Missing endings on plurals because of poor checking
- Incorrect use of vocabulary

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Very few attempted this question. Generally, less successful responses were uncertain about the concept of 'ethical business practices' and tended to focus more on 'profit making' but without examples of specific companies. Consequently, comments tended to be too generalised and only part of the question was addressed. However, there were one or two which did consider issues such as 'charitable giving', 'appropriate wages', 'using foreign labour', 'humane work conditions' and well-known brands exploiting 'cheap labour'.

Question 2

This was a popular question and prompted some interesting responses. Better ones were able to name state and private schools and explore their 'merits', as asked for by the question. Some were too one-sided and just compared the 'merits' of private schools with the disadvantages of state schools, or generalised and looked at the strengths and weaknesses of schools in general, occasionally moving beyond 'your country'. The strongest responses explored issues such as qualifications gained, facilities, teachers and overall success rates in each type of school.

Question 3

This question was rarely chosen. The few who did this seemed knowledgeable about 'corruption' but had limited understanding of 'democracy'. Less successful responses tended to list what were considered corrupt activities in specific countries but without referencing 'democracy'. Better responses showed some understanding of 'democracy' and were clear and logical in ideas but were limited in addressing 'to what extent'.

Question 4

Few candidates chose this question. Some responses suggested that the government was responsible for everything or were unsure of what 'foreign aid' was, and who actually pays for it at the moment. Less successful responses had few examples and there was a lack of focus on the question. Better responses argued that countries could become too dependent on foreign aid or that it encouraged corruption.

Question 5

A large number of candidates chose this question but there were few strong answers. However, it did prompt a wide variety of views, some suggesting that 'bad influences' could cause prisoners to 'become worse' on release, encouraging them to seek revenge. Less successful responses just concentrated on ill-treatment (brutality, torture, poor food) with little balance. Better responses did focus on constructive efforts to rehabilitate prisoners through a variety of programmes and educational initiatives, some arguing that the isolation of prison itself could be seen as a time for reflection and introspection, hence contributing to prisoner reform.

Question 6

This was quite a popular question. Many opted to begin by discussing what 'developing countries' were and then continued to define 'green technologies'. Either there was too much description of 'green technology' or just a list of priorities, neither of which was answering the question. Better responses explored a country's urgent priority and balanced this with how 'green technologies' were or were not being implemented in their countries, often with an assessment of cost and ultimate benefit to the local community.

Question 7

A smaller number of candidates chose this question. Inevitably the focus here was predominantly on 'fast food' and then linked to the pace of modern day life. Many responses compared present day diets with earlier times, where the diet was healthier, and people were employed in more physical activities. Consequently, there was a link to the health hazards posed by modern day diets/lifestyle/inactivity. Better responses were able to focus on cultural differences, how work and time have affected people's habits and the comparison with the past. Less successful responses tended to be too descriptive, with a limited scope.

Question 8

This was a very popular question. Too many saw this as a question on climate change and focused on describing how this was happening and what we can do to change the situation, with an emphasis on global warming. Responses tended to be repetitive of 'CFCs causing the icecaps to melt' or focusing on nuclear power (Japan and Chernobyl) as problems for climate change. Better answers were able to explore the issue of whether it is man, or nature, which has caused climate change, with some suggesting that it may be a combination of both working together. The best ones did address 'minority' and 'majority' but there were very few of these.

Question 9

Not very popular but was generally answered quite well with all answers providing examples of traditional values/ceremonies/attitudes and how these can enhance or hinder the chosen country's progress. Better ones provided a lot of knowledge and detail with a considerable assessment of 'progress'. Less successful ones were too generalised and did not really explain what traditional values were or looked at whether traditional values were a good or bad thing which was not the focus of the question.

Question 10

The smallest number of candidates chose this question. A few had just a limited understanding of how a census could be useful. Some did hint at important uses such as where to place resources, age related issues and healthcare/educational needs.

Question 11

There were a reasonable number of answers. Many responses spent too much time on what makes a good advert and not what makes an advert unconvincing and ineffective, which is the focus of the question. Television adverts, billboards, adverts with lots of colour, good looking people, celebrities and lively sound were seen as effective adverts but better responses considered that exaggerations of product qualities were ineffective and used a variety of examples to back up their arguments.

Question 12

This was quite popular but responses tended to be too generalised and vague. Better ones attempted a philosophical approach and addressed 'the ability to deal with problems' but there tended to be a lack of illustration. Too many responses took the word 'happiness' and tried to define it and then discuss what it was that made people happy or unhappy with insufficient focus on the key words of the question.

Question 13

Not many candidates chose this question but it was done reasonably well, explaining how markets offer cheaper, more affordable products and giving examples of such markets, saying why they were more popular than ever. The best responses considered the threats to traditional markets and how certain places in specific countries were dominated by street markets, assessing their use as an 'asset for the poor'.

Question 14

A very popular choice. Good responses explored the various social networking sites and explained what made them useful and rewarding. Those that named specific sites like Facebook and Twitter, and explored their uses, were more successful than those that simply generalised. Less successful ones generalised about the Internet and did not look at social networking sites, with some confusion as to what a social networking site was. Good responses developed arguments around the concept of 'rewarding'.

Question 15

A popular choice. Many responses tended to describe 'own country' in considerable detail, emphasising the advantages of living there, but not comparing with other countries. Some differences could have been attributed to many countries (e.g. a good government, good education, friendly people). Better responses looked more at places, religious ideas, culture and festivals that were unique.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/13

Paper 13

Key messages

Content

- Focus on the key words of the question and ensure that all aspects of the question are covered.
- Choose two questions carefully, making sure you understand them fully and have sufficient knowledge/examples to produce meaningful content.

Use of English

- Check your English thoroughly to avoid careless errors.
- Avoid writing in a 'chatty', informal style.
- Provide a clear linkage between sentences so that there is logical progression through the paragraphs.

General Comments

There were many detailed and thorough responses which addressed the question, with some focus on the keywords and a variety of relevant examples supplied to illustrate the main points. A considerable number of responses contained few or no examples, resulting in vague and generalised arguments; credible evidence, not just anecdotes, is needed to support points.

Candidates should focus on their own country when prompted to in the question; if this is not the case then a broader focus is required. Many candidates did possess good knowledge of the topic especially if it concerned their 'own country', and provided balanced answers to the question.

Quite a few candidates wrote their answers in informal, colloquial English which was inappropriate for a serious, formal examination. Often this reduced the impact of important statements. Some candidates did adapt their tone to match the requirements of the question and writing was often accurate with appropriate vocabulary.

Most candidates managed their time wisely and completed both essays but there was evidence that some candidates rushed the second one, leaving insufficient time to conduct a thorough and systematic check of the English.

Introductions should focus on the key words of the question, to show understanding of it, rather than be a lengthy pre-amble. Conclusions should not simply list the points made in the main body of the essay but should be a reasoned assessment of previous arguments.

Although there were very few instances of rubric infringement, a number of essays were 'short' (below 375 words) and lost marks for the Use of English, as a result. These short essays do not give sufficient length to develop a meaningful argument.

Candidates need to focus throughout on answering the actual question set rather than writing everything they know about a topic area.

Use of English

Use of English marks can be needlessly lost through basic errors and informal expression, examples of which are listed below:

- Subject/verb non-agreement
- Informal vocabulary such as 'kinda', 'gotten', 'awesome'
- Words not separated e.g. 'alot', 'infact', 'aswell'
- Confusion between there/their, to/too, hear/here crisis/crises
- Incorrect use of apostrophes.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question was not very popular. Less successful responses tended to be vague about 'social challenges', sometimes covering 'political challenges' as well. Better responses considered one social issue (poverty, immigration, global financial crisis) and did demonstrate knowledge with some consideration of 'how is it being met'. The quality of the response depended on whether both aspects of the question had been addressed.

Question 2

Not one candidate responded to this question.

Question 3

Only one candidate responded to this question. It tended to be list-like with brief comments about a series of taxes and reasons why they were unfair. The question was acceptably covered, however development was limited.

Question 4

There were a few responses to this question. Some responses tended to consider extreme punishments (capital punishment, chopping off hands for theft) with the only justification that it was an 'eye for an eye'. Better responses considered more community based options in the context of the justification for imprisonment itself. Responses which argued and justified 'options', rather than just listing, were more successful.

Question 5

This question was quite popular. Generally, there were reasonable and an understanding of both 'durability' and 'quality'. Some responses tended to describe products, especially electronic goods, and explain what was expected from 'good quality'. Although examples were used, it tended to be very personalised. Better responses widened the scope and considered other issues which might address the second part of the question, 'essential' (e.g. cost, throwaway society, products for the less well off).

Question 6

There were a few responses to this question. Some just listed the advantages and disadvantages of 'wind power' with little reference to 'less enthusiastic'. Better ones considered the enthusiasm of the developed world for wind power in the context of the 'push' for renewable energy and alternatives to wind power. Some candidates did present a personal assessment in order to respond to, 'Is their lack of enthusiasm justified?'

Question 7

This question was quite popular and generally well done. In many ways it was a straightforward question just requiring a range of advantages and disadvantages. However, better responses did provide a personal assessment, as encouraged by the 'do you see' aspect of the question, presenting arguments in the context of a candidate's own online study experience.

Question 8

Not one candidate attempted this question.

Question 9

Very few responded to this question. All agreed with the assertion because responses linked 'poor education' to lack of motivation, financial prospects, socialisation, an inability to look after oneself etc. The ultimate conclusion tended to be that this would lead to poverty, vulnerability, exploitation and disease. However, better responses did challenge the question, especially the notion of 'poorly educated' to suggest there were numerous definitions of it and 'the educated' are as likely to die from stress or depression. The most successful responses provided well balanced arguments and addressed all the key words of the question.

Question 10

A popular question. Less successful responses described recent natural disasters (New Orleans, Haiti, Pakistan), even mentioning Japan. The responses could be knowledgeable but tended to describe what aid was available and what people did to help so was a more implicit reference to the question. Better responses did provide balance and considered 'the worst' (looting, exploitation by the media, selfishness). Occasionally a response considered 'best' as referring to dignity, pride, heroism, an instinct to survive and whether you need to see mass suffering before a nation is at its best.

Question 11

Just a few responses. Most responses considered health, competitiveness, team spirit, entertainment but better responses addressed, 'how far do you agree'. Here, balanced arguments were provided which examined the idea of 'significant', of whether sport is a mere distraction, waste of time/resources, expensive funding of an elite. The best responses needed to make a personal assessment after considering all arguments.

Question 12

A popular response. This was generally well done but many responses tended to describe hacking, giving out personal details, stalking, privacy settings on sites like Facebook and Twitter and then conclude that 'it is no more dangerous than you want it to be'. Better responses explored this idea, suggesting that it is about personal responsibility, taking control and education.

Question 13

Not one candidate attempted this question.

Question 14

Not very popular. Some responses just described films but not always 'blockbusters', supporting the idea that fantasy was pure escapism and escapism is always popular. Better ones questioned whether CGI was too dominant, distracting from script and plot and pointing out that other genres are just as popular (crime, Jane Austen). Some argued that films and video games are inseparable in the twenty-first century.

Question 15

Only a few answers, but all explored the wording of the question, with examples. A less successful response simply celebrated 'rap' as personal preference, hence avoiding a more balanced argument. Better ones considered 'rap' in the context of various definitions; one candidate considering it as poetry for disaffected youths. This required clear arguments and illustration.