



GCE

Critical Thinking

Advanced GCE A2 H452

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H052

OCR Report to Centres June 2017

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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F501 Introduction to Critical Thinking

General Comments:

There was a very wide range of performance up to 69 marks, with strong performance in the mid-range, as well as in the sixties. At the lower end the majority of candidates were in striking range of 30 marks. Performance was evenly spread across both sections. Answers to the longer questions tended to be forcibly argued, with candidates engaging well with the topic. This did lead to the occasional rant in Q.6, where some candidates felt the need to defend wearables strongly; also to extended explanation in Q10 where some were keen to defend the benefits of wearables at length.

Candidates as a whole evidenced their skills well in:

- Q.1(e) identifying evidence
- Q.5 suggesting a reason
- Q.7 assessing the credibility of Document 2

Questions that tended to challenge their skills were:

- Q.1(a) identifying an argument
- Q.1(d) identifying examples and explaining exemplification
- Q2 identifying and explaining the argument element

There were very few No Responses, but where they occurred, it was usually in:

- Q.3 (b) assessing the table within the survey in Document 3
- Q.9 (a) weighing up the relative importance of credibility criteria.

Technical terms were correctly used especially in Section B, where they are key to assessing credibility. Occasionally ‘reliability’ crept in without reference to credibility in Q7 and Q10 restricting access to marks. However the overwhelming evidence was that credibility criteria were understood and applied well, even if odd expressions and misspellings crept in such as ‘biast’ and ‘biastly’.

Candidates appeared to manage their time well, as there was little evidence of the final questions being curtailed or ending abruptly. If anything, Q.9 and Q.10 were assessed in greater detail on this paper. Candidates tended to be guided by the answer space provided, as to the length of the answer required. The additional pages were used mainly for replacement answers where second thoughts had come into play, or more commonly for the continuation of Q10. Candidates usually indicated when answers were continued elsewhere and labelled these, which ensured that they could be correctly tagged to the relevant question. Most kept within the margins and wrote clearly, with legibility being an issue for only a few candidates’ answers.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Q.1 (a) Those that correctly identified the argument, tended to reproduce it without error. Some stopped short giving only the conclusion. Those that missed the correct argument tended to reproduce parts of the first paragraph or the main conclusion at the end of Document 1, or the conclusion at the end of paragraph 5. Others focused on the curved-glass screen of the Samsung Gear smartwatch.

Q.1 (b) Most correctly identified the counter-assertion and reproduced it without omission. Others identified parts of the counter argument in the final paragraph.

Q.1 (c) Many gained two of the three marks for correctly identifying indicator words for the reason and conclusion. A few were tempted by the 'as' to suppose that this indicated a reason.

Q.1 (d) This question discriminated well. The most targeted answers correctly identified the various watches and the Filip band. T shirts as an example of Graph Exeter products, was often incorrectly reversed with Graph Exeter being cited as the example. Many candidates correctly identified the examples but went on to describe what they were or how they functioned, rather than what they exemplified.

Q.1 (e) Many correctly targeted the evidence. Some left out the latter half, whilst others identified the young son being lost.

Q.2 (a) Most answered correctly or were in striking distance of a correct answer by identifying either the 'counter' or the 'assertion'. Others focused in on 'think' to give an answer identifying 'opinion', 'claim' or 'belief'.

Q.2 (b) There was evidence of answers in all three mark points. Most explained either the counter or the assertion and some went on to reference what it went against.

Q.3 (a)(i) Most identified a common characteristic, the most usual being a similar age and therefore similar interests. The more focused answers went on to reference similar usage as following on from this. The weakest answers did not reference students or use, focusing upon generalities of location or social media applications or sample size.

Q.3 (a)(ii) Answers to this were more focused than the previous question. Most referred to the impact of differences in courses or countries upon student use. Weakest answers again assessed sample size, rather than looking for characteristics that would set these students and their use as different.

Q.3 (b) Most answers focused on the limitations of the survey questions. The strongest went on to deal with the impact that this had. Others tried to assess sample size or the nature of the cohort, rather than the table itself.

Q.4 (a) Whilst the strongest most commonly focused upon the ability of children to operate the device, most others were able to produce either a version of a correct assumption for three marks, or a close but inaccurate statement of an assumption for two marks. Few chose to present a challenge. Fewer gave a version of what had been stated.

Q.4 (b) This followed the pattern of responses for Q.4(a). The most popular responses related to student opinion.

Q.5 Answers evidenced all three mark points. The strongest referred to 'children' and 'wearable technology' either directly or through a 'they' and a 'them'. Others correctly provided a technical reason without this reference for two marks. A few produced an argument, or two reasons or a reason with explanation for one mark.

Q.6 Those that referenced the conclusion usually did so correctly. Some picked up on conflation or generalisation or causation. Most assessed the reasoning rather than how this linked with the conclusion. Many chose to challenge the reasoning almost in the style of a rant, pointing out the way smartwatches are safer.

Section B

Q.7 The strongest answers were well developed and focused most commonly upon the expertise, ability to see or neutrality of the researchers. Strong answers avoided attributing a 'good' reputation to the researchers, focusing upon their vested interest to provide accurate information to maintain their academic professionalism. When assessing the credibility of the Head of Research, the strongest related this assessment to the credibility of Document 2, thus avoiding the capped mark.

Q.8 This was correctly answered by most. Others chose to focus on material that related to Fitbits. Some added in the sources, although they were not required by this question. A few made extensive reference to the text, perhaps in the hope that some of the information may have been correct. Candidates should select the relevant inconsistent points and state these without other reasoning being attached.

Q.9 (a) There was evidence of answers on all the mark points and in all four levels. The strongest answers focused upon the specifics of the reference; usually 'cybercriminal' and occasionally 'exploitation', gaining C+. This then opened up the possibility of their marks to level 4 with an assessment of what else you need to know. At this point some managed to avoid a circular answer thus gaining C++.

Weaker answers assessed the relevant expertise but then assessed that they needed to know whether the expertise was in fact relevant, which was circular. Many answers did not attempt this part of the question and so also could not access level 4 marks.

Other answers focused more generally upon risk or danger without referring to the actual claim and gained level 2 marks.

A few simply assessed the credibility of the source without any reference to the actual claim and gained level 1 marks. Some assessed the claim as being made by the company Symantec rather than the security strategist, looking at the credibility of the former, which could not be credited.

Q.9 (b) The majority referred to the criteria that they had used in Q.9(a). The strongest discussed which was the most important in relation to others, gaining three marks. Others that correctly assessed one criterion in isolation gained one mark.

Q.10 Candidates entered into the topic with enthusiasm, giving full bodied assessments. Most candidates organised their answers into four clear sections and were aware that they needed to assess the credibility of at least two people on a side.

Credibility was assessed efficiently, usually making best use of expertise and a negative vested interest. Assessments referring to claims of the road safety forum contributor that could be credited usually focused on them possibly being biased against anything that could be a potential threat to road safety. Comments about what was not known about the contributor restricted some access to marks, as did assessments of 'good' reputation for others when this was not indicated in the text. Stronger answers assessed vested interest to maintain an academic status or the professionalism of the job.

Plausibility was very well answered. Most were able to either build upon the issues of risk, health, road safety or connectivity; or to bring in completely new ideas of their own. Most answers were focused and to the point. Others having clinched their mark, went on at length, some with great passion in either direction of benefits or negative impact.

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Most answers came to a conclusion, the strongest drawn from both credibility and plausibility, focusing upon benefits to modern living. These went in both directions. Some claimed that there weren't enough differences from mobiles to warrant a positive impact. Others extolled the virtues of wearables.in terms of immediacy or more usually the practicality of being less easy to misplace. Weaker conclusions simply stated which side was the strongest.

This question again evidenced the full range of marks and this session saw more cohesive arguments and judgements, perhaps held together because it was a topic that was very much in their minds.

F502 Assessing and Developing Argument

General Comments:

This year's topic - the theory that target, opportunity, and motivation are needed for crime to occur, and that technology can now be used to eliminate opportunity - will have seemed further removed from most candidates' experience than some recent topics (the throwaway society last year, and repeating school years the year before). However it was very clearly explained by the resource book, and was clearly understood by most candidates.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Component 01 – Section A: Multiple Choice Questions

Qu.	Key	Text	Type	Comments on candidates performance
1	B	Theatre versus football	Identify MC	Only one of the three distractors, A, attracted a significant number of responses.
2	B		Impact of further claim	One of the better-done questions
3	D	Cost of proms	Assumption	This question had lower discrimination.
4	D	No more penalty points	Name argument element (R)	Only distractor C, "Explanation" attracted a significant number of responses.
5	C		Assumption	This was the best-done question
6	A		Weakness	
7	D		Weaken	Good discrimination
8	D		Identify MC	One of the harder questions but excellent discrimination
9	C	No aid for nuclear countries	Identify P	
10	D		Impact of further claim	
11	A		Necessary and sufficient conditions	Candidates found this question difficult. The distractor B "sufficient but not necessary" proved more popular than the correct answer.
12	C	The British education system	Identify MC	One of the better-done questions
13	A		Name argument element (Counter-Argument)	The most popular distractor by far was B "counter-assertion"; confusing Counter-Argument with Counter-Assertion also proved costly in Q25.
14	A		Assumption	The most popular distractor by far was D.
15	B		Impact of further claim	Candidates found this question difficult. Distractor D, "It weakens the argument" proved more popular than the correct answer.

Component 02 – Sections B and C**Q16 and 17**

17(b) Identifying the intermediate conclusions proved difficult, with most candidates only getting one of the three. The other sub-questions proved straightforward.

Q18

Generally done quite well. The most common cause of lost marks was to comment that the Resource Booklet had a lack of evidence about the effects of removal of motivation or target. A few candidates questioned in what sense there can be an “opportunity” (e.g. to steal a car) if the “target” (e.g. the car) has been removed, and argued that if the opportunity is still there, the target can’t have been removed.

Q19

This question proved problematic for candidates, with the 0 mark examples in the mark scheme proving quite common. The mark scheme doesn’t require a reference to the text, however those who said that seatbelts have been compulsory in the past so they should be in future were missing the point. The author takes this for granted but goes on to argue that due to ignorance of the law in the past we need a new strategy. An appeal to history is not the same as saying we should learn the lessons of history.

Q20 (a)

Many candidates were able to identify three explicit comparisons, and this question was done much better than corresponding questions in previous years. A few still quote the resource book verbatim without identifying the points of comparison. Another cause of loss of marks in this and the next question was to introduce references to *crime* which are not found in Paragraph 4. A few candidates wrote answers to 20(a) which would have been more appropriate for 20(b).

Q20(b) Many candidates were able to gain 2 marks for a comparison of the roles of government and parents, or of citizens and children. The assessment of impact for the 3rd mark proved much harder. It wasn’t enough just to say “This weakens the reasoning because...” followed by a repeat of the comparison already identified.

Q21

Many candidates spotted that the second sentence of Paragraph 5 “A few simple adjustments to cars can remove *all* opportunity for crime” [emphasis added] is a gross overstatement. The main pitfalls leading to loss of marks were a failure to give an assessment of the impact, or to produce two weaknesses which were so similar to each other that the second was capped at 1 mark. Candidates who objected that some/most car owners would not choose to install the new technology were missing the point that the author is implying that the government should compel manufacturers to include it as standard (at least on new cars).

Some candidates proved quite knowledgeable about possible issues such as dermatitis or eczema affecting fingerprints, or speed limiters being a problem on German autobahns where there is no speed limit, or the problem that learner drivers using a driving school will be covered by the driving school’s insurance and won’t be insured in their own name, though in this latter case, it would be simple enough for the instructor to start the car, except during the driving test. Other candidates seemed to conflate having insurance with having a driving licence, or assumed here (and in Q24) that the driver of a car is always the owner.

Q22

Even some of those candidates who failed to name the flaw correctly in (a) still managed pick up a mark or two in (b). The best answers referred to causes but we credited those who referred to reasons, as this question was not testing the difference between explanations and arguments.

Q23

Five of the twelve marks could in theory have been gained by saying

Prevention is better than cure (MC) because prevention is more effective (R1) costs less (R2) involves less suffering (R3).

Good responses developed these ideas so that one or more of the above reasons became an intermediate conclusion, and each was illustrated by an example, taken from different areas such as crime, safety and accidents, and disease. Some candidates were misled by the resource booklet into thinking that they were meant to argue that “prevention of crime is better than cure” and lost marks accordingly. In fact, whilst it is obvious what a “cure” is in the case of disease, there was some confusion as to whether a “cure” in the context of crime was about reversing the harm done to victims, or whether it was about curing criminal tendencies in the offenders. One of the most common responses regarded putting offenders in prison as a (rather ineffective) way of curing (them from criminal tendencies) rather than preventing (them from offending whilst inside).

Giving the correct conclusion at the beginning, or even in a title, is a way of making sure candidates don’t forget to state it later, but they should be warned against stating a slightly modified conclusion at the end, as this may be seen as their main conclusion and marked accordingly.

It is hard to argue convincingly that cure is better than prevention, which is why the question specifically required them to SUPPORT the claim that prevention is better than cure. A very few who failed to read the question did try to argue the other way, and such answers were capped at 3 out 12 but frequently got even less, because in most cases whilst they regarded prevention as an ongoing process which will always require vigilance (e.g. vaccination against smallpox), they regarded a cure as being the same as permanent prevention (e.g. the total eradication of smallpox). Others who were arguing the right way attempted to make similar points in order to produce a counter-argument and response, though that was not required in this question. Though it might have picked up a mark for an extra argument element, it had to be done well to achieve this.

Q24

The best advice to can give here is “the shorter the better”. It may be hard to define when a reason becomes two reasons, or a reason plus an example, or an argument, but in general any answer which is more than one clause runs the risk of being capped at half marks.

A number of responses to **24(a)** mentioned free will. “Because passengers should be allowed to exercise their free will” is a valid opinion, whereas “because passengers have free will” is less satisfactory. There are many theories about the nature of human free will, but none of them lead to the conclusion that people should never be given orders.

Q25

Common themes were that there will always be motivation (human greed, desperation), there will be opportunities (the police don’t have the resources to prevent all crimes or to catch all offenders, the internet opens up opportunities for new types of crime) and there will always be targets (inequality, jealousy). Ignorance of the law was often cited (or over-stated) as a significant cause of crime, though one can imagine plausible examples (do people know if bus lanes operate on bank holidays?). Counter-arguments for why there won’t always be crime were inevitably somewhat naïve, but still a common cause of lost marks was to offer a counter-assertion rather than a counter-argument. Some candidates may have thought they had achieved an argument when what in fact they wrote was a hypothetical reason, which still just counts as a counter-assertion.

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Inevitably there was some rather naïve reasoning, e.g. that crime can be prevented just by locking up all offenders (indefinitely?) or, more commonly, that there is no crime or poverty in communist countries as crime and poverty are purely the products of capitalism.

The topics of both questions 23 and 25 were such that some students (presumably doing A level psychology or sociology) were able to quote genuine evidence, though the mark scheme is such that there is no major advantage to be gained by quoting large amounts of evidence. Other students still persist in manufacturing evidence. They hardly ever do this convincingly so the difference between genuine and false evidence is normally obvious, but as marking is all done online, it is easy enough for examiners to check if there is any doubt.

F503 Ethical Reasoning & Decision-making

General Comments:

Most candidates engaged well with the topic of this exam, and some answers offered were well-considered. A few candidates did not attempt to answer the specific questions posed, but used the exam as an opportunity to express their views on world poverty, charitable giving and other issues of political philosophy.

From session to session, the topics chosen for this unit vary between public policy, personal lifestyle and the policies of commercial and public institutions. The focus in questions 3 and 4 this time was explicitly on personal choices, but some candidates wrote all or part of their answers as if their recommended policy would be compulsory. The impact of this mistake on marks varied, depending on whether the wrong focus was incidental or central to the answers. A similar mistake affecting answers to questions 3 and 4 was that some candidates discussed poverty or charitable giving in general, rather than specifically “world poverty”.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1

Nearly all candidates correctly identified Singer's expertise in ethics as his strength in relation to the issue of charitable giving, since it is an ethical issue. Several rightly identified his apparent lack of expertise in economics as the big weak point in his argument, but most based their answers entirely on the information given in the source, rather than commenting on information which was absent. Singer's adherence to (Preference) Utilitarianism is not strictly speaking a weakness in his expertise, since he is undoubtedly familiar with other theories, but it is the major weakness in the reasoning in Source 1 and so answers identifying it as a weakness of expertise were credited. The few answers which consisted of general critique of Singer's argument, without mentioning expertise or credibility, were awarded 0 marks.

2a

Most candidates answered this question well, correctly identifying two problems of definition. Appropriate examples were used to support most of these answers. A few candidates offered the same answer twice, in slightly different words, while a few answers were so vague that they did no more than repeat the question.

2b

Most candidates correctly identified a problem of definition relating to the word “generous”, and most explained it well enough to achieve 2 marks out of 2. Answers which did no more than repeat the question were awarded 0 marks.

3

Nearly all candidates accepted the suggestion in the question paper of using “fairness” as one of their criteria, and many of them made good use of this criterion, applying it in several ways. “Public opinion” was a popular criterion, but as on other occasions most of the answers were too speculative to be awarded more than 1 mark; however, a few candidates made perceptive use of their knowledge of current affairs to produce pertinent and well-judged evaluations by this criterion. A significant number of candidates used the criterion “effectiveness”, but not all were clear as to what they meant by it. “Cost” and “effect on the economy” produced some clear and some confused answers. Most candidates who chose “ease of implementation” discussed the drawbacks of a legally imposed policy, and the same mistake was fundamental to discussions of “autonomy” or “libertarianism”.

4

Most candidates, but not all, presented their answers clearly, allocating one point per paragraph and one paragraph per point, and several ended each paragraph with a summative intermediate conclusion, which improved the mark awarded for quality of reasoning. Some had wisely chosen to spend time planning their answer before setting pen to paper.

Very few discussions of principles could be described as “developed”, and many did not rise above “basic”, which caused a significant number of candidates to be limited to level 1 for use of principles. Some of them mentioned as many as seven or eight principles, without discussing them or explicitly applying them to the issue.

Most of the “developed” and “accurate” use of principles related to Act Utilitarianism. A few candidates made appropriate use of some of the dimensions of the Hedonic Calculus, rather than limiting themselves to “the greatest good of the greatest number”. Rawls’s theory of the Veil of Ignorance was particularly relevant to this topic, and many candidates made good use of it. Few candidates succeeded in persuasively applying deontological principles to their choice. Weak versions of deontological ethics, such as “You should always do the right thing”, were considered too trivial or circular for credit.

Most candidates made good use of the resource documents to support their reasoning, and many made pertinent evaluative comments, some of which focused on the ideas rather than credibility, which in this case was appropriate. Some candidates wrongly claimed that Peter Singer would support a moderate policy, such as giving 10% or 5% of one’s income to the relief of world poverty.

As required by the question, most candidates supported one policy and rejected another, but some of the policies accepted or rejected were too vague to achieve a high mark, such as “give to support charity” versus “do not give to support charity”.

F504 Critical Reasoning

General Comments:

All candidates had time to attempt all the questions. A few unhelpfully used additional answer booklets instead of the additional pages in the main booklet.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1a

Most candidates correctly identified these two elements as a counter-assertion and evidence respectively, although some wrong answers were also given. Some candidates lost a mark by incorrectly claiming that the counter related to the first sentence of the passage rather than to “much work still needs to be done....”.

1b

Nearly all candidates correctly identified the conclusion of the paragraph, but very few spotted the other intermediate conclusions; most identified them as reasons. Most candidates combined IC1 and R1 into a single element, not realising that “since the UK’s concerted export drive is causing more firms to look to break into new fast-growing markets” is a reason supporting the intermediate conclusion “and expect that to grow”. Nearly all candidates had a fair idea of the outline structure, but not the detail (eg that the evidence and IC1 jointly support IC2, which in turn supports the main conclusion). Some candidates still confused analysis and evaluation, even though the questions are clearly divided by category on the question paper.

1c

A few candidates correctly identified assumptions required to plug a gap in the reasoning in the respective paragraphs of Document 1, and some were awarded 1 mark for answers consisting of either an inaccurate version of one of those or an assumption which lay in the background of the reasoning rather than in the reasoning itself. There were also quite a lot of incorrect answers, some of which consisted of quotations or paraphrases of the paragraphs themselves, which suggested that those candidates did not know the technical meaning of “assumption” used in Critical Thinking.

2

Most candidates correctly stated that the graph broadly supported the claim that the study of languages at university level had declined, whereas the study of STEM subjects had grown, but many were bogged down in the detailed statistics rather than focusing on the interpretation. Many candidates correctly identified and explained one of the two critical interpretative issues, while a few spotted both of them, thereby gaining 5 or 6 marks out of 6. A minority of candidates identified the blatant causal flaw.

3

A few candidates succeeded in identifying the key strengths and weaknesses of Document 4 and of its response to Document 3. Some summarised the content of Document 4, without evaluating its strengths and weaknesses, while others made unsuccessful attempts at evaluation, eg identifying strengths as weaknesses and *vice versa*. A few candidates approached the evaluation from a literary point of view, which led them to identify such features as appeal to emotion as a strength rather than a weakness in reasoning.

4

Nearly all candidates performed fairly well or better in responding to this question.

Nearly everyone presented some relevant ideas on the subject, some based on the sources and some on their own experience and thoughts. Some answers ignored the specific issues of compulsion and international understanding, arguing only in favour of the study of languages in UK schools. Better answers focused on compulsion or international understanding, while a few managed to include both.

Some candidates argued on both sides of the issue before making a summative judgment, but that approach appeared to be based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the task, since arguments are supposed to defend a particular opinion, and balance in that context is not a virtue.

Nearly all answers had a clear structure, and most candidates presented that structure clearly by dividing the answer into paragraphs, allocating one point per paragraph and one paragraph per point; several ended each paragraph with a summative intermediate conclusion. The best answers showed evidence of planning.

Most candidates made good use of inferential reasoning, including intermediate conclusions, and other argument elements such as examples and counter with response.

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