

2017 J2 Preliminary Examination P1 Marking Guide

Standard Assessment Benchmarks

- Students who do not engage with the question cannot be allowed to pass overall (i.e. highest 22 marks to be awarded in total).

Specific Question Requirements

1. Should more emphasis be given to the arts in your society?

In attempting this question, students should examine and evaluate the amount of emphasis given to the arts in Singapore (or their country of origin) at present. In further engaging with the key word 'more', students should also attempt to address the implied assumption in the question that not enough emphasis was (in the past)/is currently being given to the arts in their society. There ought to be an attempt at considering the value of the arts and the benefits it brings to different stakeholders, weighing it against other priorities and challenges that are of concern to a student's society based on its specific contextual characteristics. Students should be able to provide range of examples from a variety of artistic genres (drama/theatre/television/film, paintings, literature, music, and dance) within their society to substantiate their arguments.

Weaker scripts may hijack the question and instead suggest other areas that should be given more emphasis in their society, ignoring the question's focus on the arts. Such scripts may also lose their objectivity, relying on sweeping generalisations that degenerate into a rant or complaint about the state of the arts in their society and how it is being marginalised. Weak scripts will likely provide laundry lists of the various policies and actions taken to promote the arts without a consistent evaluation of whether such efforts constitute sufficient emphasis, or necessitate more focus and attention. Such scripts will also lack concrete illustration.

2. 'Traditional values should never be sacrificed in the name of progress.' To what extent do you agree?

Students need to show an understanding of what 'traditional values' entail. These could include beliefs, principles or standards of behaviour, moral codes and cultural norms which are passed down from one generation to another. Students must discuss the significance of traditional values and evaluate the importance of their role in underpinning social stability, before explaining how various aspects of progress and modernity such as economic modernization/globalisation, and the spread of 'progressive', liberal ideas and norms are at odds with some traditional values (for e.g. communitarian principles, deference to authority & respect for elders, religious/moral principles, attitudes towards marriage). Consequently, scripts should contain an assessment of whether traditional values should be cast aside in the quest for economic growth and development, as well as in response to changing global norms. In consideration of the loaded word 'never', students need to examine whether traditional values are so sacrosanct to the extent that they should continue to be perpetuated even in our modern age. There should also be some attempt at providing a balanced perspective of the issue by students, by recognizing the importance of traditional values but also acknowledging that in certain instances, some values or the extent to which they are practiced/adhered to might have to be compromised for progress to be made. They could also utilize relevant seminal theories to justify their arguments.

Weaker scripts are likely to merely discuss why traditional values should or should not be sacrificed without linking these back to the term 'progress'. Such scripts may also ignore the

loaded word 'never' and hence fail to point out the flaws and impracticalities of such an unyielding viewpoint. In terms of illustration and substantiation, weaker scripts are likely to provide vague generalisations and stereotypes of tradition rather than relevant, specific examples.

3. 'Environmental sustainability is a desirable but futile pursuit.' Discuss.

Students should demonstrate a clear understanding of what environmental sustainability entails, and examine the question assumption that efforts to strike a balance between Mankind's use of the environment and our needs & wants are all in vain ('futile'). They should evaluate characteristics of the world today in relation to environmental resource usage management (economic activities, consumer and political attitudes, awareness, current state of environment, effectiveness of measures today) to assess if such a goal possible/impossible to achieve. Both clauses of the question 'desirable and 'futile' should be addressed, and students should at least attempt to establish why efforts to ensure environmental sustainability are desirable to different stakeholders, but, in the eyes of some, a fruitless effort. Some of the reasons could include considerations of practicality/feasibility (human needs & wants far exceed what the environment can offer), some evaluation of the varying degrees effectiveness of efforts to achieve environmental sustainability and challenges that are context-specific. More nuanced scripts may challenge the question assumption for both clauses and look at how the pursuit of environmental sustainability may not be desirable as it appears, using this argument to further bolster a stand that supports the futility of the pursuit. Given the rather broad nature of the question, students should employ a range of examples from a variety of countries in order to justify their arguments. They should also look at environmental sustainability in different aspects (biodiversity management, energy resource, waste/pollution management)

Weaker scripts will likely have a limited understanding of the concept of 'environmental sustainability'. Such scripts tend to overlook the loaded clause as well, and provide a laundry list of measures and initiatives to deal with environmental conservation, or a list of environmental problems that the world faces today. The illustration and examples provided will also be very limited in nature (for e.g. just focusing on climate change and Singapore).

4. Consider the view that foreign intervention in a country's affairs does more harm than good.

Students should first examine various possible reasons for foreign intervention, including (but not limited to) humanitarian crises, economic difficulties, threats to national security/sovereignty, as well as intrastate civil strife. Other more controversial motivations can include attempts by other countries to use their soft power or otherwise to interfere in and shape the affairs and political development of certain countries. In their essay, students must address the loaded word 'more' by consistently weighing the costs and benefits of intervention by external agencies such as international/regional organisations, civil society groups/NGOs and foreign governments. In evaluating the issue, students should assess the motivations behind external intervention, as well as the effectiveness of the intervention efforts before coming to a conclusion. More nuanced responses would avoid taking absolute stands that foreign intervention in a country's affairs will always be either more harmful or more beneficial. Students could then attempt to conclude that ultimately depend on individual situations or contexts, such as whether there is a necessity for external stakeholders to render assistance to the affected country.

Weaker scripts will likely overlook the loaded word 'more', and provide a laundry list of the benefits and consequences of external intervention without addressing the comparative requirement in the question. Such scripts would also have a limited understanding of the concept of 'external intervention', viewing it purely in terms of singular examples or forms, such as that of military intervention alone.

5. 'We can no longer trust the media.' Is this a fair comment?

Students are expected to address the inherent assumption of change in the loaded phrase 'no longer', by discussing how the trust that was placed in the media in the past has been eroded in recent times. Students should also show an understanding of the distinction between traditional media and the new media, examining how the characteristics and nature of both broad categories of the media affect their credibility and accuracy of information. In arguing their case, students should assess changes in the media landscape (as compared to the past) and explain why the media has been both criticized for its failings (for e.g. the rise of 'fake news', media bias in advertising, government objectives of propaganda) as well as lauded for upholding principles such as media ethics, accuracy and objectivity. There should be some attempt at demonstrating an awareness of how different perceptions of stakeholders towards the media's credibility will vary according to different contexts and cultures, before concluding the effect some contextual circumstances have on levels of public confidence and trust in the media as an institution. More nuanced scripts may challenge the assumption in the question, arguing that media outlets have always served the interests of those they represent. Hence, misinformation and media bias are certainly not new developments. Such scripts could also discuss the importance of diversifying one's sources of information in order to confirm the veracity and authenticity of news reports, questioning the reaction of losing one's trust in the media when consumers should instead be more discerning in light of the media landscape and developments today.

Weaker scripts would fail to consistently and accurately deal with the loaded phrase 'no longer', focusing only on arguing why we can or cannot place our trust in the media. Such scripts could also prematurely come to the conclusion that we cannot trust the media simply because of a few isolated, negative instances of misinformation and media bias. Conversely, they could swing to the other extreme when attempting to include balance and struggle to reconcile both extreme perspectives, leading to an essay of contradictions.

6. Can the restriction of personal freedom ever be justified?

Students must clearly define what 'personal freedom' is and what the restriction of such freedom entails (various types/forms of limits/controls; stakeholders involved in such restriction, for e.g. governments' limits on individual freedom of speech) in order to establish their arguments. Students must also engage with the loaded phrase 'ever be', and demonstrate an understanding of the underlying assumption, examining the premise that the restriction of personal freedom is inappropriate and unjustifiable. They may agree with this premise, or challenge it by arguing based on the nuance of the phrase 'ever be' (carries an underlying absolute tone beyond the present/immediate as well). Students should critically evaluate the various motivations/reasons for, and outcomes of attempting to restrict personal freedom (utilitarianism, moral grounds, etc.) before reaching their eventual recommendation. In elaborating on their points, students should provide concrete examples and make suitable reference to controversies (from varying contexts) regarding the restriction of individual freedom.

Weaker scripts may completely miss the loaded phrase 'ever be' and merely provide a laundry list of the benefits and drawbacks of limiting personal freedom. It is also likely that weaker scripts are vague in their substantiation, making cursory references to social media without any concrete evidence. There may also be weaker scripts that focus only on a particular type of personal freedom and/or context (for e.g. freedom of expression and Singapore).

7. 'Modern life has made living longer a burden.' How far do you agree?

Students should demonstrate an understanding that the phrase 'living longer' is nuanced and focuses more on the impact of a longer lifespan on individuals. In addition, they should clearly identify the scope of their discussion by clearly stating the stakeholders they will discuss (living longer does not only apply to an aging population/the elderly). Students must examine and evaluate the various ways in which specific, current characteristics (for e.g. higher costs of living, increased propensity for individuals to develop certain health conditions, increased rates of social isolation/singlehood/childlessness, or better healthcare, increased incomes/affluence, more accepting attitudes towards aging, better opportunities and conditions in developing countries, etc.) of life in modern society has caused a long life to be a worrisome and heavy responsibility, rather than a positive experience or vice versa. Given the nature of the question, in justifying their arguments, students should provide convincing trend-based examples/illustration from a range of different societies around the world.

Weaker scripts will likely list the pros and cons of an aging population on societies without consideration/appropriate treatment of the key words in the question. Students might also hijack the question by arguing that modern life has not made living longer, but other things, a burden instead. There may also be scripts that merely discuss whether or not we should live longer, again without addressing the key issue of whether contextual circumstances have made a longer life a burdensome one.

8. 'In your society, how effective have government efforts been in promoting a healthy lifestyle?

Students should demonstrate a clear understanding of what 'government efforts' entail, and must discuss specific local initiatives/policies in their essay. The definition of a 'healthy lifestyle' (better scripts would go beyond the formulaic diet and exercise campaigns to examine initiatives that deal with the infrastructural/psychological/economic aspects) should also be clearly defined at the onset of the essay. Students may then go on to examine why these efforts may have met with limited success (context-specific challenges to initiatives/measures, flaws of the said efforts, differing views and reception to such efforts, the lack of individual will, etc.). The scope of discussion should also be broad (for e.g. not fixated on just students in schools/the TAF club, but also include more recent trends/developments in health policies) Students should also attempt to provide a range of concrete illustration and examples to substantiate their arguments.

Weaker scripts may simply provide laundry lists of past and present government efforts to encourage a healthy lifestyle without any convincing evaluation of how effective they have been. They may also display a clear lack of contextual evaluation that is required in a 'your society' question. Such scripts are also likely to lack the evidence/data required to prove the effectiveness of government efforts.

9. Is diversity necessarily a good thing?

Student must demonstrate an understanding of the term 'diversity' by exploring how many societies around the world today are becoming increasingly cosmopolitan – a by-product of the past few decades of globalization. This potentially complicates and creates new challenges that governments have to deal with, in addition to having to already manage the diversity of their local indigenous populations. Other aspects of diversity that must be discussed could include those in terms of socio-economic status, religious/moral views, political leanings, etc. Students should at least attempt to engage with the key word 'necessarily', examining why diversity is commonly perceived as something desirable, and produces beneficial outcomes for society, but may, under certain circumstances, actually lead to a negative impact instead. Their discussion should include how diversity, when poorly managed, can lead to socio-political tensions. Ultimately, students should recognize that embracing diversity merely for the sake of political correctness might not always be in the best interest of society as no one-size-fits-all solution can be adopted or implemented to truly encourage, embrace or manage differences.

Weaker scripts would fail to address the loaded word 'necessarily', simply listing the pros and cons of having diversity in societies instead. Such scripts would also lack balance, or in the process of doing so, fail to reconcile opposing viewpoints in a way which does not contradict the stand provided in or the introduction. These scripts would also be limited in the examples discussed and might even be restricted to only Singapore-based examples.

10. Assess the view that scientific research should not be constrained by ethical concerns.

Students should examine and evaluate the premise behind the view in the question by looking at the theoretical functions and ideals of science, with one possible argument being that an excessive focus on ethics may hinder the pace of scientific and technological progress. Students could then juxtapose such a perspective against that of stakeholders who feel that ethical considerations are necessary to guard against unethical, immoral and potentially dangerous scientific pursuits and their consequences and evaluate the validity of both schools of thought. To illustrate their arguments, students should provide concrete and specific examples of a variety of scientific research practices and their associated ethical considerations (unbiased and impartial research, accurate record keeping and reporting, peer review, minimisation of potential harm to research subjects, research for altruism vs. profit, stem cell research, etc.). Students may discuss scientific processes and practices that result in the creation of certain technologies, but should not confuse the processes of these practices with the technologies themselves. Better scripts will likely provide a more successfully balanced and nuanced examination of the issue, arguing for the need to achieve a good balance between ensuring the autonomy of scientific pursuits, and the need for ethical checks to prevent abuses. These scripts will be able to support their arguments with a good variety of examples, illustrating the tension between the two competing priorities.

Weaker scripts are likely to provide mere lists of the pros and cons of scientific research or adhering to ethical guidelines in science, without any consideration of the dichotomy/tensions between the two. They may also resort to using broad generalisations about scientific research practices and their ethical concerns, with little consideration of contextual circumstances and poor supporting illustration. These scripts might also be example-led and might confuse scientific practice with technology in general and their ethical implications (e.g. CRISPR genetic editing, 3D printing guns).

11. 'Diligence is the key to success.' What is your view?

Students must engage the absolute phrase ‘the key’ and evaluate the assumption that diligence and sheer effort are most effective method for success. They should also clearly define the meaning of ‘success’ at the onset of their essays, in order for them to craft clearer arguments. They could either argue the case for the question, or challenge the assumption and say there may not be a ‘one-size-fits-all’/sole method for an issue that can be highly individual in nature, by examining how hard work may/may not pay off under different circumstances or in different contexts (culture, socio-political factors, type/severity of success, personality/psychology of individuals, etc.). Students should also attempt to compare hard work with the importance of other positive and desirable attributes that might be more crucial to achieving success in a modern knowledge based economy. Given that the question’s key focus is effectiveness (outcome-based), a variety of concrete examples (from across different aspects of life, professions, countries) establishing the effectiveness of hard work should be provided. More nuanced scripts may go on to argue how it is fallacious to place hard work or any one attribute as the most important above others, given the complexity and dynamism of the modern world.

Weaker scripts will likely miss out on the phrase ‘the key’ and be unable to demonstrate any comparison between hard work and other possible factors for success. Such scripts could be laundry lists of the advantages and disadvantages of hard work/diligence. They may also be very limited in their scope of discussion and content, providing vague illustration, mere hypothetical situations or repeated examples throughout. Weaker scripts could also possibly hijack the question by providing lists of all the possible measures/solutions for success rather than focusing on the comparison required.

12. To what extent have technological developments enhanced learning in today’s world?

Students should begin their essays by clearly defining what technological developments refer to, before examining how and why the advent of technological developments has helped learners of different profiles better explore, master and achieve their educational goals/objectives and outcomes. The key focus of the question should be the degree of enhancement such developments have brought, rather than the presence of it. Hence, there should be at least an attempt to clearly assess the degree of effectiveness technological developments, and evaluate why there may be limitations to such purported enhancements to learning. Students should systematically evaluate specific characteristics of the world today and how technological developments may have/have not effectively facilitated stronger mastery and better learning in various domains. Students could examine how an increasing emphasis on differentiated, customised and multimodal learning, more inclusivity in the education landscape – lifelong learning, specialised educational tools for those with special needs, etc., have provided the platform for technological developments to work their magic (the use of artificial intelligence/A.I. in the formal classroom, augmented reality/AR to support experiential learning, integrated online learning systems for the disabled/less mobile elderly, etc.) In their discussion, a variety of specific and fairly recent technological developments, as well as clear examples from various countries and contexts should be provided.

Weaker scripts will likely be vague, highly generalised or inconsistent in providing examples to support their arguments. Such scripts may also degenerate into a listing of the benefits and drawbacks of technology when it is used in education. Alternatively, these scripts may limit their discussion too specifically to a few technological examples (some of which may be old or outdated), or contexts (for e.g. Singapore’s education system).