**Section 1: General Paper Essays**

Write these essays in full.

**Essay Question 1.1 [Topic: Reflective Issues]**

To what extent is entrepreneurship encouraged in your society?

**Essay Question 1.2 [Topic: Environment]**

How far is it possible to live an environmentally sustainable lifestyle in today’s world?

**Essay Question 1.3 [Topic: International Issues]**

‘In today’s world, governments should prioritise domestic affairs over international ones.’ Discuss.

**Essay Question 1.4 [Topic: Media and Fake News]**

‘We can no longer trust the media.’ Is this a fair comment?

**Essay Question 1.5 [Topic: Science and Technology]**

‘People in the workplace should embrace rather than fear technological advancements.’ Discuss.

**Essay Question 1.6 [Topic: Culture]**

How far does your society embrace diversity?

**Section 2. Reference General Paper Essays**

Use these essays as reference on how to organise the content.

**Essay Question 2.1 [Topic: Culture]**

In a world where borders are vanishing, is it futile for Singapore to persist in building a national identity?

**Essay Question 2.2 [Topic: Science and Technology]**

To what extent does science and technology make us less human?

**Essay Question 2.3 [Topic: Education]**

‘Schools are no longer the key to overcoming ignorance.’ Do you agree?

**Essay Question 2.4 [Topic: Social Media]**

Is social media to blame for our ignorance?

**Essay Question 2.5 [Topic: Youth, Ageing and Family Issues]**

How far should young people be held accountable to their own actions?

**2. Reference General Paper Essays**

**Essay Question 2.1 [Topic: Culture]**

**In a world where borders are vanishing, is it futile for Singapore to persist in building a national identity?**

Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, there is greater interaction between people from various countries, such that the borders among nations become less defined. As such, there is a growing concern that the vanishing borders may hinder Singapore from forging a national identity as most Singaporeans are able to move freely and greater number of foreigners is migrating to Singapore. However, we may still need to embark on such a development to ensure the progress of the nation despite the difficulties that Singapore may in a globalised world.

Main Body

**Opposing View:**

For those who embrace globalization, they will feel that it is futile for Singapore to persist in building a national identity as the rise of modern technology in a globalized world contribute to greater interaction among diverse cultures in Singapore and other countries, thus reducing the sense of rootedness which will make it difficult to cultivate national identity.

From the 20th century onwards, the rise of modern technology has made travelling easier and tourism is part and parcel of life. In particular, social media technology raises the space for interaction. (e.g. 4G Technology, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter).

**Rebuttal:** Why we still can continue to instill our local and natural heritage despite the influx of foreign exposure

**Supporting View:** Why Singapore can still develop our national identity despite the influence of globalization

1. Cultivation of national identity through political indoctrination (flag-raising ceremonies, campaigns about our core values like Racial Harmony Day, National Service – Most Singaporeans see these as an essential form of participation in the development of national identity)

Why is political commitment a strong influence on national identity, creating a bulwark against the negative effect of globalization?

2. Cultivation of national identity through family rootedness which will create the emotional attachment to the society and the state.

**Essay Question 2.2 [Topic: Science and Technology]**

**To what extent does science and technology make us less human?**

Introduction (observation, proposition, method of discussion)

Science and technology has become increasingly relevant and significant in the modern world. The changes are aplenty, such as advances in healthcare and the interconnectedness between cities and national borders. Also, science and technology has shaped mankind, seen in terms of the way we live our lives. Such a change gave rise to concerns over the way human beings are characterised. In order for us to understand the extent of validity of this statement, we need to examine how science and technology has affected human lives, in terms of human psychology, morality and social interactions. (various aspects)

Main Body

**Point 1: Agree with the proposition that science and technology makes us less human – Psychology – undermine our capacity to become less emotional**

**Topic sentence:** For those who argue that science and technology make us less human, their rationale stems from the belief that the science and technology will create psychological impacts that shape us to be rational and mechanical (more robot-like), making us less human.

**Point elaboration:** Technological advancement has enabled humans to disregard the need for intuitive thinking and instead placed greater emphasis on task-oriented behaviour. For example, the standardization of procedures and work repetition in heavy industries have caused humans to be accustomed to the monotony of work as there is no need for independent thinking and questioning of practices.

For those who are in the academic fields of science and technology, the emphasis on dialectical thinking has shaped the way humans behave. For example, academics will pose ‘yes’ or ‘no’ surveys, which encourages respondents to think like robots. Furthermore, there is a higher degree of mechanization and conformation through the machines and computer software we used which will reduce our sensibility as a human being.

**Extent of Agreement (EOA) 1: We still have the capacity to empathise and feel, which is part of human nature**

However, it can be argued that we still retain our sense of humanity as it is part of our human nature to express emotions and feel. Throughout the human civilization, humans are used to interacting with one another, such as the expression of emotions. It is an innate part of us to empathise with one another as it supports the instinctive nature to ensure the survival of our mankind. Therefore, science and technology has improved our understanding of the world, which accentuated our sense of empathy, rebutting the argument that we are less emotional.

**Points to take note: rebuttal linking sentence / the EOA focuses on proving the limitations of the previous argument – must relate to the point in the proposition**

**Point 2: Less moral and ethical in judgement**

**Topic Sentence:** Science and technology may have made us less human as we become less moral and ethical in judgement.

**Point Elaboration:** The pursuit of knowledge has caused humans to ignore the moral implications and repercussions. For instance, the scientific discovery of cloning has sparked off controversies as some researchers value the attainment of personal prestige over the ethical concerns. Similarly, the availability of euthanasia has opened up a Pandora’s Box, in which we become increasingly less human.

Abortion – ethical dilemma

**EOA 2: We still have the capacity to make judgement**

However, it can be argued that we still possess the capacity to make judgements that display our strong beliefs in the moral and ethics. While it can be acknowledged that science and technology has opened many untold possibilities on how it affects human lives, we also become more cautious in the way we use our knowledge for the greater good.

For example, through the efforts of scientific research, we understand the destructive nature of environmental degradation, which gave rise to the green social movements that convinced people to adjust their social behaviour and minimize the carbon footprints.

**Point 3: Less sociable as our communication and interaction skills are undermined**

Science and technology has made us less human as it causes the decline in communication and interaction skills.

For instance, the use of social media tools has shaped the way we communicate with one another. Although we are no longer bounded by the constraints of time and space, humans are increasingly accustomed to online rather than face-to-face social interactions. Consequently, we gradually lose the ability to express ourselves and empathise with one another.

**EOA 3: We are still social beings**

However, it can be argued that we are still social beings. Similar to other herd creatures, humans will subconsciously desire social contact. Science and technology has instead strengthened this aspect as it feeds on our desire to be part of each other’s lives. For example, the ‘fear of missing out’ notion was discovered through studies. Science and technology has fostered stronger social ties.

Conclusion (summary, evaluation, suggestion

We can see that science and technology has influenced the human characteristics and this is part of human evolution. The extent of impact on how science and technology changes human features will depend on pace of technological advancement and how human beings adapt to these changes. In the process of integration, it is inevitable that science and technology will be part of the human civilization. Therefore, it is imperative for us to be cautious of the impact on how science and technology will deface our human features.

**Essay Question 2.3 [Topic: Education]**

**‘Schools are no longer the key to overcoming ignorance.’ Do you agree?**

**Analysis of the question**

This question examines the role of schools in acquiring skills and knowledge to overcome ignorance. Students are required to analyse the statement to show whether schools are being replaced by alternative sources, like the Internet, to overcome ignorance.

Meaning of ignorance – ignorance of the political world, about social life, environment social media

**Analysis of the question:**

Examine and interpret the proposition:

* Have schools taken a backseat in playing the main role of overcoming ignorance through education?
* What are the possible factors that have contributed/caused the diminishing role of schools?
* Are there cases when schools are still critical to overcome ignorance?
* (repeat these causation and analysis for the next three points based on three different categories)
* Features of the school function
* Features of other institutions – social media, religious institution, political institutions (NGO and grassroots)

**Structure**

Introduction

* Observation
* Set the thesis / anti -thesis
* Set Your stand – thesis – schools are no longer the key to overcome ignorance

Main Body

1. explain the opposing view – schools are the keys to overcome ignorance
2. explain why this opposing view is wrong (rebuttal)
3. explain the supporting view – schools are no longer the keys to overcome ignorance

(3 points from different categories)

**Areas of paragraph development:**

* What kind of ignorance
* Why the school is unable to clear this form of ignorance
* How other forms of experiences or teachings can solve this ignorance

Examples

* Linking sentence

**Stand 1:** school can clear your ignorance 🡪 the advantages of school in clearing the forms of ignorance

OR

**Stand 2:** school cannot clear your ignorance 🡪 the weaknesses of the school

How other social entities can help to solve – like parents, peers, social media, the government, religious institutions, social organizations

1. Introduction
2. Opposing view- why the view against your stand is correct
3. Rebuttal – prove why opposing view is wrong
4. Supporting view – why your stand is correct
5. Conclusion

**Essay Question 2.4 [Topic: Social Media]**

**Is social media to blame for our ignorance?**

While social media as we know it only began to enter the public consciousness in the mid-2000s, it has quickly become an indispensable and fully integrated part of the modern connected life. It is undeniable that the ability to connect instantly and seamlessly with countless people across the globe has changed the way we think and live. Some believe that this change has been for the worse, and that the shifts in habits and mindsets born of social media have contributed to a woeful popular ignorance. Others see social media as yet another of the many tools and technologies in content generators’ and consumers’ hands, attributing any and all possible thinking and behavioural changes and consequences to the desires and actions of users, instead of to the medium itself. While this essay acknowledges the substantial agency of users in interacting with and being influenced by social media, it contends that to see the form of social media as consequently devoid of inherent influence is myopic. Ultimately, it is undeniable that social media has, through changing the way we think and approach information and ideas, been to blame for our ignorance.

Social media cannot and should not be the culprit for our ignorance as it is but a value-neutral platform, and cannot in and of itself be held fully liable for shifts in behaviour and thinking. While social media has certain specific characteristics that might facilitate some kinds of interaction over others, it is ultimately on users to determine what kind of interaction the medium is used for, and the consequences of such interaction. Social media platforms such as Facebook can be used for constructive discussion and sharing of insightful articles, or memes and excrement-posting and Twitter can be used to marshal activists, or to broadcast daily banalities. Much as a car cannot be blamed for an accident, such a mere tool as social media cannot be blamed for the ignorance manifested in its users.

However, it is ridiculous to assume that the nature and usage patterns of any medium, quite apart from its content, are entirely neutral and devoid of influence. Even if the content of social media is (at least notionally) up to the users to determine, the peculiarities of social media have had at least a substantial contribution to the standardization of the society where it may have forged by the values of the society. While social media is not directly responsible for the content posted on it, it has nevertheless provided the platform for users the opportunity to spread their own personal agenda that may promote anti-social behaviours.

Social media should be blamed for our ignorance as its constant and instantly accessible stream of narcissistic trivia has led us to value and crave the unimportant and valueless over useful and meaningful information. It provides us with instant gratification since amusement and distraction are available at our fingertips, especially with mobile devices such as using InstaStory or Twitter feed to showcase the users’ follower on what we have been up to . As a result, many of us frequently fall to the temptation of filling up the bulk of our time with the consumption of such hollow intellectual calories, with the limited time not being used to acquire useful information. This is because it is much more pleasurable and less stressful to distract oneself with pointless trivia and personal minutiae such that vast amount of time is spent on social media. Over time, social media has conditioned us to instinctively seek trivia, leaving us with no interest or motivation to learn important things where it infuses in us the little comfort in life since it easy to incept us with a hedonistic lifestyle. With our knowledge bank and desire to improve it absent, we have become more ignorant because of the proliferation of social media.

Second, social media should be blamed for our ignorance as the ready availability of opinions and “information” on it has made us less willing to ask critical questions and seek a better understanding of the world around us, in other words social media has conform our thinking into standardized values. Many of these contents are readily available on social media, more so than on other media such political or social interest pages like SMRT Feedback, Temasek Review and Wake up Singapore. These perspectives may vary in credibility but are often misinterpreted as gospel truth by social media users due to their lack of media savvy or laziness to find assurance to the claims being told. Furthermore, it could also be the result of intentional misrepresentation by social media sources. Hence, this can lead to both lack of awareness of the full range of perspectives on issues, as well as a habit of taking things at face value without exercising critical thinking which both constitute ignorance.

Lastly, social media should be blamed for our ignorance as the ease of posting opinions and gaining others’ support makes us unused and disinclined to fully consider and craft our views and perspectives since small issues and trivia like voicing out self-centred concern which promotes individualism can be done with just a click of a button. As a result, it is far easier to gain widespread popularity and currency on social media, regardless of the merits of the opinion expressed just like what is being done by “Social Justice Warriors”, a negative term used to describe individuals who are engaged in activism to raise personal reputation like social liberalism, feminism, cultural inclusiveness and politically correct views. Seemingly spared from the need to ensure quality of argument, we become accustomed to focusing more on extreme delivery and sensationalism instead of the strength of our arguments themselves, leading to shoddier thinking and ignorance.

In conclusion, we should accept that social media is a tool whose content is determined by users. Also, even if social media were to blame for ignorance, question whether the blame should be pinned on social media or those who design it. Either way, the unique characteristics of social media make it very much to blame for increased ignorance among the population today, as the population are affected and swayed by these characteristics even if they have notional control over the content.

**Essay Question 2.5 [Topic: Youth, Ageing and Family Issues]**

**How far should young people be held accountable to their own actions?**

While young people often have the capacity to engage in weighty and sometimes dangerous actions, such as entering into contracts or committing severe crimes, they do not always have the capacity to understand and appreciate the consequences of their actions, a fact that should be considered in apportioning accountability and liability. Also, the justifications of restitution and deterrence in holding young people fully liable must be balanced with the considerations of rehabilitation, especially when it is not clear whether punishment or counsel will prove the better deterrent in the long run. Hence, the debate over how far young people should be held accountable to their own actions arises. One school of thought is that young people should be responsible for their actions while the opposing school of thought is that young people should be held responsible for their actions.

Young people should be held accountable to their own actions as they are psychologically no less capable of judgment and discernment than those of other ages, in the black-and-white decisions. Young people are taught from a young age what is right or wrong, hence if taught right, they should be able to tell easily for straight forward situations. From Paul Bloom’s research at Yale, done with Karen Wynn, they found from showing babies one-act plays that even 3-month-olds prefer the good guy to the bad guy, and that older babies and toddlers will reward the good guy and punish the bad guy. This means that babies can judge for themselves right and wrong, which also means that if they do something wrong, they are already aware that they should not be doing it. Hence, young people should be held accountable to their own actions as they are able to discern right and wrong. And since they are aware and still continue to do what is wrong, then they should be held responsible for it.

However, it is not always clear if the young are as capable of judgment and discernment as they or those around them think they are. The extent to which a young person is psychologically developed is still a matter of great psychological and criminological debate, and cut-off ages in law for areas from contracting capacity to capacity to consent to sex still vary among cultures, showing that the discussion on this issue is far from closed. For example, the legal age of consent in Singapore is 16, and sex with a minor, regardless of whether the act was consented to or not, is illegal and is a punishable offence. Since there are age restrictions for acts like that to protect the young because of the idea that they may not be old enough to understand the seriousness of the act, it is not clear whether the young are capable of judgment. Therefore, the accountability for their actions should vary according to the extent that they are fully capable of giving quality consent and controlling themselves to the level of a competent / reasonable adult.

Some say young people should be held accountable to their own actions as they should be clearly and unequivocally deterred from destructive behaviour. Children are taught from a young age what is right and what is wrong. They are usually disciplined and punished when they do something not right, hence the idea of doing bad will cause them to be punished because they should be held responsible for their mistake should be built in their head. For example, in school, cheating in a test or bullying another student would get the child in trouble, possibly getting detention or in more extreme cases, suspension. They then face shame from other students and must answer to their parents for why they did it. This then instils the understanding of what is right or wrong for students. In addition, in countries such as Japan and Singapore, students go through moral education classes which a specifically to build on the students’ moral compasses. This thus means that young people should be held accountable to their own actions as they are led to not do wrong.

However, the extent to which the above is true depends on the extent to which bearing the full brunt of consequences is an effective preventer of destructive behaviour. Pre-trial diversion, counselling and warnings may be more effective in preventing such behaviour by educating the young about the gravity of their actions and building goodwill and mutual respect, as compared to blunt sentencing, which may only engender bewildered resentment. A study conducted by Anna Aizer of Brown University and Joseph Doyle, Jr. of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, found that youth that went to prison were 39 percent less likely to finish high school than other kids who from the same neighbourhood. Even young offenders who weren’t imprisoned were better off; they were thirteen percent more likely to finish high school than their incarcerated peers. More surprisingly, young offenders who were incarcerated were a staggering 67 percent more likely to be in jail (again) by the age of 25 than similar young offenders who didn’t go to prison. Moreover, Aizer and Doyle found that incarcerated youth were more likely to commit “homicide, violent crime, property crime and drug crimes” than those that didn’t serve time. Hence, youths may benefit more if they are given the chance to understand and learn about the severity of the mistakes they have made, and thus they should not be held responsible for their actions.

Opponents say young people should be held accountable to their own actions as the ramifications of their actions are no less severe than those of the same actions performed by older people. Often, the crimes committed by children are even worse than adults because they involve other children. No matter who was the one who committed the crime, a death is a death, or someone getting hurt will still be just as significant. One of the most infamous cases would probably be of ten-year-olds Jon Venables and Robert Thomson, who in 1993, abducted, tortured and murdered two-year-old James Bulger in Liverpool. And in 2006, a twelve-year-old Alberta girl killed her eight-year-old brother and her parents because they did not approve of her then twenty-three-year-old boyfriend. The impacts of these crimes are just as big, if not greater than if adults were the murderers because having children do these just makes people wonder what more can they do wrong when they grew up and develop even more.

Young people’s accountability does not necessarily depend on consequences alone. Even considering pure tangible impact, treating youthful indiscretions with a focus on rehabilitation instead of restitution may not make amends for today’s damages, but may prevent a world of hurt tomorrow. By letting children understand and have the space and chance to learn the consequences of their mistakes and giving them room to correct and change might be better than throwing them into jail and having them be demonised such that they will forever have to live with mistakes they made when they were much younger. For example, 25 years after committing murder, Venables was jailed again due to child pornography offences. Vincent Moss, the foreman of the jury admitted ten years after he delivered the guilty verdict that he was ashamed of agreeing to the verdict of the children being guilty of murder because the children should have instead been given social and psychiatric help instead of being named monsters and having to live with that title their whole life after. Hence, youths should not be accountable for their actions simply on the consequent of their mistakes.

In conclusion, the extent to which young people should be held accountable for their actions depends on the extent to which the actions can legitimately said to be theirs in the first place. An action done under the influence of an incompletely developed mind, whose capacity for control is not yet up to its capacity to act, cannot truly be said to be the fully intended action of the person, which explains the presence of various legal ages of capacity or consent, below which the action is considered void. It also depends on the extent to which full liability will lead to the socially ideal outcome, especially when compared with the potential benefits of counsel and rehabilitation.

**FlipSide: GP Notes on Science and Technology**









