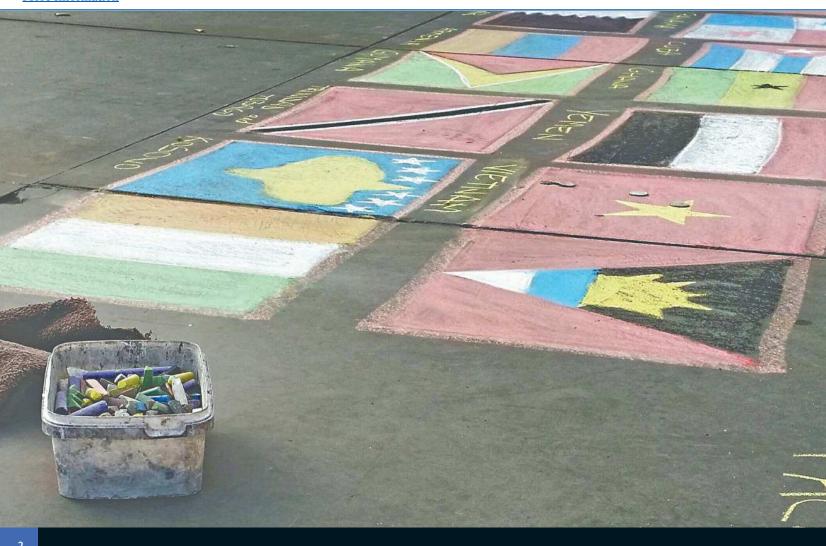


# Unit 1:

Overview of the Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper



More Information



# **Chapter 1.1**Syllabus outline

The Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper syllabus will challenge you to think critically and creatively about complex global issues.

### **Learning objectives**

#### In this chapter, you will learn about:

- the key skills that you will need to develop during the course
- the content of the syllabus and what it aims to achieve
- the benefits of taking the AS Level English General Paper course
- how you will be assessed
- the types of questions that you will need to answer.



#### Chapter 1.1: Syllabus outline

#### A Topics and key skills

In your Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper course, you will study topics from across the curriculum. The course will help you to develop both your writing and critical reading skills.

The course will prepare you to do two types of tasks:

- to write essays about contemporary society (i.e. society today)
- to *read* information critically and to respond to questions that challenge your logic and understanding.



#### TIP

There is a list of Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper topics later in this chapter in Section D Course content.

The 'key skills' are the core abilities you will develop in this course. These will help you to become a competent reader and writer as well as a critical thinker and problem-solver. The course will help you to develop a number of important key skills in both reading and writing:

#### Reading

- Can you:
  - understand the question being asked or the text you are reading?
  - understand detailed written information presented in different ways (e.g. texts, data, charts, lists)?
  - understand the use of English words and phrases as they are used in different contexts?
  - acquire a wide-ranging vocabulary from what you read?

#### Writing

- Can you:
  - use knowledge and information appropriately to support your argument?
  - express ideas in clear and accurate written English?
  - present ideas in a structured way?
  - write appropriately for a variety of purposes?
  - demonstrate range in vocabulary and control over grammar and other mechanics?

#### **Application of information**

- Can you:
  - summarise key text in your own words?
  - select appropriate information to use in your written responses?
  - pair reasons with relevant examples to support your point(s)?
  - recognise different viewpoints?
  - explain the ideas of others in your own words?

#### **Analysis and evaluation**

- Can you:
  - analyse data?
  - interpret meaning from the text you read or the knowledge you gain?
  - make inferences from what you read or learn?
  - assess various points of view and decide between them?
  - develop ideas in a logical way?
  - understand the consequences of actions?
  - offer workable solutions to real world problems?
  - make judgements supported by evidence?

#### **B** Syllabus aims and objectives

The Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper syllabus is intended to enable you to:

- develop understanding and use of English language in the context of contemporary topics
- encourage and appraise a broad range of topics
- develop a wider awareness and knowledge of contemporary issues through reading
- develop independent reasoning skills
- develop the skills of interpretation, analysis, evaluation and persuasion
- develop skills in writing structured and developed arguments, and present reasoned explanations
- develop the ability to present a point of view clearly, and consider and reflect upon those of others.

There are three assessment objectives (AOs) that correspond with these aims. To meet these objectives you will need to show that you can:

- select and apply information (AO1)
- analyse and evaluate information (AO2)
- communicate using written English (AO3)



#### Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper

The table shows examples of the kind of tasks that you may do during the course, and the assessment objective that each task will meet.

Example task	AO1	AO2	AO3
Give reasons for the increasing popularity of start-up businesses. (reading comprehension task)	<b>✓</b>		
How effective are consumer boycotts? (essay/writing task)	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>
By considering both the advantages and disadvantages, explain which of the options is most suitable. (reading comprehension task)		<b>✓</b>	
Analyse the need for classes like art, music and drama in the school curriculum. (essay/writing task)	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>
What does the expression paring down mean as it is used in the material? (reading comprehension task)			<b>✓</b>
Examine the advantages and disadvantages of travelling in today's society. (essay/writing task)	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>

#### **C** Course benefits

The skills that you will develop in this course can be applied to any subject. They may also help you to:

- meet the entrance requirements for universities, since many universities place a high value on critical thinking skills
- become more aware of contemporary 'real world'
  issues
- communicate effectively with others about these issues.

**Effective communication** is a skill that is essential to everyone, everywhere. It is a skill that enables you to change the world around you. Communicating effectively can help you discuss issues, articulate ideas and voice your opinions. Essentially, this course gives you the skills you need to find your own voice in an increasingly globalized society.



#### **KEY TERM**

**Effective communication:** using language accurately to express your thoughts or opinions about a topic while remaining sensitive to your audience's feelings and experiences.

#### **D** Course content

#### **Writing essays**

One of the main focuses of the course will be essay writing. You will usually be given a choice of essay questions, which are organised by the following topics:

- economic, historical, moral, political and social
- science, including its history, philosophy, ethics, general principles and applications; environmental issues; technology and mathematics
- literature, language, the arts, crafts, and the media.

#### **Demonstrating critical thought**

A good essay will show knowledge of the topic area, but it will also discuss that information on a more critical level. So as well as selecting appropriate information to include in your essay, you will need to analyse it.

It may help if you think of this as the 'input' and 'output' of your essay.



#### OUTPUT

(the information, facts or knowledge that you use to support the points you are making)

(your informed opinion about the information (i.e. the input), why it is relevant to your point and/or whether there are other points of view)

By sharing these thoughts with your audience, you are actively and critically interacting with the information that you present in your essay.



#### KEY TERM

**Prompt:** a question or instruction which encourages you to respond.



#### Chapter 1.1: Syllabus outline

#### **ACTIVITY 1**

Read the paragraph, which responds to the following essay **prompt**: How far do you agree that traditional stories are worth preserving? With a partner or independently, identify the 'input' and 'output' in the paragraph.

Traditional stories should be preserved because they have the ability to influence behaviour. In fables, for example, characters' actions and the consequences of choices they make culminate in a moral lesson learnt by the end of the story. For children especially, these characters serve as examples for how to act and how not to act. This serves an important purpose as they develop a sense of self and establish their own values. A classic case of such stories are Aesop's *Fables*, which have a timeless ability to influence moral behaviour. One tale, 'The lion and the mouse', teaches its audience that 'a kindness is never wasted'; and 'The fox and the goat' teaches us to 'look before we leap'. Based on the popularity of these fables, it stands to reason that traditional stories can play a significant role in how we think and act, which certainly makes them worth saving.



Storytelling is a timeless tradition in many cultures. What kinds of stories does your culture value and to what extent are these traditions maintained?

#### **Choosing topic areas for essays**

The course title, 'Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper', means that the essays you write will be on *general* academic topics from science to maths, literature to history, media, culture and beyond. For example, you may be asked to write about:

- the value of art or the quality of cinema
- the relevance of graffiti
- the benefits of research technology
- truth in advertising
- ethical concerns surrounding genetically modified crops.

Would any of these areas interest you? Would you like to write about them? If not, there are plenty more to choose from. Look at the following list for the full range of topic areas that you could be asked to write about in this course.

#### Economic, historical, moral, political and social

- The role and value of history in modern society
- Wars, conflicts and terrorism
- The state and its institutions
- Political systems, leadership, nationalism and forms of government
- The role of international organisations
- The provision and politics of aid
- Justice and the justice system; prison and rehabilitation
- The role of the individual in society
- Family, marriage and partnerships, social pressure, class and social attitudes
- Globalisation and its impacts

#### **C**AMBRIDGE

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#### Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper

- Wealth and equality in society
- Population and migration
- Education
- Welfare
- Sport and leisure
- Work and employment
- Industry and commerce
- Freedom of speech, thought and action
- Human rights
- Animal welfare
- Matters of conscience, faith and tolerance

# Science, including its history, philosophy, ethics, general principles and applications; environmental issues; technology and mathematics

- Medical and scientific advances and their ethics
- Drug testing, manufacture and provision
- Diet, health education and provision of healthcare
- Space exploration and its associated industry
- Information and communications technology
- Surveillance and privacy
- Environmental concerns
- Natural disasters including mitigation and management
- Rural and urban concerns
- Food and water security
- Transport, travel and tourism
- The uses and applications of mathematics

## Literature, language, the arts, crafts, and the media

- Literature
- · Non-fiction writing
- Language
- Performing arts
- Visual arts
- Applied arts
- Arts institutions and venues
- Traditional arts and crafts; heritage
- Print and digital media
- Advertising
- Censorship and freedom of the media and the arts

There should be something of interest here for everyone. The essays that you write during the course will always be based on the topic areas in the list. You will always have a number of essay questions, so you will be able to choose what you want to write about.



#### KEY SKILLS

In this course, you will focus mainly on developing your reading and writing skills, not on your direct knowledge of specific topics. However, it is part of your responsibility as a learner in this course to apply the knowledge you are learning in other subject areas (e.g. sciences, history, languages or media) to the skills you are practising for the AS Level English General Paper. For example, knowledge gained from a science class on the use of pesticides could be used for a writing task such as:

Are pesticides the answer to the problems facing the business of global agriculture?

#### **Answering comprehension questions**

Besides essays, the other main focus of the course will be comprehension questions. You are provided with materials and required to:

- explain and interpret information
- respond to the material by writing a persuasive text that expresses an opinion and justifies a conclusion
- demonstrate understanding of how language features are used
- analyse and evaluate the material.

Depending on the type of material, you may be asked to find the solution to a problem using common sense and logic. For example, you might need to choose the most appropriate renovation for a building; in this case, you might be given data, costs and/or a list of considerations to take into account before arriving at a decision.

Comprehension questions may ask you to demonstrate understanding of a prose piece such as a speech, email or news article. A question following a text like this, for instance, might ask you to put ideas from the text into your own words to show understanding. You may also be asked about language specifically: for example, the definition of a word in context or the meaning of a colloquial (informal) phrase.



#### Chapter 1.1: Syllabus outline



#### **KEY SKILLS**

The comprehension questions can help you improve the skills you need to meet the essay-writing assessment objectives of understanding, analysing, evaluating, applying and communicating.

Comprehension questions may ask you to do any of the following:

- summarise ideas in different types of material
- make inferences about the meaning of a text
- analyse the reasoning of an argument
- develop arguments of your own in response to a text or other material
- discuss the implications of an issue
- suggest a way of solving a problem.

The comprehension questions may cover a wider range of topic areas than the essay topic areas list that you have already looked at. You will use the skills you have learnt in the course to understand and analyse the information presented in the material, then provide relevant answers to the questions that follow. Most questions will be based on your immediate comprehension of the material; however, some questions may allow you to use knowledge outside the reading to further support your answer.



#### KEY SKILLS

The material you will read for comprehension practice can be up to 900 words long.



In their book about reading comprehension, *Mosaic of Thought*, Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann define synthesis as the process of organising the different pieces of information to create 'a *mosaic* ... a [new] meaning, a beauty greater than the sum of each shiny piece'.

**Cambridge University Press** 

More Information

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#### **Comprehension skills**

The material for comprehension questions may consist of:

- statistics
- diagrams
- maps
- tables
- notes
- listed information.

By practising comprehension questions, you will develop the skills needed to persuade your audience to accept any argument that you put forward. You will learn to evaluate the various solutions to a problem or issue before deciding which one works best.

Practising comprehension questions will also help you to develop the critical skill of **synthesising** information. After analysing several pieces of information, you might reorganise this input in a new way, creating fresh understanding of the issue.

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#### **KEY TERM**

**Synthesise:** create new ideas or understanding by combining knowledge from different sources in fresh ways.

For comprehension questions, the material may also be printed or online texts, such as:

- reports
- reviews
- essays
- scripts (e.g. dialogue, recorded conversations)
- speeches
- descriptions.

As you practise answering comprehension questions, you will learn how to read text closely and carefully in order to recognise differences in key features like tone and style. By doing this, you will develop the ability to 'read between the lines' and interpret the deeper meaning beneath the material itself. Practising with comprehension questions will also help you improve your own writing skills, because you will need to summarise and communicate information in your own words.

#### **ACTIVITY 2**

Here are some criterion-based statements, which summarise the expectations for writing an effective essay. With a partner or in a small group, consider the meaning of the underlined terms, then rewrite the statements in your own words.

#### The essay:

- **a** is <u>fully relevant</u> and offers a <u>range</u> of <u>effective</u> examples which respond to the question
- **b** analyses <u>possible meanings</u> of the question
- **c** defines the <u>scope</u> of the response
- **d** features a <u>consistently appropriate register</u> when discussing the issue
- e uses a wide range of vocabulary
- f uses a <u>variety</u> of <u>language features</u>
- **g** uses language in a <u>controlled</u> way
- **h** is <u>cohesive</u>, <u>coherent</u> and <u>engaging</u>
- i <u>links ideas</u> together in a convincing way
- j analyses a <u>range of arguments</u> in order to reach a <u>supported</u> conclusion
- **k** is <u>well-organised</u>.



#### TIP

Terms such as 'scope', 'cohesive' and 'register' may be difficult to understand. Putting these terms into your own words can help you become more comfortable with the language of the criteria. This will make it easier for you to write with these standards in mind.

#### **E Expectations and assessment**

#### Criteria for assessing essays

Assessing an essay is quite different from assessing responses to a question that offers multiple choices but has one fixed answer. For example, what do you think:

- distinguishes an *impressive* essay from an *average* one?
- makes a response *adequate* rather than *underdeveloped*?
- is the difference between a *clear* range of examples and a *reasonable* range?



#### Chapter 1.1: Syllabus outline

Distinctions like these can be difficult and subjective sometimes. However, if you understand the criteria necessary for a strong essay, you will have a greater chance of communicating ideas effectively and satisfying the objectives of this course.

To assess essays as fairly as possible, it is helpful to use a *criterion-referenced* marking system. This means there is a fixed set of criteria, or standards, that an essay is judged against.

The table contains a more complete set of criteria for assessing the effectiveness of an essay.

#### Criteria for assessing an essay

	Select and apply information (AO1)	Analyse and evaluate information (AO2)	Communicate in written English (AO3)
Effective	<ul> <li>Fully relevant</li> <li>Clear use and range of examples</li> <li>Applies evidence and examples appropriately</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Considers possible interpretations of the question</li> <li>Defines essay scope</li> <li>Considers a range of perspectives</li> <li>Strong line of reasoning</li> <li>Offers a judgement based on both evidence and personal view</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Communicates ideas clearly</li> <li>Consistently appropriate register</li> <li>Wide range of vocabulary and style</li> <li>Controlled, accurate use of language</li> <li>Ideas are well-organised and cohesive</li> </ul>
Competent	Uses examples to illustrate, though some are more relevant and appropriate than others	<ul> <li>Demonstrates an understanding of the question</li> <li>Offers some perspective regarding the issue, though not as varied</li> <li>Argument is generally logical</li> <li>Regular use of evidence to support the line of reasoning</li> <li>Some judgement is passed, but it may be too broad or irrelevant</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Communication is generally clear</li> <li>Register is generally appropriate</li> <li>Uses everyday vocabulary</li> <li>Generally controlled use of language, though not always accurate</li> <li>Errors are present but do not impede communication</li> <li>Coherent</li> <li>Organisation may be inconsistent</li> </ul>
Developing	Lacks examples, or examples lack connection to points raised	<ul> <li>Lacks understanding of the question</li> <li>Forms a basic conclusion, though it lacks insight</li> <li>Weak line of reasoning</li> <li>Does not offer judgement or draw conclusions about the information shared</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Inconsistent communication; frequent errors impede communication</li> <li>Basic or limited vocabulary</li> <li>Language lacks control and accuracy</li> <li>Response may be fragmented or disorganised</li> </ul>



#### Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper

#### ACTIVITY 3

Using the assessment criteria table, mark the following sample student essay about the influence of fashion on health and wellbeing. Apply the standards in the table, and be prepared to justify your mark to the class.



What influence does fashion have in your life?

#### To what extent does fashion determine our health and/or happiness?

Fashion can symbolise many things such as happiness and good health. Some people are dedicated followers of fashion and it could be because they believe it helps their mental as well as physical well-being. Certain colour schemes can symbolise certain things such as happiness and joy, and some even believe that image affects the overall health of an individual.

One way that fashion can determine health or happiness is that the shapes, patterns and colours can portray certain emotions. Some colours have underlying meanings or feelings associated with them. For example, some prisons have started painting the inside of cells pink because it instils calmness and encourages calm behaviour. Some symbols or patterns therefore encourage certain behaviours, which could be a reason why some people are so into fashion since it can make them feel good, happy and even healthy.

However, health and happiness are always dependent on the image of clothing or styles of fashion. While in some cases it may make an individual feel better about his or her appearance and overall health, it can be a psychological thing. For some people, for example, sports are very enjoyable to play or watch and can clear the head of the individual. For others, however, sports are a waste of time and they can get bored watching or playing no matter what it is. The same goes for fashion: while some people love it and use it for relaxation others dislike it and think it's a waste of time, proving that it is an individual thing whether image determines happiness and healthiness.

Another reason fashion may have an effect on mental or physical state might be because the nicer you look, the nicer you feel. For example, if you dress up in a beautiful wedding dress, you feel loved and important, which makes you feel happy, which makes you feel better healthwise. On the other side of the spectrum, if you were to look like a mess with ragged clothing and messy hair, with people staring at you and pointing, it could take a toll on your mental health because having people criticise you can make you feel bad about yourself. Lots of times feeling down about yourself can lead to physical complications as well, such as the way depressed people often feel physically sick.

In conclusion, people may be dedicated to fashion because it can make them feel better about themselves when they look nice. On the other hand, it may just be a psychological thing. Either way, however you look at it, happiness makes you feel good, and you need a way of achieving happiness, and for some, it is fashion.



#### Chapter 1.1: Syllabus outline

# Criteria for assessing reading comprehension questions

Some reading comprehension questions ask you to develop your own explanation, argument or other set of ideas. For example, a question might ask you to look at several options before arguing which one is the best. In this case, there is no 'wrong' answer, provided that you develop and explain your choice. Therefore, you will be assessed based on specific criteria about *how* you answered the question.

Other questions, however, will be looking for answers that can be found in the reading material. For example, a question might ask:

Which two brands did consumers like most?

The two brands in question will be clearly mentioned in the material. When a question has a specific answer like this, your response will be assessed on the *content* of the answer.

In addition to the information provided in the question itself, you will be told how many marks are available for each comprehension question that you answer. This will give you an idea of how detailed your response should be. As a general rule, those questions worth only 2 or 3 marks should be brief in comparison to those worth 8 or 10 marks.



Chapter 5.2 offers more tips for understanding how to answer comprehension questions as well as possible.

#### **Summary**

#### Studying for the Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper helps students to:

- think about issues
- sympathise with, as well as challenge, opposing viewpoints
- understand and apply ideas which are relevant to the issue
- analyse and evaluate different perspectives
- express these ideas effectively through fluent use of the English language.

#### As a student in this course, you will:

- explore a variety of global issues and be able to discuss them on a mature level
- learn how to communicate your thoughts and opinions clearly by using precise language, good sentence structure and thoughtful, logical organisation.

The skills you will learn in this course will be valuable in your study of other subjects and later as part of your university-level study.