



## TMJC General Paper Paper 1 Skills Guide

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## 1) An Introduction to Paper 1: Essay

General Paper aims to develop in students the ability to think critically and inventively, construct cogent arguments and communicate their ideas using clear, accurate and effective language. General Paper encourages students to explore a range of key issues of global, regional and local significance and appreciate the interrelationship of ideas across time, space and disciplines. This provides students with a good foundation to thrive in a fast-changing world. It is particularly in Paper 1, the Essay component, that such skills are tested.

### Description

Paper 1 (Essay) comprises 8 questions examining issues of local, regional and global significance. Students have to answer any one out of a total of these 8 questions with an essay length of 500–800 words within a duration of 1 hour 30 minutes.

### Range of Marks

Content: 30 + Use of English: 20 = Total mark: 50

### Issues and knowledge related to:

- society and culture
- economics
- politics
- the arts and humanities
- science and technology
- the environment

*Questions will be general in nature and require candidates to draw on their knowledge from across disciplines to show an awareness of significant global/national/local issues and demonstrate understanding at a conceptual level.*

The ability to convey a sustained and well thought-out argument, as well as being able to make connections across different ideas will be vital. Examples will be needed to support that argument, thus you should read as widely as possible to build your knowledge!

## 2) Choosing a Question

A good essay begins with the right selection of the question. Given that there are 8 questions to select, which should you choose?

Decide based on:

- A. Your **knowledge of the concepts being discussed**, tapping on your interests or passion, or knowledge from previous reading or other subjects.
- B. Your **understanding of the point of contention/main issue** of the question. Avoid questions with keywords you do not understand, or those with too many modifiers or conditions.

Steps to take:

1. Read **all 8** questions.
2. **Identify the concepts** for each question and eliminate those where you know little or nothing about the concepts.
3. Consider your **understanding of the point of contention/main issue** of the remaining questions. Eliminate those which you do not fully understand due to complicated keywords, modifiers or conditions.
4. Of the remaining questions, **attempt brainstorming** ideas for each of them.
5. Select the question for which you are able to **brainstorm 5 – 6 points**.
6. Get started on **thorough question analysis** and **essay planning** once you have decided on the choice of the question.

### 3) Question Analysis

Before you can even start writing an essay, you need to first understand what the question is asking for. Thus question analysis is extremely important. There are a few steps you could take:

- Step 1:** Identify and clarify **Concepts**
- Step 2:** Identify and clarify the **Evaluative Keywords**
- Step 3:** Set the **Context**
- Step 4:** Recognise Extreme Views and check for **Underlying Assumptions**
- Step 5:** Decipher the **Point of Contention (PoC)** / **Main Issue** to be addressed
- Step 6:** **Brainstorm** Ideas
- Step 7:** Organise ideas into an **Essay Plan**

#### Step 1: Concept Clarification

In analysing the essay question, the first step to take is to **identify and clarify concepts** in the question.

Clarifying them will help you to better understand what the question is about, especially if they involve concepts that are **vague**, **ambiguous** or **subjective**.

It is important to go beyond literal definitions to consider conceptually related ideas, such as the relation of the workforce to education, and issues of inequality in education.

Use **CPF** to help you with your clarification:

- **Characteristics/Connections** to the concept being discussed (e.g. issues connected to education such as competition, mental health, inequality, etc.)
- **Purpose** of the concept (e.g. aims and goals of getting an education – to make informed decisions, prepare for the workforce, for social mobility, etc.)
- **Function** of the concept (e.g. what education does – impart knowledge, meet the needs of the economy etc.)

*Note that 'purposes' and 'functions' may be similar for some concepts and may overlap. CPF is just a guide to help you consider more possible conceptually related ideas while trying to understand the essay question and guide your brainstorming later.*

Let's try:

Education: Instruction, teaching, or training, usually conducted in schools.  
**Related ideas**: Competition, Inequality, Workforce, Economy, etc.

To what extent can education improve the lives of people?

Lives of people: General well-being of individuals or their quality of life.  
**Related ideas**: Healthcare, Social Economic Status, Rights, Security etc.

#### Step 2: Identify and clarify the Evaluative Keywords

Look out for the **evaluative keywords** in the question, because they tell you how the question should be dealt with.

*\* In the example on the right, the evaluative keyword 'can' is tagged with 'improve', thus both should be read together, i.e. having the ability to upgrade/better*

Let's try

Can: Having the possibility of, being able to

To what extent can education improve the lives of people?

Improve: To better, upgrade, help, have a positive impact on...

Some evaluative keywords are also inserted to **complicate the question**. The insertion of such keywords usually hints that there is an **underlying assumption** to the question. (This will be covered in Step 4.)

There are numerous evaluative keywords such as 'should', 'important', 'value', 'effective', 'justifiable', 'ready', 'increasingly' etc. There are many but basically every question will contain one or more evaluative keywords.

Fret not, these will be progressively covered in GP lessons!

*Also, don't worry about the difference between 'concepts' and 'evaluative keywords'. Basically, if there are any words in a question which you do not quite understand on first reading, then more clarification and thinking through is needed.*

### Step 3: Set the Context

The context of a question can be examined by asking 3 important WH questions: **Who, Where, When**

#### (A) Who

Is the question specific to a special **group of people**?

Depending on the question, this group can be a specific age group like the young or the elderly, or a social class like the poor or the rich. Other groups of people referred to can range from students to migrants, or women or just about anyone.

Next, do also consider who the **other stakeholders** (person/groups who have a vested interest/concern in the issue) are in the discussion of the question. Whose views should you consider when answering the question?

#### (B) Where

Does the question require special focus on a certain **place**? What are the characteristics that define it?

For example, 'Your Society' clearly demands that the context of your essay is, quite literally, your society or country. For those of you who are Singaporean, 'your society' means Singapore, and for those of you whose homeland is elsewhere, use your home country as 'your society'.

If a question has more specific keywords for example 'developing world', then it is clear that the essay is meant to examine the issues specific to the Third World or developing countries.

#### (C) When

Are you required to look at a specific **time period**?

For example, 'Today' and 'Modern World' clearly demand a current context. Both require you to consider the characteristics of the current situation or the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how these characteristics affect the issue.

The keywords 'more than ever before', 'past' and 'present' also encourage you to make a past-present comparison in your essay.

Let's try

Who: Young People in SG  
Eg. Teenagers, students, young working adults



Other possible stakeholders:  
Parents, educators, magazine publishers, TV producers/channels, the government

How far do magazines or television programmes aimed at young people in your society have a positive effect?

Where: Your society, i.e. Singapore

Let's try

'It is tough being a teenager today.' Comment.

When: Today  
What are the characteristics present in the modern world/current situation/21<sup>st</sup> century that make it tough for teenagers? (Eg. competitive environment in schools etc)

#### Step 4: Check for Underlying Assumptions

It is important to ask yourself if the question contains any '**underlying assumptions**' (a belief that is present in the question but not immediately obvious). This is more likely for questions with extreme propositions with evaluative keywords that complicate the question (mentioned earlier in step 2), such as 'still', 'always', 'never', 'no', 'ever' etc.

So what if a question has **Underlying Assumptions**? The presence of an underlying assumption in a question means certain **key/fundamental points have to be addressed** in the answer.

Let's try

How do the following questions differ?

1. Should fairy tales be taught to children?
2. Should fairy tales **STILL** be taught to children?

The keyword 'still' forces the reader to consider the view that fairy tales may not be so relevant after all, such that they should no longer be taught to children.

#### Step 5: Identify the Point of Contention (PoC) / Main Issue

The **Point of Contention (PoC)** of the question refers to the **main issue** you are supposed to be debating/arguing in the question. Using steps 1 – 4 of question analysis earlier, rephrase the question such that you understand the question's PoC better.

##### Step 1: Concept Clarification

What concepts need to be clarified?

##### Step 2: Evaluative Keywords

Identify the evaluative keywords.

##### Step 3: Context

Who are the stakeholders involved?  
Where is this discussion centred?  
When is the time period?

##### Step 4: Underlying Assumptions

Does the question contain any underlying assumptions?  
Does this assumption stem from an extreme proposition?

It is your job to either support these assumptions or to challenge them. This forms your stand.

##### Step 5: What is the PoC/Main Issue of the question?

After going through steps 1 – 4, put together what has been analysed so far.

Let's try a different question:

'the word failure' + 'used in education'  
How is the word 'failure' used in education?  
When do you encounter the use of the word 'failure' in education? When do you not pass your exams, tests or assessments!

'The word failure should never be used in education' Discuss.

EV keywords: 'Should' calls for your recommendation, based on an assessment of arguments for and against the statement.

**Who:** Students, parents, educators, schools, and even the government.

**Where:** No specific location. Discuss schools and education systems around the world, not only in Singapore.

**When:** 'should never be used' hints that the word 'failure' has been used in education before, creating some problems. Hence it is useful to look at the past and current impacts.

'The word failure should never be used in education.' Discuss.

- ✓ Why would the question strongly object to the use of the word 'failure' in education?
- ✓ Do the potential harms, problems or disadvantages apply in all instances in education, and for all students?
- ✓ Can the word failure be used sometimes or for some groups of students?

**PoC:** Do you recommend the use of the word *failure* in education (through tests and exams), given its harms and benefits?

## Step 6: Brainstorm for Ideas

After a thorough analysis of the question, **brainstorm for ideas and main points** in order to write the essay. It is vital to have **breadth as well as depth**. It is also crucial to consider **different perspectives and contexts**, highlighting **relationships** across **time, space and disciplines**.

### Brainstorming Techniques

#### A) SPECTRAM

One of the most useful techniques for brainstorming, SPECTRAM is an acronym for the various perspectives, areas or factors one could examine when addressing an essay question.

**S:** Social (Family, children, roles of men & women, the elderly, etc.), Science, Sport

**P:** Politics, Prejudice & Discrimination, Poverty, Philosophy

**E:** Economics, Ethics, Environment, Education

**C:** Culture, Communications, Crime & Punishment, Conflict

**T:** Technology (Science), Terrorism

**R:** Religion, Race, Rights

**A:** Aesthetic, Artistic, the Arts

**M:** Media, Military, Medicine, Marriage

*Tip: Phrase your points as reasons / arguments that directly answer the question!*

Let's try this question:

'It is tough being a teenager today.' Comment.

**Social:** Liberal societies offer more choices and personal freedom for teenagers.

**Politics:** Teenagers today live in times of political stability + more attention devoted to teens' needs and views by governments.

**Economics:** Parents are more affluent and able to support teens through school.

More **economic** opportunities for teenagers, especially for their future.

**Education** of high standards BUT stressful with high expectations of teens to succeed academically.

New **technologies** increase comfort and quality of life.

Images found on **mass media** and **social media** put pressure on teenagers to look good

It is important to note that not all the perspectives above can be applied all the time. There is sometimes also an overlapping of ideas from these perspectives. Do exercise discretion when deciding which perspectives can be applied to a particular question. The social, political and economic areas are usually the most considered ones.

#### B) CLAMS

CLAMS is a useful way to examine trends, relationships and connections between issues and ideas. It can be used in tandem with other brainstorming techniques to generate balance.

**Context:** consider different contexts, e.g. developing vs developed countries, Asian vs Western cultures or even the different cultural contexts within a country.

**Long/short term/Time:** consider time perspective, e.g. how will things change, is this permanent or temporary?

**Alternatives:** consider alternative measures/reasons/solutions, e.g. is there another way of addressing this issue?

**Magnitude:** consider the reach, e.g. does it apply to the majority/minority, is this the exception or the norm?

**Severity:** consider the extent of the issue/impact, can be linked to magnitude.

Let's apply it to the same question as above:

**Context:** While teenagers in conservative societies may not enjoy the same degree of personal freedoms as those in liberal societies, there has been greater awareness of their rights.

**Long/short term/Time:** As parents become more affluent, teenagers have led more comfortable lives

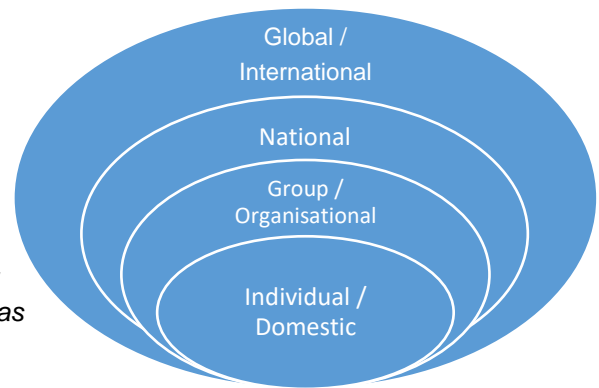
**Alternatives:** Despite facing more academic pressures today, there is also greater emotional support for teenagers.

**Magnitude/Severity:** While the media does play a part in creating social pressure for teenagers to conform to certain norms, learning to cope with social expectations has always been part and parcel of living in society.

### C) I-O-N-G / Onion Peel

I-O-N-G encourages the student to explore an issue from 4 different perspectives, namely:

*Note: Relying on a single brainstorming technique may not be sufficient, so do not be afraid to use **a mix of brainstorming techniques** to generate a range of ideas considering multiple points of view.*



#### Step 7: Organise points into an Essay Plan

Now that you have brainstormed points for your essay, you need to move on to developing an essay plan by taking the following steps:

##### 1. Sort your points into two sides

Using a table for brainstorming is most expedient as your points eventually have to be sorted into two sides of the argument. Thus, even for points brainstormed using SPECTRAM, they would have to be sorted into a table.

Let's try with this question!

'It is tough being a teenager today.' Comment.

We brainstormed these points using SPECTRAM earlier:

- **Social:** Liberal societies offer more choices and personal freedom for teenagers.
- **Politics:** Teenagers today live in times of political stability + more attention devoted to teens' needs & views by governments.
- **Economics:** Parents are more affluent and able to support teens through school.
- More **economic** opportunities for teenagers, especially for their future.
- **Education** of high standards BUT stressful with high expectations of teens to succeed academically.
- New **technologies** increase comfort and quality of life.
- Images found on **mass media** and **social media** put pressure on teenagers to look good

*The above points support either one or the other stand. Sort them out into a table!*

AGREE It is tough to be a teenager today	DISAGREE It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!
(a) <b>Education</b> is stressful with high expectations of teens to succeed academically. (b) Images found on <b>mass media</b> and <b>social media</b> put pressure on teenagers to look good	(c) <b>Social:</b> Liberal societies offer more choices and personal freedom for teenagers. (d) <b>Politics:</b> Teenagers today live in times of political stability. More attention devoted to teens' needs and views by governments. (e) <b>Economics:</b> Parents are more affluent and able to support teens through school. (f) More <b>economic</b> opportunities for teenagers, especially for their future. (g) High standards of <b>education</b> (h) New <b>technologies</b> increase comfort and quality of life.



## 2. Expand on points; delete repeated/irrelevant points

At this stage, do refine and expand on your points, and delete those that are repetitive or irrelevant. The added words are underlined.

AGREE It is tough to be a teenager today	DISAGREE It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!
<p>(a) <u>Less carefree</u> existence, with high expectations of teenagers to succeed academically, leading to <u>high stress levels</u></p> <p>(b) <u>More pressure</u> to conform to a certain definition of success (to do well, look good); images used by the mass media compound this</p> <p>Phrase your point such that it conveys how <u>tough</u> or <u>easy</u> it is to be a teenager!</p> <p>Deleted as this point applies not only to teenagers, but to everyone too. Since the question is on teenagers, only keep points specific to the context of teenagers' lives</p>	<p>(c) <u>More liberal</u> societies which lead to more choices and personal freedom for teenagers.</p> <p>(d) Especially in 1<sup>st</sup> world countries, living in times of political stability + more attention devoted to teens' needs &amp; views by governments</p> <p>(e) Parents more affluent, able to support teenagers + through school, <u>teenagers need not worry about entering the workforce early to help support families + bright promising futures</u> with more economic opportunities</p> <p>(g) <u>Well-prepared</u> by education systems of high standards + <u>easy access to information &amp; knowledge</u></p> <p>(h) <del>New technologies increase comfort and quality of life.</del></p> <p>Combine (e) &amp; (f)</p>

While brainstorming using techniques like SPECTRAM, CLAMS or I-O-N-G are often very useful, questions can also be brainstormed just from exploring the **two contrasting stances** in a table. This is an expedient tool as you can come up with arguments on both sides that directly answer the question, without the need to rearrange the brainstormed points again later.

Steps:

- Analyse the question thoroughly to decipher the point of contention. (If you get this wrong, then whatever you brainstorm will be irrelevant!)
- Consider the two possible positions or stances one could take.
- Draw a table and brainstorm points that can answer the question from both possible stances.

Let's try using this question:

'The word failure should never be used in education.' Discuss.

As shown on page 4, the PoC of the question is: **Do you recommend the use of the word *failure* in education, given its harms and benefits?** The question thus requires an evaluation of the pros and cons of using the notion of failure in education through assessments and exams.

The two possible stands that a student can take are:

AGREE	DISAGREE
The word <i>failure</i> should not be used in education at all because of all the harms, problems and disadvantages of doing so.	<p>The so-called 'problems' with using the word <i>failure</i> in education are exaggerated</p> <p>+</p> <p>The word failure should be used in education at times because there are benefits to doing so.</p>

Using the two headers above, go on to draw a table and work out the arguments according to the headers!



AGREE Harms/problems/disadvantages of using the word <i>failure</i> in education	DISAGREE Problems with use of the word <i>failure</i> in education are exaggerated + Benefits of its use in education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Harsh impact on self-esteem of the young</li> <li>▪ Fixation on grades increases stress for students, parents &amp; teachers, takes the joy out of learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students are not so fragile; can deal with failure.</li> <li>▪ A harsh but realistic reflection of life in the real world.</li> <li>▪ A useful lesson to correct misconceptions of what was taught.</li> <li>▪ A wake-up call; motivates students to work harder.</li> <li>▪ Ensures readiness for next level of education.</li> <li>▪ If education is about learning, then failure is also part of learning.</li> </ul>

### 3. Decide on the stand

The next thing to do now is to decide on the stand to take. So which side do you take? The answer is obvious.

1. DO always take the stand which is **more logical**.
2. Alternatively, you could take the stand for which you have brainstormed **MORE ideas**.

DO NOT, HOWEVER decide on a stand (emotionally) before the brainstorming stage. You might miss certain key points in doing so. For example, if this is a question on animal rights and you happen to love animals, do not quickly decide that you must take the stand that is pro-animal rights even before you have brainstormed any ideas. Also, do not take a more difficult position just to give yourself a challenge. You do not earn extra marks for doing so!

Which stand should you take for the question on teenagers?

**More points** on this side, so take this stand!

AGREE It is tough to be a teenager today	DISAGREE It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!
(a) Less carefree existence, with high expectations of teenagers to succeed academically, leading to high stress levels (b) More pressure to conform to a certain definition of success (to do well, look good); images used by the mass media compound this	(c) More liberal societies which lead to more choices and personal freedom for teenagers. (d) Especially in first world countries, living in times of political stability + more attention devoted to teens' needs & views by governments (e) Parents more affluent, able to support teenagers through school, teenagers need not worry about entering the workforce early to help support families + bright promising futures with more economic opportunities (f) Well-prepared by education systems of high standards + easy access to information and knowledge

The side that you have NOT chosen provides your  
**OPPOSING VIEWS (OVs).**  
 Your OVs OPPOSE your stand.

The side that you have chosen provides your  
**SUPPORTING VIEWS (SVs).**  
 Your SVs SUPPORT your stand.

#### 4. Mapping out points into a Balanced Discussion

Cambridge examiners expect a balanced response to the question attempted. The Paper 1 Marking Rubrics indicates that an A-grade script should have "...a **well-balanced discussion** and consideration of differing perspectives and contexts, demonstrating developed analysis and evaluation of the issues."



What is 'balance'? Simply put, you would need to consider arguments from both sides of the issue being discussed, not presenting a one-sided argument. This is because an unbalanced or one-sided essay appears biased rather than giving a complete picture of the issue being discussed.

As explained in the previous section, you should have brainstormed arguments from both sides of the issue being discussed, with **SVs** supporting the stand you have chosen, and **OVs** opposing the chosen stand.

However, do not sit on the fence! The essay needs to have a **clear stand** rather than merely agreeing with both sides. If an essay simply presents both SVs and OV that contradict one another, it may end up sounding self-contradictory!

As such, the OV cannot be left hanging in an essay and should be 'reconciled'. There can be 2 ways of reconciling OVs:

(i) Concessions

or

(ii) Rebuttals

##### (i) Concessions

You may decide to concede the OVs. What is a Concession? It is an acknowledgement or recognition that some arguments from the opposite stand may also be true.

*Concession: a statement that acknowledges or recognizes the validity of the opposing view.*

Let's try with this question we unpacked earlier!

##### Step 1: Topic & Concept Clarification

Education: Instruction, teaching, or training, usually conducted in schools.  
**Related ideas**: Competition, Inequality, Workforce, Economy, etc.

Lives of people: General well-being of individuals or their quality of life.  
**Related ideas**: Healthcare, Social Economic Status, Rights, Security etc.

To what extent can **education** improve the **lives of people**?

**EV keyword**: Can  
Having the possibility of, being able to

What does 'improve' mean?  
To better, upgrade, help, have a positive impact

##### Step 2: Evaluative Keywords

##### Step 3: Context

Who? Students, citizens, educators/schools, the government

Where? Not indicated, so examine all countries

When? Examine past and current situations – has education been successful in improving people's lives?

##### Step 4: Underlying Assumptions?

'To what extent' hints at the assumption that education may not always have the ability to improve everyone's lives, and all the time.


##### Step 5: Point of Contention

Does education have the ability to make tangible and real improvement to people's well-being or quality of life? Is this true all the time and for all groups of people?

##### Step 6: Consider SPECTRAM, CLAMS and/or I-O-N-G

##### Step 7: Organising points into a Table

More points on this side, take this stand!

	Education CAN improve the lives of people – How?	Education CANNOT improve the lives of people – Why?	
SV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Economic:</b> Equips <b>individuals</b> with skills, helps them find jobs and earn money.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Education</b> alone is only one factor. Many other factors needed for real improvement to people's lives.</li> </ul>	OV
SV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowers <b>individuals</b> to read and learn so as to acquire knowledge and make more informed decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many schools behind the times, teaching dead knowledge with little real-world application.</li> </ul>	OV
SV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools expose <b>individuals</b> to wide variety of subjects, helps broaden their horizons.</li> </ul>		
SV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From <b>national/global perspective</b>, more educated populations are more likely to create new ideas and technology, leading to the improvement of human QOL.</li> </ul>	 <b>Rebut or Concede</b> these OVs?	

At this point, we need to consider if we should come up with rebuttals to the OVs or concede to them. For this question though, it may be wiser to concede both opposing views.

This is because, **while education can improve the lives of people, this is not true in all situations or for everyone**. After all, in reality, education is not a magical solution to all our world problems.

### When do you use concessions?

- While you may use concessions in any question, they are especially useful when questions begin with 'to what extent' and 'how far'. By beginning with the phrase 'to what extent' and 'how far', the question already shows that the student gets the leeway to decide the extent or how far he wants to agree/disagree with the point of contention. For example,

- How far do magazines or television programmes aimed at young people in Singapore have a positive effect? (2005 – Q12)
- To what extent should the State involve itself in the world of business? (2005 – Q3)
- To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the skill levels of people? (2010 – Q6)

*However, not all questions that begin with 'how far' or 'to what extent' require the use of concessions instead of rebuttals. One can still take a more aggressive stand and rebut every opposing view.*

- Another way of deciding when to concede instead of rebutting is when one is faced with opposing views that are irrefutable facts. After all, it would be difficult to rebut a fact.
- Finally, to decide on which OVs you should be conceding and when you should do so, you do need to check against your own real-world knowledge of the issue.

### Dos and Don'ts when coming up with Concessions:

- ✓ Do ensure that your Concessions do not directly contradict your earlier SVs, otherwise the essay would sound confused. If the Concessions directly rebut the earlier SVs, both should be in the same paragraph as an OV/R paragraph instead.
- ✓ Make sure that your Thesis Statement does not take an absolute stand, or your essay would sound contradictory.

For example:

SV1: With technology, life is easier and we have more time for relaxation today.


SV2: ....

SV3: ....

Concession 1: Life is more fast-paced today, leaving us with little time for ourselves.

Concession 2: ...

**Contradictory!**




Change this into an OV/R instead!

OV: While it may seem like life today is more fast-paced and leaves us with little time for ourselves...

R: in reality, technology has made our lives a lot easier, giving us more time for our personal pursuits and relaxation.

**Coherent!**



## (ii) Rebuttals

*Rebuttal: a statement that refutes, contradicts or otherwise disagrees with the opposing view.*

Let's try with an OV from the earlier question!

OV	AGREE It is tough to be a teenager today	DISAGREE It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!	Your stand
	(a) Less carefree existence, with high expectations of teenagers to succeed academically, leading to high stress levels	<b>A Possible Rebuttal!</b> <i>Today, teenagers are also provided with much more emotional support from parents and schools, so they are largely able to cope.</i>	R

**When crafting a rebuttal, these are some questions to ask:**

- Is this true? Does it apply to all? Is this a fair statement?

**For example:**

- Do all teenagers face such high expectations to succeed academically?
- Are all teenagers unable to cope with such academic expectations?
- Is there no help given to teenagers to cope better?

Let's try with another OV from the same question!

OV	AGREE It is tough to be a teenager today	DISAGREE It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!	Your stand
	(b) More pressure to conform to a certain definition of success (to do well, look good); images used by the mass media compound this	<b>A Possible Rebuttal!</b> <i>Unfair to believe that teenagers did not face expectations and peer pressure in the past.</i>	R

**Possible questions to ask yourself:**

- Is there really so much pressure on teenagers to look good?
- Are such pressures to look good only true for teenagers today?

When arranged into an essay plan, this is what it looks like:

OV	AGREE It is tough to be a teenager today	DISAGREE It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!	Your stand
	(a) Less carefree existence, with high expectations of teenagers to succeed academically, leading to high stress levels	(c) Especially in 1 <sup>st</sup> world countries, living in times of political stability + more attention devoted to teens' needs & views by governments	SV
OV	(b) More pressure to conform to a certain definition of success (to do well, look good); images used by the mass media compound this	(d) Parents more affluent, able to support teenagers through school, teenagers need not worry about entering the workforce early to help support families + bright promising futures with more economic opportunities	SV
		(e) Well-prepared by education systems of high standards + easy access to information & knowledge	SV
		(f) <i>Today, teenagers are also provided with much more emotional support from parents and schools, so they are largely able to cope.</i>	R
		(g) <i>Unfair to believe that teenagers did not face expectations and peer pressure in the past.</i>	R

### Dos and Don'ts when coming up with OVs and Rebuttals:

- ✓ Do ensure that your rebuttals do not repeat your SVs. Come up with fresh points!
- ✓ When coming up with OVs, do ensure that they are logical and reasonable arguments, and not trivial and illogical. Making an OV weak just to rebut it is futile and displays poor critical thinking!
- ✓ Do ensure that the rebuttals are matched to the right OVs. Mismatched rebuttals and OVs do not make sense!
- ✓ Rebuttals must be developed in a way that addresses the specific argument of the OV.

## 5. Possible Essay Structures

In the main body of the essay, you should support your stand with 5 different points, which can be a combination of SVs, OV/Rs or Concessions. While doing this though, do plan your points to begin from the most salient, obvious or important points.

You may begin with SVs followed by OV/Rs:

Paragraph 1 → Introductory paragraph

Paragraph 2 → SV1

Paragraph 3 → SV2

Paragraph 4 → SV3

Paragraph 5 → OV1+ Rebuttal

Paragraph 6 → OV2 + Rebuttal

Paragraph 7 → Conclusion

This is known as the  
**3SV 2OV/R structure**

Let's try with the question on teenagers' lives being tough today!

AGREE It is tough to be a teenager today		DISAGREE It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!	
OV1	a. Less carefree existence, with high expectations of teenagers to succeed academically, leading to high stress levels	c. Especially in 1 <sup>st</sup> world countries, living in times of political stability + more attention devoted to teens' needs & views by governments	SV2
	b. More pressure to conform to a certain definition of success (to do well, look good); images used by the mass media compound this	d. Parents more affluent, able to support teenagers through school, teenagers need not worry about entering the workforce early to help support families + bright promising futures with more economic opportunities	SV1
OV2		e. Well-prepared by education systems of high standards + easy access to information & knowledge	SV3
		f. <i>Today, teenagers are also provided with much more emotional support from parents and schools, so they are largely able to cope.</i>	R1
		g. <i>Unfair to believe that teens did not face expectations and peer pressure in the past.</i>	R2

Your essay plan will eventually look like this when all the points are arranged linearly.

Para 1	Intro(Stand)	It is not tough to be a teenager today. In fact, it has become easier!
Para 2	SV1	Parents more affluent, able to support teenagers through school, no need to worry about entering the workforce early to help support families + bright promising futures with more economic opportunities
Para 3	SV2	Especially in 1 <sup>st</sup> world countries, living in times of political stability + more attention devoted to teens' needs & views by governments
Para 4	SV3	Well-prepared by education systems of high standards + easy access to information & knowledge
Para 5	OV1 + R1	<i>Less carefree existence, with high expectations of teenagers to succeed academically, leading to high stress levels</i> However, teenagers are also provided with much more emotional support today from parents and schools.
Para 6	OV2 + R2	<i>More pressure to conform to a certain definition of success (to do well, look good); images used by the mass media compound this</i> However, it is unfair to believe that teens did not face expectations and peer pressure in the past. More liberal societies which lead to more choices and personal freedom for teenagers.
Para 7	Conclusion	<i>Life is easier for teenagers today.</i>

OVs and matching rebuttals go into the same paragraph.



While the 3SV 2OV/R approach is the most common essay structure many students use to write their essays, there are other alternative structures too, such as the 3SV 2C structure.

Paragraph 1 → Introductory paragraph  
 Paragraph 2 → SV1  
 Paragraph 3 → SV2  
 Paragraph 4 → SV3  
 Paragraph 5 → Concession 1  
 Paragraph 6 → Concession 2  
 Paragraph 7 → Conclusion

This is usually known as the  
**3SV 2C structure**

Let's try with the question on education improving the lives of people!

Within your points, first arrange them **beginning from the most salient, obvious or important points.**

	Education CAN largely improve the lives of people – How?	Education CANNOT always improve the lives of people – Why?	
<b>SV1</b> – Begin with the most obvious point!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equips one with skills, helps one find a job and earn money.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education alone is insufficient. It needs to work in tandem with other factors for real improvement to people's lives.</li> </ul>	<b>C1</b>
<b>SV2</b> – Both seem similar, so group them as 1 para!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowers one to read and learn so as to acquire knowledge and make more informed decisions</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools expose one to wide variety of subjects, helps broaden one's horizons.</li> </ul>		
<b>SV3</b> – Move on to national perspectives after individual perspectives!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From national/global perspective, more educated populations are more likely to create new ideas and technology, leading to the improvement of human QOL.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some schools behind the times, teaching dead knowledge with little real-world application. This may be so especially for less developed countries whose schools are not well funded.</li> </ul>	<b>C2</b>

Both concessions are equally valid, so either one can go first.

Your essay plan will eventually look like this when all the points are arranged linearly.

<b>Para 1</b>	<b>Intro(Stand)</b>	Education can largely improve people's lives <u>though not in all situations.</u>
<b>Para 2</b>	<b>SV1</b>	Education equips one with skills, helps one find a job and earn money.
<b>Para 3</b>	<b>SV2</b>	Schools expose one to wide variety of subjects which helps broaden one's horizons. One is also empowered to acquire knowledge and make more informed decisions to better one's life.
<b>Para 4</b>	<b>SV3</b>	From national/global perspective, more educated populations are more likely to create new ideas and technology, leading to the improvement of quality of life.
<b>Para 5</b>	<b>C1</b>	<i>However, education alone is insufficient. It needs to work in tandem with other factors for real improvement to people's lives.</i>
<b>Para 6</b>	<b>C2</b>	<i>Some schools, especially those in less developed countries, are behind the times or teaching dead knowledge with little real-world application.</i>
<b>Para 7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<i>While education can largely improve people's lives, this may not be so in all situations.</i>

You may also choose to begin with OV/Rs or Concessions!

Paragraph 1 → Introductory paragraph  
 Paragraph 2 → OV1+ Rebuttal  
 Paragraph 3 → OV2 + Rebuttal  
 Paragraph 4 → SV1  
 Paragraph 5 → SV2  
 Paragraph 6 → SV3  
 Paragraph 7 → Conclusion

or

Paragraph 1 → Introductory paragraph  
 Paragraph 2 → OV1 + Concession  
 Paragraph 3 → OV2 + Concession  
 Paragraph 4 → SV1  
 Paragraph 5 → SV2  
 Paragraph 6 → SV3  
 Paragraph 7 → Conclusion

These are only some possible structures.

**As long as the flow of the points is logical and supports your stand, other structures are possible too!**



## 4) The Introductory Paragraph

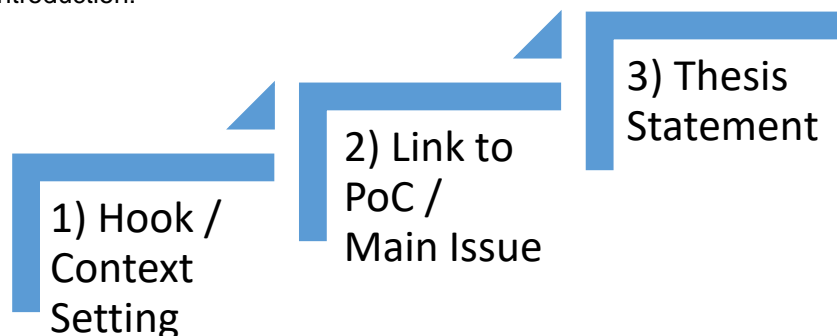
The introduction is not merely a cosmetic, peripheral paragraph. In fact, Cambridge examiners have repeatedly stressed the importance of writing good introductions.

*'A well-crafted introduction is like a knock at one's door from a welcome guest – one anticipates the encounter with real pleasure!'*

(GCE Examiner's Report)

1. It is your first chance to capture your reader's attention and interest him or her to read further. First impressions matter, so make sure that your introduction immediately impresses the marker.
2. The introduction also gives the reader some expectation of what will be covered in the essay and allows the reader to better follow your arguments.

The 3 parts to the Introduction:



### (1) Hook / Context Setting

Introductions often begin with a hook to engage the interest of the reader. Here are some ways to keep the reader 'hooked':

- a) **Share salient statistics, trends, quotations or examples** related to the issue being discussed. However, if you cannot state these accurately, please do not employ this strategy.
- b) **Asking thought-provoking questions** can also interest the marker provided that you do not repeat the question. Don't insult the reader's ability to read the question for himself!

Even if you can't think of a good hook, it is important for you to set the context and clarify key concepts/evaluative keywords at this juncture to ensure that you are tackling the PoC correctly. Here are some ways to do **context setting**:

- a) **Define any key ambiguous or subjective terms** from the question based on **CPF (Characteristics, Purpose, Function)**. However, do not unnecessarily define commonly understood words/concepts, for e.g. zoo, young people, elderly, Singapore, Mathematics. Also, be careful not to give the wrong definition!
- b) Make a **historical or geographical comparison and contrast**. This may be more useful for questions requiring some form of comparison, for example between the past and present, or between developing and developed countries.
- c) **State why the issue being discussed is important** or state certain problems/tensions existing around the issue and why it creates a controversy or is debatable.

Better scripts often include a combination of hook and context setting in their introduction to draw the reader in and set clear contexts and perimeters for their subsequent paragraphs to address the PoC.

### (2) Link to the Point of Contention/ Main Issue

Don't get too carried away with writing your introduction! Have a linking statement that shows how the start of your introduction addresses the point of contention / main issue of the question. An interesting hook and/or a thorough context setting is useless if it is irrelevant to the PoC of the question.

Better writers will ensure that their introduction eventually builds up to the stand they are taking!

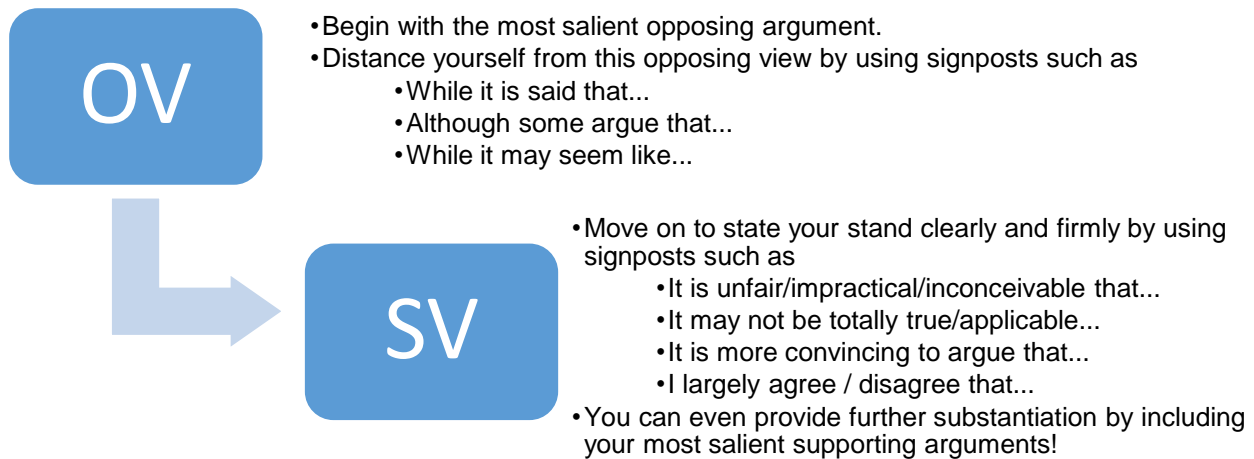


### (3) Thesis Statement

Simply put, the thesis statement is known as **the stand** that you intend to take for any argumentative question. It is the main controlling idea of your essay as it guides what the reader expects from the rest of the essay. You thus need to write it in a way that supports the arguments that will be developed in the rest of the essay.

#### (a) Thesis Statements for the 3SV 2OV/R essay structure:

Similar to the rest of your essay which should offer a *balanced* discussion (see page 8), the thesis statement could also be written in a **balanced** and **qualified** manner with an OV-SV structure:



You could also substantiate the thesis statement by adding on 1 – 2 of your strongest SV arguments, and even your strongest OV argument. This helps to introduce the reader to the key arguments that will be covered in your essay.

Let's try!

Question: There is no room for imagination in the classroom. Do you agree?

1) Hook: Definition of the typical classroom (Method a)

2) Link to the PoC of the question

3) Thesis Statement

Mention the word 'classroom' and studies, books, grades, teachers and uniform rows of tables and chairs naturally spring to one's mind. Classrooms have been labelled staid places of learning for so long that people nowadays have the impression that classrooms simply have no room for imagination. While there is no doubt that the emphasis is still on obtaining the elusive distinction grade, **today's modern classrooms have expanded to include more space for imagination**. They are increasingly becoming places where students are able to express their creativity, and have more freedom of thought.

Strongest OV

Stand

2 strongest SVs

#### THESIS BUILDER

Try out this cool website which helps you craft an effective thesis statement in a fun and interactive manner! Scan the QR code on the right to access the Tom March Thesis Builder!

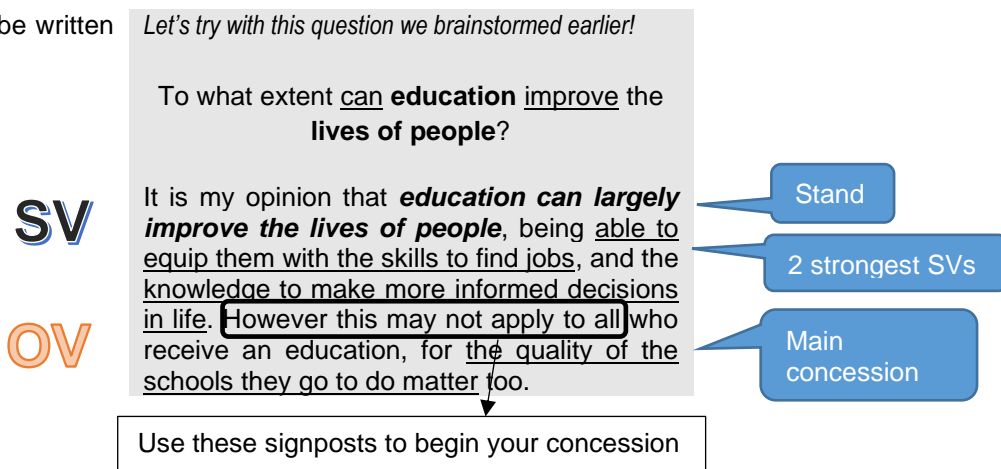
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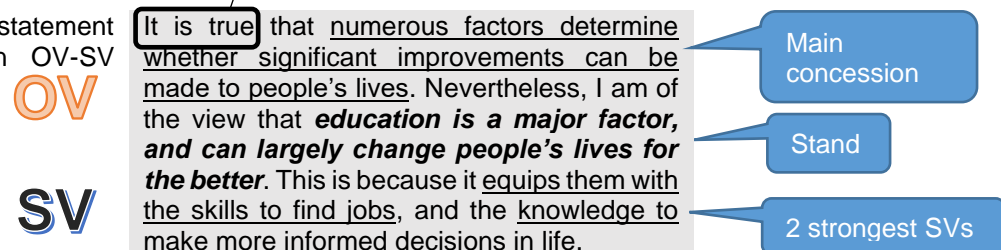
### (b) Thesis Statements for the 3SV 2OV/C essay structure:

The thesis statement is most important for an essay with a 3SV 2OV/C essay structure. You would need to moderate your thesis statement to avoid sounding too extreme, as it must allow for concessions to be made in the latter half of the essay without sounding like you have changed your stand halfway.

The thesis statement could be written with an SV-OV structure:



Alternatively, the thesis statement could be written with an OV-SV structure:



The signposts that you use to begin your concession should show that there is validity to it, for example:

- ✓ It is true that...
- ✓ The view that...is valid.
- ✓ It must be noted that ...
- ✓ It is undeniable that ...
- ✓ On the other hand, it is important to also consider that...

Just be careful not to take an extreme stand which would cause you to sound contradictory when you write your concessions!

For example:

Education always improves the lives of people.



Once you have written 'always', you can't write the concession that the quality of schools and the education received matter too!

So use '**largely**' instead, ie.  
Education **largely** improves the lives of people.

## 5) Paragraph Development for SVs

Now that you have learnt the essentials of question analysis and essay planning, it is time to move on to writing the actual paragraphs. Here is an easy way of remembering what goes into the simple SV paragraph, use the acronym PEEL.

<b>P</b>	State your <b>Point</b> in a clear topic sentence
<b>Ex</b>	<b>Explain</b> / develop the point thoroughly
<b>Eg</b>	Provide <b>Examples or Evidence</b>
<b>L</b>	Sum up your point and <b>Link</b> it back to your stand

### P - State your POINT in a Clear Topic Sentence

#### What are Topic Sentences?

The topic sentence of a paragraph expresses its main idea. Quite simply, it tells us what the paragraph is about. As such, it is a good idea to **begin each paragraph with a topic sentence** that directly answers the question.

#### Do's and Don'ts

1. Be **specific and clear** when writing your topic sentences. Make sure that it is not too vague or broad, or you will have problems developing it in the paragraph.
2. When crafting topic sentences, do **include keywords / phrases from the question**. This helps it to better link to the question.
3. Don't complicate things. Each topic sentence should introduce and deal with **only one point!** Topic sentences should also **not include examples**. Save that for the latter half of the paragraph!

Let's try:

'The word *failure* should never be used in education.'  
Discuss.

Stand: The word *failure* should be used in education

We earlier brainstormed this point:

→ A wake-up call; motivates students to work harder.

Now, write this point out in a full topic sentence, with links back to the question!

Keywords from the question

Failure grades should be used in education as it is a **timely and useful wake-up call to motivate underperforming students to work harder.**

Specific and clear argument

### Ex – EXPLAIN / develop the point thoroughly

While your topic sentence may be clear and succinct, you need to extend and substantiate your argument with further **justification or analysis**. There are 2 possible ways to elaborate on the topic sentence:

#### (A) Justify topic sentence with reasons

This is used when you have made a claim for which you now need to support or justify.

This means you need to provide strong reasons for WHY you have made such a claim.

**P:** Failure grades should be used in education as it is a timely and useful wake-up call to motivate underperforming students to work harder. =

**Ex:** This is because many people are blind to their inadequacies unless told upfront and neither do they decode constructive criticism as warnings to improve. Thus the use of the word failure in education helps to prevent complacency amongst students, motivating them to put in the necessary effort to improve.

Failure is a 'useful wake-up call' is a claim that needs further justification

2 reasons / justifications are given to support the claim.

**(B) Explain the cause-effect process / relationship evident in the topic sentence**

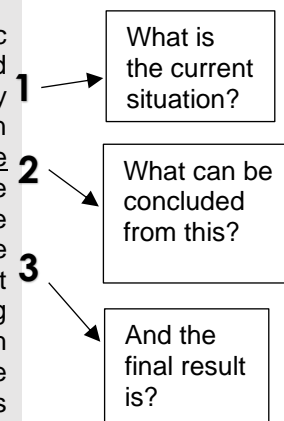
This is used especially when the question requires an explanation of cause and effect.

In order to do this right, do use linking words that can be used to signify cause and effect such as, 'as a result', 'therefore', 'as a consequence', 'hence', 'thus' or 'on account of'.

However, do note that if there is no cause-effect relationship in the paragraph, do **not** randomly use linking words like 'thus' or 'as such'!

**P:** The use of the word failure in education also has its merits as its inclusion would mean a minimum standard has to be met in order for a student to be promoted to the next level of education.

**Ex:** For most if not all forms of academic education, especially at the primary and secondary levels, there are obviously standards to be measured and quantified in education through assessments, and therefore a pass or fail grade is necessary to differentiate between those who have or have not met these standards. In this way, students who have passed are assured to be ready for the next level of difficulty. This is preferable to all being promoted to a higher level of difficulty for which some are not ready. The use of the word failure is thus important in education for it helps ensure that students are ready for the next level.



**Which of the 2 ways of explanation is the most useful?**

This depends on the point being made. Providing justifications/reasons is the most commonly used method, but a combination of the 2 methods can be used too!

**Eg – Provide EXAMPLES / Evidence**

Examples or evidence always need to be provided to support every point you present in an essay. A paragraph without examples or evidence will sound completely hypothetical, making the argument unconvincing and weak.

Appearing after the topic sentence (P) and subsequent explanation (Ex), examples should therefore illustrate the key argument presented in the topic sentence and subsequent explanation.

**(A) An example should be salient to the point being made**

Use examples which best illustrate your point. In other words, this is the best example that comes to mind whenever one brings up this point or argument.

*Always choose well-known examples, not obscure examples!*

Let's try! What examples immediately come to mind when one brings up these points?

*Point 1: The importance governments place on education*

Hint: How do governments devote attention to education?

*Point 2: The impact and scale of terrorism*

Hint: Think about a terror group that has caused widespread impact across many nations and led to the loss of many lives

Example:  
Proportion of national budget devoted to education

Example:  
ISIS & the Syrian War

**(B) Give sufficient details to your examples**

Examples should contain sufficient details and should not merely be an exercise in name-dropping. Do not merely write “for example, India” and stop there.

The details that are given must be linked to the topic sentence and therefore shows how it illustrates the point being made.

*Why does the example on the right give so many details?*

The writer is emphasising that technology has caused **NUMEROUS** or **MANY** environmental problems.

*However, do not ramble on and on. Be concise and keep to the pertinent details that illustrate your point.*

Let's try:

Consider the view that technology has made our lives easier.

Technology cannot be said to have made our lives easier as it has had **adverse impacts on our environment and ecology**, which in turn create more problems for us to solve as a human race. The **numerous adverse impacts on our environment** run the gamut from **1) pollution, 2) depletion of resources** to the greatest danger to Mankind as yet – **3) global warming**. To illustrate, the vehicles that technology created to allow convenient and speedy travel run on gasoline or other fossil fuels which are **fast depleting** even as we speak. The process of burning fossil fuels also further contributes to **pollution** by emitting gases such as nitrogen oxide, ozone and particulate matter, well known to cause lung irritation and respiratory illnesses. More importantly, vehicles emit copious amounts of carbon dioxide, the main culprit to **global warming**. Lest one thinks that it is only vehicles that cause humans environmental problems, rather than technology, let us not forget that all forms of technology invariably run on **energy sources, which are generated by burning fossil fuels**. Furthermore, technology must also bear some blame for contributing to toxic waste. When technologies are updated, people invariably dispose of obsolete gadgets and appliances, which fill our landfills with **e-waste** containing lead and cadmium, which are contaminants that are highly **toxic and non-biodegradable**.

P

Ex

Eg – 3 examples given & expanded on below

2) Depletion of resources

1) Pollution

3) Global warming

2) Depletion of resources  
+  
3) Global warming

1) Pollution

**(C) Choose examples that reflect the context (who/where/when) required in the question**

The examples you use should address the context that has been set in the question, for eg, ‘your society’, ‘today’, ‘poor countries’ etc.

*As a rule of thumb, choose recent examples over outdated ones!*

Let's try:

Discuss the importance of religion in society today.

Religion has lost its ability to dictate people's moral behaviour in favour of modern law which significantly deviates from religious codes of conduct. The legalisation of same-sex marriage is a case in point. While still considered sacrilegious to traditional religions, to date, as many as 33 countries accounting for 7% of the world's population has provided legal recognition of same-sex unions. Even conservative Asian countries like Taiwan and Thailand, where religious beliefs have traditionally held sway, are **now reviewing** marriage laws. Today's society is relying on a different set of morals that is constantly evolving and developing. They are not dependent on religion and may sometimes even clash with it. It can thus be seen that religion's importance in guiding morals has been gradually eroded.

Examples are recent, and address the context of ‘today’.

### A note on the use of Examples

You know you have to use illustrations, and you know why you are using the illustrations, but the reader would not know unless you explain **WHY**. Drawing a connection between the illustration used and the point it is meant to illustrate is very important. There are two ways in which this link can be shown:

#### a) Writing a connecting sentence after the example:

Question: Consider the importance of humour.

Humour is also commonly used in speeches and written work with the intention of being engaging. In writing, humour can come in the form of something ironic or something completely unimaginable. Speakers also use it to drive at a point while keeping the audience entertained and craving for more. It captivates the audience, which is key for an excellent read or talk when the audience bores easily. J.K. Rowling once delivered a speech for graduating students at Harvard University, entitled 'The fringe benefits of failure', where she poked fun at her early failures in life. Even though the topic was meant to be serious, she managed to integrate her own sense of humour, making the graduates laugh and more importantly, accomplishing what she set out to do: ensure that the message concerning the importance of resilience to failure was deeply engraved in the graduates' minds.

P

Ex

Eg

Connection between the example and topic sentence

#### b) Writing the example to include the explanation and link to the point:

Question: 'The word *failure* should never be used in education.' Discuss.

One cannot simply continue in one's learning journey without knowing one's gaps in knowledge, and the use of failure in assessments is meant as a clarion call for students to either plug their gaps, or improve on their methods of studying. By learning from where we have gone wrong, students are able to then pinpoint their faults and make improvements from there. In Mathematics, by learning from what one's common calculation mistakes are, one would then be able to reduce the number of careless mistakes one makes. In language, by learning from one's failures in using subject-verb agreement or the subjunctive correctly, one would be able to successfully write in grammatical language the next time.

P

Ex

Eg 1

Eg 2

The same ideas of 'plugging gaps' and 'improvement' are repeated in both examples

### L – Sum up your point and LINK it back to your stand

Ending the paragraph on an example is a bad idea, as the reader may have lost sight of what your original point was.

Do always complete the paragraph by making a final link between your original point (in your topic sentence) and the stand you have taken earlier.

How?

- ✓ Reiterate the topic sentence (P) and stand again in the last sentence of the paragraph.
- ✓ You may use some of the words you have used earlier in the topic sentence or rephrase it using other words.
- ✓ Do include some of the important keywords from the question to demonstrate how the point links to the question.

L – Include keywords from the question + reiterate your stand

Question: 'The word *failure* should never be used in education.' Discuss.

One cannot simply continue in one's learning journey without knowing one's gaps in knowledge, and the use of failure in assessments is meant as a clarion call for students to either plug their gaps, or improve on their methods of studying. By learning from where we have gone wrong, students are able to then pinpoint their faults and make improvements from there. In Mathematics, by learning from what one's common calculation mistakes are, one would then be able to reduce the number of careless mistakes one makes. In language, by learning from one's failures in using subject-verb agreement or the subjunctive correctly, one would be able to successfully write in grammatical language the next time. Hence, the use of failure in assessments is an important tool for students to realise their weaknesses, so as to make the necessary revisions.

P

Ex

Eg 1

Eg 2

L

L – Rephrase the point as 'realise their weaknesses' and 'make necessary revisions'



## 6) Paragraph Development for OV/Cs

Now that you have learnt the essentials of paragraph development for SVs, let us now move on to paragraph development for OV/Cs.

The OV/C paragraph is an adaptation of the original PEEL paragraph structure.

- P** State your **Point (Opposing View)** in a clear topic sentence
- Ex** **Explain** / develop the concession thoroughly
- Eg** Provide **Examples or Evidence**
- L** Sum up your entire concession and **Link** it back to your stand.  
(Qualify your stand where necessary, to maintain coherence)

Signpost used to begin the concession topic sentence

### Use of Signposts:

Since the concession goes in a different direction from the SVs earlier in the essay, you need to use signposts to signal the change in direction in your essay. Otherwise, it will look like you have suddenly changed your mind.

#### Possible Signposts to begin your Concession topic sentence:

- ✓ However, this may not apply to all...
- ✓ Nevertheless, there could be some merit to the argument that...
- ✓ Yet, it could be conceded that...

Let's try!

Yet, having said all of the above, it could be conceded that there are subjects in education where the word failure should not be applied so stringently. Such are subjects that are relatively abstract and subject to differences in interpretation, for example in the arts and humanities. Using the word 'failure' in the education of such subjects is to apply a stringent criterion that would impinge, rather than encourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. This would be detrimental to the student and eventually to society, when all the education system churns out are clones adept only at preventing 'failure'. Thus, for these subjects, in view of the importance of strengthening students' ability to think independently, it may be more productive to give them freedom to entertain different views to any given issue.

P

Eg

Ex – Cause & Effect

Signpost used to begin the concession topic sentence

Question: Discuss the view that playing video games is a waste of time.

Despite all these merits to video games, one cannot deny that they can be a waste of time due to the huge opportunity cost in terms of time spent on video games. Many video games include 'grinding' – a gaming term used to describe mindlessly earning experience in a game in order to make one's character stronger. This process is extremely time-consuming and often even mind-numbing. As such, one can easily lose hundreds of hours whiled away on killing the same few monsters. This is particularly apparent in Massive Multiplayer Online games (MMOs) such as 'Tera' and 'Blade and Soul'. Therefore, excessive preoccupation with such games gives very little real-life returns whether in terms of entertainment knowledge or even friendship.

P

Ex

Eg

Signpost used to signal the change in direction in the essay.

Question: Is stress really harmful?

That being said, the aforementioned limit of stress one can take is a very dangerous one to test, and the toll from pushing oneself too far can be frighteningly large for one to bear at times. It is all too easy to be consumed by stress, as it is a subconscious state of mind. When one ponders a minute too long about the grim possibility of failure or the difficulty of one's current mission, the uncertainty and self-doubt that were meant to push one closer to their goal blocks it out instead, bringing severe harms to those who falter. Globally, 800 000 people, or one person every 40 seconds, commit suicide every year, according to the World Health Organisation. Stress indeed is no child's play, especially for those pushed to the limits of sanity. Yet, this is not an unrecognized problem. Many countries around the world, albeit in more developed countries with the necessary medical resources, place much emphasis on treating mental problems such as anxiety and depression, putting in place support networks and counselling helplines to prevent one from tipping over the edge.

P

Ex

Eg

You may want to introduce a caveat to this concession to strengthen your overall stand if you have a good reason to.



## 7) Paragraph Development for OV/Rs

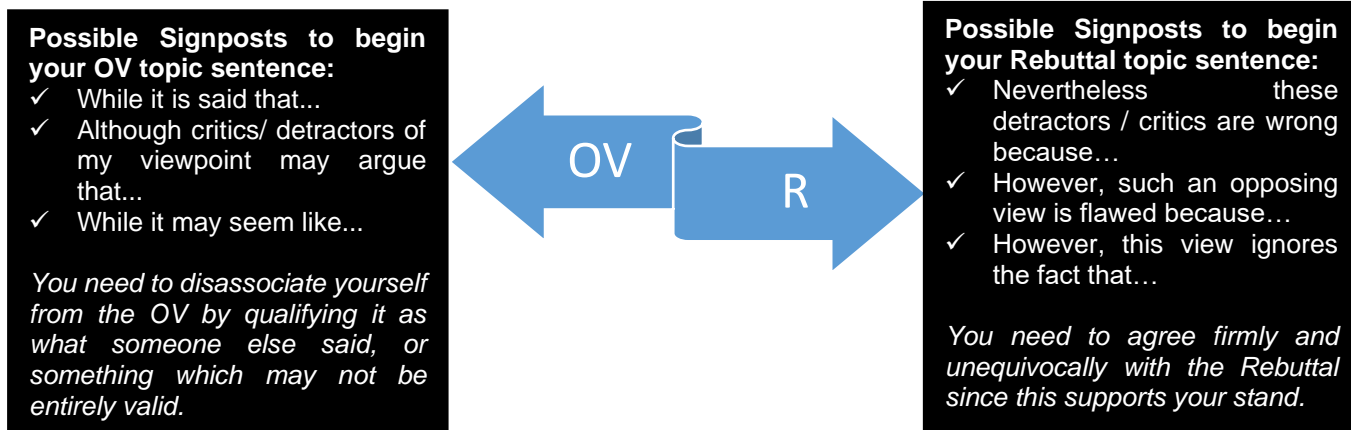
Let us now move on to paragraph development for OV/Rs.

The OV/R paragraph expands on the original PEEL paragraph structure.

<b>P</b>	State the <b>Point (Opposing View)</b> in a clear topic sentence	} Only takes up $\frac{1}{3}$ of the paragraph
<b>Ex</b>	<b>Explain</b> / develop the opposing view thoroughly	
<b>P</b>	State your <b>Point (Rebuttal)</b> in a clear topic sentence	} Takes up $\frac{2}{3}$ of the paragraph since the focus of the paragraph ought to be on supporting your stand.
<b>Ex</b>	<b>Explain</b> / develop the rebuttal thoroughly	
<b>Eg</b>	Provide <b>Examples or Evidence</b>	
<b>L</b>	Sum up your entire OV and R points and <b>Link</b> it back to your stand	

### Use of Signposts:

Since the Opposing View and corresponding Rebuttal are going in opposite directions, it is important to have **signposts for both the OV and R topic sentences** to indicate which direction one is going, and ultimately what stand one supports.



Let's try!

**P – OV**

**Ex**

**P – Reb**

**Ex**

**Eg**

**+**

**Ex**

**L**

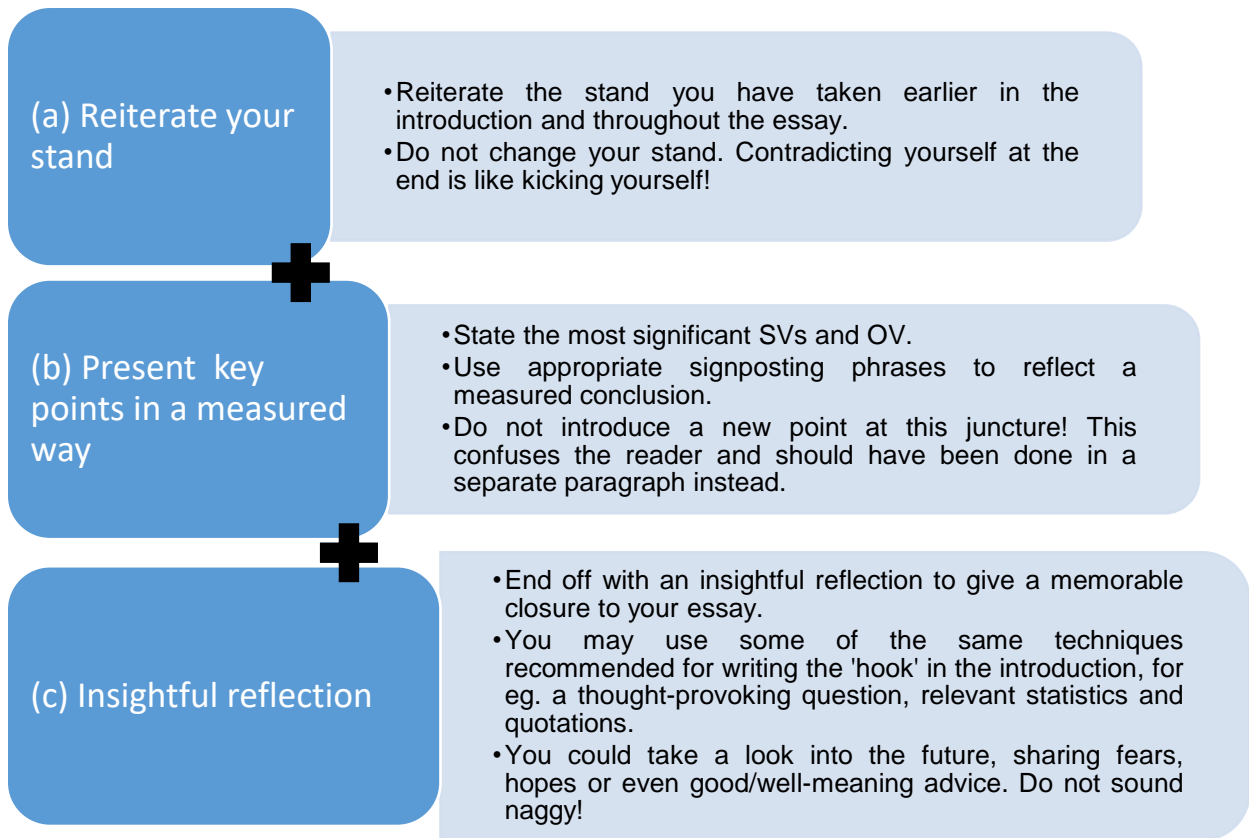
**Critics** of the use of failure in education would then point out that assessments are not always an accurate gauge of one's ability and potential, disadvantaging late-bloomers. **Such groups** would advocate a different system where assessments take place at later ages or not at all, so as to let children develop to their full potential in that subject. Finland, which regularly features at the top of lists to evaluate school systems, does not put their students through national exams till they are sixteen years old, giving them ample time to evolve as learners. **While this may seem a plausible suggestion, it clearly ignores that assessments exist for a good reason:** to assess standards which obviously *do* exist. Failing a particular test or assessment is a clear indication that a student has not made the bar and is not ready for the next level. What, after all, would be a good substitute for measuring if a student is ready for the next level of difficulty, academic or otherwise? Students in Singapore for example, take the PSLE at the age of twelve to determine which streams in secondary school they will embark on. Such streams are to cater to the different standards different students have. Should there be no 'failures', students who are academically weak may be banded together with stronger students, struggling their entire secondary school life with a syllabus that does not cater to their need for a slower learning pace. Students who are more able, yet banded with weaker students who should have 'failed', find themselves bored in class when teachers dumb down

Signposts used for OV show that it is others who argue this point

The transition to the rebuttal is clearly and firmly signposted.

## 8) The Conclusion

Whilst there are no hard and fast rules on writing a good conclusion, most good essay conclusions contain the following three elements:



Let's try using the earlier question on failure in education!

Presenting key points in a measured way

In conclusion, **one should not reflexively object to the use of the word 'failure' in education.** While failure has the potential to take the joy out of learning and harm the fragile confidence especially of young learners, it is also a phenomenon that we will inadvertently experience in our daily lives, be it in education, working life or even in our social lives. In experiencing the essence of failure in education, students in fact learn to deal with greater challenges that lie ahead of them. Seen in this light, the use of the word 'failure' in education is akin to being put through a metaphorical fire, where through the process of refinement, individuals grow to be stronger and more resilient to face future challenges.

Reiterate the stand

Signposting phrase

Signposting phrase

Insightful reflection

## 9) Sample Essay

### 'The word failure should never be used in education.' Discuss.

(07A1M12)

#### Introduction

Failure is an experience of one's inability to accomplish something one set out to do. As inevitable as life itself, one would have at some point of his life faced the prospect of, or experienced failure. Children, at young ages, would probably first encounter failure in schools, when sitting for their first tests or examinations. A humbling and sometimes painful experience, the use of failure in education has been lambasted for damaging young and fragile egos. Yet, I am of the belief that the use of failure is useful and should be used in education in most situations.

Hook – Define 'failure'

Link to PoC

Thesis Statement – OV + R

Directly addresses the evaluative keyword 'never'.

#### OV

Good use of signposts for both OV & R

People often comment how the young are simply too vulnerable to be considered a failure. The education journey one takes begins at a young tender age, where one is still in the process of growing up. Being not fully mature, both physically and emotionally, many believe that children are too young to take the blow of being labelled a failure as they are still unable to cope with it and encountering such a scenario may lead to emotional trauma to them. Yet, seen from another light, failure can be the wake-up call for the need to strive harder and to do more. Of course, the experience of failure should be coupled with encouragement by teachers and parents to work harder and not as a form of discouragement and labelling. It is thus with this experience of failure that then motivates young minds to want to improve, so as not to go through the humbling experience of failure again. Thus, the use of failure in education is an efficacious tool to drive students to improve on their studies.

P

Ex

P

Ex

L

#### SV

Furthermore, without the use of failure, and therefore assessments in education, how would students get feedback on their performance in their studies? The word 'failure' is applied in education to indicate to students – and other stakeholders such as teachers and parents – whether what students have learnt from class thus far is correct. One cannot simply continue in one's learning journey without knowing one's gaps in knowledge, and failure in assessments becomes a clarion call for students to either plug their gaps, or improve on their methods of studying. By learning from where we have gone wrong, students are able to then pinpoint their faults and make improvements from there. In Mathematics, by learning from what one's common calculation mistakes are, one would then be able to reduce the number of careless mistakes one makes. In language, by learning from one's failures in using subject-verb agreement or the subjunctive correctly, one would be able to successfully write in grammatical language the next time. Furthermore, a student's failure provides an indication to educators on the student's weak areas and hence allows them to be able to work on it to further develop and improve the students. Hence, failure should be used in education as an important tool for feedback.

P

Ex

Eg 1  
Eg 2

Ex

L

#### OV

Good use of signposts for both OV & R

Critics of the use of failure in education would then point out that assessments are not always an accurate gauge of one's ability and potential, disadvantaging late-bloomers. Such groups would advocate a system where assessments take place at later ages or not at all, so as to let children develop to their full potential in that subject. Though this may seem a plausible suggestion, it clearly ignores that assessments exist for a good reason: to assess standards which obviously do exist. Failing a particular test or assessment is a clear indication that a student has not made the bar and is not ready for the next level. What, after all, would be a good substitute for measuring if a student is ready for the next level of difficulty, academic or otherwise? Students in Singapore for example,

P

Ex

P

Ex

Eg

take the PSLE at the age of twelve to determine which streams in secondary school they will embark on. Such streams are to cater to the different standards different students have. Should there be no 'failures', students who are academically weak may be banded together with stronger students, struggling their entire secondary school life with a syllabus that does not cater to their need for a slower learning pace. Students who are more able, yet banded with weaker students who should have 'failed', find themselves bored in class when teachers dumb down lessons to cater to the lowest common denominator. The fact that no education system has abolished summative assessments and the use of failure speaks volumes of its importance for education.

Eg  
+  
Ex

L

OV

There is also the criticism that it is the prospect of failure in education and its use that leads to tremendous competition to excel in the education system, and consequently stress for students. Such stress is harmful and causes some to buckle under the pressure. Such critics cite how in countries like South Korea, China and Singapore, students committing suicide over poor exam results is not unheard of. To further add on, not only students face such forms of stress, but parents and teachers also do too. Parents desire their child to be successful in the future while teachers are accountable to the parents and schools about the results of the students. As a result, it creates much stress and

P

Ex

Eg

Ex

R

competition on not only students but also the parents and teachers. However, we must understand that failure, competition and stress are a reflection of reality in many societies around the world. In fact, what students experience in the course of education is merely a small percentage of what they would experience during their working life, where people are willing to do anything to be the best. What they experience in their education life is therefore simply a preparatory step to face the cold harsh reality of the working world. Through failures, we are able to stand up more firmly to future obstacles as we are able to learn the fact that the society has high demands for us. Furthermore, committing failures and understanding the fierceness of competition during one's earlier years in school is much better than to do so during our work life, where the stakes are much higher, and failures less forgivable when it involves millions of dollars or even lives (depending on one's vocation). Hence, seen in this light, failure in education is but a way of better preparing the young for what they will eventually face in future.

P

Ex

Eg

L

Concession

Yet, having said all of the above, it can be conceded that there are subjects in education where the word failure should not be applied so stringently. Such are subjects that are relatively abstract and subject to differences in interpretation, for example in the arts and humanities. Using the word 'failure' in the education of such subjects is to apply a stringent criterion that would impinge, rather than encourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. This would be detrimental to the student and eventually to society, when all the education system churns out are clones adept only at preventing 'failure'. This however is limited to certain subjects or higher levels of education where students are more productive when left to their own devices.

P

Eg

Ex

Conclusion

To conclude, failure is a phenomenon that we experience in our daily lives. Be it in education, working life or even in our social lives, failure is inevitable. After all, failure is the harbinger of success and without experiencing the essence of failure, one would not be able to achieve greatness in life. One should thus not reflexively object to the use of the word 'failure' in education.

Summarise  
key points

Insightful  
reflection

Reiterate  
your stand

#### Comments:

The above essay does not follow a conventional 3SV 2OV/R or 3SV 2OV/C structure. Yet, the essay flows beautifully, and more importantly, has cogent and convincing arguments! Do take note of how connectors are used to transition between OVs and rebuttals, and also clearly signal the start of the concession.