

THE SCIENCE OF GENERAL PAPER

An untold perspective.

PREFACE.....	3
CHAPTER 1: LOGIC, CONTEXT, LANGUAGE.....	4
SECTION 1.1: WHAT AM I LEARNING???	4
SECTION 1.2: LOGIC.....	5
SECTION 1.3: APPLICATION.....	8
CHAPTER 2: ESSAY.....	11
SECTION 2.1: FRAMEWORK.....	11
SECTION 2.2: ARGUMENTATION.....	14
CHAPTER 3: COMPREHENSION.....	17
SECTION 3.1: SAQ.....	17
SECTION 3.2: SUMMARY.....	18
SECTION 3.3: AQ.....	19
CHAPTER 4: STUDY TIPS.....	20
SECTION 4.1: CONTEXT.....	20
SECTION 4.2: LANGUAGE.....	22
SECTION 4.3: THE NIGHT BEFORE.....	23
FINAL THOUGHTS.....	25

By Ethan Chua, 21S43

PREFACE

This document is written by a former student. And if this reaches the right audience, written by someone who was as confused as you are now. Confused in a way more profound than integration or organic chemistry. Because rather than struggling to understand concepts, we struggle to fathom the notion of there even being ‘concepts’ to grapple with.

General Paper has presented itself to many cohorts as an amorphous blob of facts and answering techniques loosely tied together with the term ‘critical thinking’. In my opinion, the structure of the General Paper curriculum was confusing and disjointed. Each lesson felt episodic, like there was no grander plan and it was effectively just 1.5 hours of being force-fed the news. Then, there’s the excruciating feeling of having stepped out of the examination hall feeling confident, yet seeing subpar scores returned to you time and time again.

I’m not sure if that’s the consensus amongst the entire Singapore population, but if I had to hazard a guess, I’d say so.

For many of us, General Paper does little to excite, and is merely another compulsory subject, another unavoidable rite of passage we have to take in order to do well in A’ Levels. It is the subject that takes up our time trying to teach us something that in principle is of immense meaning and importance, but in practice falls short in so many ways.

I consider that a tragedy.

I found it a waste to have been hurled into years of ‘English’ and later ‘General Paper’ without even knowing what I was supposed to get out of it. In fact, even tuition centres just focus on indoctrinating us with answering techniques and frameworks catered specifically to meet the requirements of the paper. Through all this, I’m left thinking, what is the point?

This document was not written in mind to convince you to love the subject. Treat this document as an alternative perspective, supplementing whatever work you have already put into General Paper. I wish for it to be as useful as possible because there’s little time to love in the furious race that is A’ Levels. However, in telling my perspective of the subject, it would be a nice bonus if you leave viewing General Paper as a little less bitter, and a little more sweet.

(P.S. While I highly recommend reading from start to finish, if you aren’t too interested or don’t have time, skip to whatever chapter you wish to extract the most information catered to your needs. However, note that some chapters may be slightly more confusing without prior knowledge from previous chapters.)

CHAPTER 1: LOGIC, CONTEXT, LANGUAGE

SECTION 1.1: WHAT AM I LEARNING???

If I could attribute certain factors to why GP is the bane of so many students' existence, it would be the following:

1. Expectation.
2. Curriculum.
3. Disinterest.

Simply put, the education system expects us to do well in a subject which relies heavily on **logical structure**, **contextual knowledge**, and **linguistic proficiency**, while only equipping us with one of the three. Keep these 3 terms in mind, they are important and we will be coming back to them later on.

This brings me to the curriculum. General Paper lessons seem to only fall under two categories - content and practice. Your GP teacher is - either sharing some recent happenings related to the topic of the term or going through practices.

Lastly, disinterest. Because the curriculum is structured topic by topic, only half the class is interested at any point in time. This is simply because people like different things, and we have to accept that. One guy could be dozing off at an Arts and Culture lesson while the next person could care less about the newest advancements in Technology.

All in all, your average GP lesson severely under prepares you for your paper.

While I've been fortunate enough to run into little trouble dealing with this particular subject, I cannot confidently say that I possess some genetically endowed creative flair that effortlessly convinces markers of my competence in the subject. Trust me, I've seen some people like this and chances are, you have too.

My style (if you could call it that) and perspective when it comes to GP is one that is very systematic. Being something I've come to comfortably adopt, I hope that you too can find the same use out of this way of thinking. So here's the deal.

General Paper is essentially **applied logic**. It is the basic logical structures we are familiar with in foundational mathematics and even the natural sciences, repackaged into a foreign, almost unrecognisable form. Almost.

What you can take comfort in with this perspective is that the logical structures underlying the entirety of the paper, from essay to comprehension, are very simple and easily comprehensible to almost anybody. In fact, what we are actually doing when writing essays or answering comprehension questions is adding, subtracting, combining or dissecting things such that we can reach certain conclusions.

I am confident that this view, relating General Paper to something like Mathematics, is unprecedented and even a little bit controversial. I know purists will scowl at the notion of taking humanity away by replacing language with numbers. So before moving on, I would like to first say no, this does not take away from the beauty of language and no, this will not overcomplicate things. You have to trust me on this and accept this initially more formulaic way of seeing General Paper. Okay so far? Great, let's move on.

So what are you learning?

What you are learning, at its very core is how to express logical thought in word, paragraph, essay format. It is this understanding which made me feel so strongly about the General Paper curriculum lacking a portion which teaches logic. And since school doesn't teach it, I will do what I can to supplement you with whatever prerequisite understanding I think will suffice.

SECTION 1.2: LOGIC

Before you continue on thinking *WTF now there's Math in GP*, I would like to remind you that the focus is not on mathematics, but rather on logic. The logic we are dealing with in particular here is very very elementary first-order logic. I'll give you an example:

All men are mortal.
John is a man.
Thus, John is mortal.

Simple enough right? This is known as a syllogism, you can google to find out more. But in essence what is happening here is that this is an example of a very simple line of thought. Here's how that same line of thought could go awry.

All men are mortal.
My mom is mortal.
Thus, my mom is a man.

Ignoring the completely separate debate on whether my mom could be a man if she wanted to, you can see how deceptive the English language is. It makes you think that this is a line of thought, when it is actually more like a set.

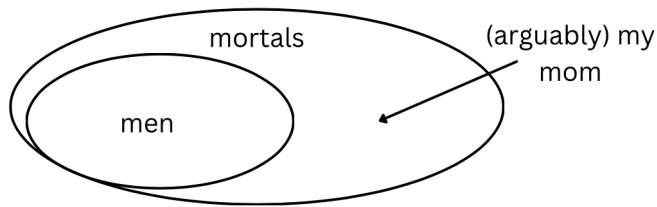
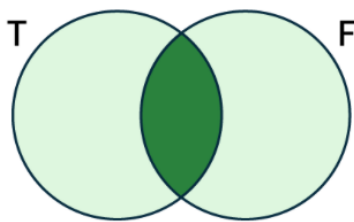


Fig 1.2.1 - Set of men and mortals.

To say 'all men are mortal' does not mean man = mortal and vice versa, but rather that men fall under the category of being mortal. Mortality is the overarching category, like how it is the larger set.

Now that we see how smaller concepts can be nested within larger concepts, we can draw parallels between that and set theory. And having drawn that parallel, we realise that concepts can not only be nested within each other, but overlap with each other the same way sets intersect.

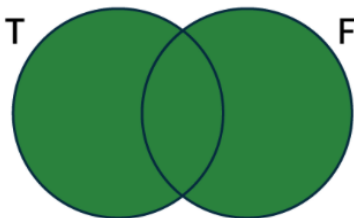


Example: Fig 1.2.2 Characteristics of different media.

Traditional media and social media both tend to present the viewer with sensationalised news. (Similarity/Intersection)

Traditional media is centralised while social media is decentralised. (Difference/Non-intersection)

They can also combine to fully cover a topic of interest the same way sets can form a union.



Example: Fig 1.2.3 Lyrical and non-lyrical music

Songs with and without lyrics make up the totality of music. (All encompassing/union)

This is a very mathematical way to put it. Another way of thinking about it is that any kind of statement is automatically situated within a broader context, linked to other statements/concepts. Your job is to figure out where your statement is situated and compare it with other statements/concepts. You could choose to compare their degree of similarity or difference, their relationship to a larger picture, or even whether one entity is subsumed under the other.

Having understood the concept of comparison, we can now look at causality. Statements exist in relationship with each other **and** tend to relate to each other in a cause and effect manner. We will now inspect this cause and effect with another example:

John broke 3 things.
Peter broke 2 things.
Now, 5 things are broken.

John exerted an effect on 3 things, Peter exerted an effect on 2 things. Thus, their combined effect is exerted on 5 things. This simple idea of things added onto one another is more prevalent in argumentation than you think.

This is what happens when you say something like factor (A), coupled with factor (B), exacerbates factor (C). Another example could be:

The prevalence of misinformation,
coupled with the media's proclivity to create echo chambers,
reinforces the media's capacity to breed animosity and tribalism.

You may also find that if addition is true, the inverse of this operator, subtraction is also true. (A) might not just reinforce (B), but it could also dampen the effects of (B), leading to a weaker (C). Here's another example:

While the Internet holds an unprecedented variety of information,
the prevalence of misinformation
hinders its positive impact.

At this point in time, do note my use of conjunctions or terms which illustrate these operations. Phrases like 'coupled with' or 'while' set up a clear line of thought for the reader to follow and I will be elaborating on them in both the next section and in Section 4.2.

Now that we are aware of comparisons and causality, there is a case you may find peculiar:

When ice cream sales increase, murder rates increase.

Does it make sense? Definitely not. Here's the rest:

Temperature has been increasing too.
This could increase demand for ice cream, thus more sales.
This could increase aggression, thus more murders.

This harps on another concept which you have likely heard before, that correlation \neq causation. Here, we speculate that there was an underlying factor causing 2 phenomena to increase. Do note

my use of ‘could’ which belong to a category of words that help in maintaining balance and nuance, abstaining from absolutism.

This concept of correlation \neq causation is a very powerful one. This can be one of the ways for you to show awareness of the fallibility of certain arguments, making for good counter-arguments and demonstrating nuance.

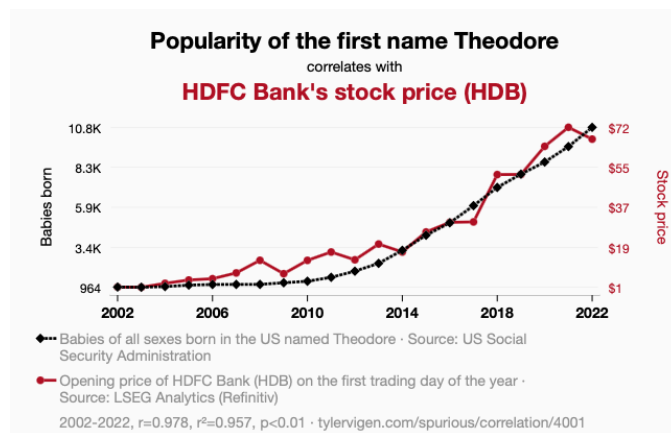


Fig 1.2.3 - Funky. Spurious correlations.

The website shows strange correlations each day between completely unrelated things.

Using this framework, I’m sure you can start to find more similarities between the mathematical expressions of logic and the language-based expressions. Maybe things like proportionality, multiplication, exponentials, but I will leave the rest up to you.

For now, these 3 things - comparison, addition, and correlation/causation are enough for us to work with. At this point in the section, you may be worried if we have drifted too far away from what General Paper asks of us.

I can assure you that by starting with a foundation in logic, we understand what I think is the most important thing in General Paper, that linguistic and logical expressions are the same thing just written in a different way. So how can we apply this logic? That is where context and language come into play.

SECTION 1.3: APPLICATION

Context basically refers to content. It’s the stuff you perform your **word-maths** on: words, examples, ideas. Having this knowledge requires a mix of both effort and empathy. You have to care about the topics you work on and be willing to put in some effort. To make things as painless as possible, I have compiled study tips for context in Section 4.1.

Language refers not just to a wide vocabulary. Language is a game of precision, to be able to use the right word to guide the reader’s mind in the right direction. I have compiled study tips on

both vocabulary and precision in Section 4.2. Language use as a precise endeavour is also a concept scattered throughout the document.

What I want to do here is to quickly walk you through how we could apply logic, context, and language in argumentation. I will be looking briefly at Essay and cover the rest in their respective components. Treat this as a proof of concept.

Let's start with a step-by-step approach at a simple argument looking to conclude that media misinforms more than it informs:

1. Pool together a few characteristics of the media. Keep in mind that these should be characteristics that are not too controversial and require minimal substantiation.
 - a. Traditional media and social media exist. The current landscape is one that is decentralised (anybody can post/contribute).
 - b. Today, there is a strong competition for attention.
 - c. The individual now has access to an unprecedented amount of information.

That should be enough. Three basic starting points is enough to pull an argument together. I think it's even enough to write a whole essay. (If you didn't notice, I was being sneaky here. The process of coming up with relatively stable starting statements has parallels to what Mathematics calls axioms.)

2. Now, let's say we want to prove that traditional media only shows users partial truth. We can start by doing some light manipulation on our characteristics:

Statements	Comments
Traditional media and social media both seem to participate in this strong competition for attention.	Introducing a similarity/intersection.
In today's world, traditional media no longer operate primarily through the distribution of newspapers or television, but attempt to establish presence along the same social media platforms it competes against.	Covering characteristics of traditional media. Still pretty self-evident.
Due to this competition for attention and the monetary incentive which comes with it, news outlets seem to resort to attention-grabbing tactics such as appealing to emotion and sensationalising the news it reports.	No longer self-evident, it is taking (A) competition for attention and speculating on (B).
This could be done through various means ranging from distorting narratives through language and framing to selective reporting.	Further elaboration, context is important.

News outlets today tend to subscribe to an agenda which appeals to a certain demographic and seem to be more willing to publish polarising, exaggerated information in order to grab attention. One of the most predictable ways to grab attention is by inciting furor. For example, Fox News and CNN are two news outlets which lean strongly towards opposite political factions in the United States. Fox News would report on Democrats using violent rhetoric towards Donald Trump while CNN would selectively ignore that fact.	<p>More inductive than deductive reasoning has been done. Example required.</p> <p>The point of this example shows that your speculations past your axioms are warranted.</p>
--	---

Before continuing, note how little logical operators have been used so far. Most of your writing is setting the stage and proving that whatever you wish to operate on are true. Basically, in essay, it's all about the set up of characteristics, then add, subtract, remove, combine them to reach your conclusion.

This highlights traditional media's proclivity, incentivised by profit and under heavy pressure as an organisation, to prioritise attention over truth, reinforcing the detrimental effects experienced by the masses.	<p>Evaluate by incorporating your example into a simple logical operation.</p> $\text{Profit} + \text{Pressure} = \text{Attention} > \text{Truth} \rightarrow \text{Detrimental Effects}$
--	---

If we wanted to complete this thought in a paragraph, we can compile this partial truth in traditional media with how social media also shows partial truth through its algorithms and echo chambers, only reinforcing pre-existing beliefs. I will not be showing that set up step by step, but rather jump straight to the only logical operation that will tie the entire paragraph together.

The tendency for news outlets to prioritise attention over truth and lean on sensationalist reporting for profit, coupled with social media's tendency to trap the individual in echo chambers through algorithms created with that same competition for attention in mind, continues to perpetually lock the individual in a vicious cycle of being fed asymmetric information.	<p>Simple logical operator tying everything you have set up thus far.</p> $(A) + (B) = (C)$
--	---

Here, you can see how logic, context, and language work hand in hand to produce a sound argument. Context helps to reinforce inductive/speculatory lines of thought, logic helps to gel all the set-ups together to reach or strengthen a conclusion, language is used more subtly to avoid absolute statements especially the more controversial yet preparatory ones. Language is also used to express logic, seen in 'coupled with' as well as clauses being used. I will elaborate on how language expresses logic in each part of the paper.

CHAPTER 2: ESSAY

SECTION 2.1: FRAMEWORK

I will ignore question analysis because I'm sure GP teachers have covered it sufficiently. Usually, what is not taught as well is how to come up with points for the essay. While there is no hard and fast rule for this, there are some general guidelines to consider.

Firstly, it all starts with characteristics. List down all the characteristics of each thing in the question. E.g. Does religion still have a role in the modern world?

Secondly, leverage on the points you will immediately think of to answer the questions. These are the big conclusions you wish to prove in each paragraph. Make sure that all your arguments are as different from each other as possible. You want minimal overlap. You want to cover as much ground in the space of the question as possible.

Now, group the characteristics according to points. What this does is it helps you double check that you have filled most of the space offered by the question and if you struggle to think of your last or second last argument, the remaining characteristics could help inform you.

Lastly, come up with a solid antithesis. Don't think that just because you have to rebut it later on you will have to make it weak. I will later teach you how we can quietly create holes in these antithesis without people realising on the first read, making your counter-argument stronger and demonstrating nuance.

Start writing your framework, listing your arguments in order along with their characteristics. Now, look at what your characteristics will lead you to speculate, and add an example to substantiate the speculation.

Effectively, each argument looks like this:

- Point → characteristics (elaboration)
- secondary/tertiary characteristics/speculations (add example)
- interlink these characteristics (evaluation)
- perform a logical operation to reach your conclusion → link

Here is an example framework for the question:

- Does religion still have a role in the modern world?

Firstly, list characteristics:

- Religion: Tendency for religious extremism, violence, hatred. Ideology/dogma makes people narrow-minded. Open for interpretation, can be taken advantage of. Place for gathering (churches, mosques). Sense of unity in shared belief. Source for spirituality. Moral centre in the religious texts. Force for good and kindness.
- The modern world: Isolated in apartments. Capitalistic society. Advancements in science and technology. Strong progress past older tribalistic times. Increased distractions where people feel like they are wasting their life.

These are the things that markers want to see. This is what they mean when they want us to show awareness of the context and current affairs surrounding the questions. When they say awareness, they are talking about awareness of **characteristics**.

Now, list points in my argument and group characteristics:

STAND: Religion still plays a role in the modern world.

- AT1: Ideological volatility
 - Religion: Tendency for religious extremism, violence, hatred. Ideology/dogma makes people narrow-minded. Open for interpretation, can be taken advantage of.
 - Modern World: Strong progress past older tribalistic times.
- T1: Force for unity and community
 - Religion: Place for gathering (churches, mosques). Sense of unity in shared belief. Force for good and kindness.
 - Modern World: Isolated in apartments. Capitalistic society.
- T2: Morality
 - Religion: Moral centre in the religious texts. Force for good and kindness.
 - Modern World: Advancements in science and technology.
- T3: Spirituality
 - Religion: Source for spirituality.
 - Modern World: Increased distractions where people feel like they are wasting their life.

I literally copied and pasted each characteristic from above and sorted them into the points.

There are a few repeats and that's perfectly fine. In fact, if you repeat some characteristics it can also show that the arguments are interlinked, making your essay more robust.

Now, add examples to each:

STAND: Religion still plays a role in the modern world.

- AT1: Ideological volatility
 - Religion: Tendency for religious extremism, violence, hatred. Ideology/dogma makes people narrow-minded. Open for interpretation, can be taken advantage of.

- Modern World: Strong progress past older tribalistic times.
- EXAMPLE: ISIS
- T1: Force for unity and community
 - Religion: Place for gathering (churches, mosques). Sense of unity in shared belief. Force for good and kindness.
 - Modern World: Isolated in apartments. Capitalistic society.
 - EXAMPLE: Cities like New York, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo are highly capitalistic and isolated.
- T2: Morality
 - Religion: Moral centre in the religious texts. Force for good and kindness.
 - Modern World: Advancements in science and technology.
 - EXAMPLE: Religious preachers like Jordan Peterson, Cliffe Knechtle garner millions of views.
- T3: Spirituality
 - Religion: Source for spirituality.
 - Modern World: Increased distractions where people feel like they are wasting their life.
 - EXAMPLE: Jim Carrey is very religious and spiritual, Dave Chappelle on Islam.

At this point we are eager to dust our hands and call it a day. But we aren't done yet. Notice how some of these examples do not reinforce their respective characteristics?

If you have written primary characteristics (C1) for everything, it's good that the examples do not reinforce them since examples are meant to reinforce secondary/tertiary characteristics (C2). (I will call these (C2) and (C1) from now on) Now, notice how not all the characteristics I listed are primary characteristics (C1)?

An example being the point on spirituality, characteristic - a source for spirituality. Duh. When listing characteristics, it's ok to list (C2). Sometimes it's hard to be able to think of (C1), especially under stress.

All that matters is each paragraph has some (C1) leading to (C2). If we know (C2), we can backtrack to find (C1). So how is religion a source for spirituality? Maybe religious rituals and traditions, religious figures being a source of comfort and peace etc. These can still be considered (C1) although they almost look like examples.

So go back to your framework and fill in the blanks, making sure each argument has at least a (C1) and a (C2). To remind you of the difference, (C1) is self-evident with little substantiation required, (C2) is speculative, usually from a (C1) or a few (C1)s. Once done, you're done!

SECTION 2.2: ARGUMENTATION

Now that we have a framework, it's time to start fleshing out our essay. I will only be working on AT1 as an example. When teachers tell you to use PEEL, the point and elaboration is the set-up, it's where you will list all your (C1) and (C2) then back your (C2) with examples.

Once that is done, there is an evaluation portion after the example where you show how it links to C2. The second half of the evaluation is taking the different (C2)s (and in some cases (C1)s) and performing some logical operation on them.

Usually, addition and unions are used to reinforce the point, present mostly in your thesis arguments. E.g. (A) along with (B) reinforces (C).

Subtraction and intersection/non-intersection is used to undermine the point, present mostly in your counter-argument to your antithesis or in thesis arguments where you wish to subvert the reader's expectation. While (A), due to (B), thus (C).

I will not write the entire AT1, but rather just show the flow of logic and how context and language are used as well.

POINT: Some argue that religion has no place in the modern world due to the fear and uncertainty that comes with its ideological volatility.

We start with all the (C1):

- Religious texts are often open for interpretation, increasing chances for malevolent individuals to take advantage of texts to pursue their alternate agenda.
- Due to religious texts having originated from or closely tied to a deity/god, there is a sense of absolutism to the teachings derived from the texts.

For language use, note terms like 'are often', 'increasing chances', 'there is a sense'. These terms are subtly placed to maintain an objective and impartial lens on the characteristics of religion/religious text.

Great, let's move on to (C2):

- The amalgamation of religion's interpretive relativity (C1) and the absolute nature of teachings (C1) derived from them create numerous avenues for religious extremism to breed (C2).
- The dogmatic nature of religion (C1) also leads to its followers adopting a more insular mindset having subscribed to a framework of ethics and ideas (C2).

Add an example:

- For example, ISIS is a known terrorist group leveraging alternative views of Islam to breed violence and hate.

Evaluate the example:

- This highlights the prevalence and ease at which religion can quickly devolve into extremism and breed violence. (linking example to C2)
- The tendency for religion to devolve into extremism is indicative of its ideological volatility (C2). The world today is one that is largely secular due to the advent of globalisation and filled with a myriad of different cultures nested in close vicinities (C1). This ideological volatility proves to be anachronistic and unfit for the modern world which has long progressed past older tribal and antagonistic behaviours. (Logical operation: Show that modern world characteristics do not intersect with ideological volatility.)

There you have it, a walk-through of how an argument flows. Remember these simple steps:

Point → C1s → C2s + example → logical operation → conclusion.

All there's left for me to share when it comes to argumentation is **counter-arguments**. Since I started with an antithesis, I will show how even though your first thesis is not too related to your AT1, you can add a rebuttal directly addressing AT1.

I discreetly nested a few fallacies in AT1 for my counter-argument. Can you spot them?

1. Religions tend to be dogmatic.

Do you see the fallacy? It's like saying all men are mortal. Religions are dogmatic but not all dogmas are religious. Thus, the tendency towards extremism can be argued as not a result of the religious quality, but rather the dogmatic quality of a religion, which can also be present in other ideologies (Communism and Facism in the 20th century).

2. ... the modern world which has long progressed past older tribal and antagonistic behaviours.

This is purely false, while the subject matter which incite tribalism is no longer the pressing topic, our tribalistic instincts have merely shifted. In the past it used to be religious, currently its political, nationalistic, economic, or ethnic. Our antagonistic behaviours have merely shifted in paradigm but in reality have not gone away at all.

To include this in my counter-argument. I will just add them in and directly address them before building my next argument. You can do it in any way you see fit, I like to do it directly:

Statement	Comment
Conversely, religion proves to still play a role today due to its ability to act as a driving force for unity and community.	
While some may propose that religion tends towards extremism, one may disregard the notion that it is not just religious ideologies which can result in extremist views. Rather, extremist views are a symptom of any dogmatic ideology and not a result of its religious aspect.	<p>Simple. Show religion as having 2 sets in the space: dogmatic and religious.</p> <p>Say extremism falls under dogmatic rather than religious.</p> <p>Can add an example being Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in the 20th century.</p>
Furthermore, while it may seem that our modern world has progressed past the barbaric nature brought upon by dominant religious systems in the past, our tribalistic tendencies have merely shifted in subject matter from the religious to other topics such as politics, class, and ethnicity. It seems unfair to attribute tribal tendencies to be a product of religion.	<p>Again, simple. Show that fact is false because tribalism still present today.</p> <p>Can include social instability in America during Black Lives Matter, left-wing phenomena in universities etc.</p>

It takes some practice to get good at nesting fallacies in your antithesis and then addressing them in your counterarguments. Everyone probably has fallacies when they write, so you can just be more wary of the fallacies that appear in your antithesis. Some common ones are as such:

1. Categorical: You think this belongs to CAT A when it actually belongs to CAT B (like my first rebuttal point).
2. False Proposition: You added something that was just plain wrong and here's why. (like my 2nd rebuttal point).
3. Correlation \neq Causation: You said that this led to this, but more likely due to an underlying factor relating the two.
4. Underlying Assumption: You said this but it depends on this assumption which is just false, you failed to consider something.

With these skills in hand, you will be much more equipped to handle the essay component, especially if you started with no clue on how to write a good essay.

CHAPTER 3: COMPREHENSION

SECTION 3.1: SAQ

In my opinion, dealing with Comprehension is a completely different ballgame from Essay. Comprehension is a very precise endeavour. I find the most important thing to grasp is something I call **units of meaning**. These are the words or phrases to which marks are allocated.

Here's an example:

both help the environment in one way
but harm it in another.

Taking from this example, there are 2 units of meaning: (1) help the environment in one way, (2) harm it in another

Most questions actually fall under 2 categories:

- (1) Directly lift + paraphrase.
- (2) Function + Context.

Here is an example of direct lift + paraphrase:

What is the strategy of 'industry-funded' (line 21) campaigns?

To address the first, direct lift + paraphrase, the procedure to derive an answer is relatively simple. When reading the question, activate that portion of your brain which you have been cultivating since primary school. Find the sentences in the text which answer the question.

Now, make sure the sentences you wish to use in your answer have sufficient units of meaning to answer the question. If you aren't sure, a good gauge is having at least two times the relevant **units of meaning** relative to the marks offered by the question.

I don't have much to say about paraphrasing, it's contingent on your command of English. I don't think there are any tricks to circumnavigate that.

There are many examples of function + context, here are a few:

why does the author place additional information in brackets?

How does the author illustrate his doubt

What is the author's purpose in describing individuals settling for mediocrity as 'white noise'

These just require you to infer an effect, purpose, or technique used to elicit something. Function + context can also refer to questions like “Why was ... unexpected?”

The premise of all these questions are the same. They expect you to describe the function (some kind of effect or transformation) and situate it within the context of the piece. So how you would answer goes something like this:

The author places additional information in brackets to highlight (function) that there are options which are beneficial to the climate (context, UOM 1) without having to modify people’s default way of life (context, UOM 2).

Essentially, indicate the function and link it to the context (literally), keeping in mind the units of meaning you include in your answer.

SECTION 3.2: SUMMARY

This is where the idea of **units of meaning** shows most promise. I don’t have much to say for the Summary section, except that it’s one of the most delicate portions of the exam. You have to be meticulous in keeping track of your units of meaning so you can both fit the right amount in and not accidentally lose any while paraphrasing.

Take a look at any summary insert/answer scheme. Notice how there are usually keywords bolded which have to be paraphrased. Summary for GP no longer marks sentence by sentence, but rather unit of meaning by unit of meaning.

While reading any phrase or clause in the passage, notice when your thoughts shift from one to another, because when that happens, you are effectively shifting live from one unit of meaning to another. See these as two separate points and paraphrase each one such that you do not lose the meaning from either.

This will ensure greater precision compared to just paraphrasing sentences which seem to relate to the question at hand. In doing that, you may accidentally lose that meaning without realising and innocently believing that you are just summing up the sentence. Even though you may think a sentence carries the same weight with or without a clause, as long as that unit of meaning is relevant to the question, there are definitely some marks there.

There is no walkthrough because what I’m saying is not something novel, just take a look at the answer scheme and adopt that into your mindset when approaching the summary. Practise a little more and once you get the hang of it, you no longer have to worry about this segment.

SECTION 3.3: AQ

I don't see a need to cover AQ as much because in my opinion, the skills required to do AQ are very similar to the skills covered in the counter-argument portion of argumentation.

Do the same thing:

1. Think of points you can use to oppose/align with the writer's stance. Usually, I find it better to oppose the writer because it gives more opportunity to demonstrate your critical thinking and originality.
2. Figure out a logical fallacy the writers may have committed.
3. In writing your argument, address the logical fallacy directly.
4. In writing the rest of your argument, follow (C1) → (C2) → conclusion, don't forget to add a sentence to concede/acknowledge the opposing side.
 - a. E.g. However, it may be conceded that...
5. Repeat for the next paragraph.

People usually like to write 3 paragraphs for AQ, but in my opinion and experience, two well-written ones will suffice.

This is in essence, the best way to demonstrate critical thinking. If you are operating on the field of logic, you can best show awareness through detecting potentially fallacious arguments, indicating a higher level of maturity.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY TIPS

A brief overview of this chapter would first be tips on how to strengthen the context and language components, followed by what to do the night before. Note that I'm not covering the logical component because as established, the logic we deal with in General Paper is extremely elementary and has been covered sufficiently earlier such that I have nothing more to say.

SECTION 4.1: CONTEXT

In order to successfully generate workable answers in November, you have to be privy, at least to a certain degree, of the various contextual backdrops tying our world together.

If you have no idea where to start, my best advice is start with what you like. If you like Valorant or Chess, you can start with gaming and the media. If you like coding and investing, you can start with tech and politics. The beauty in starting here is that learning GP content won't feel like work. You can abandon the utterly useless (but somehow widely adopted) practice of memorising examples the night before the paper.

How to go about building your understanding of current affairs? YouTube. Go on YouTube and find whatever most resembles a documentary about the topic of interest, which not only covers first-order details, but second-order ones as well. For example, don't find a video talking only about chess tips, find a video talking about the rise and fall of chess popularity due to COVID-19. Think about how chess was used in the Cold War and the impact of games and alternate means for nations and states to exhibit soft power.

Now that you're on YouTube watching a relatively useful video on a topic you're interested in, look at your recommendations and find the next educational video. Remember, just because it's educational doesn't mean it has to be boring. Skip the boring ones, the algorithm will start to understand what you're looking for.

Next thing to do on YouTube - watch podcasts. I recommend Joe Rogan and Lex Fridman, not because of any political affiliation but purely due to their ability to pull powerful/influential people onto their shows. Watch a podcast and hear what Elon Musk has to say directly. Watch Donald Trump getting interviewed. Watch Kanye West, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Brian Greene, Jonathan Haidt. The glorious thing about this is that you can still tailor these interviews to what suits your taste!

Say you like politics, watch Noam Chomsky, Jordan Peterson, Steven Pinker, Stephen Fry. Say you like physics and mathematics, watch Eric Weinstein, Edward Frenkel, Brian Greene. Say

you like art and music, watch Kanye West, Pharrel Williams, Rick Rubin, Billy Corgan. You get the idea. Chances are too that these people will drift into other topics, and all the better!

In doing these two things, you are very effortlessly fueling your brain with breadth and depth. Remember, you can use podcast episodes as an example and it will work just fine so long you use it right. Having heard what the documentaries show and what the podcasts say, there will undoubtedly be some fact or story that sticks with you. All those are now your examples. No need to physically write down, no need to memorise.

If you only stumbled upon this document weeks or even days before your GP paper, here's the hasty way you could consolidate all that information. Take the GP notes given to you by your school, list down quickly all the characteristics you can find on that topic. Watch a few videos by WSJ, NYT, New Yorker on the topic, pick out examples and pick out characteristics.

Now that you have a list of examples and characteristics, organise characteristics which overlap and tag an example to them. This will be helpful in not just meeting the 'quota' to having an example, but when padding general characteristics with a little more specificity.

Then, take those characteristics and start drawing arrows. The arrows can mean whatever you want them to mean, but just draw with the principle of logical structures in mind. Look at whether one characteristic, by your approximation, intersects with, leads to, or reinforces another. For me, I use + and - to indicate reinforcement and dampening, and double arrows indicating strong overlap/similarity, normal arrows indicate either subset or natural leading to.

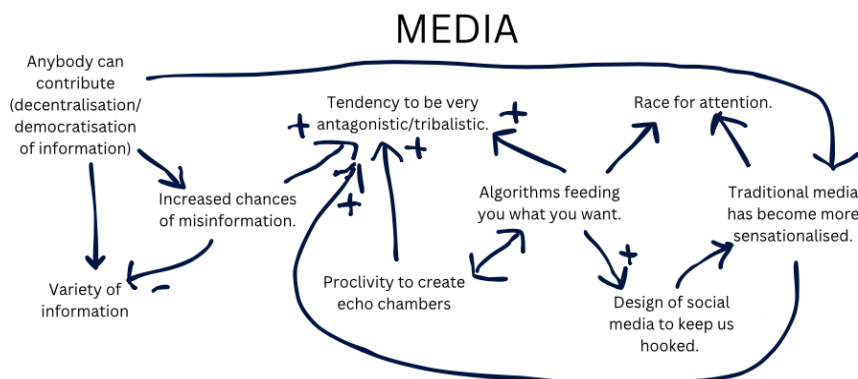


Fig 4.1.1 - Media map.

While I would much rather you go down the longer but more enjoyable YouTube route, if you really have no time and need some stable ground, this method will suffice. Another way to go about this is to practise making frameworks, grouping these characteristics in different ways for different arguments.

Before moving on to language, I'd like to share a dandy trick I use to add flair and dimensionality to my essays. No matter what you talk about, there is a huge academic canon behind it. If you are talking about history, bring in names like Yuval Noah Harari or other intellectuals you have seen from podcasts. By adding an expert concept (in just one sentence, don't let it take over your essay/AQ) and reinforcing it with good examples and evaluation, it will elevate your work remarkably because it demonstrates not only an understanding of the topic in question, but the rich academic history behind it.

I like to use philosophers and social critics like Nietzsche, Hegel, Hume, Durkheim, Foucault, to name a few. Find some thinkers you resonate with, it will help you in the long run. Keep in mind that this is optional, but highly recommended.

SECTION 4.2: LANGUAGE

Now that you have content and you have the skills to manipulate them, you just have to figure out how you're going to express your thoughts. Everyone tells you to improve your vocabulary, but it goes without saying that that is the most vague statement a person could utter.

If you have the time, I'd like you to get into the habit of reading. But who am I kidding, you don't have the time because you are a JC student rushing for A' Levels. While it's definitely a big ask, I'd hope for you to pick a book that interests you, written by a public intellectual you respect. Take that book and only open it to read when you are on public transport. Read on the bus, read on the train, and stop reading the moment you get off.

Why do I regard the act of reading so highly? For the simple reason that published books by intellectuals are professional examples of what you would be doing in November. Maybe they don't follow as rigid of a template as you will have to, but while you follow their train of thought, subtle habits and styles will stick with you. Be it a word used in a refreshing way, a phrase, or a clause used to capture a thought in an impressive manner. Styles ranging from vocabulary to sentence structure will quietly rub off on you. Again, this method, if followed diligently, will not feel like studying at all. But please pick a book you think you will like, these 2 years are torturous enough.

Similar to the previous section, having suggested a method for the long run, I will now cover what to do if your GP exam is, say, next week. Even if it isn't next week, try not to skip since I think it's rather important.

I will simply be listing (non-exhaustively) a bunch of terms which I use to better express logic in word-format:

Words that emphasise/make an argument stronger:

- Illustrates, highlights, emphasises, accentuates, stresses, indubitably, uncontrovertibly, etc.

Related to/depending on/a result of:

- Concomitant, corollary, dependent, contingent, culmination, product, etc.

Words that speculate/suggest patterns:

- Tendency, proclivity, propensity, predilection, disposition, etc.

If you really don't have time, the words that can best increase your language points, while tangibly improving the way you express yourself in your essay, are the words that operate on your phrases, clauses or ideas. Things that relate, add, subtract, indicate similarity or difference, or relate to categories of ideas are the most helpful in both Essay and Comprehension.

Go to the thesaurus and search for as many of these words as possible and memorise their meaning and nuances. They cannot all be used interchangeably, but chances are, you will definitely use a significant chunk of them to go from C1s to C2s to your conclusions.

SECTION 4.3: THE NIGHT BEFORE

The night before is arguably the most important time for your GP performance because, let's be real, it's probably the only time you allocated to revising GP.

One thing I've seen too many people do the night before is the revolting practice of compiling and memorising examples for different essay questions. Do not do this. If you focus on memorising examples, you are going to compromise your entire thought process on the day itself because you will be more preoccupied with trying to fit your argument into your example than fit your example in your argument.

Please also do not write a whole essay the day before your paper, it's a very inefficient way to consolidate and properly prepare for the test. If you were kind enough to yourself and allocated an afternoon as well, you can use the afternoon to practise writing essay frameworks for some practice questions. You will be able to get through more and practise that thinking process.

At night, my only recommendation is to practise Comprehension, and not even Summary or AQ. Just blitz through as many SAQ as you can, because SAQs are the portion that one can most easily gain or lose marks. People usually range from 9-13/15 for an SAQ (or 11-15/17 for batches before 2023).

That's 4 whole marks. It can change your Paper 2 from a 31/50 to a 35/50, or a 33/50 to a 37/50. It's a lot. So make sure you capitalise on that. There's no way you can gain upwards of 4 marks from an AQ as easily as you can from SAQ.

In summary, in the afternoon, practise writing essay frameworks, adding whatever examples come to mind. Try to be flexible with your examples, remember examples can range from podcast appearances to merely the existence of certain Reddit forums or news outlets.

At night, blitz through SAQ. Ignore the summary and AQ portion because it's too late to consolidate those, you will just have to trust your fluid intelligence.

I believe doing these the day before your GP paper will best prepare you for the paper. On the day itself, don't treat it like a science and try to recall examples or essay frameworks. Just take inspiration from what you have seen or practised before and construct something new, exciting, and original.

For your Paper 2, manage your time well and do the SAQ like you've done the night before. For the Summary, focus on units of meaning and try to not lose any meaning while paraphrasing. For the AQ, capitalise on logical fallacies and don't forget to concede/acknowledge, the rest is similar to an essay argument.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As you can see, my approach to General Paper is indeed systematic. I hope that reading this didn't feel like a waste of time. Ideally, you would have walked away feeling that GP is no longer the vague, wishy-washy, unpredictable subject you once thought it was.

My view of General Paper is one that is truly bittersweet, because I feel that the subject has much more potential than what it lives up to. General Paper feels like a portal for any student with their own passions, interests, and ideas to express them and explore them outside the confines of the other subjects like Mathematics, the Sciences, and the Humanities.

If you made it this far, you should also see that logic is used heavily in argumentation. I believe it is and while it may seem that I portray argumentation to be a product of mathematical operations, I actually have the opposite view.

I think that our human capacity to create, imagine, and rationalise is not reducible to Mathematics and the Sciences. In fact, I find that things like logic which are heavily present in certain branches of Maths, are derived first from language, communication, and cooperation. We have merely found ways of formalising what is multidimensional, real, and more importantly, human.

Before you leave, I hope that you can look at General Paper with a renewed perspective, that as frustrating as it may be, it's merely a platform for you to explore what spurs you.

I see it as an empty canvas, bounded by simple human rules, presenting itself for you to colour.