GP Paper 2 Notes (8881 Syllabus)

Preface

This set of notes is intended as a comprehensive yet non-excessive set of advice to succeed in Paper 2 of the H1 General Paper syllabus. To maximise the utility of this document, you are <u>strongly</u> advised to compare questions from your comprehension practices with the question types to understand how to apply the tips.

As this is a relatively new syllabus, take the advice provided with a grain of salt. In every case that this document contradicts your tutor's advice, take his/her advice to be correct, and those in this document to be wrong.

Nonetheless, the notes provided in this document are designed to be aligned with the 8881 syllabus (as explained later) and hence should cover the approach to most, if not all questions.

Time Management

It is extremely important to be aware of the time constraint in Paper 2. For me personally, it is absolutely necessary to allocate a <u>minimum</u> of 35 minutes to attempt the application question. This ensures sufficient time to plan the AQ for a proper answer.

0800 - 0805	Read Passage 1
0805 - 0830	Attempt Passage 1 Questions
0830 - 0833	Read Passage 2
0833 - 0850	Attempt Summary
0850 - 0855	Attempt Passage 3 Questions
0855 - 0900	Plan AQ
0900 - 0930	Finish AQ

Note: If you are unable to complete the SAQ on time, move on to the AQ. A lot of students (me included) struggle with time management because they think that spending 5 additional minutes won't hurt. But 5 minutes is about 15% of the time you should be spending on the AQ, which is time you cannot lose. The AQ is worth 12 marks in the 8881 syllabus. That's more than a third of the content marks.

Short Answer Questions

Fundamentally, Paper 2 of the H1 General Paper syllabus is a test of understanding language use. Cambridge is assessing you on your ability to empathise with perspectives of people around the world. Therefore, the primary principle when dealing with Paper 2 is to demonstrate understanding of issues raised.

In the 8881 syllabus document, Cambridge states that "There will be a range of questions on the passages, requiring candidates to demonstrate their ability to comprehend, infer, analyse, evaluate, summarise and synthesise." These skills are what Cambridge is expecting from students. Hence, that is how this set of notes are structured.

1. Read the preamble **carefully**. It gives the big idea of the entire passage.
2. Read each passage **carefully** before answering any questions pertaining to that passage.
   a. Do NOT read and do the questions at the same time. This causes tunnel vision as you do not take the context of the entire passage into account, resulting in an answer which does not capture the nuanced and contextualised understanding idea required.
   b. Do NOT read all passages first before answering questions. This causes information overload as you will forget what you have read for passage 1 by the time you have finished reading question 3, causing you to waste additional time reading passage 1 again to answer questions regarding passage 1.
   c. Do NOT read to <u>only</u> get the big idea of what the passage is saying. That information is provided by the preamble.
      i. Understand the <u>ideas and concepts</u> raised by each paragraph in the context of the passage. These come in the form of <u>reasons</u>, <u>impacts</u> and <u>comparisons</u> usually. Take note of these.
      ii. Understand the <u>cause and effect</u> of the ideas raised
      iii. Get a sense of the <u>tone</u> of the passage.
      iv. Identify the <u>arguments</u> raised for and against the topic at hand.
      v. Recognise and interpret the <u>techniques</u> used (irony, hyperbole, repetition, callback, simile, metaphor, analogy, allusion, figurative language)
      vi. Understand the <u>sentence structure</u>, <u>signposting</u>, and <u>paragraphing</u>.
3. For the above point, there is a caveat. When reading the summary passage, instead of focussing on techniques used, you should look at the ideas presented by each sentence. Frequently, ideas are repeated. Hence, you must know what each sentence means directly and whether it is different from a previously mentioned point.
4. Identify examples that you can use for the AQ whilst reading.

This section of the paper is generally more predictable than the others, so you must know how to answer generic question types. Below are a few guidelines that you should adhere to when you answer the short answer questions.

1. The number of lines provided are an accurate estimation of the length of answers expected by Cambridge. Your answer should, at most, exceed the line limit by 1 or 2 lines. When a long and detailed chunk of information is presented, you are required to distill the main idea from it rather than paraphrase it.

2. An idea should be presented in your own words as far as possible, while the sentence structure should follow the format of the question's words.
   a. Q. Using paragraph 2, identify two functions of citizen participation.
      A. One function of citizen participation…

3. In general, the answer is a mixture of literally answering the essence of the question, followed by the context of the question.
   a. Q. Explain the author's use of the phrase 'cornerstone of democracy' (line 24) to describe citizen participation.
      i. To answer this question, you would need to first 'explain the author's use of the phrase', meaning you have to explain the phrase. Then, you would need to explain how that 'describes citizen participation', meaning that you have to contextualise the phrase in the context of citizen participation.

Type 1: Paraphrase
- The structure here is **[Idea] + [Idea] + …**
- Be very familiar with basic synonyms. Words that frequently appear in passages are worth memorising paraphrases for.
- Be specific in language use. If you paraphrase wrongly by not considering either the full extent or the nuance in the meaning of the word (e.g. tone, negative connotation), you might not get the mark.
- Make sure that figurative language is paraphrased literally to ensure the meaning is not lost.
- Some technical terms do not need to be replaced. However, some terms like 'economic' can be paraphrased to 'financial', and therefore do need to be replaced.
- Word-for-word paraphrase can be substituted with paraphrasing a word to multiple words.

Type 2: Listing
- The structure here is **[Way 1] + [Way 2] + …**
  - Paraphrase the ways/ reasons ⇒ This is the preferred method. If you have reasons in this format, choose them.
  - Identify the language use/ techniques ⇒ This is acceptable. If there are no reasons in the first format, then choose this.
- Have as many answers as possible. There are usually more reasons than there are marks, and the marks are not proportional to the number of reasons required.

Type 3: Compare and Contrast
- The structure here is **[Idea 1] → [comparative word] → [Idea 2]**
- These questions require you to show a clear black and white comparison.
- Use antonyms to convey contrasting ideas, and synonyms to convey similar ideas.
- Use comparative discourse markers.
  - Comparison based on Who/ What/ Where/ Why/ How: "on the other hand", "contrastingly", "unlike", "while", etc.
  - When: "from… to", "in the past… now", "previously… currently", "before… after", etc.

Type 4a: Language Use Explanation
- This question type has many sub-question types because there are many ways language is used in a passage to convey something. The most common types are diction, metaphor/ simile/ analogy and irony. I will include some other types to be safe.
- Diction
  - The structure is **[Definition] + [Context]**
  - Q. Explain the elderly woman's use of the words 'patronising' and 'dehumanising' (line 13) to describe her experience of being a victim of a kindness prank
    A. The use of the word 'patronising' implies that the prank <u>appeared to stem from a place of goodwill</u>, but felt as if someone was <u>asserting moral superiority</u> over her. The use of the word 'dehumanising' suggests that she felt like she was <u>not treated as a real person</u>, but rather like <u>a tool</u> used by the content creator to earn profit.
- Metaphor/ Simile/ Analogy/ Figurative language
  - The structure is **[Literal Interpretation] + [Context]**
  - Use comparative discourse markers here.
  - Q. Explain the author's use of the phrase 'cornerstone of democracy' (line 24) to describe citizen participation.
    A. A cornerstone is a fundamental building block of a building because without it, the building would collapse. <u>In a similar vein</u>, the author wishes to convey that participation of the masses is the definitive and most essential feature of a democratic system.
- Irony/ Paradox
  - The structure here is **[Expectation] + [<u>Contradicting</u> Reality]**
  - Use comparative discourse markers and antonyms here.
  - Q. Explain the irony that environmentalists have pointed out in lines 28 - 29
    A. It is <u>expected</u> that a consistent inflow of articles warning about a potential doomsday would encourage and spur people to act on the issue to mitigate it. <u>However</u>, in <u>reality</u>, a feeling of despair may develop, causing the actual impact of such reports to be that people feel efforts to minimise the problem are futile, and stop acting on it altogether, exacerbating the issue.

- Rhetorical Question
    - The structure here is **[Purpose] + [Context]**
    - Rhetorical questions have two purposes
        - To encourage readers to critically consider the argument point
        - To express sarcasm/ scepticism/ mockery by highlighting absurdities
- Parentheses
    - The structure here is **[Purpose] + [Context]**
    - Parentheses have two purposes
        - To provide factual information as a side note.
        - To provide the author's opinion.
    - Q. By including the information in brackets (line 4), what is the author implying about TikTok

        A. The author is implying that TikTok may <u>falsely imply (opinion)</u> that <u>being compassionate is the fastest method to become popular online (context)</u>.
- Inverted commas
    - The structure here is **[Purpose] + [Context]**
    - Inverted commas have four purposes
        - To express sarcasm/ cynicism/ mockery
            - Sarcasm is an direct attack while mockery has a lighter tone, addressed at the situation, person/banter
            - Here, you have to explain why the author takes on this tone. The answer will be found in the passage.
        - To express doubt/ scepticism
            - Here, you have to explain why the author may be doubtful or sceptical. The answer will be found in the passage.
        - To indicate the meaning is used in an uncommon manner
            - Here, you have to explain why it is uncommon by comparing how the word is normally used to how it is used in the context of the passage
        - To coin a new term (rare)

<u>Type 4b: Language Use Purpose</u>
- The structure here is **[Technique] → [Quote] → [Purpose] → [Context]**
- Quote the relevant part of the sentence. Do not quote the entire sentence. Likewise, avoid quoting singular words out of context unless the technique used is diction.
- The purpose of argumentative techniques is usually to prove a point. Usually, this will come in the form of fancy words or metaphorical writing, but this is not a guarantee. It can be words which imply downplaying, or even grammar. Hence, we cannot identify the technique by just looking for fancy words (you should still do this, just don't let it be the sole guiding principle). Instead, you should look for implicit meanings.
- The point that the language tries to prove has to be identified obviously.

Type 4c: Effective Conclusion
- The structure here is **[Technique] → [Context]**
- A conclusion serves one of six purposes.
  - The author reiterates the central essence of his argument about (his main reason for his stand)
  - The author offers advice/ insights/ suggestions/ a call to action (implied or explicitly suggested action that the reader should take) to make the conclusion feel impactful.
  - The author uses open-minded/ aspirational/ hopeful language/ looks to the future to emphasise the significance of the issue by showing its potential impact or importance beyond the present.
  - The author summarises his points by synthesising them into (paraphrase the points that are restated)
  - The author makes a callback to (something referenced at the start of the passage) in order to bring the argument full circle.
  - The author conveys a sense of balance by explaining that (point of balance)

Type 5: Intertextual Questions
- You <u>MUST</u> cite the line number of the idea you select.
- This is ultimately still a comparison question. Hence, you should use comparative discourse markers here. As far as possible, use synonyms and antonyms to further your comparison.
- Generally, the similarity or difference in ideas should be quite apparent. Hence, you should try to look for more obviously related quotes, before trying to make contrived comparisons.
- For 'support' questions, the structure will be as follows:
  - In lines ___, passage _ claims that (<u>paraphrased</u> claim that supports quoted claim from passage 3). Similarly/ Likewise/ In a similar vein, passage 3 implies/ suggests (<u>paraphrased</u> from passage 3).
  - If you feel your answer is not clear enough, especially for passages where the ideas expressed are only implicitly the same, you are advised to add "Both passages express/ convey/ imply (similar idea)"
- For 'undermine' questions, the structure will be as follows:
  - In lines ___, passage _ claims that (<u>paraphrased</u> claim that supports quoted claim from passage 3). On the other hand/ Contrastingly/ Unlike passage _, passage 3 implies/ suggests (<u>paraphrased</u> claim from passage 3).
  - If you feel your answer is not clear enough, especially for passages where the ideas expressed are only implicitly the same, you are advised to add "Both passages express/ convey/ imply (similar idea)"

Type 6: Unusual Questions

The question types provided below are not exhaustive, but they cover the skills required for most questions. Do note that questions may not look like the below question types for one of two reasons:

1. The question type is disguised.
   - Q. In paragraph 2, why does pursuing excellence create 'huge inequalities' (line 8)?
     A. When top achievers are given a great amount of benefits, the majority of us who are mediocre get nothing [1]. When high performers are likely to grow in confidence, the masses instead experience lowered self-esteem [1].
     - This is a compare and contrast question disguised as a listing question, and it is actually quite a common trick. Therefore, you should be very careful when reading question words, especially if they use words that imply differences.
2. The question is a mixture of two types of questions.
   - Q. What is the author implying when he asks 'but has that ship not sailed?' (lines 36 - 37)
     A. The writer is implying that it is pointless to worry about the dilution of British culture [1] as it has already been influenced by cultures from immigrants, which have been integrated into Britain's culture already [1].
     - This is a language use explanation <u>and</u> purpose question. You have to identify the meaning of 'that ship has sailed' in the context of dilution of British culture, then state the point of such a metaphor being used.

Type 7: Summary Question
- Paraphrase concepts and ideas wholly and convey the proper extent of meaning. Take note that JC mark schemes may sometimes leave out ideas that you think are important. This does not mean they are not important, but rather it is usually the case that the teachers are being lenient in marking so students don't fail so badly.
- Almost all ideas presented in the passage are relevant to the question, even if they don't seem to directly answer the question. Generally, only illustration (details/exemplification) is irrelevant.
- Some points require a level of inference. You may have to interpret phrases and examples to derive their implications with relevance to the question instead of directly paraphrasing. Do not try to paraphrase these points. There are plenty of points which you do not have to infer to get the marks, and you can score very high by ignoring points which you do have to infer.
- Do not use discourse markers unless necessary. Instead, to connect sentences, use commas. Long sentences are encouraged, as long as they remain grammatically correct.
- Write in continuous prose as language is mainly assessed here and in the AQ.

Application Question

Disclaimer: Every once in a while, Cambridge sets extremely nasty topics for the AQ. For example, in 2023, the topic was photography. Hence, my genuine advice to prepare for this question is to pray the question which comes out is manageable. Realistically, depending on how much you are willing to prepare for this question, you will be able to answer 40 - 80% of all AQ questions quite well. Nonetheless, I believe that it is worth studying for the AQ — If you get lucky and the topic set is genuinely manageable (in 2024 it was working from home), but you didn't study, then the students who did study will beat you by a lot (12 marks is the difference between an A and a C). Hence, it is not a waste of time to study AQ. With that, below are a few tips to make sure you score for the 80% of questions that you can and should score for.

(1) Introduction
- The shorter (3 - 5 lines) the better. Unlike the essay, your AQ intro does not need to be long. It only needs two components:
  1. Briefly link to Singapore to tell the marker that 'your society' is Singapore. You do not need to use examples here, because you are just hinting at the marker of what society your answer is based on so he/she is not confused. A common strategy is to link to characteristics of Singapore (be very careful not to stereotype).
  2. State contrasting points of view to tell the marker that your answer is going to feature balance. You should state the reason behind your points as well, especially if your point doesn't make any sense without a reason. But keep it short.
     - "While the view that (view 1) since (reason 1) has merit, undeniably, (view 2) because (reason 2)."

(2) Selecting claims
- Pick a controversial claim and identify the conflicting perspectives on that issue.
  - Claims from the summary question or intertextual questions are good claims.
- Select key claims that you can show a clear understanding of.
  - Pick points that you have a solid understanding of. This is more important than picking a controversial claim. If you pick a point which you know sounds very controversial, but you still do not understand, you will not have enough depth and you will fail. Worst still, you risk misinterpreting the point and end up with a point that is completely irrelevant.
- Do not pick a claim that is too long: you have to address both parts, which will make your answer way too long (This is a common pitfall)

(3) Finding Examples
- A lot of schools advise you to read broadly, which I genuinely believe to be ridiculous advice. If you genuinely like reading the news, this may actually work. But I'm guessing you don't, considering you've turned to reddit for GP notes. Even if you do read the news every day, there is way too much information to remember.
- Instead, this is what you should read to maximise your efficiency of studying.
  1. CNA Insider videos: These videos are genuinely interesting (at least to me) and provide a range of points of views which you can straight up copy and paste for your AQ response.
  2. Opinion articles: Do not read objective news articles hoping that you will be able to magically know how to apply it one day. Instead, read opinion articles, where the issues are already analysed and evaluated for you by professional writers. They are literally being paid to provide analysis and evaluation.
  3. Instagram GP accounts: Accounts like thatGPguy, generalpaper and gpmylaststraw provide useful summaries of certain case studies, essentially serving as a filter for news which is actually worth reading up on.
- Do NOT just assume you will remember these case studies. Note them down in a document, and type out the analysis properly. Each case study should take up about ¼ to ½ a page long on google docs, because that is usually the depth of analysis needed.

(4) Analysing and Evaluating
- Address the opposing view before explaining your view — without "balance", your answer is immediately capped at a lower mark. Since you don't have a lot of time to write the AQ, you have to make sure you at least have balance.
  - Do not commit the straw man fallacy by reducing the opposing viewpoint. Show empathy and acceptance of the viewpoint. Then make it clear that you disagree.
- Do not only address certain parts of your claim. All parts must be addressed. There are parts which are less important, and parts which are more important. Your answer should be focused on the more important ideas in the claim, but should nonetheless be set in the context of the less important ideas. (don't only look at the big idea, consider each word)
  - E.g. "malls are offering amenities, experiences and entertainment to enhance the shopping experience" (line 42). it is tempting to lapse into a generic response about the continued relevance of the mall. A better script, on the other hand, would exemplify a decent range of "amenities, experiences and entertainment", and proceed to examine and argue why and how they "enhance" shopping experiences.
- Do not only gloss over your selected claim. Some words have implied meanings or certain connotations. You have to convey understanding of this in your examples or explanation. You should at least read the entire paragraph closely again to make sure you remember what the context was. (don't only look at specific words, consider the context)
- You must link to the central question of the AQ.

(5) Conclusion
- You do not have to write a proper conclusion, because you are not really assessed on it. Cambridge only ever complains when students do not write conclusions, so as long as you have a one-liner, you should be safe.

(6) How to Study for the AQ
- I strongly suggest referring to AQ answers on RI's model essays package KS Bull on [Holy Grail](#) to see how the advice provided here may be applied, because the advice provided here is very general, and I really cannot imbue the way of writing to score for AQ in just these few pages, unlike the other question types.
- Do not read too many model AQ answers. I strongly believe in quality over quantity. In fact, the skills required to argue can be understood if you read the AQ answers properly and try to use the same phrases and fancy words that the model AQ answers use, and how they frame certain ideas to make them sound more fancy.
  - This is not to say you should copy their examples wholesale. This will result in an answer which is not contextualised to the passages, which is bad.
- Do not study your example bank only one or two days before the exam. I can guarantee that the topic that will be tested in any exam (internal or 'A' levels) will not be something that you have directly prepared for. So, you have to be extremely familiar with your examples, so that you can think of them on the spot, because a somewhat relevant example is still better than having no examples. Even the KS Bull answers sometimes do this (one essay somehow managed to link Singapore's good transportation system to Singaporeans being lazy and leading a sedentary lifestyle).
- Example preparation is not about predicting the exact topic but about having a wide range of examples that can be adapted to different scenarios. Therefore, unlike for paper 1, do not only study certain topics.

Final Note

I understand that 10 pages of advice can feel overwhelming, and you might be skeptical since I'm just a student on Reddit. Hence, as a final note, these notes are simply a collection of strategies and insights I've gathered over my two years in JC, which personally **worked well for me** (I take PCME, if you consider that to be relevant). That said, I recognise that my methods may not work for all students, and some parts might be hard to understand. If you find yourself in that position, I'd recommend seeking clarification from your tutor or exploring other resources online. Nonetheless, for the J1s next year, I hope these notes can serve as a helpful starting point in your preparation for GP Paper 2, and for the J2s who are struggling with this absolute nightmare of a subject, I hope these notes serve as a resource for your academic comeback next year!!!

"He who will not be counseled cannot be helped." ~ Benjamin Franklin