



# **Upper Secondary Social Studies Cheat Sheet**

*Zivstory!*

### **Introduction**

**Students as Informed, Concerned and Participative Citizens.** According to the SEAB website, this line “reflects the philosophy underpinning the Singapore Social Studies curriculum”.

Well, just like what many of you are doing now, Singaporean students view SS as a subject that you must study for, that you must memorise examples for, that you must regurgitate your knowledge for. **This entirely defeats the purpose of SS!**

When I tell people that I don't really study for SS (by that, I mean that I don't force feed myself with examples to memorise the day before my paper), people think I'm just bragging. I'm not.

**SS is a dynamic subject**, with many perspectives and colours. It isn't like History and Geography, where you die-die must memorise details that are from your textbook.

**SS is flexible**, you have to make sense out of the questions in order to ace them. It isn't possible to get A1 just by memorising and force-fitting formats that you have prepared before the paper.

This cheat sheet aims to guide you in revising your content for SS, but **it is not meant to be an exhaustive list of examples and content points you must memorise!**

Take my notes with a pinch of salt, and when in doubt, take a read at the syllabus document in the SEAB website! **(Do note: For Sec 4s 2024 and batches afterwards, you are to find the 2024 version of the Combined Humanities Syllabus.)**

<https://www.seab.gov.sg/home/examinations/gce-o-level/o-level-syllabuses-examined-for-school-candidates-2024>

I have included some examples and elaboration pointers that may be useful for especially your SRQ! Do use the examples if you find them useful, but if you don't, just use your own, that's fine too. SS is a subject where you can fully utilise what you read every day without needing to worry about whether the marker will accept your arguments. **All valid ideas and examples will be duly recognised in SS.**

All the best for your future SS papers, and keep fighting!

With a lot of well wishes,  
Zistory

### **Big Concepts in Social Studies**

- Citizenship: What does it mean to be a citizen?
- Governance: What does it mean to have good governance?
- Trade-offs: Is it always a “black-or-white” dilemma where decisions must benefit everyone? Are there grey areas where there is some extent of compromise that benefits only most people?
- Citizenship & Governance: How do citizens and governments work together for positive outcomes?
- Identity: What shapes our unique identities?
- Diversity: How do we interact with people of various unique identities?
- Harmony: How can we preserve harmony amidst a diverse society?
- Globalisation: What does it mean to be globalised?
- Interconnectedness: How does globalisation tie people all across the world together?
- Interdependence: How does globalisation cause people all across the world to depend on one another?

### **Good Thinking Frameworks when Analysing Societal Issues**

- Causes: What caused a phenomenon to occur?
- Impacts: How does this phenomenon affect society?
- Responses: How do stakeholders, of varying backgrounds and scales, respond to this phenomenon?
- Effectiveness: What is the intended outcome of the policy? What is the actual outcome of the policy? Hence, how effective is the policy?

## **Broad Overview of Syllabus Content**

*Extracted from SEAB website.*

### **Issue 1: Exploring Citizenship and Governance**

***Inquiry Focus – Working for the good of society: Whose responsibility is it?***

#### ***Key Understandings***

- **Citizenship** is **varied** and **complex**.
- **Government** is a **political institution** with important **functions** and **roles** to govern.
- Different groups of people in society have differing **needs**, **interests** and **priorities**, and experience **unequal sharing of costs**. Managing these differences often requires **trade-offs to be made**.
- Both **citizens** and **government** can play **complementary roles** in working for the good of society.

### **Issue 2: Living in a Diverse Society**

***Inquiry Focus – Living in a diverse society: Is harmony achievable?***

#### ***Key Understandings***

- **Identities** are **diverse** and **complex**.
- Living **harmoniously** in a diverse society means **respecting our differences** and **appreciating what we share in common**.
- People **respond to diversity** in a **variety of ways** to achieve **harmony**.

### **Issue 3: Being Part of a Globalised World**

***Inquiry Focus – Being part of a globalised world: How can we respond to globalisation?***

#### ***Key Understandings***

- **Globalisation** shapes the **interconnections** and **interdependence** among **countries** and **people**.
- **Globalisation** creates **impacts** in the **economy**, **culture** and **security**.
- The impacts of globalisation result in **differing responses** from **countries** and **people**.

### **The Detailed Skeletal Structure of your Syllabus Content**

*Content points extracted from SEAB website;  
examples and further elaboration are compiled by myself.*

#### **Chapter 1: Attributes can shape one's understanding of citizenship.**

- Legal status entails
  - Rights
    - e.g. SG: Right to practise religion freely & right to education
    - Constitution outlines citizenship rights
    - Assures citizens that the state protects their well-being
    - Ensures that no citizen is discriminated against
    - Builds their sense of belonging to the nation
  - and obligations
    - e.g. NS in Singapore
    - Connected to other members of the community
    - Can contribute to the good of society and advance the country
    - Brings about progress and harmony in the nation
- A sense of identity
  - e.g. Identity of racial diversity in SG
  - A sense of shared identity among people of the same country
  - Comes from a shared belief of connectedness to one another
  - Strengthens belonging to the country, building camaraderie between citizens.
- Shared values
  - e.g. During the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Japanese fans were seen using plastic bags to clear litter at the end of the football match between Japan and Columbia. (shared value of civic-mindedness)
  - Values influence people's thinking, attitudes and actions
  - Shared values can give rise to common priorities, decision-making, and beliefs
  - Builds stronger relations among citizens
- Civic participation
  - as individuals
    - e.g. Mr Andy Teo's Temporary Academic Assistance (TAA)
  - and as community groups
    - Informal groups e.g. GoodHood.SG by Mr Nigel Teo and friends
    - Formal groups (NGO) e.g. Zero Waste Singapore
    - Formal groups (SSA) e.g. SG Enable

#### ***To consider the following:***

- In your opinion, which attribute best encapsulates the complex idea of citizenship?
- In your opinion, do citizenship rights outweigh obligations in shaping one's perception of one's own nation?
- In your opinion, are community groups more important than individuals in contributing towards civic participation?

## Chapter 2: Functions and roles of government in a representative democracy.

- Functions of government
  - Makes and passes laws (Legislature)  
e.g. COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act that made mask-wearing compulsory by law.
  - Implements and enforces laws (Executive)  
e.g. Several government agencies like LTA, NEA, NParks and the SPF were issued a letter of appointment by the Ministry of Health and involved in enforcing the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act.
  - Interprets and applies laws (Judiciary)  
e.g. A woman sentenced to two weeks' jail and fined \$2,000 for failing to wear a mask as well as being a public nuisance during COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act.
- Roles of government
  - Maintains law and order  
e.g. SPF, SCDF etc.
    - People obey laws, behave in an organised and peaceful way
    - Protect citizens' lives and properties from harmful acts
    - To preserve safety and security
    - Thus boosts people's trust in the nation, strengthens their sense of belonginge.g. 2013: Former civil servant from the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau convicted for misusing money entrusted to his care, jailed for 10 years.
    - Ensures justice to make sure that everyone, including the government, is equal before the law
    - Governed by clear and fair rules spelled out in the Constitution
  - Ensures economic and social well-being of citizens  
e.g. SkillsFuture → Ensures workers' competitiveness in the industry
    - Creates room for opportunity and growth
    - Helps individuals pursue life goals
    - Aids individuals in obtaining satisfactory quality of life
  - Promotes and protects a country's national interests  
e.g. 1962 Water Agreement between SG and M'sia
    - Diplomacy helps countries agree to cooperate and produce results that align with their national interests
    - Also can resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner
    - Strong and friendly ties can help vulnerable, small nation-states like SG to promote and protect national interestse.g. Conscription and NS in SG (1967)
    - Deterrence helps countries to discourage potential aggressors
    - Makes it costly for them to attack
    - Building military capabilities and defences helps to boost national security

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, which organ of the government is the most important?
- In your opinion, which role of the government is the most important?

### Chapter 3: Deciding what is good for society.

- Challenges in deciding what is good for society
  - Differing needs and interests  
e.g. Cross Island MRT Line: Cut through or skirt around Central Catchment Nature Reserve?
  - Differing priorities  
e.g. NIMBY: Constructing old folks' home in neighbourhood?
  - Unequal sharing of costs  
e.g. Thomson-East Coast Line: Property owners along the construction site had to relocate; Nearby residents had to put up with noise and pollution; Other Singaporeans would enjoy convenience and connectivity
- Principles shaping governance
  - Having good leadership  
e.g. Lee Kuan Yew
    - Steers the country in the right direction of economic prosperity and growth
    - Increases sense of confidence towards the country, ensuring people can work together and prosper as a nation
    - Attractive to investors, resulting in more investment in the country and promoting economic growth that meets the needs of the people
  - Anticipating change and staying relevant  
e.g. Integrated Resorts in SG (casino to revive SG's declining tourism industry in early 21st century)
    - Prepares for future challenges and leverages potential opportunities
    - Develops policies to maximise potential opportunities and minimise challenges before it is too late
    - Able to navigate the rapidly changing world, hence country prospers
  - A stake for everyone, opportunities for all  
e.g. Public Housing scheme and CPF
    - Everyone feels a sense of belonging to the country
    - People would own a part of the country, thus establishing sense of ownership
    - People are more willing to contribute to the country's progress and work with the government to decide how to develop the country
  - Practising meritocracy  
e.g. Edusave Scholarship and Merit Bursary schemes
    - Distributes opportunities to enable future successes
    - Rewards people according to their effort rather than race, religion, or socio-economic background
    - Talents are recognised and duly rewarded
    - People will be more motivated to contribute to society
    - Singapore can achieve economic and social progress

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, which challenge is the most difficult to mitigate when it comes to making decisions that are good for society?
- In your opinion, which principle shaping governance is the most effective?

#### **Chapter 4: Citizens and government working together for the good of society.**

- Addressing the needs of society  
e.g. Peach Ribbon Campaign during SARS  
→ Respond to issues and challenges that specific groups in society face  
→ Improve their well-being
- Influencing decision-making in public affairs  
e.g. Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home (REACH)  
→ Government listens to citizens' valuable insights  
→ Citizens can propose long-term solutions that may be of help to government  
→ Resolves challenges of differing needs, interests and priorities as government fully understands what citizens feel  
→ Make informed decisions for society
- Strengthening citizens' sense of belonging  
e.g. Dakota Crescent relocation & cultural preservation programme  
→ Citizens feel an attachment to fellow citizens and their country  
→ Unique national identity is forged  
→ Citizens feel that they hold an essential place in society

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, does the role of the government outweigh the contributions of citizens in working for the good of society?

#### **Chapter 5: Factors that shape the identities of people and contribute to a diverse society.**

- Race and ethnicity  
e.g. Han Chinese share similar physical characteristics of light skin tone, black eyes and hair; Min and Hui Chinese have unique traditions and speak different dialects  
→ Race: Physical characteristics e.g. skin colour  
→ Ethnicity: Ancestry, cultural practices, language, customs, food and dressing  
→ Define one's background and influence activities one engages in  
→ Unique global outlook influenced by own ethnic background  
→ Affects interpersonal interactions, alters one's life experience  
→ One tends to be more connected with others of the same race and ethnicity
- Religion  
e.g. Buddhism and Christianity  
→ An organised collection of attitudes, beliefs, practices and world views shared by many people  
→ Shapes the way one interacts with others, the choices one makes, and one's thinking  
→ Guides us to a path in life that aligns with the values promoted by that religion
- Socio-economic status  
e.g. PMETs, "blue-collar" workers  
→ Shapes one's life experiences as it affects the choice of housing, food, entertainment and activities  
→ Influences their social circle and can shape their identity from the interactions they encounter  
→ One's perspective of the world may also be significantly affected



- Nationality  
e.g. English roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and Indian tandoori chicken  
→ Aspects of national identity would shape one's actions in interactions with people of different nationalities  
→ Able to relate to different aspects of their nationality in different ways  
→ Shared beliefs and experiences influence a large part of one's national identity

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, which factor is the most prominent in shaping our identities?

## **Chapter 6: Interactions in a diverse society and common space, and experiences and effects of living in a diverse society.**

- Cultural exchange and appreciation  
e.g. Fusion music, fusion fashion, fusion food like squid ink mantou and laksa pasta  
→ Interact and learn from people from other countries and cultures  
→ Exposed to new and novel ideas as they may have a different perspective  
→ Creates a fusion of civilisations as we learn from each other
- Exchange of knowledge and skills  
e.g. Under the Biomedical Research Council (BMRC), renowned scientists jumpstarted Singapore's biomedical sciences sector as evident in H1N1 flu vaccine  
→ Foreign scientists and researchers who have moved to Singapore can share their knowledge and expertise with Singaporeans  
→ Provide leadership to local research institutes and mentor young local scientists  
→ Sparks innovations in local academic scene, in sciences or the arts  
→ Increases Singapore's prominence on the global stage
- Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination  
e.g. An Indian woman was verbally abused and physically assaulted by a Chinese man for not wearing her mask properly while brisk-walking in May 2021.  
→ Misunderstand each other due to conflicting values, beliefs and customs  
→ Misconception of the person just due to their ethnicity, religious beliefs or just the way they dress  
→ People jump to conclusions and make hurtful remarks that create negative sentiments
- Competition for resources  
e.g. Prices in the private residential property doubled from a price index of about 80 in 2005 to over 160 in 2021  
→ Singaporeans worry that foreigners may cause standard of living of Singaporeans to decline  
→ Concerns such as foreigners may take jobs away; cause congestion; compete for healthcare resources; deprive Singaporeans of housing  
→ Increased discrimination against foreigners  
→ Social disunity and discord  
→ Sows seeds for future conflict and tensions

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, does diversity bring more good than harm to society?

## Chapter 7A: Citizens and government responding to socio-cultural diversity.

- Responses of citizens as individuals and community groups
- Responses of government
  - Assimilationist policy and its tensions  
e.g. France's assimilationist policy (laïcité or secularism a.k.a religion-less)
    - Immigrants interact as much as possible with other French people
    - Attain fluency in French, adopt French attitudes and beliefs
    - Become indistinguishable from other French citizens
    - However, created tensions between the native French people and immigrants
    - Many new immigrants hold on to their religious identity and insist on wearing religious symbols in public, which is against the French ideal of secularism; many French nationalists believe this is a threat to French national identity
    - Caused tension between immigrants and French nationalists
  - Integration policy and its tensions  
e.g. Singapore's integration policy (Singapore Citizenship Journey)
    - Immigrants feel that their religious and cultural identities are respected as they work towards identifying with Singapore national identity
    - Integrate into Singapore as their own identity is not threatened
    - However, presence of immigrants makes Singaporeans feel that their socioeconomic positions are threatened
    - Some also fear the weakening of the Singaporean identity

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, do citizens play a more important role than the government in responding to sociocultural diversity?
- In your opinion, is assimilation a better approach than integration for social harmony in the long run?

## Chapter 7B: Citizens and government responding to socio-economic diversity.

- Responses of citizens as individuals and community groups
- Responses of government
  - A government-financed approach and its challenges  
e.g. In Sweden, all adults only need to pay a maximum of €122 for healthcare visits
    - Every Swede can afford quality healthcare services
    - Personal income tax for Swedes is very high as the government needs a lot of money to pay for the healthcare of the entire population
    - System will be further burdened as Sweden is an ageing population
  - A shared responsibility approach and its challenges  
e.g. Singapore's Medisave under CPF
    - Allows people to choose the type of healthcare they prefer
    - Ensures that even the low-SES Singapore citizens can afford quality healthcare
    - Provide better healthcare services while using fewer government resources

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, do citizens play a more important role than the government in responding to socioeconomic diversity?
- In your opinion, is shared responsibility a better approach than government financing for socioeconomic sustainability in the long run?

*Overall, consider:*

- In your opinion, is it more effective for society to address sociocultural diversity or socioeconomic diversity so as to ensure that everyone embraces diversity?

## **Chapter 8: Driving forces of globalisation.**

- Technological advancements
  - Developments in transportation  
e.g. Airports, seaports, railways and expressways  
→ Efficient and convenient movement of items and people, allowing businesses to function at high speeds  
→ People's activities and ideas become more interconnected, promoting the exchange of ideas  
→ Allow integration and interconnectedness between different countries' companies and cultures
  - Developments in digital technology  
e.g. Smartphones, social media  
→ Greater access to the internet and the increase of mobile communication  
→ Facilitate the communication and exchange of information  
→ Efficient movement of ideas and information, leading to a more interconnected and integrated world  
→ Businesses across the globe become interconnected due to the shrinking world as people can now purchase goods and services anywhere, and new ideas can be formulated and conveyed at a much faster rate  
→ Sparks off a cycle that continuously encourages the rate of interconnectivity worldwide
- Growth of Multinational Corporations  
e.g. Starbucks would grow their coffee beans in a few countries, roast and then deliver them to stores worldwide (African and South American coffee farmers)  
→ Set up facilities in different parts of the world  
→ Economies become more integrated due to the economic interconnection between people and goods across the globe  
→ Lead to interdependent relationships between the parties involved in the operations of MNCs, bringing about integration and driving globalisation  
→ Facilitates the exchange of ideas between countries, which further encourages globalisation

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, which driving force of globalisation is the most significant?

## Chapter 9: Economic impacts of globalisation and responses of countries and individuals.

- Economic impacts of globalisation
  - Countries experience economic growth
    - e.g. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) such as the United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (USSFTA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)
    - More inflow of foreign capital gives Singapore higher tax revenues as companies set up regional headquarters in Singapore
    - Government can spend more money on infrastructure development and funding various schemes that seek to improve the way of life of Singaporeans
    - Aids in the effortless movement of goods and services as well as skilled personnel, facilitating business to flourish, which in turn attracts even more investment
    - Helps Singapore attain constant economic growth and prosperity
  - and economic vulnerability
    - e.g. 1997 Asian Financial Crisis
    - Free fluid flow of capital throughout economies worldwide makes countries more susceptible to a sudden economic downturn as every economy is connected
    - A drop in the demand for the goods and services of one country will spread throughout the region like a domino effect as people will have reduced confidence in the stability of trade markets, and there will be less capital exchange between economies
  - Individuals experience employment opportunities
    - e.g. Can travel to other countries for work for higher pay like Dubai and UK
    - Greater ease of movement of people, resulting in more chances to find work overseas
    - Appealing job opportunities due to higher pay, a slower pace of living, higher job compatibility or the luxury to travel
    - More freedom and can find better-paying jobs and seek a better way of life
  - and challenges
    - e.g. Uniqlo moved out of China into Vietnam, where labour costs were half China's, causing a considerable unemployment issue in Shenzhen
    - May find themselves out of jobs when other markets offer lower labour costs or are not equipped with the right skills
    - Individuals will lose their income when they do not have jobs
    - Affect their living standards as they may not meet their basic needs
- Responses to economic impacts of globalisation
  - Government support
  - Acquisition of knowledge and skills by individuals

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, does globalisation bring more benefits or harm to economies?
- In your opinion, do citizens play a more important role than the government in responding to economic impacts of globalisation?

## **Chapter 10: Cultural impacts of globalisation and responses of countries and individuals.**

- Cultural impacts of globalisation
  - Spread of culture  
e.g. homogenisation of culture: Korean Wave or hybridisation in culture: jazz and hip-hop  
→ Culture and beliefs can spread through entertainment products  
→ Gelling of multiple cultures can lead to innovations that spark people's interest  
→ Can also create a shared culture among people worldwide
  - Dilution of culture  
e.g. Some Malay stallholders in Geylang Serai Bazaar viewed fusion food negatively  
→ New cultures may seem more appealing than traditional ones  
→ Appeal to youths more compared to traditional cultures  
→ Lead to loss of cultural authenticity
- Responses to cultural impacts of globalisation include varying degrees of:
  - acceptance  
e.g. Korean Wave
  - and rejection  
e.g. Chinese nationals protested against American-produced Kung Fu Panda which misrepresented Chinese culture

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, does globalisation bring more benefits or harm to cultures?
- In your opinion, how far do people accept rather than reject the globalisation of other cultures?

## **Chapter 11: Security impacts of globalisation and responses of countries and individuals.**

- Security impacts of globalisation
  - Transnational terrorism  
e.g. ISIS propaganda reached SG through social media, 13 self-radicalised youths detained under Internal Security Act  
→ Globalisation results in easier propagation of information  
→ Includes spread of unhealthy material regarding terrorism  
→ Promotes cross-border terrorism when locals bear dangerous terrorist ideas  
→ Locals no longer trust government due to security threat  
→ Direct threat to people's lives
  - Cyber threats  
e.g. SingHealth hack 2018, many Singaporeans' health records, including then-PM Lee Hsien Loong's, were leaked  
→ Weakens functions of society, especially in digital era  
→ Dependence of countries on digital technology = Vulnerabilities  
→ Weakens people's trust in others and the government  
→ Affects people's socioeconomic status too (online scams!)

- Responses to security impacts of globalisation
  - Vigilance by individuals
    - e.g. SingHealth hack 2018: Due to negligence on staff's end, they detected suspicious cyber activity but did not take action
    - Individuals have to stay vigilant
    - Know how to act appropriately to reduce cyber threat to the minimum (set strong passwords, don't click on phishing links etc)
    - Detect and respond appropriately to suspected self-radicalised individuals who may pose security threat
    - Individuals are the eyes of the government, help to survey blind spots that the government may not have noticed
    - Increased comprehensiveness of national security plan against these security threats of globalisation
  - Security measures by governments within their countries
    - e.g. ICA border control; Jurong Island is guarded as it is Singapore's petrochemical hub
    - Government has expertise and resources to invest in defending national security
    - Put in place policies to directly reduce vulnerabilities of areas crucial to a country's security
    - Increase overall security of the entire nation
    - Prevent occurrence of large-scale security threats
  - Cooperation among countries
    - e.g. APCERT and annual ACID in ASEAN to promote cyber security; Collaborates with USA, France and Sweden on chemical, radiological and explosive (CBRE)-related research
    - Share pool of resources, knowledge, skills and expertise
    - Exchange of skills and knowledge = Breakthroughs that may enhance effectiveness of existing counter threat measures
    - More resources and involvement from various nations = Sustainable approach in the long run

*To consider the following:*

- In your opinion, does the threat of transnational terrorism outweigh cyber threats?
- In your opinion, do individuals play a more important role than the government in responding to security impacts of globalisation?