



# 中正中学 (义顺)

## CHUNG CHENG HIGH SCHOOL (YISHUN)

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT Paper 1: Essay Writing Cheat Sheet Secondary 4 Express / Secondary 5 Normal (Academic)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS: \_\_\_\_\_

From the O Level English Syllabus Document ([www.seab.gov.sg](http://www.seab.gov.sg))

#### Section C: Continuous Writing [30 marks]

Candidates choose one out of four topics to write a text of 350–500 words in continuous prose. The topics set may cover different types of texts, e.g. narrative or exposition.

### **Question Types:**

In general, O Level essays fall into these broad categories:

1. Personal Recount / Narrative
2. Descriptive-Reflective
3. Personal-Reflective
4. Discursive / Expository
5. Argumentative

*\*Note: Increasingly, hybrid/unusual questions are being tested. For these novel question types, analyse the question extra carefully to understand what you are being asked to do and plan your essay before writing.*

### **Rubrics:**

- ♦ Highly accurate, apart from very occasional slips
- ♦ Sentence structures varied for particular effects
- ♦ Verbs forms largely correct and appropriate tenses consistently used
- ♦ Vocabulary wide and precise
- ♦ Punctuation accurate and helpful
- ♦ Spelling accurate, apart from very occasional slips
- ♦ Paragraphs have unity, are linked, and show evidence of planning
- ♦ Consistently relevant; interest aroused and sustained
- ♦ Tone and register entirely appropriate

## Past-Year Essay Questions

1. Personal Recount / Narrative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write about a time when you caused great disappointment to another person. What did you do about the situation? (2017)</li> <li>'I had never seen my friend laugh so much!' Write about a time when this happened. (2018)</li> <li>'It was my proudest moment.' Write about a time when you felt like this. (2019)</li> <li>Write about a time when you did something just to impress someone which you later regretted. (2020)</li> </ol>
2. Descriptive/ Reflective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe some of your experiences in food courts and hawker centres. How important are these places in your life as a teenager in Singapore? (2013)</li> <li>Describe how you celebrated an important family occasion. Why will this event always remain in your memory? (2014)</li> <li>Describe the possession that matters most to you and explain why you would never be prepared to part with it. (2015)</li> <li>Describe a toy, or a game you played, which still means a great deal to you. Why is it so important? (2016)</li> <li>Describe a place which means a great deal to you. Why is it so important? (2017)</li> <li>Describe an event that you looked forward to which turned out to be disappointing. Explain why you were excited about it and why it didn't live up to your expectations. (2018)</li> <li>Which person has had the most impact on your life? Describe this individual's personality and in what ways he or she has influenced you. (2019)</li> <li>Describe the things that you do to relax after you have been very busy. Explain why you find them enjoyable. (2020)</li> </ol>
3. Personal Reflective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you consider to be your greatest achievement? Why does it mean so much to you? (2013)</li> <li>Which person has the greatest influence on your life at this present time, and why? (2014)</li> <li>'The best things in life are free.' Write about some of the occasions when you have found this to be true. (2014)</li> <li>What are your ambitions for the future? Explain how you plan to achieve them, including any possible difficulties. (2016)</li> <li>'People should always tell the truth.' Do you think there are any situations in which this might not be the best thing to do? Explain your views. (2017)</li> <li>Some people like to stand out from the crowd; other just want to be part of it. Which do you prefer and why? (2018)</li> <li>Which modern invention is essential for you and your family and which one could you and your family live without? Explain your views. (2018)</li> <li>'There is no place like home.' How true is this for you? (2020)</li> </ol>
4. Discursive/ Expository	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What features of Singapore and its citizens make it a major tourist attraction for people from all over the world? (2014)</li> <li>'Shoppers have too much choice, from chocolate bars to jeans.' What, in your opinion are the advantages and disadvantages of having many things to choose from? (2015)</li> </ol>
5. Argumentative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'The way we dress reveals who we are.' What are your views? (2013)</li> <li>Parents often believe that it is better to be safe than sorry. Do you consider young people to be too protected? (2013)</li> <li>'The world would be a dull place without music.' What are your views? (2015)</li> <li>Do electronic devices, such as tablets or smart phones, help or hinder students in their studies? (2015)</li> <li>Do you agree that we can learn from the mistakes of others or do we need to learn from our own experiences? (2016)</li> <li>To what extent do you agree with the idea that some teenagers lead an unhealthy lifestyle? Give reasons for your views. (2016)</li> <li>It is often said that people are too concerned with getting things and spending money. What is your opinion? (2017)</li> <li>'Most young people today are obsessed with fame and imitating celebrities.' What are your views? (2019)</li> <li>'People can only be happy if they feel they are treated fairly.' Do you agree? (2019)</li> <li>'Learning how to respond to making mistakes is an essential part of becoming successful.' What is your opinion? (2020)</li> </ol>

## Common Language Errors

	<b>Incorrect</b>	<b>Correct</b>
<b>Tense</b> (past vs present)	Once, when I <u>am</u> in Primary Five, I <u>make</u> a mistake.  People think school <u>was</u> all about studying.	Once, when I <u>was</u> in Primary Five, I <u>made</u> a mistake.  People think school <u>is</u> all about studying.
<b>Contractions</b> (Don't use them except in dialogue!)	I <u>didn't</u> want to look bad in front of her.  Students <u>won't</u> feel so stressed when they learn in the comfort of their home.	I <u>did not</u> want to look bad in front of her.  Students <u>will not</u> feel so stressed when they learn in the comfort of their home.
<b>Singular/ Plural</b>	If <u>student</u> learn <u>this</u> values, they will become better people in <u>societies</u> .  One of the <u>reason</u> people do this is peer pressure.	If <u>students</u> learn <u>these</u> values, they will become better people in <u>society</u> .  One of the <u>reason</u> people do this is peer pressure.
<b>Subject-Verb Agreement</b> (Use the 'one-S' tip to check)	Saving the environment and endangered animals <u>are</u> extremely important.  Young people who love fashion often <u>buys</u> branded goods.	Saving the environment and endangered animals <u>is</u> extremely important.  Young people who love fashion often <u>buy</u> branded goods.
<b>Inaccurate sentences</b> (Don't begin sentences with And/But/So)	<u>And</u> , CCE lessons are helpful.  <u>So</u> , online learning is beneficial.  Some people do not like K-pop. <u>But</u> K-pop is still my favourite genre.	CCE lessons are helpful.  Online learning is beneficial.  Some people do not like K-pop, <u>but</u> it is still my favourite genre.
<b>Incomplete sentences</b> (Each sentence should have a subject – person or thing)	Running <u>ing</u> as fast as she could.  To buy the tickets for the concert, queue <u>ing</u> for a long time.  <u>As</u> we laughed and talked about our childhood.  For example, learning new skills.	<u>She ran</u> as fast as she could.  To buy the tickets for the concert, <u>he</u> queued for a long time.  <u>We</u> laughed and talked about our childhood.  For example, learning new skills is beneficial for students.
<b>Run-on sentences</b> (Use full stops and linking words)	Learning at home is beneficial, students can start at any time of the day, they will not feel sleepy like in school.	Learning at home is beneficial <u>because</u> students can start at any time of the day. <u>They</u> will not feel sleepy like in school.
<b>Uncountable Nouns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advices</li> <li>• equipments</li> <li>• staffs</li> <li>• elderlies</li> <li>• litters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pieces of advice</li> <li>• equipment</li> <li>• staff</li> <li>• elderly people</li> <li>• pieces of litter</li> </ul>
<b>Two words</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hardwork</li> <li>• infront</li> <li>• alot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hard work</li> <li>• in front</li> <li>• a lot</li> </ul>

## Varying Sentence Structure

After you have finished writing, check your work for the accuracy and complexity of your sentence structures.

	Notes	Examples
<b>Complex Connectors</b>	<p>Sentences must have <u>two</u> parts.</p> <p>To check: you should be able to switch the two parts of the sentence and it should still be accurate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although</li> <li>• Since</li> <li>• Even though</li> <li>• Because</li> <li>• As</li> <li>• By</li> <li>• Through</li> </ul> <p>DO NOT use more than one connector per sentence.</p>	<p><b><u>Although</u></b> technology may have its benefits, we should not ignore its drawbacks.</p> <p>Residents should work hard to foster good relationships with their neighbours <b><u>since</u></b> they stay in such close proximity to them.</p> <p><b><u>Even though</u></b> teenagers have busy schedules, they should still make the effort to be filial to their parents.</p> <p><b><u>Because</u></b> Singapore has a high population density, places like malls and train stations are often full to the brim on the weekends.</p> <p>She refused to give in to pressure <b><u>as</u></b> she knew that the consequences would be dire.</p> <p><b><u>By</u></b> participating in outdoor activities, people can improve their physical fitness. (**DO NOT write “it” after the comma)</p> <p><b><u>Through</u></b> hard work and determination, success can definitely be achieved.</p>
<b>Connectors indicating time or manner</b>	<p>Use these connectors to show the timing, or the way/reason something is being done.</p> <p>To check: you should be able to switch the two parts of the sentence and it should still be accurate.</p>	<p><b><u>After he had made sure that no one was watching</u></b>, he dashed across the parade square.</p> <p>Teenagers feel a strong desire to be accepted by their peers <b><u>during their adolescence</u></b>.</p> <p><b><u>As someone who is extroverted</u></b>, I do not enjoy spending time by myself. (*Note: cannot ‘switch’)</p> <p>She snatched the necklace around her friend’s neck <b><u>without thinking twice</u></b>.</p> <p><b><u>In order to build a harmonious society</u></b>, we must learn to respect each other’s’ differences.</p>

<b>Relative Pronouns (WH words)</b>	<p>To add on information to the noun before:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who</li> <li>• Whom</li> <li>• Which</li> <li>• Where</li> <li>• When</li> </ul> <p>It can be in the middle or at the end of a sentence.</p> <p>DO NOT repeat the subject (e.g. "it") when you use a relative pronoun to add on information. ("This is the pen which my mother gave <del>it</del> to me.")</p>	<p>Parents <b>who</b> want to build stronger family ties must make sure that they carve out for family bonding activities.</p> <p>She was my childhood friend <b>whom</b> I trusted completely.</p> <p>Mobile devices, <b>which</b> teenagers are obsessed with today, can be both harmful and helpful for learning.</p> <p>There is a strong emphasis on academic results in Singapore, <b>where</b> students take high stakes examinations from the age of twelve.</p> <p>I remember a time <b>when</b> children spent their leisure time running around outdoors, rather than being glued to their devices.</p>	
<b>Put subjects in the middle</b>	<p>If two sentences share the same subject, you can combine the sentences by putting the subject in the middle.</p> <p>Make sure that the subject comes after the comma and that the first part of the sentence describes the subject.</p>	<b>Subject at the front</b> <p><u>Global warming</u> is caused by the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. <u>It</u> is one of the world's most pressing problems</p> <p><u>Singapore</u> is ranked as the world's seventh most cosmopolitan nation and <u>it</u> has often been referred to as a 'melting pot' of cultures.</p>	<b>Subject in the middle</b> <p>Caused by the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, <u>global warming</u> is one of the world's most pressing problems.</p> <p>Ranked as the world's seventh most cosmopolitan nation, <u>Singapore</u> has often been referred to as a 'melting pot' of cultures.</p>
<b>Begin sentences with '-ing' words</b>	<p>Using '-ing' words (either verbs or gerunds) to start sentences can add some variety and complexity to your sentence structure.</p> <p>You can try to do this at least once per paragraph to break the monotony of repeated simple/compound sentence structures.</p>	<p><u>Resisting</u> a strong urge to give my friend a tight slap, I plastered a smile on my face.</p> <p><u>Believing</u> that all students can learn, teachers continue to work hard to educate them despite their negative learning attitudes.</p> <p><u>Paying</u> for basic needs <b>could pose</b> a problem for families living in poverty.</p> <p><u>Building</u> national identity <b>requires</b> the intentional efforts of parents.</p>	

# 1. PERSONAL RECOUNT / NARRATIVE

## Approach:

1. Identify key words in the question and make sure you understand them fully
2. Think of a general storyline
  - Ensure that your entire story fits within a few days
  - Your plot should be a believable experience of a teenager in Singapore
3. Choose a narrative approach + Plan your paragraphs
  - Chronological
  - Flashback
  - Begin at the climax
4. Plan where you will include descriptions of feelings using these methods:
  - Show, Don't Tell (Actions)
  - Personification / Similes / Metaphors / Idioms

## Dialogue

1. Steve said, "Good morning."
2. "Good morning," said Steve.
3. Steve said, "Good morning," then sat down.
4. "Ladies and gentlemen," said Steve, "good morning."



Remember to also begin a new paragraph every time you change speakers!

## Show, Don't Tell

Telling	Showing
She felt nervous.	As she stared at the crowd in front of her, she began shaking uncontrollably. Her throat went dry and her palms moistened, as beads of sweat rolled down her face. Mustering up all the courage she could, she ignored the chill that went down her spine, forced her mouth and began to sing.
She was sad.	Her lips began to tremble as a wave of emotion overcame her. Feeling an ache in her chest, she turned her face away from her friends and began to sob uncontrollably.
She was happy.	Unable to contain her joy, she jumped up and threw a fist in the air. She shrieked at the top of her lungs, "I did it! I did it!"
She was angry.	She pursed her lips and clenched her fists. Her breathing became heavier and heavier as she stared at the friend who had betrayed her, until at last she could no longer control the beast within her.

## Good Vocabulary

Personification	Similes	Metaphors
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The thunderstorm <b>raged on</b> outside my window.</li> <li>The soft, cool sand <b>caressed</b> my feet.</li> <li>The sun <b>peeked</b> out from behind the clouds.</li> <li>I could hear the faint <b>wail</b> of the ambulance in a distance.</li> <li>The moment I stepped out into the streets, I was <b>greeted</b> by the strong diesel fumes.</li> <li>The sports car <b>roared with ferocity</b> as it zoomed past the spectators.</li> <li>The road was <b>treacherous</b> and <b>unforgiving</b>.</li> <li>By the time the firemen arrived, the flames were already <b>dancing</b> on the roof.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The students were chattering <b>like monkeys</b>.</li> <li>The winner of the race paraded around the track <b>like a peacock</b>.</li> <li>When she heard someone call her name in the dark, she turned <b>as pale as a sheet</b>.</li> <li>Filled with rage, the bully charged towards me <b>like a bull</b>.</li> <li>The boys were laughing <b>like hyenas</b> when they pulled off the prank.</li> <li>She can handle it herself. She is <b>as tough as nails</b>!</li> <li>When the exams commenced, the classroom became <b>as silent as a grave</b>.</li> <li>On the last day of school, Jimmy dashed out of the school gates feeling <b>as free as a bird</b>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She felt a <b>whirlwind of emotions</b> passed through her. (overwhelmed by emotions)</li> <li>Mr Tan is a teacher with a <b>heart of gold</b>. (very kind or generous)</li> <li>Stay away from him. He is a <b>loaded gun</b>. (dangerous)</li> <li>When the basketball team got off the bus, we could smell <b>the stench of defeat</b> on them.</li> <li>After failing her exams, Shirley wallowed in a <b>sea of self-pity</b>.</li> <li>Sean's stomach was a <b>bottomless pit</b>. (extremely hungry)</li> <li>Completing this assignment was a <b>breeze</b>. (very easy to complete)</li> <li>Her laughter was <b>music to my ears</b>. (a pleasant sound)</li> </ol>



## Adverbs of Manner List

### Positive Manner

✓ Beautifully	✓ Generously
✓ Boldly	✓ Gently
✓ Bravely	✓ Justly
✓ Calmly	✓ Kindly
✓ Carefully	✓ Neatly
✓ Cautiously	✓ Obediently
✓ Cheerfully	✓ Patiently
✓ Joyously	✓ Openly
✓ Eagerly	✓ Perfectly
✓ Gladly	✓ Politely
✓ Easily	✓ Powerfully
✓ Elegantly	✓ Promptly
✓ Equally	✓ Quickly
✓ Faithfully	✓ Rapidly
✓ Frankly	✓ Quietly
✓ Honestly	✓ Well

### Negative Manner

✗ Angrily	✗ Noisily
✗ Anxiously	✗ Madly
✗ Awkwardly	✗ Nervously
✗ Badly	✗ Painfully
✗ Blindly	✗ Poorly
✗ Carelessly	✗ Recklessly
✗ Cruelly	✗ Roughly
✗ Foolishly	✗ Rudely
✗ Frantically	✗ Sadly
✗ Greedily	✗ Selfishly
✗ Hastily	✗ Shyly
✗ Hungrily	✗ Stupidly
✗ Inadequately	✗ Suspiciously
✗ Irritably	✗ Violently
✗ Lazily	✗ Tensely
✗ Loudly	

### Positive/Negative Manner

— Accidentally	— Reluctantly
— Busily	— Repeatedly
— Daringly	— Rightfully
— Deliberately	— Sharply
— Exactly	— Sleepily
— Fast	— Slowly
— Fiercely	— So
— Hard	— Speedily
— Hurriedly	— Suddenly
— Inquisitively	— Swiftly
— Loosely	— Unexpectedly
— Mysteriously	— Tightly
— Rarely	— Solemnly
— Really	— Seriously
— Regularly	

[www.englishstudyhere.com](http://www.englishstudyhere.com)

## Sample 1:

Write about a time when you tried something for the first time and it did not turn out as expected. How did you feel during and after the experience?

*"It'll be fun!" they said. "You'll be glad you did it!" they said. "You won't regret it!" they said.*

*Bending over with my hands on my thighs and panting heavily near the halfway mark, I silently cursed my friends who had encouraged me to run this marathon. Delirious from the intense 10km of running thus far, I entertained wild thoughts of pretending to faint just so that the marathon organisers would send an ambulance to pick me up and I would not have to finish the remaining 11km.*

*As a member of the Track and Field team, I had always considered myself to be an athletic individual. After all, I had brought glory to my school countless times in my pet event, the 100m dash. When my classmates from the Cross Country team had suggested that we sign up for a 21km marathon, I agreed without hesitation despite having no prior experience of any sort of marathon. If I loved running 100m so much, why would I not enjoy an even longer distance of running? The sense of camaraderie I would feel running with my classmates, accomplishment from crossing the finishing line and the likes I would get on my Instagram post of me dressed in my marathon jersey holding a "finisher" medal made the 21km marathon seem like an attractive prospect.*

*Standing at the start line, I felt adrenaline coursing through my veins and immediately set off at full speed when the horn sounded. Cruising along effortlessly for the first two kilometres, I felt happy as a lark.*

*"If I had known running a marathon was this easy, I'd have done it years ago!" I remarked to myself.*

*It was only when I crossed the five-kilometre mark 35 minutes later that my muscles started to feel strained. Both my breath and steps became more unsteady, but I refused to let this deter me from trudging on. Surely, surely I would be able to complete this marathon with relative ease, right?*

*My pride motivated me for the next segment of the race, but by the halfway mark, my body had started to give way. Just then, I saw a familiar face. My cheeks, already flushed from the harrowing first half of the marathon, became even redder. I looked sheepishly at my friend who slowed down her pace to check on me. Seeing the sorry state I was in, she offered to walk the remainder of the marathon with me. Defeated and with no energy left to give, I accepted her request and after a few long hours of walking, we made it to the end as one of the last few participants to complete the marathon. What a far cry this was from the glorious finish I had expected.*

*"Pride goes before a fall". As I reflected on this entire marathon experience, this saying replayed in my head. How silly I had been to overestimate my athletic ability. The exhaustion coupled with embarrassment from my laughable attempt at a 21km marathon run served as a strong deterrence for me to ever consider running another marathon. In some ways, this incident also showed me that in life, I would need to be cautious about biting off more than I could chew.*

## Sample 2:

Write about a time when someone embarrassed you and how you responded to the situation.

*I stood rooted to the spot. Breathing heavily, I surveyed the members of my dance group who were clutching their stomachs and roaring with uncontrollable laughter. They were laughing at me. The humiliation was unbearable but I could not immediately see a way to escape this situation.*

*I had ended up in this sorry state all because of Melissa Lee. A few months ago, I had been selected by the teachers to become the President of my Dance Co-Curricular Activity (CCA), while Melissa grudgingly accepted the role of Vice-President. It was no secret that she was vying for the position of President, but the teachers felt that she was too immature to lead the CCA. Despite her congratulatory wishes on my position and her frequent smiles during committee meetings, I knew that deep down she resented me. On occasion, I had even noticed her rolling her eyes at me when I was giving instructions to the CCA during practice. I knew that it was only a matter of time before she would try to undermine or embarrass me.*

*That day came sooner rather than later. I had been absent for one of the dance practices because I was sick, so I consulted with Melissa regarding what I would have to prepare for the following practice. She told me that we would be having a full dress rehearsal for our performance for the National Day concert and that we had to bring our own costumes. To my surprise, Melissa offered to get an extra set of costume for me since she would be buying one for herself too. I was moved by her kind gesture, naively thinking that she had buried the hatchet and wanted to make peace. Little did I know, her motives were far from pure.*

*On the day of the full dress rehearsal, Melissa passed me my costume in a bag and we all went to separate toilets to change. I was puzzled by the odd-looking costume resembling a flower native to Singapore, the Rafflesia, which was known to be large, ugly and smelly. However, I figured that our dance instructor had other plans for our performance. By the time I had put on the complex outfit, the other girls had headed back to the dance studio.*

*The moment I stepped into the dance studio, I was greeted with the sight of twenty girls dressed in elegant batik outfits representative of Singapore culture. It was then when I realized that I had been duped by Melissa. The smirk on her face filled me with disgust. How could someone do such a scheming and vile thing to a fellow CCA member?*

*After thirty unbearably long seconds of standing at the door of the studio decked in the ugliest outfit imaginable, I decided that I would not give Melissa the satisfaction of humiliating me. Mustering up all the courage and confidence I could, I said, "Isn't this a stunning outfit? I think it'll look great for my solo part of the performance!"*

*I glanced over at Melissa and saw her expression change from one of triumph to one of defeat. She certainly had not wanted me to stand out even more during my solo part of the performance.*

*We continued our full dress rehearsal and the costume ironically helped to enhance the performance and make it more interesting. Realising that her plan to embarrass me had utterly failed, Melissa could only bite her tongue and quietly dance her part in the performance. It would be a long time before she dared to cross me again.*

## 2. DESCRIPTIVE-REFLECTIVE

### Question Analysis

In the O Levels, these kinds of questions typically have 2 parts:

*Describe the possession that matters most to you and explain why you would never be prepared to part with it. (2015)*

#### (a) Description

e.g. Features / characteristics / anecdotes

#### (b) Reflection/Explanation

e.g. Reasons, thoughts, feelings

### Possible Paragraph Structures

Option 1:	Option 2:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction</li> <li>2. Description of thing/person/place</li> <li>3. Anecdote (optional)</li> <li>4. Explanation #1</li> <li>5. Explanation #2</li> <li>6. Conclusion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction</li> <li>2. Feature #1 + Explanation/Reflection</li> <li>3. Feature #2 + Explanation/Reflection</li> <li>4. Feature #3 + Explanation/Reflection</li> <li>5. Conclusion</li> </ol>

### Techniques:

*You could...*

- ✍ Make use of adjectives and adverbials.
- ✍ **Appeal to the senses** when describing (i.e. your reader must be able to imagine how it looks, smells, feels, sounds or tastes)
- ✍ Writing techniques of 'zooming' and 'panning'.
- ✍ Pay attention to details when writing.
- ✍ Establish a strong mood and atmosphere.

	Possible Descriptions	Notes
<b>Person</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical features</li> <li>Characteristics</li> <li>How you met</li> <li>Quirks (what makes them special)</li> </ul>	<i>Try to make your essay unique by choosing an unlikely person and highlight their specific eccentricities or qualities that make them so unique/influential.</i>
<b>Place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical appearance of the place</li> <li>Reasons why you go there</li> <li>Specific experiences you've had there</li> <li>Deeper significance/importance</li> </ul>	<i>Try to attach a deeper significance to the place you choose, e.g. it holds special memories, was the place you first attempted something etc.</i>
<b>Item</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical features</li> <li>Origins</li> <li>Anecdotes</li> <li>Deeper significance/importance</li> </ul>	<i>Try to have an interesting 'backstory' of the item. You could explain the feelings it evokes, what the item reminds you of etc.</i>

## Sample 1:

Describe how you celebrated an important family occasion. Why will this event always remain in your memory? (2014)

All around was green and blue – the grass a blend of darker emerald and bright parakeet green, the sky a magnificent azure. Most people would expect an important family celebration to be in a grand place with carpets, fine silver tableware or at least good catering at home – but all we had around us was grass and sky, the former laid with a picnic mat, on which sat a few containers of humble food from the hawker centre.

We were celebrating the fact that we were not bankrupt any more. To be precise, Papa was not bankrupt any more. Even though legally it had been his bankruptcy, all of us suffered through it with him. It had been five long and painful years of struggle, tears and occasionally, hunger.

We opened up the little container of rice, and then the little container of stir-fried sambal kangkong, the dark green leafy vegetable seasoned beautifully with spices. Then the fillet fish with lemon sauce, and the clams fried in chili sauce, and we savoured every bite with thankful relish. It may seem a simple meal, but to us, after five years of often getting by on plain rice and a boiled egg, it was a feast. My older brother David pulled out his guitar, and we sang along – David, my younger sister Donela and I – to the moving lyrics and soulful tunes of Sam Smith's 'Stay With Me'. Our voices blended in what some people have called a luscious sibling chemistry, as the setting sun scattered its fires passionately across the sky, a flaming encore, conflagration of renewed hope and divine mercy. Mama and Papa applauded with unmistakable pride in their faces – the fine tributaries incised into my father's brow over troubled years very visible in the orange light, but his tan face glowing with a hard-earned wisdom.

I will never forget this meal because it marked not only a liberation from financial bondage and misery, but also the redemption of my family. Once my father had cared only about money, when his medical devices company was thriving. We lived like kings in material terms, but were utter paupers in spirit. He never came home for meals on weekdays, and on Saturdays he would have a quick dinner with us before rushing off to meet a client or a business partner. Family life was barren, arid as the desert.

The end for the business came suddenly, like a bullet fired by an overzealous reveller on New Year's Eve. A competitor invented a revolutionary device that would render my father's products redundant. Papa was personally liable for his company's debts as he had signed a guarantee. From our majestic mansion in the swanky Holland Village, we had to move into a humble one-bedroom flat in Khatib.

It was the wake-up call my father had needed for years. He realised how empty, fragile and transient a thing money was, and he awakened to the foolishness with which he had lived his life for many years – neglecting his wife and children. He made great effort to spend more time with us even while working assiduously to pay off his debts. Those years when we had to think hard even before buying a dozen eggs or a new ball-point pen, when erstwhile "friends" vanished and shunned us like the plague, were a redemption for me as well. I had been a spoilt child never able to appreciate the comforts of my life, taking all my blessings for granted and kicking up a fuss over the most trivial caprice. Now even a spoonful of tasty vegetables was something I was grateful for.

As the world around us fell into darkness and the final vestiges of light lingered on the horizon, I felt comforted and blessed. After 16 years of what had seemed a vacuous life devoid of purpose, I finally felt that life had a meaning, one enfolded in the mysterious higher workings of the universe and an earnest journey to always be a better person by the setting of each day's sun.

## Sample 2:

Describe a place which means a great deal to you. Why is it so important? (2017)

The place in my country which has special significance to me is The Esplanade. The Esplanade is a concert hall in Singapore which is uniquely shaped like a durian. Built in 1996, the state-of-the-art design was meant to reflect local Singaporean culture. Not only does the venue boast a grand and majestic concert hall which seats over three thousand people, it is also home to a myriad of well-established restaurants of both local and foreign cuisines.

My first visit to The Esplanade was when I was just eight years old. My school had organised an excursion for the members of the School Band to watch the Japanese Orchestra perform a one-night show. When I first entered the building, my jaw dropped as my eyes fixated on the magnificently high ceilings and complex art sculptures in the main hall. It was like tasting chocolate for the first time, but ten times more exhilarating. What caught my eye was a stone sculpture of a young girl playing the violin with a serene look on her face, perhaps because it reminded me of myself. Mesmerised by the look of pure contentment on her face, I hardly noticed when it was time to take our seats. Entering the concert hall itself only deepened my amazement, as I took in the grand sight of what seemed like a million red chairs facing the most beautifully set up stage I had ever seen. By the end of the concert, I made it a personal goal to perform on that stage one day.

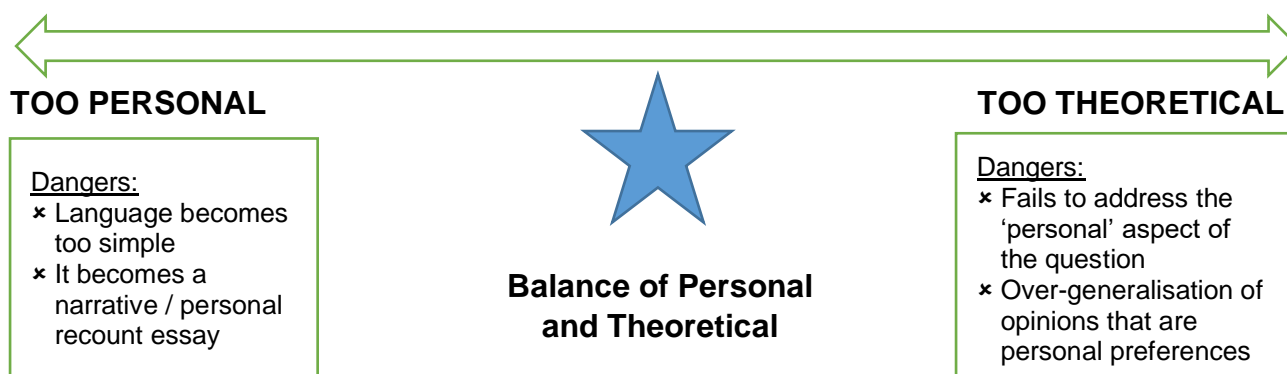
When I was in Secondary School, I finally got the chance to perform in The Esplanade, though only at the foyer for a casual lunchtime concert. Even though there were only about twenty people in the audience, seven of whom were my family members, I was still a bundle of nerves. Thankfully, the performance turned out to be a success! Just as I was taking my bow, I caught sight again of that sculpture I had seen more than five years before. Clutching my violin in my hand, I smiled widely as I remembered the deep impression this place had left on my eight-year-old self.

Besides this performance, I have been to The Esplanade many times for performances by world-renowned orchestras and ensembles. I often pester my parents to buy seats in the category with the best view, so that I enjoy the fullest experience of being in that glorious hall. My family has tried nearly all the food outlets at The Esplanade over the years, but my favourite is still Makansutra Gluttons Bay, an open-air hawker center at the ground floor of the building. In some way, it reminds me of my identity as a Singaporean and spurs me on to pursue my dream of playing in the Singapore Symphony Orchestra one day, representing Singapore and boosting the arts scene here.

The Esplanade is not just a physical place to me. It represents my journey with music, all the way from my eight-year-old self, to the present day, as I hope to pursue music as a full-time career. I have yet to fulfil my dream of playing in the concert hall, but with hard work and determination, I know that I can one day. Before I was born, and long after I am gone, The Esplanade will continue to be a special place for all Singaporean performers.

### 3. PERSONAL-REFLECTIVE

#### Approach



#### Possible Paragraph Structures

... Which do you prefer?	... How true has this been for you?	Situations/Occasions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction (state preference)</li> <li>2. Reason #1 + anecdote/example</li> <li>3. Reason #2 + anecdote/example</li> <li>4. Reason #3 + anecdote/example (<i>alternative: give an exception/limitation</i>)</li> <li>5. Conclusion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction (state how true it has been for you)</li> <li>2. Why true/untrue?</li> <li>3. Why true/untrue?</li> <li>4. However, in what circumstances may it be untrue/true?</li> <li>5. Conclusion</li> </ol> <p>*Include anecdotes/examples!</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction</li> <li>2. Situation/Occasion #1</li> <li>3. Situation/Occasion #2</li> <li>4. Situation/Occasion #3</li> <li>5. Conclusion</li> </ol>

#### Pointers

1. Where appropriate, come up with a thesis statement to guide your essay.
2. Plan a clear paragraph structure (Generally, aim for 5 paragraphs).
3. Include specific anecdotes/examples from your own life (Note: tenses!).
4. DO NOT generalize your points to apply to all people or adopt a tone of 'giving advice' (Note: You should not use 'you' / 'your' / 'yourself').
5. Avoid making meaningless comments about personal preferences, especially in the introduction and conclusion. e.g.
  - a. "Everyone is different and has their own preferences."
  - b. "At the end of the day, people should make their own choices."
  - c. "No one should get to dictate what other people choose."
6. Continue to adopt good, sophisticated vocabulary. Use idioms, proverbs, metaphors, similes, personification, persuasive language etc.

## Sample 1:

Some people like to spend their free time around others, while others prefer being alone. Which do you prefer and why?

Personality tests are a dime a dozen, but whichever the test, the results are likely to include an assessment of where one lies on the introversion-extroversion spectrum. While introverts gain energy from being alone, extroverts thrive in social situations. For me, these tests always yield the same results – 95% extroversion. With such an outgoing personality, it is no surprise that spending time with others during my free time appeals much more to me than spending it in solitude.

Social interaction is fuel for my soul. When I spend hours on end in the presence of others, I become more and more invigorated. Reflecting on my past experiences, moments of intense positive emotion generally occur when I am around others. Whether it be the collective and uproarious laughter from sharing a funny anecdote or grins of satisfaction after a competitive sports game, it seems that the majority of my life's joys are shared with my friends and family. Conversely, being left on my own and having to think of ways to occupy myself can be rather mundane. In particular, the recent quarantine instituted by the Singapore government during the COVID-19 pandemic was a period marked by great lethargy and boredom for me. As soon as it was safe to do so, I rushed to meet the many friends I had missed for so long.

Besides energising me, interacting with others also sharpens my thinking and helps me to grow as an individual. I find that excessive introspection can be quite unhealthy for me, as I often end up dwelling on unhelpful emotions or reinforcing my unrefined opinions. Instead, sharing my thoughts and feelings out loud with others and hearing from them challenges my views on a whole host of issues, helping me to draw more rational conclusions. This was especially so a few months ago, when the weight of examination stress became almost too much for me to bear. Spending whatever pockets of time I could find on revision, I gradually became like a hermit, withdrawing from others. However, this became counterproductive as my mind kept jumping to worst-case scenarios of me failing all my assessments. Only when my family finally pulled me out of the rut I was in and took me on a leisurely stroll was I able to articulate what I had been feeling. They then offered me great comfort and advised me to think differently about my examinations. This short but meaningful interaction offered me a new perspective on my problems, emphasising to me the need for voices other than my own in my life.

Even though these reasons are self-evident to me, those who enjoy their solitude often ask me whether constantly being around others evokes feelings of insecurity. They wonder if I worry about how others would perceive me, seeing that I spend so much time with people. These feelings are, admittedly, something I struggle with, but I would say that they neither cripple nor overwhelm me. Furthermore, being an extrovert does not mean I am unselective about the people whom I choose to be around. I would naturally opt to partake in leisure activities with those I am more comfortable with. Ultimately, the joys of being surrounded by loved ones far outweighs my self-consciousness.

'No man is an island' is an expression that I deeply resonate with. To me, one of life's greatest joys is being around other people and thus, choosing to spend my free time with people whom I love is a matter of instinct. Perhaps my craving for social interaction can be chalked up to youthful exuberance, or even a naive outlook on relationships. Whatever the case, I am, for now, contented to continue building these meaningful relationships in my life.

## Sample 2:

'To master a skill, all that is needed is practice, practice and more practice.' How true has this been for you?

All children have been told, at some point in their lives, that practice makes perfect. Whether in Mathematics lessons or piano lessons, practice is hailed as the formula for success. Admittedly, there is some truth to this age-old adage. Without repeated application of any skill, mastery becomes impossible. That being said, my experience has led me to believe that innate ability and motivation are first necessary for any degree of practice to be effective.

"It's not fair! I did ten practice papers and Jean only did one but I scored so much worse than her!" This thought about my best friend, Jean, crossed my mind after almost every Mathematics examination I took in secondary school. The fact that effort was not directly correlated to results frustrated me to no end. Believing my teacher and my parents that what I needed to pull my Mathematics grades up was simply practice, I would religiously do practice questions after school each day. Yet, my practice produced dismal results in comparison to the mathematical aptitude that Jean was born with. She had a knack for analysing numbers and observing patterns that no amount of practice on my part could replicate. While I could solve questions that were largely similar to the ones I had practised, tackling novel problem sums often yielded little success. At this point, I suppose I am resigned to the fact that I lack a natural talent for Mathematics that no amount of practice can ever compensate for.

In addition to talent, I have come to see that personal motivation is a prerequisite for fruitful practice. Similar to many children in Singapore, I was forced by my parents to learn the piano. I detested it. They would drag me kicking and screaming to my piano teacher's house every Friday and tolerated the way I mindlessly hammered away on the piano in protest. Needless to say, I also refused to practise. Frustrated but unwilling to pander to the whims of a seven-year-old, my parents threatened to take away television-time if I failed to practise my scales for 30 minutes every day. Since my attachment to Sesame Street was greater than my hatred for piano, I went through the motions and fulfilled the daily routine of playing my scales. Yet, my piano-playing hardly improved because I saw this half-an-hour of torture as a means to an end. The lack of motivation to master the piano rendered my practice useless and my parents, eventually seeing my distaste for music, gave in after a year.

Interestingly, my affinity with music did not end there. In fact, it was reignited one day when I walked past a busker at the train station near my house. The way his fingers moved nimbly across the neck of the guitar to produce the most beautiful sounds mesmerised me. When I headed home that day, I went onto YouTube, an online video platform, and watched video after video of people playing the guitar. Soon enough, I saved up to buy a second-hand guitar and consumed online tutorials with great passion. With a deep desire to master this skill, I practised and I practised like I had never practised anything before. Who would have thought that my aversion to music would be solved by a change of instrument? Many of my waking hours were spent poring over song sheets, memorising chord progressions and improving my strumming patterns. It was through this process that I discovered my flair for it. Armed with motivation and talent, I continue to practise hard and, I would say, have achieved a commendable level of expertise in the guitar.

All in all, my personal experience with Mathematics and music has shown me that practice alone is insufficient to become proficient in a skill. Practice without any aptitude is frustrating, and practice without motivation is futile. Rather, I believe that with the golden combination of natural ability, motivation and sustained practice, no skill will be too difficult for me to master.

### Sample 3:

Some teenagers enjoy having many siblings; others think that being an only child is better. Which would you prefer, and why?

*"The more the merrier." I believe that this saying is true in a family. The more brothers and sisters one has, the merrier life at home will be. As someone who has three sisters and one brother, I cannot imagine being an only child. I personally feel that having many siblings is preferable to being an only child, despite the fact that more conflicts are bound to happen.*

*Firstly, family life is more vibrant when there is a greater number of people. With many siblings, there will be many interesting conversation topics over family meals as each person has different opinions. It also increases the options for leisure activities that the family can participate in. For example, my siblings and I could visit an escape room, or watch a movie, which are activities that are usually done with more people. If I were an only child, the house would be a rather quiet and dull place and there would be a limited number of activities we could do together as a family. Thus, having more siblings adds colour to a family's everyday experience.*

*In addition, having more siblings means that I have a greater number of people to confide in when I am experiencing problems. A greater number of siblings means that there would be more people with different personalities or expertise in my house whom I could turn to for help, depending on what the problem is. For instance, if I have relationship issues, I could turn to a sister for advice because she would be able to empathise with what I am going through. If I was unsure about how to do a Mathematics problem, I could turn to my brother who is academically inclined. However, if I were an only child, I would have fewer people to turn to for help. Asking friends for help virtually through messaging apps cannot compare with going to the next room to ask a sibling for help. Therefore, I would much rather have many siblings whom I could confide in when I am feeling troubled.*

*While the benefits of having many siblings are numerous, one cannot deny that there is bound to be more conflict at home the more people there are. With many siblings, there is a higher likelihood of arguments occurring over shared possessions. If I were an only child and did not have to share any belongings or share the common space in the house, I would probably have a more peaceful time at home. However, I believe that resolving these conflicts can help siblings to form even stronger bonds and grow to love each other more. Having occasional conflicts at home is thus a small price to pay for experiencing the warmth that comes from having many siblings.*

*Overall, the sense of camaraderie felt between siblings is precious and cannot be replicated if one is an only child. While friends can certainly offer love and care, it is not the same as the relationship between siblings who live together under the same roof. Even though more conflicts are inevitable in a large family, having more siblings ultimately makes family life more vibrant and gives me a greater number of people to confide in. Thus, I would definitely prefer to be surrounded by many brothers and sisters rather than be an only child.*

## 4. DISCURSIVE / EXPOSITORY

### Choosing Points:

	Bad Example	Good Example																				
a) Mature and sophisticated	<p><u>Immature/vague/superficial points:</u></p> <table><tr><th colspan="2"><i>What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying overseas as a teenager?</i></th></tr><tr><th><i>Benefits</i></th><th><i>Drawbacks</i></th></tr><tr><td>✗ freedom to do what they want</td><td>✗ students will miss their parents</td></tr><tr><td>✗ they can have more fun</td><td>✗ no friends</td></tr><tr><td>✗ they can learn a lot</td><td>✗ they will rebel</td></tr></table>	<i>What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying overseas as a teenager?</i>		<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	✗ freedom to do what they want	✗ students will miss their parents	✗ they can have more fun	✗ no friends	✗ they can learn a lot	✗ they will rebel	<p><u>Mature/sophisticated points:</u></p> <table><tr><th colspan="2"><i>What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying overseas as a teenager?</i></th></tr><tr><th><i>Benefits</i></th><th><i>Drawbacks</i></th></tr><tr><td>✓ students can gain a global perspective</td><td>✓ students may feel a strong sense of loneliness</td></tr><tr><td>✓ students will expand their network of friends / social circle</td><td>✓ there is a lack of supervision and monitoring</td></tr><tr><td>✓ it instills a sense of independence in students</td><td></td></tr></table>	<i>What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying overseas as a teenager?</i>		<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	✓ students can gain a global perspective	✓ students may feel a strong sense of loneliness	✓ students will expand their network of friends / social circle	✓ there is a lack of supervision and monitoring	✓ it instills a sense of independence in students	
<i>What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying overseas as a teenager?</i>																						
<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>																					
✗ freedom to do what they want	✗ students will miss their parents																					
✗ they can have more fun	✗ no friends																					
✗ they can learn a lot	✗ they will rebel																					
<i>What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying overseas as a teenager?</i>																						
<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>																					
✓ students can gain a global perspective	✓ students may feel a strong sense of loneliness																					
✓ students will expand their network of friends / social circle	✓ there is a lack of supervision and monitoring																					
✓ it instills a sense of independence in students																						
b) A balance between general and specific	<p><u>Too general:</u></p> <table><tr><th><i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i></th></tr><tr><td>✗ Technology has made people happier.</td></tr><tr><td>✗ Technology has made our lives easier.</td></tr></table> <p><u>Too specific:</u></p> <table><tr><th><i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i></th></tr><tr><td>✗ Technology allows us to listen to music on the go.</td></tr><tr><td>✗ Technology helps us to find our way to different places.</td></tr></table>	<i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i>	✗ Technology has made people happier.	✗ Technology has made our lives easier.	<i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i>	✗ Technology allows us to listen to music on the go.	✗ Technology helps us to find our way to different places.	<p><u>A balance between general and specific:</u></p> <table><tr><th><i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i></th></tr><tr><td>✓ Technology has made our daily lives much more convenient.</td></tr><tr><td>✓ Technology has increased the forms of entertainment we can enjoy.</td></tr><tr><td>✓ Technology has enhanced the frequency and ease of communication.</td></tr><tr><td>✓ Technology has revolutionised the healthcare sector.</td></tr></table>	<i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i>	✓ Technology has made our daily lives much more convenient.	✓ Technology has increased the forms of entertainment we can enjoy.	✓ Technology has enhanced the frequency and ease of communication.	✓ Technology has revolutionised the healthcare sector.									
<i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i>																						
✗ Technology has made people happier.																						
✗ Technology has made our lives easier.																						
<i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i>																						
✗ Technology allows us to listen to music on the go.																						
✗ Technology helps us to find our way to different places.																						
<i>How has technology improved the lives of people today?</i>																						
✓ Technology has made our daily lives much more convenient.																						
✓ Technology has increased the forms of entertainment we can enjoy.																						
✓ Technology has enhanced the frequency and ease of communication.																						
✓ Technology has revolutionised the healthcare sector.																						
c) Varied but logically linked (if applicable)	<p><u>Overlapping points:</u></p> <table><tr><th><i>“Saving the earth is everyone’s responsibility.” What are some ways that mankind can contribute to saving the earth?</i></th></tr><tr><td>✗ People can practise environmentally-friendly habits such as the 3 Rs.</td></tr><tr><td>✗ People can bring their own reusable cutlery and bags when they go out.</td></tr><tr><td>✗ People can up-cycle.</td></tr></table>	<i>“Saving the earth is everyone’s responsibility.” What are some ways that mankind can contribute to saving the earth?</i>	✗ People can practise environmentally-friendly habits such as the 3 Rs.	✗ People can bring their own reusable cutlery and bags when they go out.	✗ People can up-cycle.	<p><u>Varied and logically linked:</u></p> <table><tr><th><i>“Saving the earth is everyone’s responsibility.” What are some ways that mankind can contribute to saving the earth?</i></th></tr><tr><td>✓ <u>Individuals</u> can adopt a more sustainable lifestyle.</td></tr><tr><td>✓ <u>Communities</u> can raise awareness about environmental issues.</td></tr><tr><td>✓ <u>Governments</u> can put in place environmentally-friendly laws and policies.</td></tr></table>	<i>“Saving the earth is everyone’s responsibility.” What are some ways that mankind can contribute to saving the earth?</i>	✓ <u>Individuals</u> can adopt a more sustainable lifestyle.	✓ <u>Communities</u> can raise awareness about environmental issues.	✓ <u>Governments</u> can put in place environmentally-friendly laws and policies.												
<i>“Saving the earth is everyone’s responsibility.” What are some ways that mankind can contribute to saving the earth?</i>																						
✗ People can practise environmentally-friendly habits such as the 3 Rs.																						
✗ People can bring their own reusable cutlery and bags when they go out.																						
✗ People can up-cycle.																						
<i>“Saving the earth is everyone’s responsibility.” What are some ways that mankind can contribute to saving the earth?</i>																						
✓ <u>Individuals</u> can adopt a more sustainable lifestyle.																						
✓ <u>Communities</u> can raise awareness about environmental issues.																						
✓ <u>Governments</u> can put in place environmentally-friendly laws and policies.																						

## Techniques for Elaboration:

Strategy:	Examples: <i>*Note: these are NOT full paragraphs</i>
a) Past → Present	<u>Gone are the days</u> when people had to travel by foot or animal, often over dangerous terrains. With technology revolutionising the transportation industry, people are <u>now</u> able to safely and efficiently travel in a variety of modes.
b) Cause → Effect	Having grown up in the digital age, teenagers today have never known life without mobile devices. Within seconds, they are able to independently access a wealth of information on the internet. Since they are accustomed to looking for solutions to their own problems, they are, in my opinion, much more self-directed than people who grew up decades ago without such resources available to them.
c) Mind-set → Action	Humans are social creatures who <u>yearn</u> to make connections with other people. As a result, they rely heavily on their mobile phones to <u>stay in constant contact with others</u> .  <u>Valuing</u> convenience and efficiency over sustainability, people often <u>adopt</u> wasteful habits.
d) Problem → Solution	Not all students may feel comfortable sharing their opinions in class due to a fear of judgement from others. In these cases, digital platforms which allow for anonymity <u>can be a useful tool</u> for teachers to garner student response.
e) Strategy/ Method → Usefulness/ Benefit	Through international sporting competitions, such as The Olympics, national pride can be cultivated. There is a strong sense of unity when citizens rally together in support of their national team. If the team wins, the celebratory mood in the country is also infectious. This is ultimately beneficial to a country because patriotic citizens are more likely to be motivated to contribute to society.
f) Problem → Impact/ Severity	An ageing population is a challenge that Singapore currently faces and will continue to face in the decades ahead. Elderly, being unable to work, are less likely to contribute financially to the country's economy. Furthermore, they are more susceptible to health-related problems. Providing for the needs of the elderly, be it for their daily necessities or healthcare needs, thus <u>poses a financial burden</u> to both the country and to individual families. Singapore would not only be receiving less revenue in taxes due to a decrease in the workforce, but also have to use more resources to construct healthcare facilities to cater to the ageing population. At the same time, working adults may have to face the stress of providing financially for their aged parents.
g) Trend → Interpretation	In the past decade, new hotels and attractions have been sprouting up like weeds in Singapore. The government's willingness to invest in and support such developments stems from its focus on boosting Singapore's tourism industry. Without improving its infrastructure, how else would a 'little red dot' on the world map be able to compete with other larger countries for tourists?

## Structure:

**Question: What are the benefits and drawbacks of studying overseas as a teenager?**

Introduction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hook:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Fact/Statistics</u>: A significant 2.7% of each cohort leaves Singapore to study overseas before the age of 16, a figure that has steadily risen over the years.</li> <li>○ <u>General observation</u>: Increasingly, parents who are able to afford it are sending their teenage children overseas to study in search of greener pastures.</li> <li>○ <u>Question</u>: Is studying overseas as glamorous as it seems? Some might beg to differ.</li> <li>○ <u>Idiom</u>: 'The grass is always greener on the other side.' This is the attitude that parents who send their children overseas to study adopt.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ As the number of teenagers who go abroad to study increases, <u>it is worth examining</u> the benefits and drawbacks of doing so.</li> <li>○ In considering whether to send their children abroad to study, parents should <u>carefully analyse</u> the advantages and disadvantages of doing so.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Thesis statement (summary of 4 points)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>While</u> studying overseas can encourage students to be open-minded and instill a sense of independence in them, <u>there are concerns</u> with regard to their safety and the lack of supervision or monitoring.</li> <li>○ <u>The benefits of studying overseas are</u> that students will learn to see themselves as global citizens and expand their social circles. However, <u>the drawbacks are that</u> students may be unable to handle the strong sense of loneliness they feel and lose their sense of belonging to their home country.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				
Body Paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not start every paragraph in the same way (e.g. "The first advantage is..., The second advantage is... The first disadvantage is...")</li> <li>• Alternative ways to start paragraphs for 'advantage' and 'disadvantage':</li> </ul> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Advantage</th><th>Disadvantage</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studying overseas can be <u>advantageous</u> for students because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas is a <u>meaningful opportunity</u> for students because...</li> <li>• A <u>benefit</u> of studying overseas is that...</li> <li>• It <u>appeals</u> to parents and students because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may <u>promote</u> students' growth because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas can be an <u>enriching experience</u> for students because...</li> </ul> </td><td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While studying overseas has its advantages, it should <u>be taken into account</u> that ...</li> <li>• A <u>limitation</u> of studying overseas is...</li> <li>• A <u>drawback</u> of studying overseas is...</li> <li>• Studying overseas is <u>not without its disadvantages</u>...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may be <u>undesirable</u> because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may <u>hinder</u> students' growth because...</li> </ul> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Advantage	Disadvantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studying overseas can be <u>advantageous</u> for students because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas is a <u>meaningful opportunity</u> for students because...</li> <li>• A <u>benefit</u> of studying overseas is that...</li> <li>• It <u>appeals</u> to parents and students because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may <u>promote</u> students' growth because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas can be an <u>enriching experience</u> for students because...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While studying overseas has its advantages, it should <u>be taken into account</u> that ...</li> <li>• A <u>limitation</u> of studying overseas is...</li> <li>• A <u>drawback</u> of studying overseas is...</li> <li>• Studying overseas is <u>not without its disadvantages</u>...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may be <u>undesirable</u> because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may <u>hinder</u> students' growth because...</li> </ul>
Advantage	Disadvantage				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studying overseas can be <u>advantageous</u> for students because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas is a <u>meaningful opportunity</u> for students because...</li> <li>• A <u>benefit</u> of studying overseas is that...</li> <li>• It <u>appeals</u> to parents and students because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may <u>promote</u> students' growth because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas can be an <u>enriching experience</u> for students because...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While studying overseas has its advantages, it should <u>be taken into account</u> that ...</li> <li>• A <u>limitation</u> of studying overseas is...</li> <li>• A <u>drawback</u> of studying overseas is...</li> <li>• Studying overseas is <u>not without its disadvantages</u>...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may be <u>undesirable</u> because...</li> <li>• Studying overseas may <u>hinder</u> students' growth because...</li> </ul>				
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your conclusion, restate your four points (i.e. reword your Thesis Statement)</li> <li>• It is not necessary to make a stand on whether the advantages outweigh the disadvantages or not (because this is not an argumentative essay)</li> <li>• End on a positive note using this formula             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b><u>If</u> (suggest a way to mitigate the problem), the benefits of _____ can be maximised/harnessed and (state a positive outcome)</b></li> <li>○ <i>If parents are able to adequately prepare their children for the challenges they will face overseas, <u>the benefits of studying overseas can be maximised</u> and students would then be able to have a <u>meaningful educational experience</u>.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>				

## Sample 1:

What features of Singapore and its citizens make it a major tourist attraction for people from all over the world? (2014)

*In 1965, Singapore was, to put it bluntly, in a rather pathetic state. Our British colonisers had packed their bags and left us to fend for ourselves, while a unification with our Malaysian neighbours across the Straits of Malacca had just broken down. With much of the land and our economy undeveloped at the time, one would scarcely believe that Singapore could and would eventually grow into the modern metropolis it is today. Each year, millions of tourists flock to Singapore to enjoy the sights and sounds of our sunny island. What is it that has led to Singapore's success on the world stage? In my opinion, the unique blend of traditional culture and modernity packed into the 600 square kilometres of land is what draws so many visitors each year from all around the world. This is most evidently seen in the country's culture, infrastructure and language.*

*Cities like Tokyo, Sydney or New York are vibrant and bustling cities while destinations like Ho Chi Minh City or Venice are known for their interesting traditions and culture. In Singapore, however, one can enjoy the best of both worlds! Tourists who are undecided between visiting a modern city and a culturally-rich place often choose to come to Singapore to experience both. While Singaporeans are technologically-savvy and economically competitive, we also hold on tightly to our traditions, particularly those of our racial groups. For instance, visitors to Singapore often witness or learn about traditional festivals such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya or Deepavali, which are celebrated by various racial or religious groups in Singapore, namely Chinese, Muslims and Hindus respectively. These vibrant and intriguing festivals are just one part of the rich culture of different groups in Singapore, which foreigners are keen to learn about and experience.*

*Even in our infrastructure, Singapore maintains its fine balance between history and progress. Heritage sites are peppered all over Singapore. For instance, the World War II fortress named Fort Siloso has been well-maintained and is open to tourists, and a significant part of Singapore's land is used for old religious sites like Thian Hock Keng Temple or the Sultan Mosque. Yet, Singapore also boasts tall skyscrapers and numerous mega-malls like ION Orchard and The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands. Such diverse landmarks and tourist attractions in Singapore mean that tourists get to enjoy an all-in-one experience, even while taking just a short trip to Singapore. The whole range of cultural and shopping locations one can visit within Singapore thus make it appealing to foreigners.*

*With great foresight, the Singaporean government mandated that English be the medium of instruction in all schools in the 1970s. Students were also required to learn their mother tongue languages, such as Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, as a second language. As a result, the majority of Singaporeans are bilingual, achieving the dual benefits of communicating with foreigners while retaining our cultural roots. This makes our country appealing to foreigners, a large percentage of whom speak English, because communication is made much easier, whether in asking for directions or buying food during their trip. At the same time, the retaining of our mother tongue languages makes Singapore a culturally diverse place that remains exotic enough for people from other countries to want to visit.*

*Although Singapore may be an insignificant little red dot on the world map, it certainly punches above its weight in tourism. The diverse culture, varied infrastructure and citizens' language are some of the most significant features that make it a popular and inviting tourist destination. With its unique blend of tradition and modernity, Singapore will undoubtedly continue to attract those from far and wide to come and experience its rich culture.*

## Sample 2:

What are some of the mobile phone applications you use in your daily life and how have they made things more convenient for you?

Technology has become so prevalent that most of us living in a modern city like Singapore cannot imagine our lives without our mobile phones. Mobile phone applications have indeed revolutionised our daily lives. What previously took hours to achieve in the era before smartphones can now be carried out in an instant. It is thus no surprise that people today grip onto their phones like a lifeline. As a teenager, the mobile phone applications that make my life more convenient are Instagram, Food Panda and Google Maps.

One of my favourite mobile applications is Instagram, which is a social media application that allows people to interact with each other through posting photographs with short captions. Individual users can share personal pictures or videos in an Instagram post, or an “Instagram story” which disappears after 24 hours. Being able to share photos with numerous friends at once allows me to express myself efficiently, while at the same time being able to keep up with my friends’ lives. In addition, companies also make use of Instagram as a platform to advertise products, while popular influencers can also endorse these products to their worldwide audience. When I want to purchase items like clothes or accessories, I can visit the shop’s Instagram page, see pictures of people using the product, and pay for the item all on the same platform. Instagram thus makes my life more convenient by allowing me to interact with many friends at the same time and also making online shopping a smooth and effortless process.

Besides social media applications, food delivery applications have become commonplace in recent years. With a few taps on my phone using the app Food Panda, I am able to get freshly cooked meals delivered to my door step. In today’s fast-paced society where convenience is prized above all else, Food Panda certainly saves me much time. I no longer have to walk out to a nearby coffee shop or restaurant to buy food, nor spend hours buying ingredients and cooking, but instead, I can enjoy scrumptious food from all over Singapore for just a small delivery fee. Ever since I introduced this application to my family, we have become frequent delivery customers, so much so that some of the delivery drivers and riders know my address by heart. Ultimately, being able to order food deliveries without much effort frees up time for me to complete my homework or pursue my hobbies instead of spending time fretting over what to eat.

Lastly, Google Maps is another mobile application that I depend on greatly. I remember my parents telling me about the days when they would have to search a hardcopy map for its routes and memorise which bus numbers to take to get to their desired destinations. However, with maps conveniently stored in my phone under the Google Maps application, I no longer have to rely on faulty memory or outdated hardcopy maps. Whenever I am travelling within Singapore, I simply need to key in the address and a whole range of routes involving buses, trains or even private hire cars will appear. By following the instructions, I can travel to my destinations effortlessly as well as get information about real-time traffic conditions to help me adapt my chosen route accordingly.

In conclusion, mobile phone applications have had a significant impact on the lives of people in the world, including myself. With mobile phone applications like Instagram, Food Panda and Google Maps, my daily life is made more convenient and the time that is freed up can be used for other meaningful pursuits. As inventors continue to innovate and create new mobile phone applications, we can only imagine how the future of the human race will look like.

## 5. ARGUMENTATIVE

### Approach

	Paragraph Structure	Example <i>'Learning how to respond to making mistakes is an essential part of becoming successful.' What is your opinion? (2020)</i>
Method #1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction: <u>agree OR disagree</u></li> <li>2. Supporting argument #1</li> <li>3. Supporting argument #2</li> <li>4. Supporting argument #3</li> <li>5. Conclusion</li> </ol>	<p><u>Thesis Statement:</u> I agree that learning how to respond to making mistakes is an essential part of becoming successful.</p> <p><u>Argument #1:</u> Learning how to respond to making mistakes with <b>perseverance</b> will help one to press on towards success.</p> <p><u>Argument #2:</u> Learning how to respond to making mistakes with <b>humility</b> will help one to have the right attitude for success.</p> <p><u>Argument #3:</u> Learning how to respond to making mistakes with <b>creativity</b> will help one find alternative ways towards success.</p>
Method #2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction: <u>agree OR disagree</u></li> <li>2. Supporting argument #1</li> <li>3. Supporting argument #2</li> <li>4. Counter-argument</li> <li>5. Conclusion</li> </ol>	<p><u>Thesis Statement:</u> I agree that learning how to respond to making mistakes is an essential part of becoming successful.</p> <p><u>Argument #1:</u> If one is able to respond well to making mistakes, they will be able to learn from them and improve, eventually achieving success.</p> <p><u>Argument #2:</u> If one does not respond well to making mistakes, they may either give up or repeat their mistakes.</p> <p><u>Counter-argument:</u> <b>Some may argue that</b> some people can achieve success without facing mistakes... <b>While this may be true</b>, the majority of people will make mistakes and therefore need to learn to deal with them...</p>
Method #3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction: <u>nuanced stand</u></li> <li>2. Point #1</li> <li>3. Point #2</li> <li>4. Point #3</li> <li>5. Conclusion</li> </ol>	<p><u>Thesis Statement:</u> One not only needs the right <b>attitude</b> in responding to mistakes, but also the <b>aptitude</b> and <b>resources</b> to recover from them in order to succeed.</p> <p><u>Argument #1:</u> Having the right attitude towards making mistakes will help one to persevere towards success using innovative methods.</p> <p><u>Argument #2:</u> The right attitude without aptitude in a particular field will not guarantee success.</p> <p><u>Argument #3:</u> Possessing the attitude and aptitude to achieve success may not always be possible without sufficient resources.</p>

## Examples of Thesis Statements

Your thesis statement informs your entire essay. Come up with it BEFORE you write. It does not necessarily have to fit nicely in one sentence.

Ideally, it should be more complex/nuanced than just “I agree...” or “I disagree”. To achieve this, analyse the issue and think about these questions:

- Do I instinctively agree or disagree with the statement?
- What are the reasons people argue for this?
- What are the benefits/drawbacks of this?
- Are there any exceptions/limitations to this?

	<b>Thesis Statement:</b>	<b>Points (Body Paragraphs):</b>
<b><i>'Young people today live much easier lives than those from previous generations.' What is your opinion?</i></b>	Each generation faces its own set of challenges. While identifying these challenges is important, it is not productive to compare who had it worse.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Previous generations faced hardships such as wars which undoubtedly brought about great suffering</li> <li>2. However, young people today face different kinds of pressures (e.g. stressful education systems, peer pressure on social media)</li> <li>3. Older people adopting an “I had it worse” mind-set is unhelpful. Instead, they should seek to empathise with younger people and help them manage these challenges.</li> </ol>
<b><i>Do you think passion or practicality is more important when choosing a career?</i></b>	Choosing a career based on passion is only possible if one possesses sufficient resources and talent. Otherwise, practicality is more important.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Only with the necessary resources will one be able to pursue their passions (e.g. resources to pay for art/music lessons)</li> <li>2. Only with the necessary talent will one be able to pursue their passions (if not they should do it as a hobby)</li> <li>3. Some might argue that this is cynical, but practicality is necessary for survival</li> </ol>
<b><i>Do you think that peer support or family support is more important in a teenager's life?</i></b>	Family support and peer support are play equally important but different roles in a teenager's life.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Families provide practical support (e.g. money, shelter) for teenagers</li> <li>2. Peers provide socio-emotional support (e.g. comfort, advice)</li> <li>3. When a teenager has both, both their physical and mental well-being will be taken care of.</li> </ol>

## Counter-arguments

	<b>Example</b>	<b>Phrases</b>
<b>1. State the opposing point</b>	Pragmatists may argue that music brings no practical value to society and thus, a society's resources should be spent on industries like healthcare and education. They say this because these sectors bring about tangible benefits for people. However, I would argue that they underestimate the power of making or enjoying music. While music cannot cure diseases nor construct buildings, it has a therapeutic effect on humans. After all, which of us has not experienced the joy of listening to a good song after a long day or school or work? Acting as a stress reliever, music makes one's life more vibrant and energises them to continue living. Surely, this is something worth funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocates of _____ may assert that...</li> <li>• Some may argue that...</li> </ul>
<b>2. Explain their rationale</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They say this because...</li> <li>• Perhaps they feel this because...</li> <li>• They put forth this idea because...</li> </ul>
<b>3. Explain why their argument is flawed</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, _____ should not come at the expense of _____</li> <li>• While there is some merit to their claim, I would argue that...</li> <li>• While this may be true, the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks and hence, ...</li> </ul>
<b>4. Link back to your stand</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ultimately, I believe that...</li> <li>• Since _____, ...</li> </ul>

## Useful Phrases

<b>Connectors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additionally / In addition</li> <li>• Furthermore / Moreover</li> <li>• Thus / Therefore / Hence</li> <li>• While _____, _____</li> <li>• Not only _____, but also _____</li> <li>• Rather than _____, we should _____</li> <li>• To illustrate this point, ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apart from _____, ... / Besides _____, _____</li> <li>• That being said, ...</li> <li>• Conversely / In contrast / On the contrary / Yet</li> <li>• Alternatively / Instead</li> <li>• Although / Even though</li> </ul>
<b>Expressions that show personal opinion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In my opinion...</li> <li>• I am of the opinion that...</li> <li>• I strongly believe...</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I personally feel that...</li> <li>• I would argue that...</li> </ul>
<b>Hedging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perhaps</li> <li>• Probably</li> <li>• Could / may / might</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One possible explanation is that...</li> <li>• It could be the case that...</li> <li>• _____ appears to be...</li> </ul>
<b>Persuasive language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not uncommon...</li> <li>• It is evident/undeniable that...</li> <li>• It is hardly surprising that...</li> <li>• It is appalling that...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is safe to assume that...</li> <li>• _____ points to the fact that...</li> <li>• _____ is called into question.</li> <li>• _____ should not come at the expense of _____</li> </ul>

## Additional Pointers

- Write your **thesis statement** first and ensure that your ENTIRE essay supports your stand. DO NOT contradict yourself in the essay (e.g. by first saying you agree, and later saying that you disagree) – ensure that all your body paragraphs support your stand.
- Maintain **formality**:
  - ✗ Avoid using personal pronouns like “you”
  - ✗ Avoid using connectors or phrases that are only for speeches, e.g. “Adding on, ...”
  - ✗ Avoid using imperatives to command the reader
  - ✗ Avoid beginning sentences with “And”, “But” or “So”
- As far as possible, **DO NOT be formulaic** in the first sentence of each paragraph:
  - ✗ Firstly, I agree that teenagers should keep a healthy lifestyle because ...
  - ✗ Secondly, I agree that teenagers should keep a healthy lifestyle because ...
  - ✗ Lastly, I agree that teenagers should keep a healthy lifestyle because ...
  - ✗ In conclusion, I agree that teenagers should keep a healthy lifestyle because ...
- In fact, avoid using the word “agree” and “disagree” more than once in your essay so as not to sound like you’re answering a comprehension question
- Think of **synonyms** and other alternative ways to express the words/ideas in the question so that you aren’t repetitive in your phrasing
- Be careful not to over-generalise, e.g. saying “This proves that...” after citing one example. Instead, use hedging (“perhaps”, “probably”, “highly likely that” etc.).

## Sample 1:

'Celebrities have a negative influence on people.' What is your opinion?

While the word "idol" had exclusively been used in religious contexts for centuries, it has taken on a new meaning in recent decades. It now refers to celebrities of all sorts, from musicians and actors to social media 'influencers'. Like gods, celebrities have a tremendous impact on their followers' attitudes and behaviour, though there remains a vibrant debate regarding the nature of this impact on society. Personally, I believe that celebrities have perpetuated materialism and promoted unrealistic standards of beauty, which negatively influence the mindsets, and subsequently the behaviour, of people who idolise these celebrities.

Celebrities portray lives of glitz and glamour, which are on full display for the world to see, especially with social media. When people are constantly bombarded with pictures and videos of mansions, luxury cars and wealthy lifestyles, they inevitably aspire towards having similar material comforts. It is not uncommon to see celebrities flaunting their possessions on social media, a prime example being the reality show *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*. This show, which documents the daily lives of an elite Hollywood family, showcases to the world how the richest one percent of humanity lives. Fans naturally make comparisons between the affluent lives of celebrities and their own seemingly lacklustre ones which not only creates feelings of discontentment and envy, but also influences them to think that acquiring more wealth and possessions is the ultimate goal in life. Over time, people may buy into this ideal and pursue riches at the expense of other important aspects of life, like relationships and moral values.

Besides materialism, celebrities also unwittingly promote unrealistic beauty standards. When celebrities appear in the media, they undoubtedly look their best, thanks to their teams of make-up artistes and stylists, or in some cases, digital artists. These images and videos of well-put-together celebrities, which are constantly and continuously fed to fans all over the world, influence people's perceptions of beauty. Adopting such unrealistic and naturally unattainable standards has an impact on how people view themselves and others. First, physical appearance becomes one of, if not the most important criteria when evaluating another person. Furthermore, people may also resort to drastic and unhealthy measures to achieve that hourglass figure or flawless skin. It is, for instance, no coincidence that the plastic surgery industry in Korea has become more and more lucrative since the Korean Wave, a term describing the rise of Korean pop. This culture created by celebrities, where appearance is king, negatively influences the mindset and behaviour of people across the world.

Some assert that many celebrities, in contrast, do advocate for contentment and body positivity during interviews or on social media, which has a positive influence on fans. They may cite examples like Korean boyband BTS or American singer Meghan Trainor who constantly tell their fans that they should be self-confident and comfortable in their own skin. While these types of positive messages are indeed parroted by a number of celebrities, I would argue that actions speak louder than words. What credibility does someone who sits in an ivory tower of privilege have? These celebrities certainly do not give up looking beautiful or handsome in front of the camera, nor do they refrain from showing off their glamorous lives for all to see. The impact of some celebrities' feel-good words ultimately pales in comparison to the collective power of the entertainment industry to perpetuate materialism and unrealistic body standards.

With the evidence presented, it is undeniable that the influence of celebrities has been largely negative. As technology continues to increase the interconnectedness of people from all over the world, the reach that these idols have will only become more and more widespread. Since there is little that can be done to curb their influence, the responsibility rests on the celebrities themselves to use their platforms for good. Fans must also learn to be discerning in order to reduce the negative influence that the stars of the entertainment industry have on them.

## Sample 2:

Some students say that non-academic activities in school are a waste of time. What are your views?

Time in school is generally split between academic activities and non-academic activities. Academic activities generally refer to classroom lessons or activities related to the examinable curriculum, while non-academic activities include Co-Curricular Activities (CCA) and Character and Citizenship Education (CCE). Many students in Singapore are focused on performing well in high-stakes examinations, so they subconsciously believe that non-academic activities are a waste of time. In my opinion, non-academic activities are useful for students, though academic activities should ultimately take priority.

Firstly, participating in non-academic activities can help students strengthen friendships and learn interpersonal skills. If students attend school for the sole purpose of studying, they will not have the opportunity to interact with others as much. During CCAs like basketball, dance, Scouts or Library Club, students communicate with other students in the school besides their classmates. These CCA friends can be a strong support system for students as they develop a sense of camaraderie during weekly sessions. Furthermore, since arguments are inevitable, students can also learn how to manage conflicts maturely and tactfully. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' and perhaps even a socially inept one. It is essential for students to enjoy activities with other students outside the classroom to develop socio-emotional competencies and lead a more balanced life.

Apart from interpersonal skills, non-academic activities can also instil moral values in students, such as discipline, empathy and grit. For instance, through Values-in-Action (VIA) service learning programmes, students have the opportunity to help the less fortunate in their communities. It is crucial for young people to develop these values from a young age, so that they will grow up to become upright citizens who contribute to society. If students lack such chances to help others, they may become self-centred and apathetic individuals, who care only for their personal success. Would a society full of academically-driven but heartless citizens be desirable? Certainly not.

Even though non-academic activities are important, academic activities should still take priority. When a student applies for a particular school, it is their academic grades that are taken into account. For students who are concerned about getting into a course of their choice, it is understandable that they would place more importance on their academics rather than non-academic activities. Schools also place a similar emphasis by spending more time on academic lessons rather than non-academic activities like CCA and VIA. Hence, while non-academic activities bring about benefits for students, the majority of the time should still be spent on academic activities.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that time spent on non-academic activities is valuable and students can truly benefit from them. Strengthening friendships and learning interpersonal skills, while acquiring good moral values will make a student's school experience more enriching and help them in their futures. That being said, academics have a greater impact on a student's future and hence more priority should be given to it. If students can appropriately balance their time between academic and non-academic activities, they can cope with the demands of each and have a fruitful and holistic school experience.

### Sample 3:

**'Singapore should remove standardised testing in schools.' Do you agree?**

*In 2016, an 11-year-old boy committed suicide after receiving his end-of-year examination results in Singapore. He was not the first and he certainly will not be the last, unless Singapore chooses to remove the ferocious beast that is standardised testing. In my opinion, Singapore should indeed remove standardised testing because it causes stress for students and it may not be a holistic assessment of their abilities.*

*Gone are the days when learning was enjoyable and meaningful. Instead, students' learning is now impeded by standardised testing as it causes high levels of stress. In Singapore, examination results appear to determine a student's entire future. At twelve years old, Singaporean students embark on their first round of standardised testing, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). At sixteen or seventeen years old, they take yet another standardised test, the O or N Levels. These results are used to determine entry into schools, and eventually access to jobs. As a result of these high stakes examinations, it is not uncommon to see students having emotional breakdowns in the months leading up to these tests. By removing standardised testing in Singapore, our students will be able to enjoy learning and their mental well-being will be improved.*

*Using standardised testing to determine a student's ability is like using a ruler to measure the circumference of an apple. A standardised test alone cannot holistically assess a student's proficiency in a subject. There are many other factors that contribute to a student's performance on a test such as test anxiety, cultural references and their condition on the day itself. Furthermore, a standardised test cannot assess a student's attitudes toward a subject or their behaviour in a classroom – these insights might perhaps be best provided by their teachers. As such, one examination is not an accurate measure of a whole person and to use standardised testing to grant students' entry into institutions of higher education or to certain jobs is flawed. Thus, such standardised tests should be removed and other methods of assessment that are more holistic should be considered instead.*

*Advocates of standardised testing may argue that standardised testing is beneficial because it allows for targeted teaching. They assert that looking at test results helps teachers to teach their students according to their needs. While this may be true, standardised tests are not the only way to assess students' needs. For instance, teachers can look at students' daily work or assign several projects across the year to know how to best help them in their weak areas. Thus, removing standardised testing may not necessarily mean that teachers are unable to teach in a targeted manner.*

*In conclusion, standardised testing has many disadvantages such as causing stress to students and not being a holistic assessment of them. This points to the fact that it has no place in Singapore society and should be removed. If the authorities can consider the negative impact and ineffectiveness of standardised testing, they would hopefully take steps to abolish it in our education system, resulting in our students having a meaningful and stress-free experience in school.*

#### Sample 4:

Social media is harmful to teenagers. What are your views?

With the advent of social media, words like 'feed', 'stories' and 'handle' have taken on new meanings. Gone are the days when people actually held their heads up when taking public transport, or admired the scenery without feeling the need to capture a photograph to share it with others. Instead, we live in an age where 'scrolling' has become popular pastime among adolescents. As social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram change the fabric of human interaction, we as a society must consider its impact. In my opinion, social media has done more harm than good for teenagers on both a personal and interpersonal level.

I believe that social media has a negative effect on a teenager's well-being. 'Profile pages' on social media platforms have allowed teenagers to curate how their lives look like to their peers, which breeds narcissism, that is, an unhealthy obsession with one's self-image. It is not uncommon to see teenagers religiously checking their profiles numerous times a day, especially after they have posted an update. Trying to live up to the imagined standards portrayed on Instagram while seeking validation from internet users can be harmful to a young person's self-esteem. In a study conducted by The Royal Society for Public Health, young people who use social networking sites for more than two hours a day are more likely to report poor mental health, including psychological distress. Besides mental well-being, teenagers who use social media incessantly may do so at the expense of their physical health. Whether it is the sheer amount of time spent being sedentary while using social media instead of doing physical activity, or the lack of sleep resulting from late nights of social media surfing, it is undeniable that social media has taken a toll on teenagers' physical well-being. Thus, it is evident that social media has been detrimental to the mental and physical health of teenagers today.

Furthermore, the prevalence of social media has been detrimental to the interpersonal relationships among teenagers. Social media platforms add a whole new dimension to the interactions between young people, who can Whatsapp or Direct Message each other at any hour of the day. While convenience is certainly a benefit of this, a new host of problems such as cyberbullying, hacking and perceived social isolation have surfaced. Hiding behind their screens, teenagers now have a new method of bullying. With the click of a button, embarrassing or private photos and videos can be shared with a large number of people. In Singapore, an alarming three out of four youngsters say that they have been bullied online. Such a statistic points to the fact that social media has drastically changed the nature of interactions between peers in a negative way.

Advocates of social media may argue that social media has brought about good by giving teenagers a voice and allowing them to express themselves in new ways. They put forward this idea because those in the past could only showcase their talents or opinions on a physical level, while teenagers today can do so for the world to see on their social media pages. While this may indeed be a benefit of social media, I would argue that a platform for expression should not come at the expense of teenagers' health and happiness. There may be such benefits to social media, but they are not comparable to the price that teenagers pay in terms of their mental and physical well-being or the quality of their friendships as previously argued.

Whether we like it or not, social media is here to stay. It is unfortunate that this phenomenon has negatively impacted the young people in society, but rather than lament about the ills of social media, we should work on harnessing its benefits while managing the negative impact. If parents, teachers and other adults can encourage young people to use social media in a responsible way and in moderation, perhaps its negative effects on teenagers can be minimised and managed.