

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Paper 9777/03
Presentation

Key messages

- The most effective titles are clearly focused on debates between perspectives which lead to judgements.
- Perspectives are most effectively structured with an overview followed by specific sources and evidence.
- The most effective presentations make links between sources.
- There should be enough space given to conclusions so that they can be supported with arguments and evidence as well as personal reflection.

General comments

The Resource Booklet

The main topic of the resource booklet was the ethics and economics of food, with Documents 1 to 6 exploring arguments from a number of different perspectives on the tensions, inequalities and processes of global food supply and demand. The minor, alternative topic was artificial intelligence, with Documents 7 and 8 forming an invitation to a debate on the risks and benefits of AI. Candidates did produce a range of responses on different aspects of a global crisis in food, although about half preferred to engage with the topic of AI.

Titles

One of the distinctive demands of this component is for candidates to write their own question. This means a clearly focused, conceptually precise interrogation highlighting a debate between specific, alternative perspectives already sets itself up to access the full range of achievement. On the other hand, questions which are unclear, or focus on factual or narrative issues, will make it harder for presentations to demonstrate that they have met the requirements being assessed. Teachers continue to be encouraged to support their students with the development of effective questions, although they cannot assist with the production of drafts for this component. Some examples of successful questions for the main topic follow:

'Should food production methods change in order to mitigate global hunger?'

'Is the global hunger crisis gendered?'

In the first example, the use of the *'should'* question stem frames the issue as an ethical debate, allowing for perspectives on either side. The mitigation of global hunger is assumed as a good in itself, but the issue of the methods of production provides a debate with answers on either side. In the second example, the *'Is'* stem provides for a straightforward debate focused on the *'global hunger crisis'* but the term *'gendered'* at the end provides for a sharply conceptual focus around issues of gender, using Document 6 as the starting point for its arguments.

Questions which were less successful on this topic included ‘*Will there be a global food crisis by 2050?*’ which does provide for a clear debate, but one that is speculative of the future, and so difficult to convincingly evidence either way. On the second topic, ‘*Will artificial intelligence take over jobs?*’ was a debate with similar issues of speculation. Relatively few questions introduced significant self-imposed limitations, although this was one example:

‘What are the benefits and risks of artificial intelligence and what does the future hold?’

Here, the ‘*what*’ stem tends to produce a question which asks for factually descriptive information, rather than structuring a debate which could lead to an evaluative conclusion. That limitation is added to by the final part of the title which introduces a second question: ‘*...and what does the future hold?*’ This makes the focus split so it is harder to maintain a single line of argument. In addition, asking what the future holds is both speculative and makes it hard for the presentation to be precise.

Perspectives

In general, nearly all presentations submitted recognised that arguments needed to be organised into perspectives. The presence of clear, conceptually ordered debates in the questions assisted with this as the two sides of the debate allowed for a grouping of the arguments located into perspectives. The following extract is a good example of this:

‘I am going to explore this question from three contrasting perspectives, as shown on my overview, economic, political and environmental.’

SLIDE

From an economic perspective, it is well understood that economic reasons could be the cause of a global food crisis. Timmer believes that “A food crisis is usually set off by a shock to either supply or demand for food and often involves a sudden spike in food prices.” However, there are two main schools of thought on how to mitigate this. Jan Piotrowski demonstrates the first in document 5; she argues that reliance on trade makes food systems vulnerable. One the other hand is Timmer, who argues that essentially trade and markets are the most effective way to prevent a crisis, with acknowledgment of the fact that policies do also need to focus on distribution and access.’

The candidate first clearly labels their perspectives thematically (economic, environmental and political) then links a specific source argument (‘Timmer’) to the first of these. It then moves fluently between ‘*schools of thought*’ (i.e. perspectives) and individual arguments, showing a command of the relationship between them.

Treatment of Sources

The treatment of sources is assessed by the fourth criterion in the mark scheme at a number of different levels. At the lower levels, sources are either absent (Level 1) or mentioned narratively (Level 2) as part of the description of the issue. Virtually all presentations operated above this level, picking out and explicitly selecting the sources they used as objects for further analysis or evaluation. In this way they were operating at least at Level 3. However, a significant minority of presentations went beyond this, showing some (Level 4) or sustained (Level 5) synthesis of sources, making specific links between their arguments or evidence, either of comparison or contrast. This assisted presentations in broader ways, as those synthesising links provided a firm foundation for the construction of broader perspectives. The following is an example of some synthesis taking place:

‘Whilst researching I found a document written by Nanyang Technological University, titled ‘Impact of Climate Change on Food Production: Options for Importing Countries.’ The document discusses the impacts climate change will have on food production and how this will impact importing countries. ... This source agrees with Document 5 as it argues that the results of climate change on agriculture in the developing world will feed through to importing countries. Therefore, making them more vulnerable to price shocks and food shortages.’

The argument in the source located by the candidate is aligned with the claims made by Document 5 about the impact of climate change on agricultural imports. These links between specific aspects of specific sources are what is required to demonstrate synthesis.

Conclusions

How presentations conclude is a key aspect of their achievement, assessed as the final criterion in the mark scheme. At the most basic level, there needs to be a conclusion. After this, successful presentations provide developed conclusions (often occupying a significant proportion of the total running length) which are well-grounded in the preceding argument. Here is an extract from the opening of an effective example of this responding to the question, *'Does international trade have a negative impact on food security?'*:

'In conclusion, it is difficult to say whether international trade has a negative impact on food security. On the one hand, it does leave those countries that are increasingly reliant on it to face food shortages and make them more vulnerable when there are shocks in the chain. Furthermore, when population is at maximum capacity, food security is also weaker. Considering the general increase in population each year, this is a genuine concern and problem with international trade with concerns to food security. Another point mentioned was the issue of government intervention, which may occur under instance of global warming concern, for example.'

The question is directly addressed and the key perspectives explored are summarised once more. The candidate then begins to recapitulate specific points raised in the preceding argument (i.e. *'another point mentioned...'*). This combination of precisely referenced arguments and evidence from the presentation gives the candidate the ability to make judgements about the perspectives they have assembled in response to their question and clearly achieves at Level 4.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Paper 9777/04
Independent Research Report

Key messages

- The evaluation of evidence should be supported and developed
- There should be a focus throughout on analysis rather than description
- Questions should give enough opportunity for sustained debate and discussion

General comments

There were a small number of candidates and the performance overall was variable. This was because the questions chosen were not always helpful for the candidates in leading to extended discussion and analysis. Centres should make use of the advice available from Cambridge consultants on the questions by submitting an Outline Proposal Form. The advice is not binding but is always worth the consideration of candidates. Some questions led to an over descriptive response and made it difficult to establish competing perspectives. It is worth restating previous advice that what is required is not an essay or a project but a report that considers the evidence supporting different overall viewpoints on an issue to reach a supported conclusion. The assessment objectives relate to the higher order thinking skills demonstrated in the process.

The evaluative and critical skills in the reports should be an extension of the type of assessment of evidence developed in the other Global Perspectives papers. This series, some evaluation of sources did go beyond looking at the origin and possible credentials of the authors. This led to a simplistic judgement that did not analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments or provide an assessment of the methodology used. While reliability based on the origin and nature should be considered, the evaluation should go deeper and avoid formulaic comment or assertion. This higher order evaluation was seen in some reports and the results were impressive when analysis considered the methodology employed, the size of samples taken in research or assumptions made by the authors. There were also effective comments made on the basis of corroboration of evidence, but a distinction was not always made between simple comparison and juxtaposition and the explicit use of evidence from different sources to support a specific viewpoint.

Candidates should avoid writing long passages of descriptive writing. It is often necessary to set the scene and explain the background of a discussion but centre marking did not always recognise when different views were simply being described/evidence listed rather than being used, analysed and assessed. This was particularly true when candidates considered case studies in support of arguments. This can be helpful but long accounts and descriptions are not helpful in sustaining the type of critical analysis required in the reports.

Better reports reflected on the methods and evidence used to comment on the validity of conclusions but this tended to be neglected or done in quite a limited way. What is required is more than a few sentences on personal experience during the research. Once a conclusion is reached, part of the critical path is that there is some reflection on its validity in the light of the approach taken and the sources consulted. The depth of this reflection may be one of the elements considered when assessing the extent to which the report responded to intellectual challenge. The critical approach taken might be considered as well as the challenge offered by the subject and the evidence chosen. There were instances of challenges being met and developed and sophisticated critical thinking about topics which went beyond the demands of A Level or its equivalent, but there was some over estimation of this aspect when there had been limited understanding and assessment of some complex sources or when the topics themselves were not especially challenging. More explanation about why markers considered higher levels to have been reached for this assessment objective would have helped.

This report should not give the impression that there was consistent disagreement with centre marks – there were many helpful comments and marks for AO1 generally explained carefully. It was clear that reports were evidence based and that key elements of the requirements had been grasped. The extent of independent study and initiative was often impressive and appropriately rewarded. As has been the case generally, the benefits to the candidate of the opportunity given to them by centres for pursuing a topic, which engaged their interests and allowed them to work on their own to produce a structured and extended piece of analytical writing were considerable.