**Continuous Writing – Sample Essays**

Common genres:

1. **Personal recount**
2. **Personal reflective**
3. **Descriptive**
4. **Argumentative**
5. **Discursive**
6. **Descriptive-expository**

**Describe an incident where you regretted your own action.**

Genre: **Personal recount**

| Fire  Taking the MRT at rush hour in the evenings had a depressing air about it. The crowds would force themselves into whatever little standing space there was, oblivious to status and apparel. I had just managed to shuffle myself into one of the cabins. The door-closing bell was sounding off in an ominous peal and there was a mad clatter of soles and heels from the train across the platform. The doors slid together and half opened in a teasing, mocking way at the commuters who had just missed it, and then shut again.  The sun, now low, rushed into the cabin as the train emerged into the Red Hill estate. Dusk was an evocative time of the day for me. The period between the six and darkness gave a bittersweet feeling. All around, people in business clothes and uniforms seemed placid and unmoved, almost sad, on their return journey.  I alighted at Buona Vista station which was alive with sounds of the red jaws of the silver turnstiles chugging through the motions of opening and closing for thousands of heartlanders spilling out into the estates.  Relieved but weary, I made my way up to my house. As I stepped into the lift lobby, the fluorescent tubes and yellow lamp post bulbs flickered to life for their night would soon emerge into comfort. The estate would come alive again.  As I relished the daily experiences including the usual ritual of meeting my beloved at his workplace, I sipped on the straw on my chintz-covered armchair, the only possession in my shabby house that is of value, cool Ribena coursing down my throat. I shut my eyes and let the fragments of episodes of life rush into my mind.  I reached into my Ferre jeans for my lighter and knocked the charred part of my Marlboro off, uncovering the unused part. I put it to my lips, flicked my lighter, and the Marlboro stick sizzled. As my cigarette whined in protest, I drifted off into lumber, with the stick dangling dangerously at the tip of my lips.  Then all hell broke loose.  The flames licked my house, reducing the already shabby and poorly maintained apartment to nothing but a blazing nightmare and continued to spread, with no hint of exhaustion. As it began on its savage prowl, devouring anything in its path of destruction, it churned out thick black billowing smoke.  I scanned the vicinity in desperation, looking for something, anything that could possibly salvage the situation. Above all, I could not stop but keep wondering what could have possibly caused the fire. Almost naturally, my mind eliminated the possibility of arson, since I always lived in seclusion and never bothered anyone around me. All this happened too quickly. My nostrils prickled at the stark scent of the smoke, and soon my nostrils screamed for attention. By the time I awoke, the house was already possessed by the flames from the underworld as they feasted on my furniture, my valuables.  MY VALUABLES!  My instincts pulled my legs to my bedroom, despite the infernal obstacles that lay across the marble floor, with flames dancing merrily on them as an accompaniment of my desperation. I prayed silently to nobody in particular, since I was an atheist, that my valuables would be spared by the flames. All my valuables! My handphone! My wallet! My Identity Card! My Bus Pass! My passport! My laptop!  I ran like the wind, overcoming encumbrances along the way. My cupboard tipped itself over, as if from the extra weight exerted by the flames. I tried to resist the overwhelming load with my arm, while attempting to run for my valuables. Every second I spent trying to fight the cupboard back, another second for the flames to feast on my valuables.  As though determined to prevent me from reaching my assets, more and more furniture turned into ravenous monsters after being possessed by the fire. It dawned upon me that it was simply too dangerous to make my way to the room, and there was not much time left before the entire house would be reduced to a wasteland. Despair assailed. I stopped my conquest. Blank-eyed. There was laboured breathing as I stopped and witnessed the catastrophic damage caused by the voracious flames; my voice was snatched away by the leaping flames and the stiff moustache above my lips quivered as I rasped my final “No…” before I was engulfed by darkness.  “He’s awakened,” I could hear somebody muffle. It was a nurse. Her short cut hair was bouncing with each elegant stride, her skirt swirling around her like gentle waves on the ocean. But I was in no mood for those feelings. I attempted to prop myself up, but failed. The nurse, upon noticing my attempt, walked over to help me.  The tears dried up long ago, but the bitterness etched onto my heart nevertheless. With a composed mind, I began to question myself: How did the fire start? After a series of elimination, it descended upon me that the only possible reason for the fire was my Marlboro. My cigarette! I felt my tears welling up. Like every storm, it would abate in time. It did not call for any resistance - I cried, not over the loss of my house, my furniture, my assets and valuables. No, I am not crying over those. I was weeping out of remorse. If there was one thing I took away from that fiery encounter was the lesson on carelessness, the lesson on cigarettes, the lesson on fire that it is a good servant, but a bad master, so goes the cliché. |
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| Burglary  There was a methodical and habitual movement in each person’s routine. I was of no exception. My ‘movement’ would be ‘observation’. The close proximity of flats cultivated the temptation to peer into others’ rooms. These were excellent pockets of voyeurism, where if one examined them carefully, all contained a tale or two.  My wife had always complained about the way I interfered with others’ business. “You shouldn’t keep spying on others like this. They don’t like their privacy to be intruded on,” she would often say, resignation in her tone. She already knew I was going to proceed with my ‘observation session’ anyway, so she could not care less but to go to work.  Usually, my ‘observation session’ would involve surveying the morning crowd, where the cacophony of buses unloading the schoolchildren added to the neighbourhood atmosphere. The screams of the children playing football in the void deck and the maids scurrying after their charges all added to what would otherwise have been a dull monochrome neighbourhood. Soon after when the morning crowd has dissipated as the merciless heat of the sun settles in, I would then continue my ‘observation session’, I prefer to call it, peeping into others’ privacy with my handy little binoculars.  It was one of the mornings when I conducted my ‘observation’ session which left its mark on me, when I discovered that something was amiss in Mr. Soh’s house. It was routine for Mr. Soh to be home to watch some movies, since his jobbed at the press required him to produce movie reviews, but apparently, he was not at home. I took a look at the usual car park slot he occupied- his car was there. Having been in this estate for some ten years, my knowledge of Pasir Ris Estate 12 was boundless and infinite. I knew every single nook and cranny, the names of all the children of block 341, and I even took the liberty to name the stray cats which roamed the blocks. But the presence of Mr. Soh’s car was beyond my comprehension. He would never travel without his car, and he has never had an MRT card.  Perhaps my wife was right. This whole ‘observation’ session was making my imagination run wild. I stole a last glance at Mr. Soh’s room with my binoculars, my expectation to see Mr. Soh waking up was invalidated when I saw a Spiderman rummaging through Mr. Soh’s closet.  A grown man with a Spiderman mask on the streets would have been hilarious, but to see one in someone else’s house was definitely nothing funny at all. The first thought that assailed me was the very word: “Burglary”. As though the sight of a masked intruder set off the smoke alarm in my body, I began to perspire instantly. Heart pounding in my chest, I took deep breaths to regain my composure.  But then again, Mr. Soh had never been much of a friendly neighbour anyway. There is no reason whatsoever as to why I should help him and stop the burglar! Eyes narrowing with malicious intent, a vivid recollection of how Mr. Soh had been so disrespectful to me in the past as a succession of images flashing through my mind only served to spark an irrepressible fire within me. The flames of anger and hatred writhed and twisted, evolving and expanding as more and more of our sour encounters cascaded from my memory vault. He never replied when I greeted him at the coffee shop. Neither did he help out at the annual Happy Neighbours Fair 2009. And particularly exasperating about him was the fact that he always parked his car irresponsibly, occupying not one, but two lots, just to get the residents to get to notice how wealthy he was.  But oh, the internal turmoil! It was never hard to make a decision, especially so if it involves a rude neighbour. A small insistent voice of reproach surfaced, determined to get its message across. If I could not even fulfill a duty and promise of a helpful neighbour, what use is it to help out at the Happy Neighbours Fair 2009? If I did not help Mr. Soh, my pledge to be a utilitarian would just be a pretence, a masquerade. If I sit and stare and do nothing, I am nothing different from who I detested most- Mr. Soh.  Gripping my binoculars tight, I continued observing the burglar. A deep sigh escaped through my lips as I picked up the phone and dialed the police hotline. After giving the particulars, I proceeded with my monitoring of the burglar’s activities. That poor burglar! He must have thought that Mr. Soh was a rich man, but alas, he never was! The big talk about his inheritance and the number of factories he own was all a façade! The paucity of the find obviously irked the burglar, as all he could find right now were perhaps some watches, but definitely not the real ones, I assumed. But resolute as he was, the burglar never gave up on his rummage, despite yielding disappointing results. Subconsciously I was wishing that the burglar would leave earlier, lest the police caught him. Mr. Soh would really need a lesson on neighbourly cooperation, soon after he learns the concept of neighbourly respect. But then again, I have already rang up the police, there was nothing I could do but to watch the drama unfold.  The familiar red and blue of the police car made their contributions and together conveyed an aura of intense drama. My eyes following closely to the movements of the police squad, a surge of exhilaration and adrenalin rushed through my veins. I was nearly jumping on my seat! An ambush was laid and the policemen waited in patience for the hapless burglar to emerge from the house and into their trap. As sure as fate, the burglar, disgruntled after a disappointing find, walked straight into the ambuscade.  Ten minutes later, one of the policemen knocked on my door and thanked me for my vigilance. At a corner, I could see Mr. Soh running towards me, sweat coursing down his face. Maybe he did have a conscious after all. However, instead of thanking me for assisting the police in their capture, he blatantly ignored me altogether.  “Thank you sir, for informing me! I am sure the burglar did not discover my safe’s code, did he?” Mr. Soh insincerely questioned.  “Well, he did open your safe, but he found nothing inside,” explained the policeman calmly.  Upon realising that his secret has been revealed, Mr. Soh decided to spare himself from further embarrassment, “That was impossible! You must search him, again! I have to go now! Got a billion-dollar deal meeting on! I trust that you would handle the situation appropriately.”  Typical. |
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**Describe an ungracious act on public transport that you have witnessed, read or heard about. Explain why you think it is important to be gracious in our society.**

(*2021 CCHMS Sec 3 GP3*)

Genre: **Descriptive-expository**

Description:

| A heavily pregnant lady entered the train carriage, both hands occupied with a bag of documents and a laptop bag. She plodded towards the interior, perspiring profusely and stood in front of the seat nearest the door, that was, the one reserved for the aged, pregnant women and the incapacitated. She looked exhausted, the varicose veins on her swollen legs bulging. The seat was occupied by an able-bodied youth. The presence of a tired woman with a swollen belly often has a soporific effect on most occupants of the reserved seat. He falls into a deep slumber, only to miraculously awake when the train reaches his destination. Or he could be so deeply immersed in a game on his cell phone that he is seemingly unaware of her presence. In this scenario, he was so engrossed in the game that he berated himself for having made a silly mistake. He cursed, much to the chagrin of the commuter beside him. Strangely, none of the commuters seemed to be bothered by what had transpired - not the game that he was playing but the fact that he did not relinquish his seat for the poor lady who needed the seat most. Nobody cared. |
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| Stretched across three of the plastic seats in the train was an old man. His back was against the plastic barrier of one end of the row of seats, and his bare feet atop one. He was dressed in a torn and tattered grey singlet, his brown shorts stopping above his knee. He appeared to be babbling with tufts of hair springing up here and there over the expanse of his otherwise bald head. He also appeared to have a goatee. He clutched his phone in his knobbly hands and smiled amusedly at the high definition images of animals grazing in the jungle. His black, worn-out slippers were strewn haphazardly across the floor of the train. His feet that were propped up on the seats in front of him smelled like rotten fish, warts appearing between his toes and yellowing toe nails. I gagged in disgust and scrunched up my nose, eyes flicking upwards to other fellow commuters. Some were glaring at him, ashamedly shaking their needs in embarrassment for him, while others looked to be equally as disgusted as me. Another middle-ages lady with her hair up in an elegant bun was holding up her phone, most likely snapping a picture of the inconsiderate man who was still watching the documentary on full blast, seemingly nonchalant to the disturbance he was causing. |
| After an energy-draining 12 hour day in school, I tiredly trudged through the doors of the train. The train was relatively empty, with little to no people and a majority of the seats free. However, I knew that would change after a few stops. As I lethargically held on to a handle and took my earpiece out of my pocket, I noticed a young man sitting on one of the available seats. He was wearing a simple, plain white tee-shirt, along with metal rim glasses. He also had a gold chain on his neck and long, ruffled hair that covered almost the entirety of his forehead. He had a particularly boned and cocky expression on his face. He put down his bag onto the free seat next to him, plugging in his earpiece. But to my shock, he also started resting his legs and feet on the other free seats, comfortably positioning himself in a lying down position as he tilted his head back to use his bag as a pillow. I was immediately appalled by his actions, as it was not a pleasant thing to do, but I shrugged it off. “At least no one else is present in this part of the train,” I thought to myself.  However, when we got to the next stop and people started spilling into the train, he remained in the position he was in. People gave him aggressive stares and annoyed glances but he continued staring at his phone. He even glanced up at all the faces looking at him at some point, but he continued to feign ignorance and remained in his posture. At the next stop, a middle-aged man and his elderly mother walked into the train. His mother was weak and frail, and you could see the breathless look on her face. As all the other seats were taken up, the middle-aged man politely asked the young man taking up four seats to make space for his mother. The young man looked at the middle-aged man for a second, and then swiftly turned his attention to his phone again, blatantly ignoring his request. I was absolutely sickened by this man’s sheer lack of sympathy at heart. Not only was he inconsiderate, but he also was downright selfish and heartless to turn away an elderly woman, just for the sake of his own comfort. Thankfully, as he was alighting at the next stop, he got up after a while, and the elderly woman got to rest on the seats. |
| Throughout my time as a teenager, I have rarely witnessed ungracious acts on public transport. However, there was one prominent incident that remains deeply etched in my memory till this day.  Slowly yet unsteadily, the frail old lady with her back hunched, made her way to one of the waiting areas for the train. I was on my way to school, with my earpiece plugged in as I let the soothing music take me to another land. However, the old lady caught my eye immediately, with her small frame and wooden stick she leaned on. Her hair was white as snow, all traces of her youth long gone. The announcement of the train arrival snapped me out of my train of thoughts as my eyes swirled to the train which I could observe from a distance. A sea of people rushed out when the doors opened, unidentifiable, due to the large crowd as I stepped inside to lean at a corner of the train. The old lady coughed with her hoarse voice while solemnly hobbling into the train. I could notice heer dismal look as the corners of her mouth sloped downwards, while she struggled to look for an empty seat. Also, she had no choice and conceded defeat, and went to grab onto a metal pole rooted firmly on the floor as the train began accelerating, continuing its journey.  Her boney hands gripped onto the pole tightly, and I realised that there was a middle-aged man who was in the seat meant for the elderly and pregnant women. I faltered for a moment, wondering if I should ask him to give his seat up. However, no one else was willing to leave their seat, as if they were glued to it. Before I could intervene, a loud crisp voice broke the silence in the train, besides the sounds of the motors whirring. |
| “Is nobody going to give up their seat?” I continued staring at the old man who was currently getting pushed side to side by the people around him. The old man held on to his walking cane as well as the railing on the glass panel weakly with trembling hands. As time ticked by, I became increasingly annoyed with the people in the train who did not even move or react after seeing the old man in his state. The old man wrinkled his forehead and adjusted his grip on the railing on the train. While doing so, he accidentally dropped his walking cane on the floor and a loud ‘bang’ rattled throughout the train. It was then when more people started to realise the old man’s presence in the train but the people’s reactions were far different from what I expected. Most of them started side-eyeing the old man and glaring at him for causing a commotion in the MRT. However, one middle-aged woman who was also standing, reacted quickly and told the people in front of her to give up their seats to the old man. The people seated glanced at each other, all unwilling to stand up and give up their seats. The old man’s face flushed red and he tried to wave his hand while holding the grocery bags which were so heavy that they were begging to give way. “It’s alright, I’m fine.” |

Transition:

| The above anecdote is unfortunately not uncommon. In fact, it is but one of the instances of poor social etiquette on public buses and trains, such as ungracious commuters hogging seats by placing their bags on the seats next to them, or inconsiderate commuters who swing their backpacks on trains. It does not take much to be gracious. To be gracious to someone means to be kind and helpful. Being gracious binds us to others and it applies to all our relationships, whether it is dealing with our colleagues, family or friends. In hindsight, I believe that it is important to be gracious to one another in our society because it helps to build strong community bonds and buys us a lot of goodwill, giving us joy and a sense of fulfilment. |
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Expository:

| It is important for us to be gracious as it leads us to happiness and fulfilment. Being gracious enables one to form positive relationships with people. Naturally, people gravitate towards people who are kind, caring and compassionate and they are well-liked. Would we not be happy to have many good friends around us? We have opportunities to experience life. Life is not a bed of roses. It is never smooth sailing but at least, we can build good relationships with our friends and even neighbours living next door to us so that we can help each other out during our times of need. Simple acts such as holding the door to the elevator as our neighbours come in, smiling at them and asking them how they are, do not take much effort on our part. We are able to build a positive and friendly atmosphere in the places where we live, work or study. Undoubtedly as we show kindness, warmth and generosity towards one another, we will feel a sense of fulfilment and happiness in life. |
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| Firstly, being gracious in society will lead Singapore to become a harmonious nation. Imagine a society where everyone puts the needs of others before theirs, practices empathy and treats everyone with respect, compared to a society where everyone is impolite and hostile towards one another. I believe that the latter will be harder to achieve harmony. If we want to be treated graciously, we should be gracious to others first. When Singaporeans are finally gracious, society will surely become a warmer, loving and harmonious place. Therefore, being gracious is important to ensure that Singapore is harmonious.  Secondly, being gracious will improve our relationships with the people we meet, leading to stronger and more meaningful relationships. Furthermore, relationships are vital to one, allowing one to forge more friendships and get to know friends on a deeper level. For example, our late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is known for treating foreign leaders from neighbouring countries such as Malaysia with tact and grace. This allows for our relationships with other countries to be stronger and misunderstandings prevented. Hence, being gracious in society is important when it comes to forging treasured relationships. |
| In addition, a gracious society would bring about economic, political and social stability in a nation. A more pleasant and productive environment for the locals results in them having trust and faith in the government, and amongst each other. Foreigners who come to visit may be pleasantly surprised by the efficient functioning of the nation as a whole, and be attracted to a culture based on kindness and carrying oneself in a dignified manner. They may even decide to immigrate here and contribute to the talent pool of our nation. This brings about economic benefits for Singapore, which experiences financial growth compared to its other competitors worldwide. |
| Living in a multiracial and multicultural society, it is important to be gracious to others and always be respectful to one another. Being gracious allows one to understand and embrace others, be it from different cultures and religions. Take a Housing Development Board (HDB) for example. Many families of different races and regions live in close proximity to one another. They must learn to be accepting and not judge each other for their distinct practices and beliefs. For example, a Chinese family should be able to be accepting and gracious of a Malay family whenever they commence their daily prayers, and vice versa. We have to learn to give without expecting rewards and be tolerant of one another, lest tensions arise and friction occurs. Graciousness in our society allows Singapore to continue developing as a melting pot of culture, where everyone resides in peace and harmony. |

Conclusion:

| All in all, graciousness plays a crucial role in strengthening a closely-knit society where people live harmoniously despite the differences. Being gracious also gives us joy and makes living more meaningful. It takes the effort of everyone to make Singapore a gracious society. We must know by now that we should give up our seats on the bus or train but we can also thank the cleaners who clean our table at the food court or let someone who has one item to pay go ahead of us in a queue when we have a full trolley of groceries. We can also greet the bus driver when we board the bus or offer to share our umbrella on a rainy day with a stranger who does not have his own. If we perform these acts often enough, we can make the world a better place. |
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**Describe a place which holds great memories for you. How has this place shaped who you are today?**

Genre: **Descriptive-Expository**

| As I stepped into the familiar purple building, I took a deep breath of fresh, cool air and gazed lovingly around the ground floor of the building. The helpdesk, along with the amiable people manning them, the checkered wool carpet that felt softer than a pillow and finally the most wondrous thing about this magnificent building – the bookshelves. The library was one of my most frequented comfort spots that I can rely on to take a break from life’s struggles. Whenever I had a bad day at school, or a quarrel with a friend, I could always count on this library which I call my second home.  The library had a plethora of different genres of books that I would immerse myself in reading. The books transported me to my own world, where life could not take a hold on me. I strolled over to my favourite armchair, with a stack of books in my arms and sunk into the cushions. I slowly flipped open the first book, planning as I always did to savour every minute of time I spent there. When I had to leave for home, I would reluctantly close the book I was feasting my eyes upon and rise from the red armchair, returning all the books I had finished reading to their respective shelves. Whereas for all the books that I had not had the chance to finish, I would go over to the borrowing section and check all of them out to save them for later.  However, even with my love for books, be they paperbacks or hardcovers, there would be times where I misplaced these magical objects. I can still recall the first time I lost books from the library vividly. My daily routine was to return all the books I had finished to the library on my subsequent trip there, which was usually the next day. When I reached the library, I received notice that there were two books I had forgotten to return and they happened to be due that day. As the library was not far from my house, I quickly returned the books I had and rushed back home to search for the other books. To my horror, I was unable to find them. I was almost in tears as I trudged back to the library to inform the librarian of my blunder. Even though I felt ashamed, the librarian comforted me and told me that all I had to do was buy two new books worth the same amount and donate them to the library.  My experiences at the library were a huge part of my childhood. For the few times that I had lost a book, my parents were very forgiving and I remember returning to the library with a smile on my face to donate the two new books I had bought. I learnt many things at this wonderful location, especially the value of reading, being responsible and accountable for my mistakes.  From my visits to the library, I had learnt the importance of reading widely. Many of the things that I had read about could be applied in school or life in general. The non-fiction books I read allowed me to gain a headstart on my classmates on topics such as science and mathematics. The fiction books I read allowed me to generate ideas quickly for compositions and taught me a wide range of vocabulary that I could use. Even today, the articles and stories that I have read help me in subjects such as Social Studies, where contextual knowledge is crucial. In society today, smart phones and modern technology are dominant and many do not realise the value of a good book, especially teenagers who would stand to gain copious benefits from reading but are instead, indulging in the games on their electronic devices. Thus the library had nurtured me to become the book-lover that I am today, with knowledge that I would not have gained without the wonders of the library.  The library has also taught me how to be responsible and accountable for my actions. Through the borrowing and returning of books, I learnt that there is a deadline for everything and only I am responsible for my belongings. After the first time that I misplaced the books that I had loaned, I was infinitely more careful with the other books I borrowed thereafter. This carried over to my daily life where I will be sure to check that all my possessions are safely kept and accounted for. From my encounter with the librarian, I learnt that accountability is important and I should not shy away from the mistakes made but confront them and calmly resolve the situation. This applied to school: whenever I forgot to finish any homework, I owned up and took responsibility for it instead of hiding the fact that my paper was blank. Therefore, the library has taught me to be responsible and accountable for my actions which are values that I apply in everything that I do.  In conclusion, the library was a huge part of my childhood that has shaped me into who I am today, a person who values reading and someone who is responsible and accountable for my actions, which are two things that contribute greatly to my personality and values as a person. |
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**‘Celebrities are good role models for teenagers.’ Do you agree?**

Genre: **Argumentative**

| Have you ever had the chance to meet a celebrity that you adore? Nowadays, many teens and even adults are looking up to celebrities, or ‘influencers’. As access to social media becomes easier and more common, celebrities become very influential as more people follow them online and some even treat them like role models. Personally, I do agree that celebrities are good role models as they spread positive messages, motivate others and raise awareness about certain issues.  Firstly, many celebrities use social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter to engage their fans. These celebrities often spread positive posts or messages. These posts could encourage their fans to cheer up and know that things can change for the better. They are also able to spread these messages to a wide range of people. Words of advice could also be shared to teach people important messages and values such as how to be considerate and kind to everyone, modelling for teenagers so that they know how they should treat others.  Secondly, celebrities can motivate teenagers. Many celebrities come from less-than-ideal backgrounds or were regular people just like you and me. However, they overcame these challenges and worked hard to get to where they are now. For example, Robert Downey Junior, or “Tony Stark” from the Marvel Cinematic Universe came from a complicated background. Before becoming a widely known figure, he was influenced by his father. He drank alcohol and took drugs at a young age, eventually landing himself in jail because of drugs. However, he decided to turn his life around once he was released from jail. Through years of hard work, he has become one of the film industry’s highest paid actors. It is due to celebrities with stories like this which will motivate teenagers that whether they are just a regular person or face countless problems, as long as they are willing to change their lifestyle and work hard, they too can succeed.  On the other hand, many people feel that celebrities are bad influences as they take drugs, drink and smoke. While it is inevitable that there will be black sheep in the industry, there are also other celebrities who raise awareness about certain issues to help others. Due to their large following, they are able to raise awareness about the need to be concerned with mental health or global warming to people who might be unaware or ill-informed. For example, the popular Korean boy band, BTS, has released albums and songs bringing attention to mental health and how we should all practise self-love and not harm ourselves. Through their songs, this issue has been brought to light to millions of people. BTS has over ten million followers on both Twitter and Youtube. Teenagers are able to know about such issues going on in the world and those who suffer from mental illnesses like depression are willing to speak up for themselves. These teens are then able to spread these messages to millions all over the world and let everyone know about certain issues going on in the world, ensuring that people stop ignoring them.  All in all, I do agree that celebrities are good role models and are able to positively influence both teens and adults to make society a better place. After reading this, what are your views on celebrities influencing teens? |
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**Describe a place which means a great deal to you. Why is it so important?**

Examiner’s report

| * Note that the question is in present tense. This means that the place you choose to write about must still be important to you, in the present moment. It could be a place of great significance to you since some time in the past, but continues to be significant now. Perhaps the place is gone but it remains in your memories. It could also be a much newer place that has come to become special and momentous for you. (Note the need to avoid repeating the words in the question in your writing (i.e. ‘great deal to you’ or ‘important’). Use synonyms as I have used here (Eg. Significant, special, momentous…can you think of any others?) * A place is often significant not just because of its physical location or characteristics, but because of relationships, events, or memories etc. * Plan your essay before you begin, even though it is a descriptive piece. * Extract from examiner’s report: *Stronger responses were well planned and sustained, with both elements of the question covered without undue repetition. They showed skilled descriptive and narrative techniques: evocative and apt adjectives and adverbs; some figurative language; precise choice of vocabulary; and the use of varied sentence structures for particular effect.* * Brainstorming on possible places: school, your childhood home [typical egs]; [some less typical egs] a neighbourhood minimart you often passed by on your way to school, the swimming pool where you nearly drowned but later learnt to swim; the coffee shop where your family would have breakfast every Saturday morning etc. * Here’s a tip: Although it does not have to be entirely autobiographical / real, maintaining a personal element in your writing often makes it unique, special and engaging. Reach into your memories to draw on something real, and then, if you wish, adapt it for the purpose of your exam essay. |
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Opening paragraph

| There is a place which means a great deal to me even though it no longer exists in its original state. It is the site of my childhood home, a two-storeyed semi-detached house along 53 Jalan Jelita – a road whose name used to intrigue and puzzle me to no end. As a young child, I would pester my father with questions on what ‘Jalan’ meant, what ‘Jelita’ meant, and what they meant when they were strung together. Not knowing much Malay himself, my father often struggled to reply, but eventually he shared with me that it meant ‘a charming or lovely road’. What a strange name for a road, I thought then. Looking back, this peculiar name is imbued with special meaning as I think about the charming little road upon which so much of my childhood was built upon. |
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**Write about a time when you caused great disappointment to another person. What did you do about the situation?**

Genre: **Narrative**

Examiner’s report

| * The stronger responses developed thoughtful scenarios and expressed their feelings of regret and shame very sensitively. There were some developed and effective descriptions of witnessing a disappointed reaction, through close scrutiny of facial expression and body language, with sensitive realisation of the profound impact of their disappointing behaviour on others. * Where a narrative approach was taken, many of the stories involved dialogue featuring the characters arguing. In some responses, there were mistakes in the setting out and punctuation of direct speech. Although the word ‘disappointment’ was in the question, many candidates were unable to spell it correctly. |
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**It is often said that people are too concerned with getting things and spending money. What is your opinion?**

Genre: **Argumentative**

Examiner’s report

| * Your opinion is being asked for, and it is advisable to take a stand and support it with relevant points and examples. * Weaker responses were short of ideas and examples to respond to this question and consequently were very repetitive in structure, vocabulary and expression. Most repeated the wording of the question at the end of each paragraph. Better responses used synonyms for ‘getting things’ and ‘spending money’ throughout, and succeeded in recasting the given sentence to enable it to fit in with the syntactical structures of the original writing. They were also well-structured with cohesively linked paragraphs. * Weaker responses used discursive markers such as ‘firstly’…’secondly’…in a formulaic manner, whereas better ones adjusted them with some sophistication to point the way through the line of argument. Again, repetition of the wording of the question was a problem. |
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Introduction:

| Craft introduction using **C-A-T-F-I-S-H**   * **C**omment   + *Comment on the increasing materialism among youth and adults in society that is also fueled by the aggressive advertising tactics that retailers are employing, eg. Advertisements linked to your search results that will pop up as you scroll your social media feeds etc.* * **A**ppropriate Quotation   + *begin with a quote (eg using slogans/signs often seen in retail outlets, for instance, “Last chance to buy…Don’t regret!*” or “*A women can never have too many shoes”)* * **T**houghtful Question   + *begin with a question that can probe the reader to consider the difference between a need and a want: Do we buy things that we truly need, or are they often things that we want?* * **F**actual Background   + *Begin by discussing a psychological theory, Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (see pyramid below) which shows that getting things and spending money go beyond our basic needs. Since most of us have our basic needs met, we are now looking to satisfy our psychological needs. But will getting things and spending money actually help us achieve real self-fulfillment?*   Image result for maslowâs hierarchy of needs  OR   * Discuss Marie Kondo and her wild popularity worldwide that is perhaps fueled by the consumeristic tendencies of people who can afford to keep buying things without thinking about whether they really need them. * **I**mportance of the topic   + *Begin with the idea that the environment is being threatened as so much waste is being generated by people who acquire more things without considering if they can reduce or reuse items.*   OR   * + *Begin with the idea that this is an important issue as it highlights the deepening divide/gap in many developed countries between the rich and the poor. The rich can afford to keep spending, while the poor continue to struggle.* * **S**tory (Anecdote) or **S**tatistics   + *Paint a scenario of how people queue overnight just to buy certain limited edition goods eg. iphones* * **H**ow you want to mix them   + *Blending two or more different methods appropriately.* | |
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| Yes, I agree with the statement | No, I disagree with the statement |
| 1. Given the advancements in technology, people are often persuaded that they need the latest versions of devices that they already possess (Eg. The latest smartphones, smartwatches, smart TVs, Fitbits, tablets, laptops, earphones etc) 2. The pervasiveness of advertising makes it difficult to be lured into such consumerism. (eg. Fashion brands frequently engage social media influencers to market their products as part of their daily lifestyles on their social media platforms. Others invite influencers to review their products. This means that the average teenager is surrounded by a plethora of advertisements in her social media feeds throughout the day, sending subtle messages about which products are worth buying etc.) 3. The ease with which items can be obtained/purchased (Eg. online shopping) 4. The fixation on materialistic pursuits as a symbol of success or marker of status | 1. People are becoming increasingly aware of the perils of mindless consumerism. (Eg. Marie Kondo has become a household name, with many being spurred on to clear their homes and purchase items that they truly need or which really ‘spark joy’. Note the possible counterarguments here 🡪 this is just a fad, people are tidying up rather than changing their spending habits etc. (how would you rebut these?) 2. As a society, we are not overly materialistic, as we have not lost our sense of compassion and generosity towards others. (Eg. Students’ VIA projects, churches or other religious organisations who help the needy and whose religious doctrine also influences people’s beliefs and actions etc) 3. Many people still treasure their health, friends and family over their materialistic pursuits 4. People are aware that consumerism only brings temporary satisfaction, and not real contentment. |

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| Firstly, many people are caught up in a spiral of relentless consumerism due to the rapid pace of technological advancement in today’s society. Regular household appliances which might still be functioning well may easily be deemed irrelevant and in need of replacement when compared to newer versions with ‘smart’ functions. For instance, robotic vacuum cleaners are extremely popular now, as they can move on their own, be switched on remotely through a mobile phone application and even communicate with the owner through the application. Likewise, companies like Apple, Samsung and Huawei frequently churn out the latest smartphones with upgraded features such as enhanced cameras, facial recognition software or waterproof exteriors that make their older counterparts pale in comparison. It is not surprising, then, that many people are prepared to fork out money to purchase enhanced versions of their devices. Thus, although the advancements in technology are a boon to society, it also fuels a highly materialistic culture as those with spending power strive to attain the latest gadgets. |
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**‘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.**

Genre: **Argumentative**

Examiner’s report

| * Although you are being asked for your views in general, the statement contains absolute words (‘should’, ‘always’) and it is inviting you to consider if you think there are situations where this rule need not apply. Given the absolute nature of the statement, **it is best to take a firm stand.** Decide whether you wish to hold steadfast to this maxim of telling the truth at all times, or disagree and provide good reasons why there are situations when this rule need not apply. There is no right or wrong answer here, and neither answer is any more popular than the other. You can decide, but do support your stand with good reasons and examples. * *Stronger responses were detailed and full of examples and ideas that seemed to come from personal experience.* * *Many candidates highlighted the temptation of telling lies in certain circumstances and explored examples of how sometimes lying is necessary to spare someone’s feelings and avoid inflicting hurt. As long as these ‘white lies’ did not inflict permanent harm on others then most candidates approved of them. Stronger responses took a strong stance at the start of the essay and justified it using clear examples. Weaker responses tended to be less strongly opinionated and simply offered examples where lying may be justified. This usually resulted in rather bland, and sometimes, repetitive writing.* * *Some linguistic problems occurred with insecure verb forms and tenses, with pronouns. The use of ‘in a nutshell’ as an introduction to a conclusion was common, but not always appropriate.* |
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Introduction

| Craft introduction using **C-A-T-F-I-S-H**   * **C**omment   + *Comment on the well-learnt and well-known moral value of integrity that parents and teachers inculcate since young. Tilt the introduction towards the direction of your stand—eg. do you feel that there are exceptions to this rule that most people fail to consider because they adhere to this moral code so rigidly?* * **A**ppropriate Quotation   + *Begin with a quote (eg. ‘*Honesty is the best policy’ → and then question whether it is truly the ‘best’, depending on your stand’) * **T**houghtful Question   + *Begin with a question taken from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant’s famous example: Imagine that there is a murderer at your doorstep, and he wants to know the whereabouts of your friend, who unbeknownst to him has taken shelter in your house. Would you lie or tell the truth?*   *Links to resources:*  <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/philosophy/kants-axe>  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJyC9Cz3Xgg>   * **F**actual Background   + *State incidents of corruption among high-profile leaders (eg. The 2016 South Korean President’s corruption scandal — Park Geun Hye; local corruption scandal involving City Harvest Church leaders etc). Discuss how hiding the truth can lead to dangerous consequences. If you are taking the opposite stand, you may wish to choose other incidents (eg. where hiding/masking the truth resulted in good outcomes) for a more persuasive opening.*   *Links to resources:*  <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37971085>  <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/city-harvest-case-recap-of-a-saga-that-dragged-on-for-7-years>   * **I**mportance of the topic   + *Begin with the prevalence of fake news and how it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction these days. This question is thus of utmost importance.* * **S**tory (Anecdote) or **S**tatistics   + *Start with a scenario like the murderer at the doorstep (Kant)*   + *Showcase stories* * **H**ow you want to mix them   + *Blending two or more different methods appropriately.* | |
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| Yes, I think that there are situations where lying is the better option  If you take this stand, structure your points around the different types of situations in which lying can be justified. | No, I think that people should always tell the truth  If you take this stand, give strong reasons in each paragraph for why lying can never be justified. |
| 1. In situations of calamity, white lies may spare the parties from pain or hurt (Eg. not telling an elderly relative the truth about his medical condition, or withholding the truth of a parent’s demise from a young child) 2. In times of crisis, lying may be the wiser thing to do as our priority should be the well-being and safety of our loved ones. (eg. reference to the Kant example of the murderer at the doorstep, or the job of a spy or soldier who may have to lie to protect his country or comrades) 3. When planning a surprise, lying is inevitable in order to generate greater joy and excitement 4. At a job interview, one may lie to boost one’s chances of success at the interview – not to the extent of falsifying qualifications, but perhaps to give the expected answers or lying about one’s passion for the job in order to secure the job. | 1. Lying is not morally acceptable, even if it provides comfort or spares someone from pain or harm. It is intentional act of misrepresenting the truth, and it denies the party the chance of hearing the truth. Who are we to decide what is ‘the best thing’ for others? (use the phrase in the question) 2. If we entertain the possibility of situations where lying is justified, it becomes difficult to uphold the moral value of integrity. Integrity goes down a slippery slope into a meaningless sifting of situations in which one chooses to, or chooses not to lie. 3. Lying to attain positive outcomes for oneself or for others is still not justified, even if the situations may seem innocuous. Ultimately, this boils down to personal beliefs and priorities: some of us value success and pleasure more than the rigid adherence to integrity. However, if one believes that one should always tell the truth, then it should be the priority even in trivial situations, or situations where benefits can be easily obtained with a slight lie or two. 4. Lies are not foolproof and there is always the possibility of the liar being exposed. The parties involved may feel a deep sense of betrayal that the truth was withheld from them, |

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| Some may argue that white lies are innocuous and even beneficial to the parties involved, sparing them from unnecessary hurt or pain. For instance, an elderly relative may be spared the real truth of his medical condition, so that he need not worry about his health or the financial burden he may exact on his family members. One might also imagine many adults refusing to tell a young child about the unfortunate demise of one of their parents, disguising the awful truth with a suitable euphemism. However, I would argue that the truth should always be told in such situations. Even if the elderly relative or young child is spared from pain and tears, the real emotional burden – the veritable weight of the truth – is being borne by other members of the family. Secondly, lying to a family member in such situations is an intentional (albeit well-intentioned) act of misrepresenting the truth. Despite one’s good intentions, it must be acknowledged that one is making an important decision on behalf of someone else, denying the other party from access to the truth for a significant duration of time. This is tantamount to deception, but with altruistic intentions. Who are we to play God or to decide what is truly best for the parties involved? As loving bystanders, we have no guarantee that the agonizing truth masquerading itself as benevolent lies may have any enduring benefit for the parties involved. Would it not be better, then, to let the truth be told, and to support our loved ones through the challenges of facing this painful reality? To withhold the truth is morally unacceptable as it means that we assume a position of authority and prescience over our fellow human beings, which we do not actually possess. |
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