

Cambridge International AS & A Level

THINKING SKILLS

9694/02

Paper 2 Critical Thinking

For examination from 2028

SPECIMEN INSERT

1 hour 45 minutes



INFORMATION

- This insert contains all the resources referred to in the questions.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.

This document has **4** pages.

Section A

Study the evidence and then answer **Question 1** and **Question 2**.

Source A

Extract from the book *A Simple Introduction to Economics*

The practice of motor manufacturers making frequent minor changes to their models is an example of 'planned obsolescence'. This practice should be encouraged because it has multiple advantages for the world economy. Those people who want to have the latest model and can afford to do so buy a new car every year. These repeated sales create employment for workers in the automobile industry. These workers pay taxes to the government and spend the remainder of their wages on buying other products, which in turn pays the wages of other workers. The cars which have been driven for only a year can be bought by people who cannot afford to be in the forefront of fashion but need a reliable car.

Source B

Website of consumer protection organisation

Many of the complaints we receive refer to planned obsolescence – the practice of manufacturers increasing sales of their products by reducing their lifespan and making it difficult or impossible to repair them when they break. Domestic appliances such as washing machines often develop faults much sooner than they used to. The cost of spare parts for newer models has gone up and the technical support available is very limited. Most customers find it easier to buy a new appliance than to attempt to repair their current machine.

Several well-known examples of planned obsolescence relate to printers for computers. Most ink cartridges cannot be refilled and therefore have to be replaced. It is not surprising that 350 million ink cartridges currently end up in landfill each year in the US. Furthermore, although printers are often available cheaply, the ink cartridge they come supplied with soon needs to be replaced, and the replacement may cost more than the printer itself. In addition, when computer operating systems are updated, existing printers often cease to function and have to be replaced.

Software updates limit the life of smartphones. Many people believe that some updates are designed deliberately to slow down older phones, to encourage owners to upgrade. The lifespan of batteries in laptops and smartphones is apparently shortened artificially, and even if replacement batteries are available, they are so expensive that most people choose to buy a new device.

Source C**Statement from lawyers specialising in the law concerning electronic products**

We are acting on behalf of a group of major producers of computers, software, smartphones and electronic consumables. Our clients absolutely deny recent allegations that they incorporate planned obsolescence into their products to increase sales of new devices. The features referred to have been introduced in response to customer demand or in the interests of safety. To make smartphones more compact, with no loss of capability, batteries have become inaccessible, making it impossible to replace them when they stop working effectively. Fortunately, this is not a problem, since modern batteries last for many years. Although manufacturers do set a limit to the lifespan of batteries in laptops and smartphones, this is a safety feature, designed to prevent fires or damage to devices resulting from using old batteries that no longer work properly.

Source D**News report, 2018**

In France, it is a criminal offence to shorten the lifespan of a product deliberately. A major multi-national producer of electronic products has been fined \$27 million, their profit for about three hours' work, after admitting that older smartphones were deliberately slowed by software updates. However, they claimed that the reduction in operating speed was to prevent diminishing battery performance. Following the judgment, the company has drastically reduced the prices of replacement batteries.

Section B

Read the following passage and then answer **Question 3** and **Question 4**.

- 1 Appeals to popularity have long been criticised as logically flawed, but in practice arguments of this kind are a useful guide and should be accepted. If a million people hold a particular opinion and one individual disagrees with it, the majority view is correct. No one has the necessary time or expertise to form their own opinion about every issue that arises in their life and so they ought to accept the majority view on everything.
- 2 At the end of a university lecture, a student may challenge the fundamental presuppositions on which the lecture is based. This is not helpful because it distracts attention from the specific content of the lecture. It is as if someone having a house built were to keep distracting the builders from constructing the walls to dig up and inspect the foundations. To participate in study at university level, it is necessary to accept certain widely held beliefs, assumptions and attitudes without constantly questioning them.
- 3 It is dangerous to stand out from the crowd. In many settings, such as the armed forces, anyone who is perceived as different from their fellows will be bullied. Being persecuted by coworkers or neighbours for being different will send victims into a downward spiral of depression, loneliness and misery.
- 4 Some actions – such as asking a stranger how much money they earn – cause offence in some cultures, not because there is anything intrinsically wrong with them, but because they go against generally accepted standards of behaviour. Everyone should follow these standards whether they agree with them or not.
- 5 Therefore, the best policy in life is to imitate the opinions and actions of the majority. Admittedly, subsequent history has occasionally revealed that an accepted opinion or customary behaviour was wrong and a prophetic individual was right, but in practice it is better to ignore this possibility because such situations are very rare indeed.

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