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GPSTUDYNOTES.COM

# *GENERAL PAPER*

PAPER 1 NOTES



# Preface

Hey there.

These study notes are meant to guide your revision as you prepare for the General Paper examination. In this package, you will find a collection of essay planning and writing tips and strategies that can be applied to whichever essay question you choose to attempt.

Keep in mind, however, that each school has a slightly different approach to the essay paper. Thus, it is important to follow what your teachers have taught you in class closely and use these notes to plug in any gaps that may exist.

I believe that educational resources should be open-source and democratised. So, feel free to share these notes with your friends and relatives if you think that they will find value in them.

Wishing you the best of luck with your upcoming assessments. Always remember, though, that you are more than the sum of your grades. Keep on keeping on.

Cheers!

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# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to the General Paper Essay

The General Paper essay requires you to write a 500 to 800 word response in 1.5 hours to one of twelve options offered. You will need to present a clear stand for any question that you attempt. You are also expected to provide **supporting ideas and evidence** to back up your stand. To this end, General Paper candidates should keep abreast of contemporary developments in order to demonstrate their grasp and knowledge of current affairs as well as their ability to craft coherent, cogent arguments.

You will be assessed based on the **quality of your arguments and supporting evidence** (content) and the **effectiveness of your use of language**. 30 marks are allocated for content and 20 marks are allocated for language use. The band descriptors for the General Paper essay are as follows:

### Content (30 marks)

Marks	Descriptors
<b>Band 1</b> <b>26-30</b>	<p>The response is original and insightful. The ideas presented are profound, perceptive, or thought-provoking. The discussion is well-balanced according to the question requirements and demonstrates an in-depth evaluation of the issues contained in the question.</p> <p>The use of illustrations and examples is wide-ranging and fully appropriate. The examples are also clearly linked to the point or idea being expressed. The illustrations enhance the overall quality of the argument, and some of the examples may be original and not used by most people. The examples are also likely to cover very recent events.</p> <p>The response is fully relevant and answers the question in its entirety. The use of content shows personal insight and possibly originality of thought.</p>
<b>Band 2</b> <b>19-25</b>	<p>The response is thoughtful and consistently argued. The discussion is balanced according to the question requirements and demonstrates a clear (but not sufficiently thorough) evaluation and awareness of the issues raised by the question.</p> <p>The use of illustrations and examples may lack originality, but clearly supports the argument. Most of the examples are clearly linked to the point or idea being expressed.</p>

	<p>The response is fully relevant and sufficiently addresses the demands of the question. The use of content is appropriate in supporting the ideas being put forward. Responses with wider-ranging illustrations and examples tend to get higher marks within this Band.</p>
<p><b>Band 3</b> <b>13-18</b></p>	<p>The response is adequate: it shows an awareness of the issues being raised, though in a relatively restricted manner. There is evidence of some attempt at providing a balanced response according to the question requirements, though it may be awkwardly handled.</p> <p>There is a moderate use of illustrations and examples, possibly relying on standard material. Most of the examples show some connection to the point or idea being expressed. The examples are factually accurate for the most part.</p> <p>The response is largely relevant and sufficiently addresses the demands of the question. The use of content that is consistently relevant will secure higher marks within this Band; the use of content and explanations that are not well-developed tend to secure lower marks.</p>
<p><b>Band 4</b> <b>7-12</b></p>	<p>The response is limited: there is some awareness of the issues being raised, but there may be a lack of a coherent argument in addressing these issues. The ideas presented may be fragmentary or vague, and there is weak balance.</p> <p>The use of illustrations and examples is very limited with little or no development in relation to the point or idea being expressed. Knowledge of current affairs is quite restricted. Standard references may be used with little evidence of understanding.</p> <p>There is some evidence of relevance which addresses a limited range of points raised by the question. Responses with attempts at some developed illustration will secure higher marks within this Band; responses without a coherent argument or developed illustration will tend to get lower marks.</p>
<p><b>Band 5</b> <b>1-6</b></p>	<p>The response does not address the demands of the question. There is no clear use of illustration and the examples used may be obscure or non-existent. Relevance is barely apparent and the ideas are almost completely lacking in coherence.</p>
<p><b>0</b></p>	<p>Nothing in the answer meets any of the criteria.</p>

**Language Use (20 marks)**

<b>Marks</b>	<b>Descriptors</b>
<b>Band 1 17-20</b>	<p>There are very few errors of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Sentence structure is varied and expressions are apt and precise throughout. Vocabulary is wide-ranging, sophisticated, and appropriate to the task.</p> <p>The organisation of ideas is excellent. There is a clear and effective introduction and conclusion. The essay is segmented into effective paragraphs. Each paragraph focuses on one point or idea. There is a wide range of linking devices and discourse markers used. The conclusion is persuasive.</p> <p>There is a strong personal voice in the response. There may be a few language errors, but they do not affect the meaning of the ideas at all. The response demonstrates confidence and conviction.</p>
<b>Band 2 13-16</b>	<p>There may be minor errors of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. There is some evidence of a variety of sentence structure and vocabulary. Expressions are mostly apt but are sometimes clumsy.</p> <p>The organisation of ideas is very good. There is a clear and effective introduction and conclusion. The essay is segmented into effective paragraphs that discuss one point or idea each. Some linking devices and discourse markers are used. The structure of the essay is clear throughout, though it lacks subtlety and effectiveness.</p> <p>The precision of language use determines the mark within the Band, but the errors are relatively minor and do not significantly affect the meaning of the ideas. The response shows some confidence, but lacks quality and assurance.</p>
<b>Band 3 9-12</b>	<p>There may be frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, and grammar, but the meaning of the ideas is not affected significantly. Sentence structure and vocabulary are adequate for the task, but tend to be rather simple and repetitive. The use of language may be 'safe' or ambitious, but flawed.</p> <p>The organisation of ideas is reasonably clear throughout, but the introduction and conclusion may be too short or overly laboured. Paragraphing and the use of linking devices and discourse markers may be basic or repetitive, but are still evident. There may be some ambition in the response, but the existence of errors takes away from the overall clarity of expression. Lower marks in this band indicate a consistent lack of clarity due to frequent errors or unsure or forced expression. Ideas can still be discerned without the examiner having to construe the meaning.</p>

<p><b>Band 4</b> <b>5-8</b></p>	<p>There may be frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, and grammar that affects the meaning of the ideas being expressed to varying degrees. Sentence structures and punctuations are inconsistent. Vocabulary is simplistic or incorrectly used.</p> <p>The organisation of ideas is weak; the introduction and/or conclusion is confusing and lacking in precision and focus. Paragraph linking is very basic or unsystematic. The meaning of the ideas is not securely communicated due to the presence of errors of language use and expression. Re-reading is required to understand the ideas being conveyed.</p>
<p><b>Band 5</b> <b>1-4</b></p>	<p>Few sentences show control or accuracy, to the effect that meaning is barely conveyed. Basic errors occur constantly. Vocabulary is very limited or insecure. Paragraphs, introduction, and conclusion -- if present -- are very basic and lack clarity, focus, or coherence. Re-reading is required, but sometimes no ideas may be deduced.</p>
<p><b>0</b></p>	<p>Nothing in the answer meets any of the criteria.</p>

## Chapter 2

### Choosing an Essay Question

In general, it is wise to choose an essay question only if the following criteria are satisfied:

1. You are **familiar** with the topic area.
2. You understand and can **accurately and fully define all the key words** in the question.
3. You have **sufficient content knowledge or concrete examples** to address the question requirements fully.
4. You have a **firm stand on the issue** and are confident of persuading someone to agree with your position.

It is also good practice to have prepared for at least 4 to 5 different topics before your General Paper examination. Make sure to equip yourself with **up-to-date examples** from current affairs so that your essay response can benefit from a **wide-ranging and relevant pool of supporting evidence**.

I'd strongly encourage you to do your own independent content research early on. Start as early as possible! Build up the habit of reading the news regularly. However, if you do not have time to conduct your own content research, you can purchase my **current affairs content packages** here: [www.buymeacoffee.com/gpstudynotes/extras](http://www.buymeacoffee.com/gpstudynotes/extras). I'll be adding new volumes periodically, especially before major examinations.

Keep in mind that you need not purchase the content packages to do well for GP! **There are a plethora of free resources out there**. However, if you prize convenience and if you have found some value in these notes, please do consider supporting me if you are willing and able to do so.



## Chapter 3

### Question Analysis

Before you even start to brainstorm ideas for your essay response, it is important that you perform at least *some* element of question analysis. In performing question analysis, you:

- Identify the **requirements** of the question so that you are less likely to go off-topic,
- Clarify the **main issue** posed by the question,
- Start the process of identifying any **contentious or questionable underlying or implicit assumptions** in the question, and
- Begin formulating your **balanced stand** in response to the question.

There are a few steps involved in question analysis. The mnemonic, “AFK SIA”, may help you to recall the question analysis process with more ease.

#### Question Analysis Mnemonic: AFK SIA

1. Absolute or relative terms
2. Focus of the essay
3. Key terms you need to define
4. Scope of your response
5. Implicit Assumptions

When performing question analysis, go through each of the steps on the following page to gain a greater understanding of the question requirements and the way you should approach writing your response.

Practice makes perfect! Try performing question analysis for different kinds of questions. In fact, throughout your pre-university career, you should go through these steps in question analysis every time you come across new types of essay questions.

**Step 1: Identify absolute or relative terms and take note of their implications**

- Absolute terms
  - Examples of absolute terms: all, none, nothing, never, always, only, merely, solely, greatest, most, least, best, worst, completely, totally, utterly, etc.
  - *Implication*: You need to give a yes-or-no answer.
    - E.g. “Advertising is always bad.” Do you agree?
    - Possible responses:
      - Yes: ***All*** instances/aspects of advertising are bad.
      - No: At least ***some*** instances/aspects of advertising are good/not bad.
    - Unacceptable response:
      - To some extent: Advertising is ***always*** bad ***to some extent***.
      - This is unacceptable because this stand is contradictory. This is analogous to saying that the school cafe is always open sometimes; that’s plainly impossible. The school cafe is either always open, or it is only open sometimes!
- Relative terms
  - Examples of relative terms: mainly, mostly, predominantly, largely, generally, usually, better, worse, more, less, etc.
  - *Implication*: You need to take a more calculated approach and weigh both sides of the issue before deciding on your stand.
    - E.g. Is environmental protection more important than economic progress?
    - Possible responses:
      - Yes, but... (there are exceptions: developing countries)
      - Yes, and... (it is the most important factor to consider in all human endeavours because...)
      - No, economic progress is more important because...
      - No, and environmental protection should never be a concern because...

**Step 2:** Identify the focus of your essay: what do you need to judge or evaluate?

- Identify what the question is asking you to judge/evaluate. To do so, it is always helpful to **paraphrase the question**.
- Complete the sentence: “I need to judge \_\_\_\_.”
  - E.g. “Print media is becoming increasingly irrelevant.” Is this true in your society?
  - *Essay focus:* I need to judge whether people in Singapore (my society) **still** think that things like newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets (print media) are important/valuable in their lives.
- Tips for identifying the essay focus:
  - Don’t change the meaning of the question
    - Don’t choose questions with words you don’t 100% understand.
  - Don’t forget the context if it is given
    - Pay attention to words like “today” and “in your society”
  - Double check to see if u missed out any key parts of the question

**Step 3:** Identify the key terms that you need to define in your introduction

- It is important to define key words in the essay question so the examiner knows exactly what you are talking about.
- Words you **HAVE** to define:
  - Subjective words
    - Words that mean different things to different people
  - Words with hidden meanings
    - Metaphors, figurative words or phrases, words with positive or negative connotations. E.g. “Reality TV is pure **garbage**”.
  - Topic words that are open to interpretation
    - E.g. the media, globalisation, technology...
- Words you **CAN** define (but don’t have to):
  - Topic words that only have one standard meaning
    - E.g. physical newspapers, the law, marriage, education
- Words you **SHOULD NOT** define:
  - Words like “a, the, it”, absolute and relative terms, words like “agree, extent, how far”, 5W1H...

**Step 4:** Determine the scope of your discussion

- Some questions require you to only consider events and people in your society only
- Other questions need you to consider an issue in a global manner
- If the question contains the phrase “in your society”, then you have to consider events and people in your society only.
  - *Note:* If you have lived in different societies, write about the one you are the most familiar with.
- If the question does not contain the phrase “in your society”, then you need to talk about events/people in and beyond your society
  - It is not enough to just talk about people in your society.

**Step 5:** Identify any contentious implicit assumptions that the question may have that you wish to challenge

- Whenever we make any claims, we rely on some implicit assumptions.
- If you can identify any questionable or contentious underlying assumptions in the essay question, you may choose to question it in your essay.

At the end of your question analysis process, you should know:

1. Whether you need to give a straightforward yes-or-no response;
2. What you need to judge or evaluate in your essay;
3. The key terms you need to define in your introduction;
4. The scope of your discussion (global or just in your society);
5. If there are any implicit assumptions in the essay question that you want to challenge in your essay.

## Chapter 4

### Brainstorming, Ideation, and Organisation of Ideas

Now that you have completed question analysis for the essay question that you have chosen to respond to, you need to start **brainstorming ideas** and **plan how you are going to organise them in a coherent manner**.

#### Brainstorming and Ideation Techniques

There are two key mnemonic devices that you can use to aid in your brainstorming and ideation process. The first is PAL and the second is SPECTRA.

##### PAL: Perspectives, Aspects, and Levels

#### 1. Perspectives

- When we consider different perspectives to an issue, we are essentially considering the different stakeholders who are involved.
- A **stakeholder** in a particular issue refers to someone who has *reasons to care* about that particular issue.
- E.g. “The process is more important than the product in education.” Do you agree?
  - *Stakeholders include:* students, parents, teachers, school principals, schools, universities and institutes of higher learning, the Ministry of Education, the labour market, future generations...
- We consider different perspectives of an issue so that we can generate more points and ideas for our essay. Some questions you can ask yourself when you are brainstorming include:
  - Which stakeholders would agree with the claim in the essay question and which ones would fervently disagree?
  - Whose opinions should we give more weight to, and why?
  - Is there a way to appease all the stakeholders in order for us to attempt to come at a consensus?

## 2. Aspects

- Different aspects of an issue refer to the various dimensions, sides, or facets of that issue. We can often consider a single event through different lenses.
- We can use the SPECTRA mnemonic to help us consider the different aspects of various issues:
  - S – social/social injustice/inequality; science and medicine; sports
  - P – politics and leadership; philosophy; prejudice; poverty
  - E – environment; ethics; education; economy
  - C – culture; consumerism; crime and punishment; corporations
  - T – technology; terrorism/conflict/war/military
  - R – religion; race
  - A – the arts and media; aesthetics
- We think about the disparate aspects of an issue to make sure that we do not provide a one-dimensional analysis in our essay.
  - *Example:* Trump's threat to ban TikTok in 2020

Aspects	Elaboration
Technology, the media	This issue concerns the survival of TikTok.
Politics and leadership, conflict	Trump's threat was issued in the backdrop of a souring US-China relationship.
Economy	Immense amounts of money generated on TikTok; Microsoft wanted to buy the rights to operate the application in the U.S.
Culture, the arts and media, aesthetics	TikTok users would have lost a platform to express their identities.
Ethics, politics and leadership	Should governments be allowed to ban apps and stifle the free-flow of information for political reasons?

- In considering the different aspects of an issue, decide which aspects you think are the most significant. Choose those to discuss in your final response, making sure that the ideas that you come up with through this ideation technique **answers the essay question directly**.

### 3. Levels

- The different levels of consideration for an issue refers to the different stages at which the issue can play out in society.
- Examples of levels include:
  - International
  - Regional
  - National
  - Community
  - Family
  - Individual

### Organising Ideas

After brainstorming and coming up with as many ideas as possible, you need to transform them into **REASONS** that directly answer the essay question.

Let's work on a sample essay question together:

“It is impossible to prevent doping in sports.” Do you agree?

Possible **reasons** that directly answer the essay question:

1. It is impossible to prevent doping because most countries have the **ability and incentive** to cheat.
2. It is impossible to prevent doping because the countries or athletes who do not cheat are **just the minority**.
3. We cannot completely eradicate doping because advancing technologies make it **difficult to detect and catch dopers**.
4. It is impossible to prevent doping because the international agencies responsible for preventing doping (IOC, WADA) experience a **conflict of interest**.

Now, you need a systematic way to organise your ideas. Here are some possibilities:

- Individual→Society→World→Analysis
- World→Society→Individual→Analysis
- Past→Present→Future→Analysis
- Present → Short Term → Long Term → Analysis
- Pros→Cons→Analysis
- Benefits→Costs→Analysis
- There may be others too...

An example of how to organise the potential reasons on the previous page:

INDIVIDUAL→SOCIETY→WORLD→ANALYSIS

#### **Point 1: INDIVIDUAL**

- It is impossible to prevent doping in sports because advancing technologies make it difficult to detect and catch dopers. In fact, many **individual athletes** have admitted to doping.
  - According to an anonymous survey conducted by the IAAF in 2011, 44% of athletes admitted to doping, but only 1-2% of them are ever caught.

#### **Point 2: SOCIETY**

- It is impossible to prevent doping because **most countries** have both the ability and incentive to cheat in sports.
  - Russia's elaborate doping scheme in the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics; this got them banned in the 2016 Rio Olympics
  - They got caught cheating again in 2021 and they even faked a car accident for Russian high jumper, Lysenko, so that he could avoid going for a drug test.



### Point 3: WORLD

- Moreover, it is impossible to prevent doping because the international agencies responsible for preventing doping (IOC, WADA) are led by people who face conflicts of interest.
  - Russian government officials hold leadership roles in IOC and WADA
  - This raises questions about the effectiveness of anti-doping agencies.
  - So, it seems that even with these regulatory agencies, we cannot completely prevent doping as long as such conflicts of interest exist.

### Point 4: ANALYSIS

- Across all levels, current attempts to prevent doping in sports face **irremediable challenges**. It is difficult to catch individual athletes who cheat, powerful countries can cover up their elaborate doping schemes, and the institutions set up to prevent doping experience deep conflicts of interest. **So, the upshot of my discussion is that it is impossible to prevent doping in sports unless international sports authorities like IOC and WADA undergo fundamental reforms.**

Analysis refers to your final assessment of the issue based on the different considerations that you have afforded to the issue. It is an overall evaluation of what you are supposed to judge for the essay question based on all the ideas that you have considered in your essay.

After completing the brainstorming and ideation stage as well as the organisation stage, your essay is effectively complete. All there is left to do is to write your ideas down in prose.



Don't be afraid to spend up to 20 minutes on your essay planning!

# Chapter 5

## Writing the Introduction

### Elements of an Introduction

1. **Background** (Set the context).
2. **Define the key terms** in the essay question (Refer again to Chapter 2).
3. Explain the **central tension** of the essay question.
4. **Thesis statement** (i.e. your stand) and include a **preview of your main points**.

The rest of this chapter will detail each of the elements of the essay introduction.

### 1. Background

- The purpose of beginning your essay with a background is to **set the context**.
- In other words, talk a bit about the issue raised in the essay question. How is it significant in the contemporary world?
- *Q*: Can the background in an introduction be a hook?
  - *A*: Yes, it can, but the main point of writing a hook (e.g. interesting stories, personal anecdotes, quotes, statistics, etc.) is still to set the context.
    - **Caveat**: Be sure to avoid cliché or overused quotes. Furthermore, if you use a hook, remember to show how the hook directly answers the essay question.

### 2. Defining key terms

- Define the key terms — specifically, those you have identified in the question analysis stage (Chapter 3).
- Also define any new terms **you have introduced** that are open to interpretation.
- *Note*: Some questions don't have key terms to define.
  - Cambridge examiners have remarked that there are some words like "education" that they'd rather you **NOT** define.

### 3. Explaining the central tension

- State some of the opposing or conflicting views in this debate.
  - E.g. “All mothers should stay at home to take care of their children.”  
Do you agree?
  - **View 1:** Some think that all women are *morally obligated* to stay at home to take care of their children once they become mothers.
  - **View 2:** Others think that women should have *the right and autonomy* to plan alternative childcare arrangements.
- *Note:* Don’t just state extremes and say some people agree and some people disagree.

### 4. Writing your balanced thesis statement and your preview of points

- Clearly state your stand in the debate.
- Your thesis statement should be well-balanced. Since you should avoid defending extreme views, your thesis statement should not include absolute words like “always”, “never”, “all”, and “none” most of the time.
- Don’t leave the examiner guessing your stand.
- Complete your introduction by providing a preview of the main points that you will be discussing in your essay.
  - You should have a list of ideas by now after going through the brainstorming and organising process in Chapter 4. Summarise each of your topic sentences in a few words and string them together in a sentence. (See the following page for an example.)

## Sample (not necessarily model) Introduction

*Question:* Social media does more harm than good. Do you agree?

Since their incipience, social media platforms have empowered their users to rekindle and discover social connections; they have also augmented their users' ability to share and obtain information almost instantaneously. (BACKGROUND) However, recent user-data breaches on these platforms and concerns over the pernicious effects these apps have on their users' mental health have raised questions regarding the need for legal regulation on these sites. Thus, one can justifiably question whether these interactive, internet-based social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit produce detrimental effects to society that outweigh any benefits that they may bring. (CENTRAL TENSION, DEFINING KEY TERMS) In this essay, I argue that — on balance — social media generates more harm than good because the benefits that it brings about occur much less frequently than the deleterious effects that it engenders. (THESIS STATEMENT) In particular, while social media can facilitate international coordination for important social movements, the detrimental consequences that it generates include the spread of fake news that threatens political stability, the threat on individuals' mental health, and the ease of abuse of personal data privacy. (PREVIEW OF POINTS)

Keep in mind that different schools have slightly different approaches to teaching you how to write an essay introduction. For internal examinations and assessments, you should always default to what your tutors have taught you in class!

## Chapter 6

### Writing the Body Paragraphs

PEEL is a popular framework for developing and organising the body paragraphs of an essay. A PEEL body paragraph has the following structure:

#### P - Point

- The first sentence in your body paragraph, also known as the **topic sentence**.
- This is where you state your **main idea**. More precisely, you should **state a reason** (refer again to Chapter 4) why your reader should agree with your stand.
- You should only discuss **one idea per paragraph**.

#### E - Elaboration

- Sometimes, you can't express your reason fully or convincingly in one sentence. Use the second sentence to explain your reason a little bit more.

#### E - Evidence/Example

- Support the main idea in your topic sentence with relevant, real-world, concrete examples. You need to keep abreast of current affairs in order to provide these kinds of evidence.
- However, **be careful not to provide too much detail in your examples!** Your main task is still to argue for a position in a controversial debate, not simply to regurgitate everything you know about the news.
- You are trying to persuade someone of your position; you're not writing a story.
- The example you use to support your main idea should be between 20% to 40% of your total paragraph length.
  - This is an arbitrary restriction, but it's a good heuristic to keep in mind so that your essay does not become overly descriptive!
  - If you spend the bulk of your essay describing current affairs rather than arguing for a **well-balanced stand** *based on your knowledge of current affairs*, then something is wrong!

## L - Link

- Close your paragraph by explicitly stating how your example supports your main idea.
- Ideally, your link will do two things:
  - 1: Make a general or abstract observation about how your example exemplifies (shows) the main idea in your topic sentence.
  - 2: Explain how everything you have said so far directly answers the essay question.

## On Topic Sentences

You should begin each of your paragraphs with your topic sentence. They **introduce the main idea** for that particular paragraph to make sure that your examiner understands exactly what you are going to argue for. Thus, your topic sentences should be **incisive and clear**. You should only discuss one key idea in each of your body paragraphs.

Examples of topic sentences:

*Question:* Social media does more harm than good. Do you agree?

### Topic Sentence 1: Supporting Paragraph 1

Social media platforms without proper regulatory practices and mechanisms in place allow misinformation to fester, which in turn jeopardise the integrity of our political systems.

### Topic Sentence 2: Supporting Paragraph 2

The superficial interactions prevalent on social media can easily compromise the mental health of some of its more impressionable users.

### Topic Sentence 3: Supporting Paragraph 3

In the digital age today, one of the greatest threats that social media poses is the frequent and pervasive infringements on digital privacy and personal data.

#### **Topic Sentence 4: Balance Paragraph 1**

Notwithstanding, opponents of my view may point out that social media is an indispensable tool for coordinating international efforts to protest against gross social injustices.

Topic sentences should invariably express **REASONS** for your broad agreement or disagreement with the claim(s) expressed in the essay question that you have chosen.

\*\*\*

In the next chapter, we'll discuss the role of balance paragraphs (sometimes called counter-paragraphs) in argumentative writing.

## Chapter 7

### Writing Balance Paragraphs

Balance paragraphs are sometimes known as “counter-paragraphs”. They are the paragraphs where you consider alternative or opposing viewpoints that challenge your overall stand.

You should have **at least one balance paragraph in any GP essay that you write**. Balance paragraphs are where you talk about some of the views and ideas that you don't agree with. By considering these counter-arguments, you show that you are aware of the potential objections to your argument and are mature enough to engage with them.

However, do NOT simply stop at raising an idea that directly contradicts your thesis statement. Instead, continue by giving reasons why someone should continue to support your thesis statement; always rebut/respond to any idea that contradicts your thesis statement!

**Keep in mind your ultimate goal: convince the examiner of your thesis statement.**

A possible structure of a balance paragraph:

State opponent's view (in a topic sentence) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Discourse marker: “Notwithstanding, opponents of my view...”</li></ul>
Example in support of the opponent's view
Explain how the example supports the opponent's view
Response/Rebuttal to the opponent's view <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Discourse marker: “Nevertheless/However/Yet, ...”</li></ul>
Explain your rebuttal in more detail
Link: Why your view should be preferred over the opponent's view



An example of a balance paragraph that follows the structure above:

Notwithstanding, opponents of my view may point out that social media is an indispensable tool for coordinating international efforts to protest against gross social injustices. In particular, they may cite examples like the #MatchAMillion Twitter campaign, where fans of the Korean supergroup, BTS, rallied together on social media to raise a million dollars in support of the Black Lives Matter movement in just under 25 hours in June 2020. Undoubtedly, the campaign exemplifies the immense rallying power of social media, and it shows that these online platforms can be used to organise social movements in forceful support of certain marginalised populations all over the world. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these extraordinary campaigns happen much less frequently compared to the harms that social media brings on a daily basis. Put another way, while we can only name a handful of success stories like #MatchAMillion and #BlackLivesMatter, the nefarious effects of social media that I have explicated earlier on are much more commonplace; it is an unfortunate truth that the exploitation of personal data and the adverse effects that social media has on our mental health can be felt almost every day. Consequently, I contend that social media's ability to harness political will and inspire social movements for positive societal change fails to outweigh the plethora of injurious effects that it simultaneously generates.

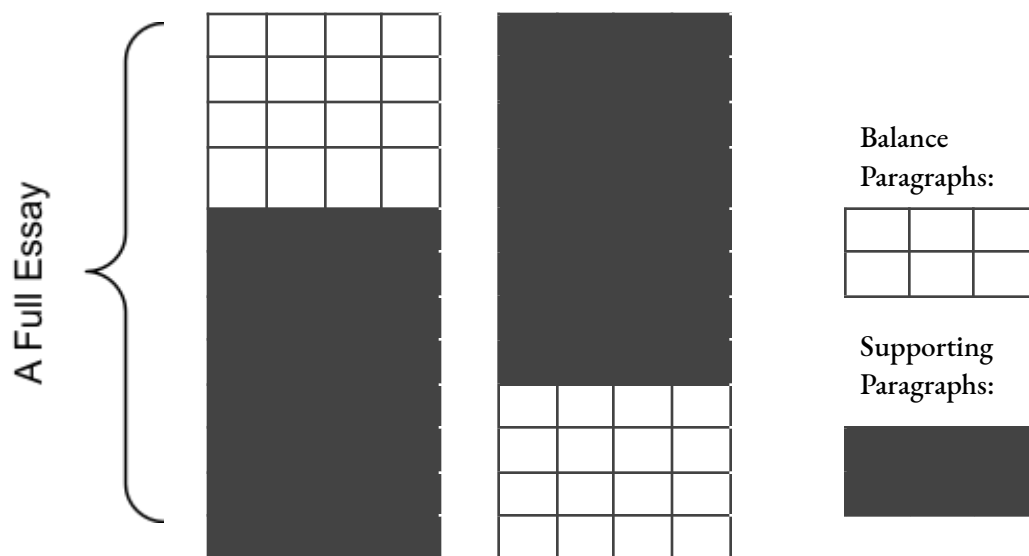
*(Underlined words are examples of discourse markers.)*

Another way to structure your balance paragraph (same as the one above, but with 2 additions):

State opponent's view (in a topic sentence)
Example in support of the opponent's view
Explain how the example supports the opponent's view
Response/Rebuttal to the opponent's view
Explain your rebuttal in more detail
<p>*NEW*: Anticipate an objection to your rebuttal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Discourse marker: "At this point, my opponents may respond by..."</li></ul>
<p>*NEW*: Refute the objection and present a revised version of your view that accommodates the objection that has just been raised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Discourse marker: "Nevertheless/However/Yet, ..."</li></ul>
Link: Why your view should be preferred over the opponent's view

To recap, having balance in your essay is to ensure that your essay has considered alternative points of view and how these objections may be countered.

Two suggestions for where to include balance paragraphs in argumentative essays:



How to introduce balance points:

- “Opponents of my view may contend that...”
- “Some of my detractors may object to my view by maintaining that...”
- “An unreasonable viewpoint on this issue is one that suggests that...”
- “Others may mistakenly argue that...”
- “There is a rather misguided view that posits that...”
- “Critics of my argument may point out that...”

By including balance paragraphs (i.e. by raising opposing views before following up with a proper rebuttal), it **allows you to make others’ opinions less compelling or convincing than yours**. Here are some ways you can do so: Argue that

- The opposition’s point is good BUT SO IS YOURS;
- The opposition’s point is good BUT YOURS IS BETTER;
- The opposition’s point is true, BUT ONLY OCCURS VERY RARELY;
- The opposition’s point is UNTRUE/ HAS PROBLEMATIC ASSUMPTIONS/ IS AN EXAGGERATION/ IS OVER-GENERALISED, etc.

## Chapter 8

### Writing the Conclusion

Elements of a Conclusion:

1. Discourse marker
2. **Reiterate your thesis statement and main ideas**
3. Highlight the **significance/ impact/ implications** of the issues
4. Include a **call to action**

The rest of this chapter will detail each of the elements of the essay conclusion.

#### 1. Discourse marker

- Including a proper discourse marker will signal to your examiner that you are concluding your essay.
- *Examples of discourse markers for the conclusion:* In conclusion / in sum / to conclude / in the final analysis / all in all...

#### 2. Reiterating your thesis statement and main points

- The purpose of restating your thesis statement and main ideas is to remind your examiner of your main arguments.
- Make sure you paraphrase your thesis statement and main ideas and that you are not simply copying whatever you have written from your essay introduction.

#### 3. Highlighting the significance or implications of the issues

- The purpose of highlighting the significance of the issues is to strengthen your stand by suggesting what might happen if people do not agree with or accept your thesis statement.

#### 4. Ending with a call to action

- The purpose of including a call to action at the end is to show how your argument has significance for the future.

## Sample (not necessarily model) Conclusion

*Question:* How far should online learning be encouraged?

In conclusion (DISCOURSE MARKER), I argue that **online learning should be strongly encouraged unless it worsens inequality in society**. This is because A, B, and C. (REITERATING THESIS STATEMENT AND MAIN IDEAS) At the heart of it all, education is **supposed to be a social equaliser** that bridges the inequality gap in society. So, if online learning is encouraged to the point that some students become significantly disadvantaged because of it, then, ironically, the whole enterprise of online learning becomes antithetical to the main purpose of education itself. (HIGHLIGHTING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ISSUE) Thus, despite the numerous advantages of online learning that I have highlighted so far, it remains true that society first needs to make sure that most students have access to the relevant technology that allows them to participate in digitalised education. Ultimately, even though I still believe that online learning should be strongly encouraged, **we need to think of ways to create a more robust system of ensuring equity in education** before we can afford an unreserved countenance of online education. (CALL TO ACTION)

Again, different schools have differing approaches to teaching you how to write the essay conclusion. When in doubt, always follow what your teachers have taught you in class!

A common consensus regarding the essay conclusion, however, is that **you should not be introducing new ideas at this stage**. Include all the elements of your argument in your body paragraphs. Do not be tempted to raise new points or points that you did not have time to develop in detail in the conclusion; these ideas will come across as unsubstantiated and it might work against you instead.

## Chapter 9

### Proofreading and Editing

If you had spent about 20 minutes planning your essay and about 60 minutes writing your response in full prose, you should have about 10 minutes left for proofreading and editing.

Here are the things you should do in this last stretch of time:

1. Re-read your essay and **fix any spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors**.
2. Go through your essay and **fix any clumsy expressions** or change any words that you are not 100% confident about. It's better to use simple and accurate English than complicated but erroneous expressions.
3. If you have time, **include more accurate but sophisticated vocabulary wherever possible**.

Make sure to perform these steps if you have time left. The correction of a few major technical errors in the final minutes may result in a difference of a few crucial marks for language use!

However, **don't worry if you do not have any time left to perform the proofreading editing process**. Just try your best to be careful not to make any serious technical errors (spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.) as you are writing your essay. You will get better with more practice.

If you are prone to making these errors, I have a **pamphlet that summarises the most common errors made in General Paper essays and how you can correct these mistakes**. You can find it on [www.buymeacoffee.com/gpstudynotes/extras](http://www.buymeacoffee.com/gpstudynotes/extras). (*Members and Supporters get this for free.*)

## Chapter 10

### Other Tips and Strategies

Here are a few more parting tips and strategies to maximise your score for the General Paper essay:

1. Have a few key vocabulary prepared so that you can flaunt your linguistic prowess. It is a good idea to have a few words that can be used regardless of the essay topic. Some examples include: “ubiquitous”, “ameliorate”, “ineluctable”, etc.
2. On the flip side, be careful not to overuse esoteric vocabulary such that your writing becomes unnecessarily complicated and difficult to parse. Someone who does that may easily come off as pompous. When in doubt, always choose to write clearly in simple terms rather than to oversaturate your response with difficult words.
3. The top essays are invariably supported by a succinct but incisive reference to current affairs. If you are pressed for time and are too busy to conduct your own content research, you can purchase my **current affairs content packages** here: [www.buymeacoffee.com/gpstudynotes/extras](http://www.buymeacoffee.com/gpstudynotes/extras).
4. Briefly **browse through the news the night before** your examination (and, if you’re not feeling too stressed out, the hour before your paper on your way to school). Examiners tend to be impressed with “hot-off-the-press” information. Follow me on Instagram @gpstudynotes for regular current affairs quizzes!
5. One of the simplest tweaks you can make to your writing to elevate your language use score is to vary your sentence structures. Follow longer sentences with shorter ones. This helps with the cadence of your essay and can keep your examiners engaged.

Good luck with your assessments!

# Afterword

You made it! ⚡

I hope you've found some value in these notes and that they will stand you in good stead. Feel free to share these notes with your friends and relatives or anyone you think might benefit from them.

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However, please do not worry if you can't afford to support me at this moment. You can still access my A Levels GP resources on [www.gpstudynotes.com](https://www.gpstudynotes.com) at no cost.

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