

Advice for candidates

Section One

- Read the questions carefully. Read each question twice before you answer it.
- It is important to always check your work thoroughly and make sure that you have answered all of the questions.
- A clear understanding of the meaning (truth conditions, as in, what makes the statement true or false) of the connectives (if/then, and, or etc.) is important. This includes a grasp of how the conditional is used to express necessary and sufficient conditions.
- A clear understanding of the difference between the concepts of argument evaluation is crucial. Understanding the difference between premises, sub-conclusions and conclusions, between acceptability, validity and cogency is essential.

Section Two

- Candidates should avoid structuring their responses strictly according to previous marking keys, as this can lead to a repetitive response that may not be succinct.
- Avoid spending too much time on this section of the paper, and overlooking the fact that this is an analysis and evaluation of a dialogue.
- Be careful not to write too much and compromise your performance elsewhere in the examination (typically Section Three).
- Succinct analyses are far better than lengthy descriptions.
- Lists of statements (premises and conclusion) should not be a rewording of the passage verbatim. You need to paraphrase the argument in the passage into a list of statements that is a succinct and an accurate representation of the argument in the passage.
- Candidates should only diagram an argument if they feel certain that it will help to clarify their analysis. A diagram of an argument is a step in the process of clarification and is not assessed as part of a candidate's skills in evaluation.
- Lengthy and verbatim descriptive recounts of the argument in the passage should be avoided.

Section Three

- Inadequate time management contributes to poor performance. Leave enough time for Section Three.
- Read the question carefully and engage with the actual question. Just writing down your knowledge of the topic will not gain full marks. Do not try to use a prepared written essay in response to a question. Provide an argument in response to the statement given.

Advice for teachers

- Encourage students to complete the construction of argument section first, using the entire reading time to select a question and construct a cogent line of reasoning. It is difficult to focus for ten minutes on a single argument in your head but the alternative is students providing superficial responses. Have students practice this skill throughout the year.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Critical reasoning (30 Marks)

Candidates demonstrated a range of ability in Section One. Candidates appeared to be more proficient in answering this section than in previous years.

Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation (40 Marks)

Both questions in Section Two exhibited a similar range of candidate performances when compared to past examinations.

The community of inquiry (COI) in Question 10 was shorter, more targeted and more succinct than in the previous year, which made it easier for the candidates to produce

concise answers. The COI included a number of explicit propositions and fallacies of reasoning that provided focal points for candidate analysis. Candidates are encouraged to apply the skills and language of critical reasoning where appropriate, particularly in the process of evaluation. The demonstration of these skills is a necessary condition for a good quality answer. A targeted and balanced philosophical assessment of the claims made as a dialogue was the mark of an excellent answer. Many candidates spent too much time on Question 10. No more than three or four pages of analysis is required. Time would be better spent on Section Three.

Question 11 produced a typical range of candidate performance with regard to the analysis and evaluation of the passages. There was a clear preference for passage one over passages two and three. To analyse them well required a recognition of some of the underlying complexities and the contentious claims in each of the passages.

As is the case with the COI, written responses of about three pages in length that are succinct and precise in clarification and evaluation were evaluated positively. Lists of statements to clarify the argument are encouraged but statements ought to be paraphrased accurately and succinctly. Verbatim lists of sentences were not rewarded. Simplifying the argument too much resulted in candidates missing important points. A balance needed to be achieved.

There was no requirement to provide a diagram of the argument, and candidates should have only done so if they were certain that it would help to clarify their evaluation of the text. Poorly understood or unnecessary diagrams confused rather than clarified the argument.

Candidates must evaluate cogency correctly and use the technical language appropriately and accurately. Statements could be either premises, sub-conclusions or conclusions, but not more than one. There appeared to be some confusion about the meaning of the term 'premise'. Many candidates used the term as though it were synonymous with 'argument'. Others used the term as though it were a synonym for 'separable statement'. Using the disciplinary terminology correctly is essential.

Candidates who performed well on Question 11 gave good reasons for their evaluations of premise acceptability, inferential strength and overall cogency.

Section Three: Construction of argument (30 Marks)

Section Three functioned extremely well in providing candidates with a diverse range of accessible topics on which to write an extended answer. While some questions were more popular than others, there was a better spread across the five questions than in previous years. Section Three exhibited typical trends in performance from the candidates. Time-management was a problem, with candidates hastily producing an argument that had merit but lacked structure and clarity of expression. Candidates are strongly urged to allow for the suggested working time of 50 minutes, and to plan before committing pen to paper. This too will alleviate the tendency to drift away or interpret only half the question.

Candidates often failed to respond to the statement in its entirety and instead focused on one element. While some modification of a thesis is possible when arguing for or against a statement, missing out a major component of the statement, or rewriting the statement so that it means something quite distinct, severely impacts the cogency of the response.

There was a common tendency for candidates to provide a diagram (or 'natural deduction' style representation i.e. a list of premises and conclusion) of their argument as part of their essay. Most philosophical arguments made in this section will be conductive arguments, that is, they will be arguments where a number of considerations in favour of the conclusion will be put forward (i.e. a number of convergent premises) and where at least one counter

consideration will be discussed. Providing a diagram would not add anything to the clarity of such an argument in the case where a candidate has written a clear, concise introduction setting out their conclusion and stating explicitly how they intended to argue for it. A diagram in this context is gratuitous, unnecessary and an interruption to the progress of the argument. That said, in a situation where the structure or form of the argument was crucial to the support for the conclusion (i.e. the argument being given was formally valid, for instance an argument of the form *modus ponens*) a diagram might be helpful. Candidates need to focus on giving well supported reasons for their conclusions, for instance using relevant examples or counter examples, to plan and structure a systematic and well supported argument. If their examples come from the philosophical tradition (e.g. thinkers and ideas) then candidates are expected to refer to philosophers and their ideas in a way that shows an understanding of the relevance, rather than doing so simply to display knowledge.