

## **Tips from the Chief Examiner's Report 2018 – Issued by SEC, May 2019**

### **Comments on the Essays:**

#### **They're looking for 'Quality, not quantity':**

- *“Although not penalised for going beyond the given length, candidates were expected, where possible, to complete their essays in the three pages provided. This is to support the skills of writing well-argued essays that are incisive, focused and concise. When marking these essays, examiners were encouraged to recognise the value of skilful brevity.”*

#### **It's not just about information, it's about using that information to formulate an argument:**

- *“High-scoring essays in this section directly addressed and contextualised the issue in the introduction. They demonstrated a very extensive and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the issues while interrogating a broad range of relevant, authoritative and credible evidence.”*

#### **Don't just give one side of the argument, give 'some' sense that you understand there are alternative perspectives that might be useful:**

- *“Critical engagement with the issue was demonstrated through the analysis of the evidence in conjunction with the integration of comparative and alternative perspectives. Conclusions which were insightful and independent were further evidence of critical thinking, whilst simultaneously maintaining excellent focus and clarity throughout the piece of writing.”*
- *“Understand the difference between reasons and evidence. Candidates were adept at providing reasons for the different positions taken, but were less so at identifying the evidence to support those reasons. Many essays neglected to identify and deal with potential counter-arguments, which limited the persuasiveness of the position taken and indicated a lack of balanced thought around the particular issues being discussed. Weaker Higher-level candidates summarised arguments and evidence rather than analysing and evaluating them, which resulted in very limited independent thinking in the conclusion of the discourse.”*

#### **Be aware of the difference between the 'Stimulus Material' and the actual question:**

- *Re: Lynch Essay... “It is evident that some candidates recognise and focus in on one element of the essay requirements only and proceed to write what they know about it, without taking into account the full text of the question. While such answering demonstrates a familiarity with big theories, ideas and their corresponding theorists, it also suggests an inability to apply these theories to everyday situations, incidences and examples – a requirement at this level.”*

#### **Don't try and bluff 'data' if you don't know:**

- *“Occasionally, the evidence presented was not credible, accurate or relevant to the points being made, thus highlighting deficits in knowledge and understanding on the part of the candidate in the context of the chosen topic.”*

#### **Here are some 'top tips':**

1. While exploring and examining contemporary issues and real-world situations, learn to relate them to the big ideas and theories of the course.
2. Undertake the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.
3. Develop dedicated vocabulary lists and context-rich sentences over the two years to support the topic-specific vocabulary necessary to write discursive essays.
4. Learn to critique and evaluate evidence and arguments rather than presenting summaries of the issues.

### Tips for during the written exam itself:

- Read through the paper carefully to ensure you understand what each question is about, then read each selected question again before answering it.
- Carefully read the **command words** for each question – what exactly is the question asking?
- Identify the key **question elements** of a question, particularly if there is **more than one** element to a question. (you don't have to address all elements equally, but you do have to address all elements)
- In the short questions, **attempt all questions required**, even with limited knowledge, as no marks can be awarded to blank spaces.
- Short-answer questions require concise answers. (i.e. Don't 'over-write' the short answers – be guided by the number of lines on the exam paper.)
- Make sure to allocate more time to those questions worth more marks. (see my handout on this)
- Spend time planning the discursive essay, as a planned approach will result in a better essay. (It seems that evidence of planning is important to the examiners, so give them at least some kind of brief **mind-map** or **spider diagram** to indicate that you've thought about what you're doing!)
- Identify the evidence to be used to support various positions within the essay. (i.e. make sure you have data in every paragraph)
- Avoid spending too much time on one discursive essay. (That goes for every exam, you know!)
- Whilst all extra questions will be marked, consider that you might be better served spending more time reviewing and clarifying your previous answers. (i.e. DON'T attempt 3 essays. Focus in on developing 2 very good answers)
- Organise the extended writing by separating key ideas into paragraphs.
- Complete the discursive essays in the number of pages given. The skill of a discursive essay is to produce a succinct argument. (To show you are producing succinct arguments, your 'Thesis Statements' should remain focussed throughout. One tip is to leave a line or two between each paragraph, and when you're reviewing your work at the end, you can insert a line that helps you to focus in on the actual question asked.)
- Avoid the "kitchen sink" approach. Don't just write down everything you know about a particular topic, without relating the information to the question.

### Key "Take-Aways" from the Report

1. Provide **Evidence** of Essay **Planning**
2. Make sure you provide an **alternative perspective** in your essays
3. Link the key thinkers to the question in an **overt** way
4. Remember to think of different levels of response – Theory, Global, Local, Personal

Your attitude going into the exam should be to *"I'm looking forward to see what they ask!"* and remember, if your evidence could be considered relevant, it is!

**BEST OF LUCK ON THE DAY!**