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Syllabus 8881 - What Cambridge is looking for

The syllabus document is an absolute MUST-READ! It is our compass for General Paper, and what we base our strategy on. After all, Cambridge is the final judge – but we can't fulfil requirements we don't know of.



**Scan this QR code to view the syllabus document!*

(https://www.seab.gov.sg/docs/default-source/national-examinations/syllabus/alevel/2024syllabus/8881_y24_sy.pdf)

The following breaks down parts of the syllabus that are most worth addressing, and explains how they are relevant to our core GP strategy of Insights and Dive In. I would recommend reading the entire syllabus document alongside – to get a fuller picture!

Firstly, as quoted from the Introduction section:

*The syllabus requires students to **actively explore** a range of key issues of local, regional and global significance. These issues cut across disciplines and are **explored from diverse perspectives**. Students develop **fair consideration** of, and respect for different perspectives, **appreciate the interrelationship** of ideas, and become more adept at **interpreting** and **evaluating** the complexities of the world we live in.*

The most apparent observation is that all the words in bold, which is everything that Cambridge wants from us, are active – not passive.

We can take away two main things:

1. Rather than knowing or absorbing knowledge, Cambridge wants us to *explore* – to *learn* and *inquire into* something. Moreover, it is not just exploring, but “actively” and “from diverse perspectives”.
2. It must not end at “exploring”! Knowledge and information are not supposed to be the product, but the *tools*. The tools that Cambridge wants us to use for the purpose of consideration, appreciation, interpretation and evaluation.

Thirdly, the Aims of the syllabus:

AIMS

The syllabus aims to enable candidates to achieve the following outcomes:

- *Understand better the world and themselves by fostering a critical awareness of continuity and change in the human experience*
- *Broaden their global outlook and deepen their understanding of local issues as well as how issues of regional and global importance relate to Singapore*
- *Appreciate the interrelationship of ideas across time, space and disciplines*
- *Develop critical and inventive thinking skills*
- *Develop critical reading skills and engage in independent research; and*
- *Develop the skills of communicating clearly, accurately and effectively using the English language.*

This essentially serves as a guide to studying GP.

Here, I hope to share a thought habit that'll help us do things more effectively: first determine the purpose – why we're doing it – before doing it. Note that it is not just about what the purpose is, but how this purpose *relates to us*. Then based on this, we find a way to achieve it that is suitable for us.

So, *to us*, Cambridge's aims are our learning outcomes – what we have to prove or demonstrate to them in our essays.

Understanding how it relates to us, we can look at each of the six points listed, and find a corresponding way to study for GP, in order to effectively demonstrate these outcomes.

Although exploring a wide range of issues, *diving into* a single example and formulating our own insights are effective strategies, these do take time.

Realistically, however, some of us are already in J2, and do not have the luxury of time. If you're in this position, especially late into the year, not to worry! We can still ensure you get the high score you need – but we'll have to take the short cut! The two most crucial things you can do now is:

1. Employ the strategies and tips under *Chapter 2, 2.1: No time la!* This includes brushing up on writing techniques, and other effective, easily adopted and applied strategies.

Now you understand what Cambridge examiners would feel when they come across an inappropriate example. So, please be careful to keep your logic consistent and smooth!

OK, you've now learnt the writing techniques of Aristotle!

For even better results, combine this with the following 4: *give the examiner a wonderful "IKEA ice cream" ending!*

4: End your essay with an IKEA ice cream

Do you buy the soya ice cream whenever you visit IKEA? The 50-cent super cheap and super delicious one! I always, always get it!



Actually, IKEA's 50-cent ice cream is a super smart marketing strategy! It's based on a famous psychological law—*Peak-End Rule*.

It is a cognitive bias that impacts how we remember past events. If your experience is pleasant at the peak and at the end, you'll have a positive impression of the entire experience. This also means that the emotions you experience at the peak and end determine the emotions you feel toward the entire experience.

When you're enjoying your ice cream, you feel that your visit to IKEA has been refreshing and pleasant, your purchases were a bang for your buck, and it's worth coming back. It is this ice cream that gave you this very positive impression of IKEA before leaving!

This is how we want the Cambridge examiners to feel after reading our essays!

If we pleasantly surprise the examiner with such a brilliant and refreshing ending, our **scores will be so much higher than if we end in an abrupt and super unsatisfying way** (yes, the horror—this is precisely what we've been doing. We either write "in a

This is why I recommend some movies and documentaries in *Chapter 2* of this part—though they don't seem as “intellectual” or “serious” as books, they can be really fruitful.

Ok! Surely, you've realised that giving up when appropriate is a great way to improve reading efficiency. Read what fits your purpose and interest, and is meaningful to you!

The methods we will explore next—speed reading and close reading—are for reading these meaningful books!

1.2: Speed reading

Speed reading is simply reading quickly, or completing a reading task in a short amount of time.

When should we speed read?

Generally, if your purpose for reading the material is to obtain some fragmented and surface-level information, to “get a gist of it”, speed reading is the best way. This is because speed reading is the most efficient way to **quickly obtain key information** that satisfies your purpose.

For instance, when your purpose is to cite some appropriate supporting examples or reference some ideas for a group assignment, quickly reading through and finding just what you need is often enough. Perhaps you want to build your insight net, or you simply enjoy exploring anything and everything—speed reading is suitable too!

But how can we actually read efficiently when speed reading?

First and foremost, of course, determine your reading purpose—it not only helps you understand why you read, but also helps you to easily judge what is important in the material.

This may sound like a given, but actually, many of us simply scan line by line, from beginning to the end, without consciously judging what's important. However, as your reading purpose differs, the content you need to pay attention to inevitably differs as well.

A simple example: if your purpose for reading this book is to find your intrinsic motivation, *building your insight net* is the key content of your reading. If your purpose is to find tips for your upcoming A-Level paper, then *No time la!* is what you should pay special attention to.

Daily News #1: *Vantablack*

Scope: *Arts, Ethics and Responsibility, Science and Technology, and Environment.*

Now we dive in~ to the world's blackest black!



Vantablack is one of the darkest materials ever created, developed by Surrey Nanosystems in 2014. Comprising of carbon nanotubes, it absorbs 99.965% of visible light, such that anything coated with Vantablack would appear flat. We'll look into the applications of this "blackest black" in a bit. Now, let's turn to an art world drama—

Born to be a new game-changing material, Vantablack unexpectedly triggered a "petty" war in art.

Anish Kapoor, the artist behind Cloud Gate ("the bean"), bought exclusive artistic rights to the world's blackest black in 2016.

