

# Preface

This compilation of 20 model essay questions and answers have been carefully selected to provide you with a great deal of content on a wide variety of topics and issues tested in Cambridge papers such as the media, arts, sports, science, religion, politics, war and conflict, environment, poverty, education, social issues(issues related to the young and the old, marriage and so on), Singapore issues and other general issues such as the importance of languages, success in life, threats and opportunities in the world. In short, a student who studies and thinks through all the essays will have armed himself or herself with knowledge on a large spectrum of issues. Many examples are also based on recent events, which examiners expect to see in good essays. Moreover, as the thinking and planning process are critical to essay writing, students are encouraged to deeply think through every essay question before reading the model essay. Before the model essays, there is also an example question that aims to guide students on how to plan well for a question. The best paragraph in every model essay is also indicated with a star and there are comments at the end of the essay to indicate why that paragraph is very good. The comments are phrased from a student's perspective as if a student wrote the essay, making it more personal. At the end of every model essay, the student is also encouraged to think about other possible points that could be included in that essay. This makes the thinking and planning process complete. The model essays are longer than the usual 500 to 800 words expected under examination conditions as the aim is to provide as much content as possible.

Finally, do use this handbook to supplement your reading of current affairs in order to excel in your own essays!

# About the author

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# Acknowledgements

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Channelnews Asia news website

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CNN news website

The Guardian online

Ministry of Education website (for 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies)

Singapore Biomedical Research Council website

The Health Promotion Board website



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# Model Essays

## Example question and a sample essay plan

### Question:

*Is your society ready to tackle the challenges of the future?*

## Deep Thinking!

## My essay plan

1. What are the **keywords** in the question and **what do they exactly mean?**

- ✓ 'Your society'- means Singapore
- ✓ 'Ready'- means 'prepared for'
- ✓ 'Tackle the challenges of the future'- means dealing with new developments that may require a different set of skills or approach

2. What does this question require me to do? (i.e. what is **the focus of this question?**)

*I am required to take a stand as to whether Singapore is prepared to deal with future challenges. The future could be the near or distant future- I would consider the future to be the near future, perhaps 5 or 10 years down the road.*

3. What **information** do I need to answer this question well?

*I need to know the various challenges in different aspects or spheres of Singapore society (that is, political, economic, environmental, social and so on). I need to know who are responsible for dealing with these various challenges and whether they have the necessary resources and expertise to do so.*

4. How can I **organise this information well** in my essay?

*I can organise the challenges according to different aspects (e.g. one paragraph can be on the political challenge while the second paragraph can be a social challenge and so on). In each paragraph, I must clearly show how that particular challenge will be dealt with well or cannot be addressed well, depending on the stand I take.*

## 5. What **specific points** and **examples** can I use to answer this question?

**Point 1:** Changing economic climate, where jobs are being re-designed and some jobs are being made obsolete while others are being created.

**Example 1:** Artificial Intelligence is giving rise to a new industry of its own. The government is investing in this industry, recognising its potential.

**Point 2:** Social challenge- Dealing with a more vocal generation that demands more rights.

**Example 2:** More people championing for equal rights such as the LGBTs but the government is firm in its pro-family stance and the conservative, mainstream society will still prevail.

(continue with more points and examples below)

**Point 3:** Challenges posed by lack of resources (environmental).

**Example 3:** Singapore's continual investment into new environmental technologies for greater sustainability. Development of eco-friendly infrastructure/facilities.

**Point 4 (counter-argument):** Social challenge – not ready to tackle the problem of falling birth rates

**Example 4:** No good solution to this challenge (employing more foreigners may not be welcome by locals as seen in past years leading up to the 2011 General Elections and incentives to parents to have children still will not pay off as more people get educated and assert their independence).

## 6. What are the specific **topic vocabulary** and **good phrases** I need to use **to score well for language** for this essay question?

### Some words related to the future and planning for the future

✓ **Masterplans, strategic planning, foresight, visionary leadership, envision, envisage, long-term initiatives.....**

### Some other good phrases that I can use in my essay

- ✓ As society **evolves**
- ✓ **Economic restructuring**
- ✓ **Environmental sustainability**
- ✓ **Embrace** challenges
- ✓ It will be an **uphill battle** to address this challenge

1

# How far are the needs of the elderly taken care of in your society?

## Deep Thinking!

### My essay plan

1. What are the **keywords** in the question and **what do they exactly mean?**

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2. What does this question require me to do? (i.e. what is **the focus of this question?**)

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3. What **information** do I need to answer this question well?

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4. How can I **organise this information well** in my essay?

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5. What **specific points** and **examples** can I use to answer this question?

Point 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Example 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Point 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Example 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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*(continue with more points and examples below)*

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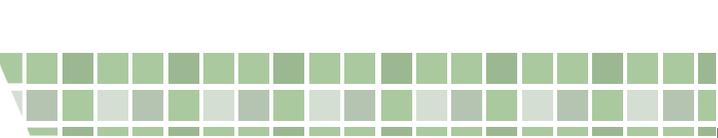
6. What are the specific **topic vocabulary** and **good phrases** I need to use **to score well for language** for this essay question?

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## 1. How far are the needs of the elderly taken care of in your society?



### Analysis of question

- Q 'How far'- indicates that the student has to evaluate the degree to which the statement holds true.
- Q 'The elderly'- this refers to the aged. Students could consider those **over the age of 50, 55 or 60**. They need to decide on the age range based on the points and examples they have.
- Q 'Needs of the elderly'- this is the **most important keyphrase** in the question. This requires students to evaluate the extent to which the various needs of the elderly (physical, social, emotional and so on) are taken care of by different sectors of society.
- Q 'Your society'- this refers to Singapore.

'Old is gold'. Although a clichéd saying, it is still true today. Be it ancient artifacts or other remnants from the past, they are valuable in various ways in illuminating the historical experiences of our forebears. Similarly, the elderly, who have lived through the past, cannot be dismissed just because they are frail and in some cases, economically unproductive. They are repositories of wisdom and we can learn much from their varied experiences. However, the reality is that the elderly are not all treated the same across societies. In some cultures, the aged are revered and even feared while in others, they are derided or slighted. As an Asian society that upholds traditional Confucius values like filial piety, Singapore holds its elderly in high regard. As a society that is facing an ageing population, the elderly are increasingly receiving special attention in various areas such as employment and healthcare.

First and foremost, the Singapore government has rolled out several initiatives to ensure and enhance the welfare of the aged, especially in recent years. Government initiatives are perhaps one of the strongest indicators to signal the value we place on the elderly for they set the tone for how the rest of the society should operate. The elderly are considered by the government as the pillars of strength in our society, the pioneers who have weathered past crises to build the Singapore we reside in today. In view of their sacrifices, the government caters to their needs in several areas. For instance, in recent years, apart from regular top-ups to the elderly's Medisave accounts, the government also initiated the Pioneer Generation Package to specially provide benefits and privileges to a small group of the elderly who were pivotal in

nation-building. Although critics may argue that this package is only reserved for the minority of the elderly and that it is a mere token gesture, it is still arguably one of the best packages that substantially reflects the government's appreciation of their efforts and to better cater to their needs. Government funds are limited and we cannot possibly cater to the needs of every single elderly and so, the government's Pioneer Generation package is a good step in the right direction.

Moreover, as an Asian society, we value the need to stay together with our aged parents and care for their needs. In Western societies, once children reach maturity, they move away from their parents to live on their own. This is a mark of independence and they may or may not keep in regular contact with their parents or often visit them. However, in Singapore, we encourage children to live near their parents. The Proximity Housing Grant, for instance, is a subsidy provided to couples who choose to live near their parents. Furthermore, the emergence of Three generational flats are a testimony to how we signal the importance of living together as three generations- parents, children and grandchildren. On the surface, this may seem to be a push by the government but the popularity of such flats reflects the peoples' desire to live together with their parents too, most of whom may be aged, above the age of fifty. Although cynics may also assert that this could be due to the convenience of having grandparents to take care of grandchildren, the fact that children choose to live with their aged parents shows their relative comfort level with their parents and how much they treasure them. Some prefer to live in such flats as they can take better care of their parents and they also would want their children to learn the values imparted by their grandparents. Therefore, in Singapore, the elderly are indeed highly valued.

Additionally, we pay particular attention to the needs of the elderly as seen by how we have numerous programmes and activities aimed at meeting the needs of a diverse group of elderly. Singapore started preparations for an ageing society in the 1980s and from then, we have been making several adjustments and enhancements to cater to the needs of the aged. If we did not value the elderly, we would not have implemented these numerous initiatives. For instance, for the elderly who need better healthcare, we have programmes like Eldercare Fund, to particularly subsidise healthcare for low-income individuals. For those who are fit, we have Active ageing in place, to encourage them to partake in meaningful pursuits in life to stay happy and fulfilled. Barrier free facilities are also in place to enhance mobility for the elderly who need to move around in wheelchairs. The re-employment age has also been increased from time to time, to ensure the elderly remain employable. The list goes on and it is very evident that we invest a great deal of effort to ensure the well-being of the elderly.

However, on the other hand, even though we may have numerous initiatives, we do have elderly whose needs may not be sufficiently taken care of. It is inevitable that some slip through the safety nets we have put in place. For instance, there are still homeless elderly in Singapore, some of whom are abandoned by their children. It is

not that these people are not helped by the government or others in society but at times, the Asian culture of 'saving face' prevents these vulnerable group from seeking help and they go undetected. We also have increasing cases of elderly suicide, which tell us that we may not have been very effective in helping some elderly. A Straits Times report indicates that there has been a sixty percent rise in elderly suicide since 2000. Social isolation, physical and mental ill health were the major contributing factors. It seems that our efforts are still limited in catering to every single elderly member. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for the myriad and complex issues faced by the elderly and that so long as various sectors of society continue to collaborate, we can combat more problems confronting the aged.

In the final analysis, as a matured and progressive society, Singapore has done much in the areas of employment, healthcare, housing and physical infrastructure to make lives better for the aged. Special programmes have also been initiated to take care of their needs. However, we should not rest on our laurels and should continue to invest in our aged, who have contributed much to our progress as a society.

### Comments on the paragraph

The introduction is very coherent with clear links between the ideas. The student starts off by discussing the value of old things such as artifacts and then makes a smooth and clever transition to the value of the elderly and the the extent of importance that different societies have towards the elderly in different societies before finally discussing the situation in Singapore. Culture and the trend of ageing population are used to convincingly argue the student's point that in Singapore, the elderly are well taken care of.

#### Reflection

What other points and examples can I use for this essay question? Jot down your responses below.

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**2**

## Consider the value of learning many languages.

### Deep Thinking!

### My essay plan

1. What are the **keywords** in the question and **what do they exactly mean?**

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2. What does this question require me to do? (i.e. what is **the focus of this question?**)

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3. What **information** do I need to answer this question well?

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4. How can I **organise this information well** in my essay?

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5. What **specific points** and **examples** can I use to answer this question?

Point 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Example 1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Point 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Example 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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*(continue with more points and examples below)*

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6. What are the specific **topic vocabulary** and **good phrases** I need to use **to score well for language** for this essay question?

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## 2. Consider the value of learning many languages.



### Analysis of question

- Q 'Consider'- this question word indicates that students have to **examine** several factors **before reaching an informed conclusion**.
- Q 'Value'- this refers to the **importance or significance** of something. The student should consider this in the context of the various benefits.
- Q 'Learning many languages'- this means **being multilingual**.

Students could consider the significance of being multilingual in **the context of our globalised, technologically-driven society**, where innovation and opportunities are aplenty.

It has been said that many of the jobs that people will be doing in the future have yet to be created. This suggests that the knowledge that people are learning in schools today may become obsolete quickly. Therefore, it becomes vital to equip our students with varied skills, which includes the study of different languages. In many schools today, people learn one, two or at the most three languages. This could be English, which is widely recognised as the international language or could be the native language such as Mandarin or German, depending on where an individual was born and bred. However, in an evolving, complex world characterised by technological innovation and breakthroughs in various fields, one's marketability and survivability in the future may depend more on one's versatility. The ability to speak several languages may prove to be an asset to someone who may have opportunities to travel widely in this highly globalised world and work as well as interact with different cultures.

One of the significant benefits of learning many languages would be the ability to become a more culturally sensitive individual. Translation services like 'Google translate' may help us translate vernacular languages to better comprehend them but the nuances of the language such as emotions and specific cultural references can never be fully appreciated unless one immerses in the study of such languages. The Korean language, for instance, has several words which reflect deep emotions, similar to other languages. A distinctive feature is the presence of 'honorific' language, where there are special words reserved for superior or elderly people. Such variations may never be appreciated by someone who understands such facts only at the intellectual level. Moreover, the knowledge of such nuances may allow one to have an edge over others as one could have opportunities to reside in the country or countries of the dominant language, acquiring experiences that may have been otherwise impossible if one did not have knowledge of that specific language. An individual who knows both

French and Korean for instance, could benefit from exposure to both the Western and Eastern cultures, enhancing his marketability for any employer.

Moreover, learning several languages benefits us cognitively and boosts our mental health in various ways too. Physiological studies, for instance, have discovered that speaking two or more languages is a great asset to the cognitive process. It makes us more intellectually able and it even helps stave off Alzheimer's and dementia. According to a study conducted by the Pennsylvania State University, multilingual people, especially children, are skillful at multitasking. Such indirect and long-term benefits arising from learning many languages certainly speaks volumes of learning them.

Apart from benefits accruing to an individual, a multi linguist can also enhance the lives of different people in the world. In a world mired in poverty, discrimination and social strife, many struggle to even make ends meet and often our efforts to reach out to the destitute are hampered by our inability to converse with them in their own languages, which further prevents us from being cognisant of their problems from a first-hand perspective. If that barrier can be circumvented, it would enhance our ability to meet the needs of the native population in more beneficial ways rather than engaging in meaningful but still not very beneficial one-off community service projects such as painting the wall of a village school, which may not be sustainable for the community we are seeking to help. Knowing the local language builds trust with the people, which would foster better relations and lead to more beneficial outcomes.

In a nutshell, besides the thrill that learning different languages accords to an individual, being multilingual allows one to thrive in different environments and acquire varied experiences. The individual benefits are also aplenty, especially the long-term psychological and health benefits. Moreover, the value a multilinguist can add to other communities worldwide is also noteworthy. Although these myriad benefits are desirable, it is also a fact that it is an insurmountable challenge to learn a new language. Nevertheless, we can still attempt to do it, even if it means we are taking baby steps.

### Comments on the paragraph

This paragraph has an insightful point- a point that people will not usually think of. The student considers indirect and long-term benefits, which show strong evaluation too. Moreover, there are good examples to support this point and the conciseness of this paragraph makes it even more effective.

