CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Cambridge International AS Level

ENGLISH GENERAL PAPER **8021/12**

Paper 1 Essay **February/March 2026**

MARK SCHEME

Maximum Mark: 30

Published

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

Cambridge International will not enter into discussions about these mark schemes.

Cambridge International is publishing the mark schemes for the February/March 2026 series for most Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge International A and AS Level components, and some Cambridge O Level components.

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Generic Marking Principles

These general marking principles must be applied by all examiners when marking candidate answers. They should be applied alongside the specific content of the mark scheme or generic level descriptions for a question. Each question paper and mark scheme will also comply with these marking principles.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 1:

Marks must be awarded in line with:

- the specific content of the mark scheme or the generic level descriptors for the question
- the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the generic level descriptors for the question
- the standard of response required by a candidate as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 2:

Marks awarded are always **whole marks** (not half marks, or other fractions).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 3:

Marks must be awarded **positively**:

- marks are awarded for correct/valid answers, as defined in the mark scheme. However, credit is given for valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme, referring to your Team Leader as appropriate
- marks are awarded when candidates clearly demonstrate what they know and can do
- marks are not deducted for errors
- marks are not deducted for omissions
- answers should only be judged on the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar when these features are specifically assessed by the question as indicated by the mark scheme. The meaning, however, should be unambiguous.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 4:

Rules must be applied consistently, e.g. in situations where candidates have not followed instructions or in the application of generic level descriptors.

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GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 5: Marks should be awarded using the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme for the question (however; the use of the full mark range may be limited according to the quality of the candidate responses seen).
GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 6: Marks awarded are based solely on the requirements as defined in the mark scheme. Marks should not be awarded with grade thresholds or grade descriptors in mind.

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Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
✓	Demonstrates an understanding of the question and is used to indicate: • a focused introduction. • each new valid point made in relation to the key words of the question.
⇩	Further development of a valid point in the question or development of evaluation. [This may precede or follow a tick, according to the candidate's argumentative method.]
EG	Use of relevant example.
λ	Generalised and descriptive points.
AE	Assertion. Opinions stated without any credible evidence.
REP	Repetition of point.
NAQ	When the candidate has not answered the question, or a section of the response is not answering the question.
TV	Vague points and ideas.
EVAL	Evaluation is attempted.

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Annotation	Meaning
L	Examples of ambitious, sophisticated accurate expression, punctuation and grammatical structures.
~~	Serious errors that impede communication and for where register becomes informal or inappropriate.

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Generic levels of response descriptions

These level definitions address Assessment Objectives (AOs) 1, 2 and 3, and should be used in conjunction with the indicative content for each question in the mark scheme. Information about AOs can be found in the Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper syllabus (8021) for examination in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Introduction

The level definitions which follow reflect, and should be interpreted within the context of, the following general statement:

(a) Examiners will give their highest marks to candidates who demonstrate a disciplined management of the discussion the question provokes and use clear and accurate communication. Examiners will be guided more by careful selection and application of information, effective analysis and evaluation, and supported judgement, than by weight of facts.

(b) Examiners will use these level definitions in combination with the question-specific mark schemes.

(c) Explanation or judgement is strengthened if informed by the use of relevant examples.

(d) The level in which an essay is placed depends on the range of criteria detailed in AO1, AO2 and AO3. As a result, not all essays fall obviously into one particular level. In such cases a ‘best-fit’ approach will be adopted with any doubt erring on the side of generosity.

In marking an essay, examiners will first place it in a level and then fine-tune the mark in terms of how strongly/weakly the demands of the level have been demonstrated. The criteria in each level are written to exemplify the middle of that level.

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Levels of response descriptions				
Level	**AO1** **Selection and application of information**	**AO2** **Analysis and evaluation**	**AO3** **Communication using written English**	**Marks**
5	• Selects a range of fully relevant information that effectively exemplifies the main aspects of the response to the question. • Applies a range of examples appropriately to support the main ideas and opinions in the response.	• Analyses possible meanings of the question and defines the scope of the response. • Develops, analyses and evaluates a range of arguments to reach a supported conclusion. • Develops a strong argument with clear use of supportive evidence.	• Communicates clearly with consistently appropriate use of register. • Uses a wide range of vocabulary and a variety of language features. • Uses language with control and accuracy. Errors, if present, are only related to the use of sophisticated words and structures. • Constructs a cohesive response which links ideas, arguments and paragraphs convincingly. Text is well organised.	**25–30**
4	• Selects relevant information that exemplifies the main aspects of the response to the question. • Applies examples appropriately to support the main ideas and opinions in the response.	• Analyses the meaning of the question to inform the scope of the response. • Develops, analyses and begins to evaluate different arguments to reach a supported conclusion. • Develops a well-reasoned argument with use of supportive evidence.	• Communicates clearly with appropriate use of register. • Uses a range of vocabulary and language features. • Uses language with control and some accuracy. Errors relate to the use of less common words and structures. • Constructs a clear response which links ideas, arguments and paragraphs. Text is generally well organised.	**19–24**

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Levels of response descriptions				
Level	**AO1** **Selection and application of information**	**AO2** **Analysis and evaluation**	**AO3** **Communication using written English**	**Marks**
3	• Selects information that exemplifies some of the main aspects of the response to the question. • Applies examples to support the main ideas and opinions in the response.	• Demonstrates understanding of the meaning of the question in the response. • Develops and brings together some arguments to form a conclusion. • Constructs an argument which is logical and usually supported by evidence.	• Communicates clearly overall but with inconsistent use of appropriate register. • Uses everyday vocabulary and some varied language features. • Uses language with some control. Errors are noticeable but do not impede communication. • Constructs a mostly coherent response which links ideas, arguments and paragraphs. Text has some organisation but may not be sustained.	**13–18**
2	• Selects limited information that exemplifies aspects of the response to the question. • Applies examples that are linked to some of the ideas and opinions in the response.	• Demonstrates partial understanding of the meaning of the question in the response. • Refers to arguments to form a conclusion. • Constructs an argument partially supported by evidence.	• Communicates clearly in places, with inconsistent use of register. • Uses basic vocabulary with limited language features. • Uses language with limited control. Errors are frequent and sometimes impede communication. • Constructs a fragmented response which links some ideas and/or arguments.	**7–12**

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Levels of response descriptions				
Level	**AO1** **Selection and application of information**	**AO2** **Analysis and evaluation**	**AO3** **Communication using written English**	**Marks**
1	• Selects limited information that is relevant to the question. • Makes examples which may not link to the ideas and opinions in the response.	• Makes a limited response to the question. • Makes some form of basic conclusion. • Constructs a weak argument.	• Communicates with lack of clarity and/or register is inappropriate. • Uses basic vocabulary. • Uses language with control rarely. Errors are frequent and communication is often lost. • Constructs a response but the response is not organised and ideas are not linked.	**1–6**
0	• A mark of zero should be awarded for no creditable content.			**0**

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Question	Answer	Marks
1	**Evaluate the view that freedom of speech is always desirable.** Answers are likely to: • explore what freedom of speech is • assess the extent to which freedom of speech is always desirable • make a judgement, based on consideration of the evidence and arguments put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • freedom of speech being a basic human right which should be protected • freedom of speech allowing a wide range of voices to be heard • freedom of the press being important to freely report news opinions • free speech allowing minority groups and individuals to have an unrestricted voice • restrictions on freedom of speech leading to the repression of some groups in society • offensive or abusive speech being forbidden or restricted to maintain a stable society • public order issues and anti-social behaviour having implications for what can be permitted • free speech allowing for unethical and immoral views to be expressed.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
2	**Examine the reasons why so many wars and armed conflicts continue in the world today.** Answers are likely to: • assess the role of war in human society • explore factors that make it likely that wars and armed conflicts will continue • make a judgement, based on the consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • the destruction caused by previous wars failing to deter future armed conflict • countries continuing to need more living space and a range of resources • some leaders seeing that brute force is always likely to prevail over pacifism • economic sanctions not stopping nations from building up military strength • dictators using war to consolidate their power and grow their legacy • revolutionaries using smaller scale wars and conflicts to seize power • there being a commercial motive for the continued production of weapons • war being used to protect land and assets due to fear of those perceived as the enemy.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
3	**To what extent can the hunting of wild animals be justified?** Answers are likely to: • analyse the reasons for justifying the hunting of wild animals • explore why the hunting of wild animals can never be justified • make a judgement based on a consideration of the argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • hunting being justifiable for conservation purposes and also for food • those communities that have always relied upon hunting for their survival • hunting often being a more humane alternative for animals facing prolonged suffering • restrictions on the hunting of wild animals is curtailing liberty • the hunting of animals for food or clothing being unnecessary in most societies • ethical arguments challenging hunting for pleasure, status or making a profit • those arguments focusing on animal rights where hunting is always morally wrong • there being ways other than killing to maintain balance in the ecosystem.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
4	**To what extent are formal examinations the best way to assess a child's academic development?** Answers are likely to: • discuss the role of formal examinations • assess the extent they may be an effective means of assessing a child's academic development • make a judgement, based on a consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • formal examinations assessing how much has been learnt and understood during the educational process • examinations being a source of motivation and a way to encourage time management and planning • examinations being objective and without bias from teacher or examiner • examinations giving qualifications which are recognised by universities and employers • coursework and other forms of informal assessment providing a more accurate picture of the learner's abilities • examinations causing negative pressure on learners and teachers which impact on the accuracy of results and wellbeing • fewer examinations allowing for more creative and flexible teaching and learning • some learners being less academic and preferring to engage in practical assessments.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
5	**To what extent could the cost of health care be reduced in <u>your</u> country?** Answers will be focused on one country with which the candidate identifies or to which they direct their answer. Answers are likely to: • discuss the role of healthcare in the chosen country • assess the extent to which the cost of healthcare could be reduced • make a judgement, based on a consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • countries strengthening public systems reducing the need for private healthcare • using natural forms of medicine and therapy could be less costly • greater emphasis on prevention of problems rather than curing them after they occur • a range of education programmes teaching healthy habits from an early age • private healthcare markets expanding causing treatment costs to rise for many patients • insufficient specialist recruitment increasing reliance on more expensive temporary staff • ageing populations increasing demand for long-term and complex medical care • patients resisting cheaper generic medicines, believing branded pharmaceuticals are more effective.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
6	**To what extent is mathematical estimating needed in everyday life?** Answers are likely to: • examine what is meant by mathematical estimating in various contexts • explore how the lack of precision brought by mathematical estimating is not always desirable • make a judgement, based on the consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • budgets and schedule estimates being useful as they can predict what may happen later in a process • enabling more accurate planning and the distribution of personnel and resources • estimates allowing time to consider whether a premise is reasonable before making a final decision • allowing a project or idea to remain within a safe or economic range • in some cases, imprecision being dangerous and threatening human safety • the need for some mixtures and compounds requiring precise measurements to remain safe • the problems caused by inaccurate estimation of one link of a chain of events • precision and exactness being regarded as strong and vital characteristics.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
7	**Examine the view that motor cars create more problems than benefits.** Answers are likely to: • discuss the importance of the motor car both today and in the past • assess the extent to which motor cars create problems and benefits • make a judgement, based on the consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • the pollution and environmental damage caused by large numbers of cars • damage to the countryside and wildlife being caused by the construction of roads • people becoming too reliant on private cars for travel and not getting enough exercise • large numbers of deaths as a result of car accidents • cars making travel easy and efficient for large numbers of people • the motor car bringing enormous economic benefits and technological advancements • cars being about more than just travel they are status symbols and historical and cultural artefacts • infrastructure in and between urban centres has improved as a result of the motor car.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
8	**To what extent do you agree that advertisers target the most vulnerable members of society?** Answers are likely to: • assess the various purposes of advertising • explore the extent to which advertisers target the most vulnerable people in society • make a judgement, based on the consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • it often being difficult to distinguish between information and advertising • advertising creating psychological pressures and exploiting the insecurities of many people • positive advertising for unhealthy products having a major influence on vulnerable people • the problems of advertisements aimed at children and the wider consequences of this • all economic groups are targeted by advertising and can easily be influenced by what they see • individuals finding themselves targeted and disturbed on a variety of platforms • consumers being able to compare what different products offer in terms of quality and cost • advertising prompting healthy and positive behaviours in a range of contexts.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
9	**Animal characters in fictional writing are included for entertainment only. Discuss.** Answers are likely to: • explore a range of texts in which animals feature • examine why the depiction of animals in fictional writing might be entertaining • make a judgement, based on the consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • animals in children's fiction often being used to represent adult figures in a way children can relate to • the exploits of certain animals requiring readers to suspend their disbelief • the authorial intention being simply to provide comic relief or stir sentimental feelings • animals being used for allegorical purposes rather than just to entertain • those works of fiction highlighting the extinction of certain species • an appreciation of the importance of specific animals being shaped by the narrative • the potential for fiction featuring animals to develop both empathy and imagination • those fictional texts where animals play an important role in advancing the narrative.	**30**

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Question	Answer	Marks
10	**Evaluate the importance of the arts in <u>your</u> country's heritage.** Answers will be focused on one country with which the candidate identifies or to which they direct their answer. Answers are likely to: • discuss which art forms are part of the country's heritage • assess the importance of these forms of art within a country's heritage • make a judgement, based on the consideration of the evidence and argument put forward. Answers might include discussions and examples such as: • certain art forms being considered as central to a country's heritage • art remaining an integral part of human culture irrespective of structural boundaries and linguistic diversities • art being used to express emotions and to communicate ideas which are central to a country's heritage • art being used to pass down knowledge and historical awareness from one generation to another • those modern forms of art capturing aspects of contemporary society in new ways • a lack of interest in art leading to the reduction of the world's rich cultural heritage • technology being increasingly representative of a country's heritage rather than art forms • cultural practices existing beyond the realm of recognised art forms.	**30**

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