

IELTS Speaking:

A Comprehensive Guide

by Mark Griffiths

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170. A business
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173. An economic activity
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178. A foreign language
179. The education system
180. Youth culture
181. A foreign culture
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183. A hobby or interest
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186. A physical activity
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188. Something you do to relax
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Elderly people
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Giving presents
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Groups and co-operation
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Health
Help
History
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General Introduction

Having taught IELTS preparation courses in China for twelve years and having extensive experience as an examiner of Chinese students and students from

numerous other countries, I have become familiar with the main problems students from different cultural backgrounds face when getting ready to take the test. This book aims to help students deal with these problems. The first part of the book gives an overview of the speaking test and its requirements in terms of the test criteria. This section also includes information on the use of grammar and various parts of speech. The second part of the book provides topics for the three parts of the test with questions and suggestions for active practice. These topics and questions are based on actual topics and questions that appear in the IELTS Speaking Module.

So how is this book different – and better – than other books on the market? First of all, it takes the user through the test and through the test criteria in greater detail than other books. It looks at problems that candidates actually have during the test. Furthermore, it provides candidates with various structured ways to create their own original answers. For each topic, for each part of the test, there are questions followed by suggestions for answer development. Of course, these suggestions are not the only ways to answer the questions, but they provide starting points for candidates who are having difficulty finding ideas. Students should, of course, aim to supplement them with others that they have learnt during their English studies.

Candidates often ask me about how long they need to prepare for their test. This is, of course, highly variable and largely depends on their current level, the level they wish to reach and how long they have to prepare. It also depends on how often they use their English and for which purposes. The IELTS test developers, say on their website that it takes 3 months of study, in an English-speaking environment, to improve by one band score. I think that this period can be shortened – even without being in an English-speaking environment – if a candidate approaches their preparation for the test in a methodical manner with an appropriate mindset, something that this book aims to encourage with suggestions for answers.

Introduction for Teachers (Students should read this, too!)

As a teacher myself, I was eager to produce a book which would be ‘teacher-friendly’. To that end, this book can be used simply in a classroom environment without the need for many further materials. Naturally, most teachers will find ways to provide supplementary material – particularly vocabulary and grammar exercises – for their students. This book clearly stresses practice. The simple fact is that in whatever field you care to name, a person’s ability needs practice to

develop. The topics and questions in this book not only represent those that appear in the IELTS Speaking Module, they also represent the kind of topics that people all over the world talk about and the kind of questions people ask when discussing those topics.

With regard to vocabulary, bear in mind that the actual range of vocabulary required to do well in the IELTS Speaking Module (i.e. achieve bands 6 to 7.5) is not large. However, it does need to be used well, i.e. accurately and appropriately. This means that teachers should focus on ensuring that their students do not give answers that are misleading or confusing. In addition, spending a lot of time on vocabulary that can only be used in a limited number of situations is not as efficient as getting candidates to use words that can be used in many different topics. Most of the vocabulary will not actually be new to most students, but the aim is not to teach vocabulary so much as developing students ability to actively use the words in conversation and in response to questions. Do not be satisfied with basic answers to questions. Do not accept short, general statements from candidates who wish to achieve anything higher than band 5.5.

Some basic English structures are presented in the first part of the book. Remember that this is not a grammar book and that the grammar and structures contained in it are really designed to serve as a reminder for students.

When using this book, teachers and candidates should really work through the whole of the first section to begin with. Deal comprehensively with the test format and criteria. The pages devoted to grammar and structures are designed to ensure that students know what level of English is expected of them in the test.

The three sections containing practice questions can be done in a more flexible manner, depending mainly on the amount of time available. Since there are 60 topics, it is unlikely that the course will be long enough to cover al of them. This is not a problem. Candidates must prepare outside the classroom too. You can choose to cover topics that have recently been in the test, those that you expect to be in the test or (my favourite) those that your students feel lees confident or knowledgeable about.

Encourage candidates to be imaginative and thoughtful. Certain topics and questions (e.g. “Tell me about your ideal home.”) truly give students the scope for original, highly individual answers. These often provide the best answers from candidates and the questions often work well when given as homework, because

students will be more likely to need to check new words which might otherwise take up valuable class time.

Students should be encouraged to ask each other ‘follow up’ questions (questions arising from answers given to previous questions), as this is very likely to happen in the actual IELTS Speaking Module – and will certainly happen in seminars, tutorials, and everyday conversation abroad.

Students should also be encouraged to use compensation strategies when necessary. Many IELTS books already have several pages of these, which is overdoing things. A few simple phrases like “ Sorry, I didn’t express myself very well!”, “Could you repeat that, please?”, and “Could you rephrase that, please?” are quite sufficient. “Uh?” makes the student sound like a caveman, not a university student!

Acknowledgements

My students have had more to do with this than they may realise. Students who make mistakes have often been more useful to me than students who get things right. When a student makes mistakes, my natural instinct is to ask why they have made the mistake. Is it a problem of translating directly from their first language into English? Is it that they are using an inadequate dictionary? Have they confused the meanings of two different words? People should learn from their mistakes, but people can also learn from the mistakes of others. So, thank you to them. As I like to tell my students, make as many mistakes as you like in class – just get it right on the day of your test!

Any mistakes in the book are my responsibility.

The Format of the Speaking Test

Overview

The speaking module takes the form of a one-on-one interview with a trained and certified examiner. Almost all of the examiners are native English speakers with teaching experience and teaching qualifications. The examiners are supposed to be trained such that the band score you receive from one examiner is what you would receive from any other examiner.

The speaking module lasts for a total of eleven to fourteen minutes. The examination should be carefully timed by the examiner to ensure that each student receives an equal chance to demonstrate his or her level of proficiency in English. The speaking module consists of three parts, beginning with simpler questions in Part 1, the student's long turn in Part 2, and more demanding questions in Part 3. It is vital to remember that it is the job of the student to demonstrate his or her ability – it is not the examiner's duty to help the student find their level.

Part One

First, the examiner introduces the examination, asks the student his or her name, checks the student's ID. Strictly speaking, this is not part of the test. The examiner needs to have the candidate's name recorded and needs to check that the candidate is who he/she says they are.

When the examiner is conducting the introduction, candidates who have an 'English' name in addition to their own name in their own language can add it, e.g. 'My name is Li Tao, but you can call me John.'

When you first meet the examiner, it is essential that you behave in a reasonably confident manner. Many candidates introduce themselves and then add – perhaps out of modesty – that their English s not good. This might create a negative impression on the examiner.

The examiner then asks the candidate questions relating to three topics which should be fairly familiar to the student. The examiner will usually have five questions per topic. However, the actual number of questions asked will depend largely on the length of the student's answers, since the time for this part of the test is fixed at between four and five minutes in total. This means that each of the three topics should take about 1½ minutes to cover. In my experience, on average, candidates should talk for about 20-30 seconds in answer to each question. This gives candidates enough time to develop and answer with 2-3 points.

The first topic that the examiner asks about is always one of the following:
a) your work
b) your studies
c) your home
d) your home town
e) where you live now

If the examiner decides to ask about your work or studies, the examiner will first ask “Do you work or are you a student?” You then reply and the examiner continues with the appropriate topic. If you currently neither work or study, you should tell the examiner which you did most recently and then the examiner will continue with that line of questioning. In this situation, candidates should be very careful with grammar (past and present tenses).

The questions about your home town and where you live now are interchangeable, so preparing for one of these topics automatically prepares you for the other. If you now live in your home town, you only have to prepare one answer for both topics. If you do not, you must prepare two answers – unless you decide to lie! Bear in mind that lying is completely acceptable in the IELTS speaking module, but that your lies must be reasonable (believable) and that you should remember you lies so that you do not cause any confusion later during the test.

Since you know that the examiner is sure to about one of these topics, you should be well-prepared for them. The examiner knows that you know you will be asked about one of these topics and it is reasonable for him/her to expect particularly good responses here.

If the examiner only asks a candidate one question on a particular topic, this could be because the candidate has given a very long answer or because the candidate has failed to understand which topic he/she is supposed to be talking about. Long answers are usually fine, as long as the candidate can maintain a good level of quality throughout the answer. If candidates fail to understand the topic that they are being asked about, it conveys a poor impression to the examiner.

The examiner selects the topics and any attempt by the student to avoid answering the questions can be taken to mean that the student does not possess the English language skills to do so. Candidates are not permitted to change topics and must wait for the examiner to do so. The reason for this is simply that if one candidate is permitted to change topics, more candidates will want to do the same thing whenever they are faced with a topic they are not fully prepared for or familiar with. The questions are relatively simple and mainly personal and factual. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that a student having problems in part one will have very serious problems during the remainder of the examination, particularly in part three.

In part one, I strongly recommend that candidates do not spend too much time answering one question. This could indicate to the examiner that you have prepared very well for one topic which could appear in the test and do not wish to risk being asked a question on another topic. Even an average student is expected to be able to talk about several different topics. So, if your answer to the first question in a topic is very long, the examiner could change topics to something that you might have prepared less well.

Part Two

First, the examiner gives the student instructions regarding what to do, hands the student a cue card, featuring the main question in bold writing) and four suggestions for what to talk about, and gives the student one minute to prepare his or her answer. During this minute, the student is permitted to make notes using a pencil and paper provided by the examiner. It is strongly recommended that you make notes. Candidates that fail to do so often find that they pause more often and often cannot think what to say next. Some candidates make notes in Their own language, others in English. It does not matter since the examiner will not read any notes you make. My students tell me that they find it faster to write in Their own language, but easier to remember words if they are written in English. The choice is yours.

Remember that you must answer the main question. The four suggestions are simply to give you ideas. You can use all of them, none of them or just a couple of them. Whichever option you choose, your score will not be affected. Personally, I recommend using the suggestions. They are almost always good ones and – most importantly – they mean that you don't need to spend so much time thinking about what you are going to say.

Second, the student speaks for one to two minutes on the given topic. This means that you should time your responses carefully when preparing for the test. The examiner will not allow the student to speak for longer than two minutes. Students should note that they do not have to talk for the whole two minutes. This is useful to remember if you feel that your level of fluency is dropping after one minute, or if you have no more to say. One minute (the minimum suggested time) may be a little short, but is still acceptable. Obviously, two minutes of fluent speech, using plenty of good vocabulary and grammar is better than one minute of similar quality speech, but this does not make a substantial difference unless you are aiming at a very high score. Remember - no part of the speaking module is a test of how long

a student can talk – quality is more important than quantity!

Third, the examiner can ask the student one or two follow-up questions based on what the candidate has said regarding the topic. Most examiners will just ask one. When the examiner asks a 'follow up' question, this is not a cue for you to continue talking at length about the original topic question. Answer the follow up question directly and succinctly, perhaps using only one or two sentences. Then stop. Part two lasts three to four minutes in total.

When preparing for the IELTS Speaking Module, some students preface their long turn with phrases such as "I have been asked to speak about XYZ, including A, B, and C," or "I would be very pleased to tell you about XYZ." These phrases are unnecessary and a waste of time. Similarly, don't end your speech by saying something like "That's all" or "I have finished". When you have finished speaking, simply make eye contact with the examiner and hand him/her the cue card.

Part Three

The examiner will continue the interview along the lines of the topic introduced in part two. The questions in part three are generally more abstract and conceptual in nature and cover a wider area than in the previous two parts. They are therefore more demanding linguistically. The examiner selects the questions and any attempt by the student to avoid answering the questions can be taken to mean that the student does not possess the English language skills to do so.

Part three lasts four to five minutes. Consequently, as in Part 1, the number of questions will largely depend on the length of the student's answers. An average of a little under one minute per answer (i.e. about twice as long as for answers in Part 1) is enough for a reasonably developed answer to a part three question.

Each of the questions in the speaking module requires that candidates use their English to accomplish one or more of the following linguistic tasks:

analyse
compare and contrast
compare the student's experience with the experience of other people
compare the past with the present and/or future
describe
discuss advantages and disadvantages (costs and benefits)

discuss past developments
explain
express and justify opinions
express preferences
narrate
provide personal and non-personal information
provide reasons
speculate about possible future developments
suggest
summarise

Broadly speaking, there are five main categories of questions that examiners ask in Part 3. You should expect at least one question from each of these categories. The five categories are:

a) describe
b) advantages and disadvantages
c) opinion
d) speculate
e) compare

a) Describe

Questions that require a candidate to describe are generally the easiest ones in Part 3. Examiners usually ask them at the beginning of this section of the speaking module. Candidates should try to provide answers that describe different situations or groups of people. For example, if a candidate is asked to describe the kind of music that people in her country like, it is a good idea to consider the kinds of music that different groups of people like, e.g. teenagers and the elderly.

b) Advantages and disadvantages

Candidates are frequently asked about the advantages and disadvantages of certain things. Candidates should be aware that examiners can change the words ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’ to ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ or ‘pros’ and ‘cons’. Candidates should also use these words since they demonstrate a wider range of vocabulary. Be aware that examiners may also ask only about the advantages (benefits/pros) or only about the disadvantages (costs/cons), but candidates can still provide both in their answers. It is also a good idea to point out whether these

advantages and disadvantages are big or small (major or minor). Useful words and phrases include “The main advantage” and “A minor disadvantage”.

c) Opinion

Almost all candidates are asked to express an opinion at some point during Part 3. Remember that opinions are not facts – they are what you think, but something that other people might disagree with. However, your opinions should have some factual basis (i.e. support and reasoning). Be careful when answering questions that begin “How important …?” because some candidates have a tendency to say that everything is “very important”. This is repetitious and reduces the impact of the answer. Try using other adverbs of degree and phrases, such as ‘somewhat’, ‘quite’, ‘fairly’, ‘moderately’, ‘not very’, ‘not as important as’.

d) Speculate

The verb ‘speculate’ means to think about future possibilities. Be wary of using ‘will’, since 'will' suggests that something is certain. Try to use other words, such as ‘can’, ‘could’, ‘might’ and ‘may’ which indicate that the future situation is not certain. If you are talking about your personal future, you should try to use phrases like ‘would like to’, ‘hope to’, 'aim to' and ‘wish to’. This allows you to express your exact meaning and demonstrates a wider range of vocabulary. If you do use ‘will’ in your speech – perhaps accidentally – you can add ‘probably’ or ‘possibly’ immediately afterwards to change the meaning.

e) Compare

Candidates are frequently asked to compare in Part 3 of the speaking module. There are two types of comparison that are particularly common. The first is to compare groups of people – men and women, young people and older people, children and adults. Candidates will only be asked to compare people from their country and foreign people if they have said that they have lived or travelled abroad or know some foreigners well.

The second common type of comparison is to compare the past, the present and possibilities for the future. This type of question might be asked in the following ways – “How has XYZ changed over the past 10/20/50 years?” or “How do you think XYZ may change in the future?” Comparisons of this type usually involve using the comparative forms of adjectives, e.g. “Things have got better (or

“become worse”) in recent years.”

There is a third kind of comparison, but it is not commonly asked. Candidates may also be asked to compare the cities and the countryside in their country. This is usually in countries where there are clear differences between the two, such as there are in China. Since candidates tend to be from wealthier cities, they often have very limited views.

Examiners may ask candidates to compare aspects of two different countries. However, examiners can only do this when it is clear that a candidate has enough relevant experience. For example, an Indian candidate who has been studying in Australia for two years could be asked to compare his/her experience of life in those two countries.

It is vital that candidates remember that the questions in part 3 are rarely only about the candidate as an individual, although they may refer to the candidate's experience. Bear in mind (particularly with 'describe' questions) that what you like and do may not be what other people like and do. Also, bear in mind that many questions in part 3 combine two or even three of the five categories of question mentioned above, so candidates need to adjust the content of their answers accordingly.

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Sample Interview

Here is a sample interview, demonstrating the format of the test, the things the examiners say to candidates, the types of questions asked and examples of possible responses.

[First, the examiner opens the door to the interview room and invites the candidate in.]

Examiner: Good afternoon. Come in and take a seat.
Candidate: Thank you.

[The examiner and candidate sit down and the examiner checks the identity of the candidate.]

Examiner: Good afternoon. My name is Mark. Could you tell me your full name please?
Candidate: Good afternoon. My name is Wang Kai. My English name is Keith.
Examiner: Can I check your identification please?
Candidate: Yes, here you are.
Examiner: Thank you, Keith. That's fine.

[Now that the examiner has checked the candidate's identity, the test can begin. The examiner introduces the first part of the test and the first topic.]

Examiner: Now, in this first part, I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself. First, let's talk about your hometown. Where do you come from?

Candidate: I'm from Shanghai, on the east coast of China. It's one of the biggest cities in China – if the not the biggest – and it is a key city in terms of transportation, investment and services.

Examiner: What work do the people in your hometown do?

Candidate: I think most are employed in the service sector, mainly trade, retail, government services, tourism and transportation. Many others are employed in the manufacturing sector, making machinery and textiles. A small percentage are involved in farming. I should also point out that many people are involved in construction. If you go to Shanghai, you can see new buildings and infrastructure projects everywhere.

Examiner: Would you say your hometown is a good place for young people to live?

Candidate: Yes, I would. The educational facilities are amongst the best in China. There are plenty of sports facilities. Many young Chinese people are interested in computers and it's easy to find them, buy computer games and get connected to the Internet in Shanghai. On the other hand, the pollution levels are quite high, so it's not the ideal place for young people.

Examiner: Is there anything special about your hometown?

Candidate: There's nothing unique about Shanghai, but it is special in that it has many old buildings, a great foreign influence and a lot of skyscrapers. In Chinese

cities, there has been a trend to knock down old buildings, but in Shanghai you can still find many in the city centre. The foreign influence goes back to when Shanghai was a major port for Britain, France and other world powers. Their influence can be seen in the architecture and felt in the attitude of the people towards doing business with foreigners. The new skyscrapers are magnificent. I think Shanghai has some of the tallest buildings in China.

[The examiner has spent enough time on the topic of 'hometown' and wishes to change the topic to 'reading'.]

Examiner: Let's move on to talk about reading. Do you like reading?

Candidate: Yes, I do. I enjoy reading the classics – both Chinese ones like The Dream of Red Mansions and English ones like Jane Eyre and Oliver Twist. The English classics can now be bought very cheaply in bookshops.

Examiner: Did you read much in your childhood?

Candidate: Certainly. My parents encouraged me by buying me books for my birthday and on other special occasions. I have to admit though that I didn't like the books they bought for me as much as the ones I chose for myself. My parents seemed to have the idea that they knew which books were best for me. Of course, I also had to read school textbooks. They were a little boring.

Examiner: Do you do much reading at work?

Candidate: Yes, I do. I have to read a lot of manuals and reports. The manuals are quite thick and take a long time to read. Fortunately, most of them are also in computers files so I can load them onto my laptop and take them anywhere. I find the reports much more interesting to read. The keep me informed about what is happening in the company – what people are doing, how our clients feel, what our revenue flows are like and so on.

Examiner: Where do you usually read?

Candidate: I usually read in the office, but I much prefer taking my laptop to a café and sitting there to read. Obviously, I can't do this very often, because I have to be in office most of the time, but my boss is kind and doesn't mind if I do it once a week. The most important thing is that I get the reading done.

[The examiner decides that it is time to change to the third part 1 topic]

Examiner: Let's talk about art. Do you like art?

Candidate: Yes, but it's not one of my main interests. I sometimes look at pictures and like them, but have no real idea about what the artist is trying to communicate. This is especially true of modern art where the artists express themselves much more freely than in the past.

Examiner: Did you learn about art at school?

Candidate: No, we didn't. Not many schools teach art as a subject apart from specialised schools for students with artistic talent. I think it's a shame, but I don't think this situation will change any time soon.

Examiner: Did you do any artistic activities when you were a child?

Candidate: As a small child, I enjoyed finger painting and I used to doodle a lot. My parents bought me crayons and paints and I drew, painted and coloured the usual things that kids do – smiling faces, people and houses, trees, cats and dogs.

Examiner: Do you like visiting art galleries?

Candidate: I don't mind visiting them, but visiting an art gallery is not generally top of my list of things to do. My girlfriend doesn't like them too much, so we usually go to other kinds of places together. I'd probably only visit an art gallery if there was something of special interest to me there.

[The examiner decides to end part 1 and go on to part 2.]

Examiner: Now, I'm going to give you a topic and I'd like you to talk about it for one or two minutes. Before you talk, you'll have one minute to think about what you are going to say. You can make some notes if you wish. Do you understand?

Candidate: Yes.

Examiner: Here's some paper and a pencil for making notes and here's your topic. I'd like you to describe and interesting magazine or newspaper that you read.

[Here is the cue card that the examiner has given to the candidate.]

Part 2 – Cue Card

Describe an interesting magazine or newspaper that you read.

You should say:
what the magazine or newspaper specializes in
what information it contains
who you think reads this magazine or newspaper
and explain why you think this magazine or newspaper is interesting.

[One minute passes and the candidate makes some notes.]

Examiner: All right? Remember, you have one or two minutes for this, so don't worry if I stop you. I'll tell you when the time is up. Can you start speaking now please?

Candidate: I'd like to talk about 21st Century. It's a weekly publication that can be bought in cities all over China. I've never seen it on sale in smaller towns and villages. It's one of the few newspapers and magazines available in mainland China that is Chinese but in English. It contains a selection of articles from other publications, along with some articles written specially for 21st Century. Some of the articles contain explanations of the vocabulary and grammar structures used, so that students can improve their English. I think this is very useful. The stories are of general interest and include ones about stars, technology, social issues, films, music, books, history and politics. This means that it is a great source of information, not just something we can use to improve our language skills.

[The examiner asks a follow-up question.]

Examiner: Do you buy this publication every week?

Candidate: Not every week, but certainly most weeks. Sometimes, I simply forget to buy a copy and other times it is sold out before I buy one.

Examiner: Thank you. Can I have the task card back, please?

[The candidate hands over the task card and the examiner moves on to part 3.]

Examiner: We have been talking about a publication that you read and I'd like to discuss with you one or two more general questions related to this. Let's consider first of all journalists. Compare the jobs of magazine journalists with those of newspaper journalists.

Candidate: I think that magazine journalists often need more specialised knowledge, because they usually have to write longer articles and they generally focus on particular things within a field. In the past, newspaper journalists needed to be much quicker than magazines journalists in terms of getting their stories to the editors, but the arrival of the Internet has meant that magazine journalists need to be almost as quick now.

Examiner: What special skills a journalist should have?

Candidate: A good journalist needs to be good at looking at a story from different angles, so that they can get the full story rather than just a biased one. If a journalist only presents one side of the story each and every time, readers might become suspicious of the journalist's motives. A journalist also needs to be able to be in the right place at the right time. Perhaps this is more of an instinct than a skill.

Examiner: What are the advantages and disadvantages of working as a journalist?

Candidate: One of the advantages, I think, is that you are able to directly influence what people think. It's a great responsibility. Another advantage is that journalists usually need to travel, so if you like visiting new places, journalism is a good career choice. A third thing is that journalists have the opportunity to meet a wide variety of people – not just famous people, but ordinary citizens. This can help them to get a wider perspective on society and on how decisions from above can affect the people below.

[The examiner decides to move on to another sub-topic]

Examiner: Let's talk about the role of the press. What responsibilities does a newspaper have to its readers?

Candidate: In my opinion, the primary responsibility is to be truthful. Newspapers

should also make sure to distinguish between facts and opinions. As I mentioned before, they should look at stories from different perspectives. Part of this is the responsibility to ensure that journalists ask searching questions when they interview people. They also have the responsibility of getting news to people in a timely manner. News is not really news if it is late!

Examiner: What effects can newspapers have on society?

Candidate: As I said before, newspapers and journalists have the opportunity to change and shape people's opinions and attitudes, so they can clearly have a great effect on society. They can warn people of problems. They can reassure people that a problem has been successfully dealt with. They can also influence which products people buy or which services they use by printing positive review of them. They can give people new ideas. For instance an article about a nice beach in Thailand might inspire some people to take a holiday there.

Examiner: Do you think there should be any restrictions on the press?

Candidate: Definitely. The press should be punished when it publishes lies. The press should also be prevented from publishing too many details about crimes – particularly details that could help the criminal or future criminals to escape justice. The press should also be prevented from publishing certain state secrets. The problem is that it is often difficult to decide which secrets and details are OK to release and which are not.

Examiner: Thank you very much. That is the end of the speaking test.

Interpreting the Band Scores

You cannot 'pass' or 'fail' IELTS. Candidates are given a score which indicates their English level. Universities and other institutions set the minimum scores they will accept for various courses (or, usually for General Training candidates, for immigration). So, if a candidate is applying to take particular course at a particular university and is told that the requirement is 6.5, anything less means a failure to get a place on that course. The candidate did not fail IELTS.

Scores in all four modules (listening, reading, writing and speaking) are given as half-bands and as whole bands, meaning that you can achieve 5.5, 6.5, 7.5, etc. However, in the speaking and writing modules, scores for each criteria are only

given as whole bands. Then they are averaged. The averaging works slightly in favour of candidates, since an average score of .25 rounds up to .5 and an average score of .75 rounds up to the next whole number. In other words,

Fluency and Coherence 6
Lexical Resource 7
Grammatical Range and Accuracy 6
Pronunciation 6

gives an average of 6.25 which is rounded up to 6.5 and

Fluency and Coherence 7
Lexical Resource 7
Grammatical Range and Accuracy 6
Pronunciation 7

gives an average of 6.75 which is rounded up to 7.

These are the four criteria for the IELTS Speaking Module, as published by the test creators and administrators. Examiners have slightly different criteria, but for the purposes of scoring they are identical in meaning.

Band 9 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction. Any hesitation is content related rather than to find words or grammar. Speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features. Develops topics fully and appropriately.

Lexical Resource

Uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics. Uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately. Produces consistently accurate structures apart from ‘slips’ characteristic of native speaker speech.

Pronunciation

Uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety. Sustains flexible use of features throughout. Is effortless to understand.

Band 8 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction. Hesitation is usually content related and only rarely to search for language. Develops topics coherently and appropriately.

Lexical Resource

Uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning. Uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully with occasional inaccuracies. Uses paraphrase effectively as required.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Uses a wide range of structures flexibly. Produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriacies or basic non-systematic errors.

Pronunciation

Uses a wide range of pronunciation features. Sustains flexible use of features, with only
occasional lapses. Is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility.

Band 7 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence. Uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility. May demonstrate

language related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction.

Lexical Resource

Uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics. Uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation with some inappropriate choices.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Uses a range of complex sentences with some flexibility. Frequently produces error-free sentences, though grammatical mistakes persist.

Pronunciation

Shows all the positive features of Band 6 and
some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8.

Band 6 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation. Uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately.

Lexical Resource

Has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies. Generally paraphrases successfully.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility. May make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems.

Pronunciation

Uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed Control. Shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained. Can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times.

Band 5 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going. May overuse certain connectives and discourse markers. Produces simple speech fluently but more complex communication causes fluency problems.

Lexical Resource

Manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility. Attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy. Uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems.

Pronunciation

Shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6.

Band 4 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly with frequent repetition and self-correction. Links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence.

Lexical Resource

Is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice. Rarely attempts paraphrase.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare. Errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding.

Pronunciation

Uses a limited range of pronunciation features. Attempts to control features but lapses are frequent.
Mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener.

Band 3 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Speaks with long pauses. Has limited ability to link simple sentences. Gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message.

Lexical Resource

Uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information. Has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances. Makes numerous errors except in memorised expressions.

Pronunciation

Shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4.

Band 2 Descriptors

Fluency and Coherence

Pauses lengthily before most words. Little communication possible.

Lexical Resource

Only uses isolated words or memorised utterances.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Cannot produce basic sentence forms.

Pronunciation

Speech is often unintelligible.

Band 1 Descriptors

No communication possible. No rateable language.

Band 0 – Does not attend.

General Band Descriptors

Aside from the more detailed band descriptors shown above, the more general band descriptors are still used to give an indication of a candidate's overall speaking ability, though only for 'whole' bands – not 'half' bands.

Band 9 – Expert User

A candidate scores Band 9 for the speaking module if the English they produce is basically perfect. The candidate's grammar and vocabulary are at educated native speaker level. The candidate is able to express his/her ideas in depth, extremely clearly, accurately and fluently, using the widest possible range of vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Band 8 – Very Good User

A candidate scores Band 8 for the speaking module if he/she speaks fluently and

coherently, using a very wide range of vocabulary and grammar accurately. Answers are clearly developed appropriately and the candidate makes very few mistakes with grammar and vocabulary, even when using complex language. The student is able to express his/her ideas in depth.

Band 7 – Good User

A candidate scores Band 7 for the speaking module if he/she produces developed answers to the questions in all parts of the module with ease and without losing coherence. The candidate makes occasional mistakes, particularly with complex language. The candidate is able to express his/her ideas clearly and fluently, using a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. The candidate's lexical resource includes less common and idiomatic items.

Band 6 – Competent User

A candidate scores Band 6 for the speaking module if the English he/she produces is clearly sufficient to talk about the topics in all parts of the module in full and at length. The candidate makes some mistakes, particularly with complex language. The student should be able to express his/her ideas reasonably clearly, using a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Band 5 – Modest User

A candidate scores Band 5 for the speaking module if the English he/she produces is sufficient to talk about most topics, but with limited lexical and grammatical flexibility. The spoken English contains many mistakes. The candidate's fluency and ability to be understood vary considerably and the candidate lacks the vocabulary to develop answers beyond overall meaning.

Band 4 – Limited User

A candidate scores Band 4 for the writing module if he/she has problems expressing more than basic meaning. The student's spoken English may often be hard to understand, particularly when discussing unfamiliar topics. This may be due to a limited vocabulary, poor grammar, or poor pronunciation. The student is rarely able (or unable) to communicate using complex grammatical structures. The student may not have a problem with familiar topics, but unfamiliar ones present problems because the student lacks the necessary vocabulary.

Band 3 – Extremely Limited User

A candidate scores Band 3 for the speaking module if he/she can only able to produce a limited amount of spoken English. The student will probably only be able to express basic meaning. The student's spoken English will probably be hard to understand, or even impossible to understand, possibly because of a limited vocabulary, poor grammar, or poor pronunciation.

Band 2 – Intermittent User

A candidate scores Band 2 for the speaking module if he/she can barely communicate with the examiner. Band 2 candidates are only able to produce a very limited amount of original spoken English and cannot usually make sentences. The student will probably not be able to answer questions using more than very basic vocabulary and phrases. The student may even have great problems understanding the questions in the speaking module.

Band 1 – Non User

A candidate scores Band 1 for the speaking module if he/she only says a few words of original spoken English and cannot communicate with the examiner.

Band 0 – Did not attempt the test

A candidate scores Band 0 for the speaking module if he/she does not attend for any reason.

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The Assessment Criteria

Each candidate is assessed by the examiner in four linguistic areas:
Fluency and Coherence (which are dealt with separately below)
Lexical Resource (i.e. Vocabulary)
Grammatical Range and Accuracy
Pronunciation

Fluency

Fluency refers to how well the candidate's speech flows, the level of continuity, the speech rate, and whether the candidate is able to achieve fluency without much effort. Is the candidate pausing? If so, how often and for what reasons? Native speakers often pause for effect or to stress a particular point. Do pausing and repetition cause the speech to become difficult to understand? How quickly is the student speaking? Does the speech rate vary according to the importance of what the candidate wishes to express?

Problems with fluency

1. Pausing too often

Pausing can be a good thing. It can give the speaker time to consider their next words. It can give the listener time to consider what the speaker is saying. However, many candidates are guilty of pausing too often. Often, this is because they are nervous or because they need to recall simple vocabulary. Particularly poor candidates pause every few words, or even in the middle of words. This even happens when the candidates are discussing very familiar topics, such as their families, hobbies and jobs. Your speech should be fairly fluent (smooth) and pauses should usually be between sentences or clauses.

2. Repetition

Candidates often appear to stumble through sentences, saying a few words then repeating those same words with an additional few words tagged on the end. The next sentence is sometimes simply a rewording of the first. An example would be, "My family … family … my family has three persons … people … three people. There are … are … three people … persons … there are three people in my … family." In addition to sounding poor, the student is wasting an enormous amount of valuable examination time where they could be developing answers.

3. Self-correction

Many candidates are more worried about their accuracy than their fluency. This is understandable, but IELTS candidates should be informed that, whilst both accuracy and fluency are obviously important, a certain lack of accuracy is tolerable, even at the higher band levels. However, a lack of fluency is not tolerable to the same extent. Self-correction does show the examiner that you are

aware of having made a mistake, and may be a good idea when the mistake is very obvious or intrusive, i.e. makes the candidate difficult to understand or changes the meaning of what the candidate says. However, if you continually correct yourself, it breaks up fluency. In extreme cases the examiner might forget the beginning of the sentence before you get to the end of it! And so might you!

4. Speaking too quickly

Some candidates confuse fluency and speed. They think they are the same thing. The result is that they speak too fast (possibly faster than most native English speakers!). This can cause two problems. First, the examiner may not have time to understand what the candidate is saying – particularly when the candidate makes grammatical errors, uses inappropriate vocabulary, and/or has problems with pronunciation. The second problem is that the examiner may ask why the candidate is speaking so quickly. Candidates often do this to impress people, even though their actual ability is quite poor.

5. Short answers

In the IELTS speaking module, an examiner can only give candidates good scores for fluency if those candidates demonstrate that they can speak fluently for a reasonable length of time. In other words, saying one or two very short sentences fluently is not enough. The examiner wants to assess a candidate whilst he/she is talking for a longer period of time. Hence, many examiners are trained to pay special attention to fluency in Part 2, when candidates are assessed on their ability to produce a longer stretch of English.

Coherence

Coherence refers to whether the examiner can follow what the candidate is saying. Is it easy to understand what the candidate wishes to express? Are the candidate's thoughts expressed in a logical manner? Does the candidate use a variety of connectives, conjunctions, and discourse markers to do this? An important aspect of coherence which some candidates overlook is whether what the candidate says actually answers the question that the examiner has asked.

Problems with coherence

1. Not answering the question

Listen carefully to the question. Your response should address the question, not the general topic. A simple example is “What do you study?” “I study at Bangkok University.” Of course, the situation is even worse when the candidate’s answer is not even related to the topic! Another way in which candidates do not answer questions is when they are asked about people generally and respond with an answer about themselves – or vice versa, e.g. “Do young Chinese people like to play football?” “I like to play football.”

2. Illogical answers

Candidates very often indicate that they have memorized answers or simply not considered their responses carefully enough through illogical answers. Here’s an example. In part one the examiner could ask, “What do you do in your free time?” The candidate may answer, “I go window shopping and surf the Internet.” Then the examiner might ask, “Why do you like window shopping?” The same candidate may say, “I have too much homework and never have any free time to go window shopping.” In the second answer, the candidate has contradicted the information they gave in the first answer! The answers indicate that the candidate does not really know what he/she is saying. Often, answers are made illogical because the candidates incorrectly add or omit negatives (see the first example below).

3. Illogical sentence order

Remember that logically ordering sentences also helps the examiner understand your exact meaning. It also shows that you have given consideration to your answers before coming to the test – in other words, it shows that you are well-prepared!

Here is an example of illogically ordered sentences. Change the order to a more suitable one.

“My mother is a doctor. My father is an engineer. He likes football. She likes tennis. She works in a hospital. He watches football on TV.”

4. Lack of connectives (linking words)

Some candidates overuse basic connectives (linking words) such as ‘and’, ‘so’, ‘but’, ‘because’, and ‘for example’. A list of alternative connectives is included

later in this book. Use them. Many candidates also use ‘although … but’ in one sentence. This is not done in English. The use of connectives makes speech more interesting to listen to and helps the listener to follow what we say.

Lexical resource (Vocabulary)

Vocabulary should be relevant and appropriate. Does the candidate use a variety of words correctly? Does the candidate often repeat the same words in answer to different questions on different topics? Can the candidate distinguish slight variations in meanings between words? In most languages, words with similar meanings are used in different ways. For example, we ‘go to a party’, ‘visit a castle’ and ‘attend a meeting’. Can the candidate distinguish between verbs (to be in a danger), nouns (a danger), adjectives (dangerous) and adverbs (dangerously), or does the candidate always use the same form? Can the candidate get around a gap in vocabulary by using other words (circumlocution)? Use of idiomatic English and proverbs is desirable for a high vocabulary score, but they should be used in context and not sound contrived or memorised.

Problems with vocabulary

1. Overuse of certain words

Many candidates overuse certain words and phrases, in particular connectives such as ‘and’, ‘so’, and ‘but’ and discourse markers such as ‘right’, ‘of course’, and ‘as [you] know’. Overuse of vocabulary also extends to words such as ‘like’. Even an average candidate should be able to replace ‘like’ with other suitable words such as ‘love’ and ‘enjoy’.

2. Misuse of certain words

The misuse of words is another problem. ‘Of course’ is often used by native speakers prior to stating something that is generally known or accepted. A 25 year-old woman who says, “Of course, I am married,” is using the phrase inappropriately as it is certainly possible for a woman of that age to be single. Many candidates say things like “absorbed in her kindness and reliability,” “enlarge your eyesight,” “taste the experience,” “touch new things,” and “touch the culture,” which sound very poetic but sound nonsensical in everyday spoken English.

3. Distinguishing between different forms of words

Be sure to differentiate between nouns (n), adjectives (adj), adverbs (adv), verbs (v), and past participles (pp). Use them in the right situations! Here are a few examples.

accountant (n - person), accountancy / accounting (n – job/subject), account (v/n).
interest (n/v), interested (pp), interesting (adj), interestingly (adv).
musician (n), music (n), musical (adj), musically (adv).
fashion (n), fashionable (adj), fashionably (adv).
culture (n), cultural (adj), culturally (adv).
freedom (n), free (adj/v), freely (adv).
exhaust (v), exhausted (adj/pp).
preserve (v), preservation (n).
nutrition (n), nutritious (adj).

4. Not being specific

Many candidates are not specific enough. One candidate told me, “A girl died at a school sometime from something.” Which girl? Which school? When? How did she die? Failure to give specific examples clearly tells the examiner that your ability to give examples and construct arguments in English is limited, probably because of your lack of vocabulary. In IELTS, suggesting to the examiner that your English is limited is one of the worst things you can do!

5. Undeveloped answers

After answering the question, develop your answer by adding a little more relevant information. “Do you enjoy swimming in your free time?” “Yes, I do. I have loved it ever since I was a child. I go swimming twice a week with my wife and daughter. We go to the swimming pool at the hotel where my wife works, because it is cleaner and less crowded. Aside from swimming, I also enjoy playing basketball and table tennis.” When developing answers, be careful not to go off the topic. However, remember that you can develop your answers in particular ways that might lead the examiner to ask you a particular question, especially in part 3. Regardless of how you develop your answers, always make sure that the examiner can follow what you are saying and is not confused.
6. Inability to discuss a range of topics

Many candidates are able to make ‘small talk’ in English, but are unable to discuss a range of issues and topics. Remember, IELTS is a test designed to see not only if candidates can function socially in English but also to test whether they can function in an academic (or working) environment in English. If you are planning on studying for an MBA in Australia, for example, you will be required to participate in discussions, as well as write essays on, topics such as management psychology and financial management, not on how much you like football or food. Your fellow students will certainly make ‘small talk’ when they first meet you (rather like in part one of the speaking module), but this will rapidly move on to other, more complex, topics such as how best to improve the environment, how to raise living standards in poor countries and marketing techniques used by large corporations. These are the kinds of things that educated people frequently discuss and you should be able to present a point of view and be able to support it (rather like in part three of the speaking module and in IELTS Writing Task Two).

7. Referencing (Paraphrasing)

The published band descriptors mention ‘paraphrasing’ in the criteria for lexical resource. This refers to the use of words such as ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’, ‘they’, ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘these’ and ‘those’ instead of nouns. Many candidates have problems with these words, particularly mixing ‘he’ and ‘she’ and using singular references instead of plural ones (and vice versa), usually because they are not distinguished from each other in the candidates' native languages.

Grammatical range and accuracy

Grammatical range refers to whether the candidate uses a range of appropriate tenses and other grammatical structures to express his or her thoughts. Does the candidate possess a knowledge of how to form different tenses and structures in English? Can the candidate effectively implant these tenses and structures into his or her use of language? The examiner will be listening for the use of clauses (subordinate, relative) in complex sentences.

Grammatical accuracy refers to the number of mistakes the candidate makes. Are the mistakes systematic and/or unsystematic? A systematic error is when the student makes the same mistake again and again. Unsystematic errors are occasional ‘random’ mistakes. Are the mistakes that the candidate makes intrusive and/or non-intrusive? Intrusive mistakes are those which affect the meaning of the

sentence or speech whereas non-intrusive ones do not. Does the candidate make errors when using simple and/or complex structures?

Problems with grammatical range and accuracy

1. Lack of range

Many candidates are guilty of not using a range of tenses and grammatical structures. This often relates to a lack of developed answers rather than a lack of knowledge of grammatical structures. Some candidates are under the impression that if they simply answer the questions correctly, they will get a high band score. This impression is incorrect and misses the whole point of the examination, which is to assess the candidate's level of English and ability to express him/herself in English. Candidates should take every opportunity to use various tenses and structures, rather than repeating the same structures again and again in different answers.

The criteria refer to 'simple' and 'complex' sentence structures. In both the IELTS speaking and writing modules, 'simple' structures are those that use a single structure in a single sentence, e.g. 'She likes dogs', 'I went shopping yesterday' and 'They will visit the zoo tomorrow'.

Complex structures are those that use more than one structure in a single sentence or that use clauses in sentences. This can be done in different ways, for example by creating
a) conditionals – 'If I won a million dollars, I would buy a big house.'
b) clauses (using 'that', 'which, 'where', 'when' and 'who') – 'She is the girl who won a million dollars' or 'That is the hotel where we stayed on holiday last year'.
c) sentences that show two actions happening at the same time – 'I watched TV whilst my husband was cooking dinner.'

2. Too many basic mistakes

Try not to make many basic grammar mistakes. The candidate's aim in the speaking module is to demonstrate that they speak English well. The examiner will not be impressed if you say things like, "My father like football," and "There is three computer in my office." You are almost certain to make grammatical mistakes when you use more complex English, but mistakes from the first lesson of

a standard English textbook are hard for the examiner to forgive. Another fairly basic thing that candidates often get wrong is the use of ‘very’. Candidates often say “I very like football” rather than “I like football very much.”

3. Misusing pronouns

Possessive pronouns and personal pronouns are another potential problem area.

Personal pronoun – possessive pronoun
I – my
you – your
he – his
she – her
it – its
we – our
they – their

4. Misusing or omitting prepositions

Remember to use prepositions correctly and notice that certain words are followed by certain prepositions in particular situations. Here are a few examples.

listen to someone / something
a song / film / book by someone
pay attention to someone / something
depend on something / someone
similar to something / someone
good / bad at something
go somewhere on business / to study
apply for a job

5. Word order

Word order can change the meaning of what you say, especially when you also make a grammatical mistake in the same sentence. Study the following pairs of sentences and notice how they express completely different meanings!

I like nearly all the subjects I study at school. (I don’t like all the subjects, but I

only dislike one or two.)
I nearly like all the subjects I study at school. (A strange expression that a native speaker would probably not use. However, the meaning suggested is that the speaker doesn't like any of the subjects, but doesn't really dislike them either.)

I hardly study. (I study very little.)
I study hard. (I study a lot.)

I use a computer almost every day. (I use a computer on (perhaps) six out of seven days a week.)
I almost use a computer every day. (Another strange expression that a native speaker would probably not use. However, the meaning suggested is that the speaker doesn't use a computer at all, but nearly uses one every day.)

I like computers very much. (I like using computers, I think they are good or useful.)
I am very like computers. (Grammatically incorrect, but seems to mean 'I am similar to a computer'.)

6. Verb + 'ing' or infinitive

Some verbs are followed by an 'ing' form if the next word is a verb, whereas others are followed by an infinitive, either with or without 'to'. Here are some common examples.

Verb + 'ing' – admit, avoid, deny, enjoy, finish, imagine, (don't) mind, feel like.
Verb + infinitive – decide, expect, forget, hope, manage, promise, refuse, seem, want.
Note that after some verbs, e.g. expect, forget, and hope, you can use the 'ing' form with or without 'that' - "I hope (that) studying in Britain will …"
Verb + infinitive without 'to' – make (= force), let (= allow). Modal verbs (can, could, would, might, may) are also followed by the infinitive without 'to'.
Verb + 'ing' form or infinitive – like, love, dislike, hate, prefer.

Sometimes the meaning of the verb changes according to whether you use the 'ing' form or the infinitive.
I remembered to pick up my keys before leaving the house. (= I did not forget)
I remember picking up my keys before leaving the house. (= I remember this action)

7. Uncountable nouns

Uncountable nouns are not normally used with ‘a/an’. If a verb follows, use the singular form – “The information was useful”, “This bread tastes horrible”. Here is a list of the most common uncountable nouns.

information, advice, knowledge, news, housework, homework, money, hair (lots, e.g. on your head), music, equipment, traffic, furniture, travel, luggage, weather, accommodation, rice, bread, food, people (plural of person), milk, tea, beer, water, paper, research, progress, work, cloth, silk, cotton, leather, energy, oil, coal, metal (a quantity of, not types of)

Pronunciation

This criteria is reasonably clear in its requirements. A candidate who speaks clearly and enunciates words will score highly in this area, whereas a mumbling one will get a low score. Higher than average pronunciation scores (6+) also take into consideration the ability of the candidate to include stress patterns in his/her English words and sentences.

A candidate with Band 4 pronunciation will be fairly clear, but is not generally able to produce stress and intonation or enunciate differences in vowel sounds. A candidate with Band 6 pronunciation is easily understood, enunciates fairly clearly and has some stress and intonation. A candidate with Band 8 pronunciation may not be perfect, but is close to educated native speaker level. Notice that the pronunciation criteria do not mention accent – that is because your accent doesn’t matter as long as you can be clearly understood.

Common pronunciation problems

1. Mispronunciation

Sometimes mispronunciation can change the meaning of the word and therefore confuse the listener. Here are some examples of this:

acknowledge – knowledge
angry – agree
apartment – department

example – sample
fingers – figures
he's – his
house – horse
invite – invent
meal – mail
population – pollution
poor – pure
pot – port
selling – sailing
serving – surfing
ship – sheep
soup – soap
trip – tip
washing – watching

2. Vowel sounds

Candidates often do not distinguish between different vowel sounds. Pay particular attention to long and short vowel sounds. Some candidates, for example, pronounce the ‘a’ in ‘tasty’ the same way as in ‘cat’. A similar mistake occurs with ‘also’. The letter 'r' after a vowel often elongates the vowel. If you do not do this, the word ‘surf’ becomes ‘suff’, and ‘learn’ becomes ‘len’. Check the list of pronunciation mistakes mentioned above.

3. Stress and intonation

Use stress to help convey exact meaning. The stress placed on words in sentences can depend upon the speaker or upon the question being answered. ‘Did you stay in different hotels?’ ‘We both stayed at that hotel.’ ‘Which hotel did you stay at?’ ‘We both stayed at that hotel.’ ‘Did you camp there?’ ‘No, we both stayed at that hotel.’

English is a very melodic language and a good student can be expected to be able to vary their voice, intonation, and stress. All these also make your speech much more pleasant to listen to!
In words of two or more syllables, candidates often put stress on all parts of the word equally or on the wrong syllable(s).
‘Vegetable’ and ‘comfortable’ each have three syllables with the stress on the first

one, i.e. veg-ta-ble, comf-ta-ble, not four with equal stress - ve-ge-ta-bles, com-fort-a-ble.

Note where the stress falls in the following words and also note how the stress can change according to whether the word is a noun, verb, etc. Here are some examples.

vegetable – vegetation
competitor – competition
product – producer
photograph – photographer
economist - economical

4. Adding, dropping and changing sounds

Be careful to pronounce the whole word if required. Some candidates pronounce ‘collect’ as ‘klekt’, ‘also’ as ‘or-so’, and ‘temperature’ as ‘tempratch’. On the other hand, do not add sounds, particularly at the ends of words, e.g. ‘clothes’ – ‘cloths-is’. This is particularly important with ‘er’ sounds as they often make jobs from nouns or verbs, e.g. reports – reporters, drives – drivers.

‘Th’ is one of the most difficult sounds for non-native speakers to get right in English. Do your best to show the examiner your proficiency by saying it correctly and not defaulting to ‘s’, ‘d’, ‘t’, and ‘z’ sounds. See ‘Test Preparation’ for more advice about this.

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Test Preparation

Here are some ideas on how to prepare for the speaking module of the IELTS test. Remember that most candidates perform worse on the ‘active’ parts of the test (speaking and writing) and so should focus on using English actively as much as possible.

Practice speaking with a partner or as part of a small group. Speaking with native speakers is obviously advantageous, but may not be possible. Try to find people who have a similar level of English. If your English is much better than the others’, you will not learn from them and they may get disheartened. If your

English is worse, you will remain passive and may disrupt the flow of the conversation by interrupting and asking for words or translations. Discuss a wide range of topics, not just work, study, family, hobbies, and your home town. You cannot predict exactly which topics you will get in the test, so you must be ready for anything reasonable.

Read newspapers and magazines which have articles about a variety of topics, particularly social issues and recent developments, which are often asked about in part three of the speaking module and task two of the writing module. Of course, you use the Internet to access newspapers, magazines and articles online.

Use recordings. (i) Listen to recordings and copy not only the words that are spoken, but also the intonation and stress patterns used by the speakers. If you have two recorders, you can use the second tape recorder to record your pronunciation and compare it to the original. It doesn't matter if the only tapes you have use basic English. Getting the vowel sounds correct and producing good stress and intonation causes problems for many students, even when they discuss familiar things. Again, recordings are easily available on the Internet.

(ii) You can also record conversations you have with your partner(s). Doing this is useful because you can find and correct your mistakes later. This is much better than disrupting the flow of the conversation by doing it during the conversation. You can repeat the conversations after you have corrected your mistakes.

Watch English TV channels or English language films. You may find the English to be too fast, especially with films. However, you will get used to how English really sounds. With DVD's, downloads or streaming, you can go back and listen again if you wish, and you can often see the subtitles. Many students find that films are too long and require too much concentration, so they prefer to watch shorter TV shows.

Get on the Internet. As well as articles and recordings, you can find English language chat rooms, where you can discuss the topics you need to prepare for the IELTS test. There are some IELTS related websites which provide useful information and even a forum for candidates to chat and exchange experiences.

Practice writing essays. At first, write in your own time to get used to it, but as you get closer to your test date, do so in the time limit you will have to work under during the actual test. Compare your essays with those by other people. Correct

mistakes in them and advise each other on layout, content, and cohesion. Writing your thoughts down will also help you prepare for the speaking module, particularly part three, since many of the part three questions are on the same topics as the Writing Task 2 essay questions.

Keep a vocabulary notebook. Organise the vocabulary by topic and include both the translation into your native language and the correct pronunciation. You can also include phrases, prepositions, and collocations (= words that often go together) under each entry in your notebook.

Become confident when you use English. This should be your aim, because when you are confident that your English is good, you will spend less time worrying about it and more time relaxing and giving the examiner a reasonable and coherent answer. Examiners are trained to help students relax, but in the end it is up to you. Of course, you will be more confident if you have prepared and practised thoroughly.

Frequently asked questions

Can I make notes during the speaking test?
You can take notes only during Part 2 of the speaking test when you are preparing your speech. Remember that students are not permitted to take notes away after any part of the test.

Are all examiners trained in the same way?
Yes. This is necessary to ensure that students receive fair scores. Examiners are constantly assessed to ensure that they are giving scores to the required standard and conducting the test in the manner prescribed by the test creators. Becoming an examiner requires a teaching qualification and several years of teaching experience. Examiners must also pass a training course.

How fast do examiners speak during the speaking module?
At about the same speed as a native speaker English teacher during a class.

How should I begin and end the interview, i.e. the speaking test?
At the beginning, simply greet the examiner with “Hello”, “Good morning” or “Good afternoon”. The examiner will guide you through the test. At the end simply say “Thank you. Good-bye.” Then leave the room. In particular, avoid poetic phrases such as ‘It has been a great pleasure and honour to have such a wonderful

and lovely discussion with you.'

Does the length of my answer in Part 2 affect my score?
As long as you speak for at least one minute, you will not be penalised. However, candidates who speak well for closer to two minutes can expect to be rewarded more than candidates who just exceed one minute. Before you speak, the examiner will tell you that you have one to two minutes to speak, so that is how long you should aim to speak for. If you try to speak for more than two minutes, the examiner will interrupt you and stop you, since that is the maximum time allocated. Candidates are not penalised if they do not finish their speeches within two minutes.

My friend told me that the examiner only asked her about two topics in Part 1. Is this possible?
Yes, if the candidate gives very long answers or if the examiner makes a mistake with the timing of Part 1. In neither case is the candidate's band score affected.

Are body language and eye contact important during the test?
No. Examiners are trained to ignore body language and eye contact, since they often have a cultural basis and do not reflect spoken English ability. Remember that the interview is recorded and that any examiner listening to the recording (for example if a candidate asks for his/her score to be checked) will not be able to see the candidate's body language or level of eye contact.

Can I ask the examiner questions during the test to get a real conversation going between us?
Theoretically, candidates can ask examiners anything they like, but the examiner will probably not answer or at least not answer in more than a few words as it wastes time. Examiners will certainly answer questions which ask him/her to repeat or rephrase questions. In part one, the examiner cannot change the wording of the questions in any way, so only ask the examiner to repeat them. However, in part three, the examiner can change the question wording, so asking the examiner to rephrase might be preferable. Do not ask the examiner questions like "Do you know …?" or "Have you heard of …?" as these waste time and do not contribute to your score.

Will the examiner speak more slowly if I ask him/her and will this affect my score?
You can ask the examiner to speak more slowly and it will not directly affect your

score. However, if the examiner is speaking very slowly, it means that there is less time for you to answer questions and show how good your English is.

Can I use my own watch to time my speech during Part 2?
Yes. It might be useful so that you know when you have spoken for more than one minute. However, it could distract you from your speech. I wouldn't recommend using a watch during the whole of the test as it is distracting both for you and for the examiner.

What clothes should I wear to the examination?
Wear clean clothes that you feel comfortable in. The examiners (and your score) will not be influenced by your appearance, but you will perform better if you feel that you are tidy and reasonably dressed.

What is the most difficult part of the IELTS test?
Different candidates have different strengths and weaknesses, but generally students do not do as well on the "active" parts of the test (speaking and writing) compared to the "passive" parts of the test (reading and listening). Within the speaking module, most candidates report that they find part three the most difficult, which is not surprising.

Should I take an IELTS preparation course before taking the test?
An IELTS preparation course at a good school with teachers who are truly informed about IELTS will provide you with the information and skills to make the most of your English during the test. This can certainly help improve your band score, usually by one band. However, an IELTS course is not a substitute for a general English course. If you do not have a reasonable knowledge of English when you begin the course, the IELTS course will be virtually useless to you.

How can I decide if a school is good or not before I enrol?
Find out something about the teachers and their experience. A teacher who is not a native speaker should have already taken the test and received at least a band 7.5. If they cannot get a good score, how can they teach you to do it? A good school will also send its teachers to take the test so that they know exactly how it is conducted. Alternatively, the school may be an IELTS test centre. Do not focus too much on whether a school is a new one or an old one. Be very cautious of schools that "guarantee" you a certain score. Also be very cautious about schools that claim that most (all?) of their candidates receive good band scores, especially Band 6.5 or above.

Is it a good idea to memorise some answers from books before the test?
Memorising answers for the speaking test is not a recommended strategy, because the examiner may notice this and not give you any credit for the answer. Remember that examiners also have access to IELTS preparation materials, so noticing a copied answer is not too difficult.

How many words should I know for the IELTS speaking test?
It is impossible to say exactly, but I know many candidates who achieved good scores (6+) even though their vocabularies were not extensive. This is because they could use basic vocabulary accurately and flexibly. Other candidates claim to have larger vocabularies, but as they are unable to use them, they do not achieve the good scores that they wish to attain.

Will my accent and/or style of English (British, Australian, American) influence my score in the speaking test?
Your accent will only affect your score if it makes part of your speech difficult to understand. It does not matter at all if you use British, Australian or American English. Remember that the examiners come from all of these countries and many others.

Does it matter if I express an opinion that the examiner does not agree with?
It does not matter whether you agree or disagree with the examiner's personal viewpoint. The important things to remember are i) express yourself clearly, ii) give your viewpoint some support, and iii) be ready to defend your viewpoint. These three things are very important skills for university level studies and IELTS is basically a test of academic English skills. The examiner cannot reduce your score because he/she disagrees with it – nor can the examiner increase your score because he/she agrees with it.

Are short, simple sentences with no mistakes better than complex sentences with mistakes?
As long as the complex sentences are clear in their meaning and the mistakes are small, they are better than always using short, simple ones. Look at the band descriptors. They clearly state that, in order to get a good grammar score, candidates must use a range of complex structures. During the test, you will have plenty of opportunity to demonstrate to the examiner that you can use short, simple sentences with high accuracy. Take the opportunity to use complex structures as often as possible.

The examiner will assess my English in the speaking module on the basis of the criteria. What if I am very good at one (e.g. vocabulary), but very poor at another (e.g. grammar)?
In such a case, your score will be somewhere between the high point and the low point, but you cannot predict exactly where. Consequently the only strategy is to aim to be as good in each area as possible. This is the only way to be sure of maximising your score.

In the speaking test, the more the candidate talks, the less the examiner will ask, right?
Yes, because there is a time limit. However, that may not a desirable situation for the student for several reasons. Firstly, the examiner wants to know if you can talk about a variety of things, not just one or two. Secondly, if you are just talking and not actually answering the question, your score will be poor. Thirdly, you may simply be repeating yourself, demonstrating poor English language ability. Fourthly, the examiner may lose track of what you are saying, again resulting in a poor score.

What should I do if the examiner asks me about a topic I am not familiar with?
Look at the band descriptors for lexical resource printed in this book. A candidate is expected to be able to deal with unfamiliar topics. If you cannot do so, your score will be low. If you meet with a question you honestly cannot formulate an answer for, all you can do is say what you can to try to provide an answer to the question, then wait for the next one and hope that you are better able to answer that one.

Use of English

Tenses

In this section, we will briefly look at the basic tenses which even an average student can be expected to use, i.e. the present simple, the present continuous, the future using ‘be going to’, the future using ‘will’, the past simple, and the present perfect. Of course, the correct use of further tenses such as the past perfect and past continuous can only improve your score, but let’s just take a brief look at the use of the basic ones. Then, we will look at the use of modals, passive tenses, and conditionals.

Present simple
This tense is used for regular activities or things which are generally true, e.g. “I go swimming every Saturday”, “She likes dogs more than cats.” Many students use “will” in these situations, which is incorrect! Use the present simple with words that say how often something happens (e.g. rarely, sometimes, often, always).

Present continuous
This can be used in three main ways. Firstly, it is used to talk about something that is happening now, e.g. “I can’t talk to you now, I’m going to work” or “I’m considering changing my job.” Secondly, it is used to describe trends, e.g. “Africa’s population is increasing rapidly” and “Things are becoming more and more expensive”. Thirdly, it can be used to talk about the future, e.g. “I’m travelling to Shanghai on business next week.” Remember that the present continuous is used with action verbs. It is not used with verbs like believe, want, like, prefer, and hate (‘I believe in God’ not ‘I am believing in God’).

Future using ‘will’ and using ‘(be) going to’
‘Will’ is often used with words like ‘probably’ and ‘maybe’, i.e. in situations where future actions are not certain. ‘(Be) going to’ suggests certainty. Native speakers sometimes appear to use these tenses interchangeably, which is often OK. Both imply a certain degree of certainty, so be careful how you use them. “I will go to Australia” suggests it is quite certain that you will go. “I’m going to go to Australia” suggests that plans have already been made. Many students use ‘will’ instead of the present simple. “What do you do in your free time?” “I will play football.” In these cases, ‘will’ is always incorrect and in fact displays a shocking lack of knowledge of English grammar.

Past simple
This tense is used for events which happened in the past and have been completed, e.g. “I went to Hainan last year” or “Yesterday, I left my books in the library.” If you are discussing two events which both happened in the past, you may need to use the past continuous (“The phone rang whilst I was cooking dinner”) or the past perfect (“I had just arrived at the office, when my boss called me”). The first example shows you how to talk about an event which happens during another event. The second example shows you how to talk about an event which happens after another one. Don’t forget that many common verbs (e.g. be, have, go) are irregular!

Present perfect

This is usually used to talk about a situation which began in the past and is still true. It may or may not continue to be true in the future, e.g. “The weather has been very hot recently.” We can also use it to talk about our life experiences, e.g. “I have been to the States, but I have never been to Africa,” or “I have heard of that film, but never seen it.”

Which tense? Some advice!
A useful thing to remember when using English – not just during the IELTS test – is that you often the same tense in your answer as the questioner used in their question. “When did you leave?” “I left at seven o’clock.” “When will you leave?” “I will leave at seven o’clock.”

Exercise. Use the verbs in brackets in their correct form to complete the sentences.

1. He (play) basketball every weekend.
2. In Britain, couples usually (marry) on Saturdays or Sundays.
3. Maybe I (play) football tomorrow.
4. I (want) an ice-cream now!
5. Yesterday, I (go) to see a film.
6. I (read) a good book at the moment.
7. I (meet) him five years ago.
8. I (go) to Australia for sure.
9. I (probably eat) at home this evening.
10. I (never go) to Canada.
11. I (love) it here at the beach.
12. I (wash) my clothes when the doorbell (ring).
13. I (live) in Beijing for three years now.
14. I (see) that film twice.
15. I (work) for IBM several years ago.

Answers (Look at these after you have done the exercise, not before!)
1. plays
2. marry
3. will play
4. want
5. went
6. am reading
7. met

8. am going to go
9. will probably eat
10. have never been
11. love
12a. was washing
12b. rang
13. have lived
14. have seen
15. worked

Modal verbs

Most students do not use modal verbs at all or use them in a very limited manner. When discussing the future, students tend to use 'will', which indicates a high degree of certainty. Try using modal verbs to demonstrate to the examiner that you know the differences in meaning. 'Should' and 'ought to' indicate that something is a good idea or preferable. 'Could' indicates possibility. 'Might' and 'may' indicate less of a possibility. 'Would' indicates possibility or intention. Use a modal + have + past participle to indicate what could have been done in the past to prevent a situation now, e.g. "We could have explored the use of solar power earlier to prevent high pollution levels in the world today."

Exercise. Use the modals mentioned above to say what could happen if …

a man hits another man in a restaurant. (hit back, throw out, break a table, arrest)
a person wins a lot of money. (spend, buy a house, waste, donate, take a holiday)
there is a car accident. (kill, injure, break, cause a traffic jam, wait for the police)
someone forgets their bag when they get out of a taxi. (lose, give back, return)
a person's mobile phone rings during a Beijing opera. (get angry, ask to leave)
someone goes abroad to study or work. (become lonely, make a lot of money)

Passive tenses

Recently, many IELTS textbooks, websites, and teachers have been recommending that students use passive tenses as much as possible. This has resulted in many students using these tenses incorrectly, e.g. "I am being studied / I am worked at …" Using passive tenses is good because it shows you can use a range of tenses, but you must use them correctly. "The effects of an increased number of cars in Beijing is being studied at Tsinghua University." "Many things were done to reduce traffic accidents last year."

Conditionals
The first conditional is used for possible future actions which depend on the result of another future action. The conditions will probably be met. Use ‘if’ + present simple + will. “If I see him at the meeting, I will give him your best regards.”
The second conditional is also used for possible future actions which depend on the result of another future action. However, the conditions will probably not be met. Use ‘if’ + past simple + would + base form of verb. “If I saw him at the meeting, I would give him your best regards.”
The second conditional can also be used for imaginary present actions where the conditions are not actually being met. “If you worked less, you would be more relaxed.” In other words, you are working too much and are not relaxed.
The third conditional is used for past actions which did not happen because the conditions were not met. Use ‘if’ + past perfect + would have + past participle. “If you had arrived late, we would have missed the train.”
The zero conditional is used for actions which are always true if the conditions are met. Use ‘if’ + present simple + present simple. “If you heat water enough, it boils.”

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Connectives (Linking Words)

As with tenses, an average to good student will be expected to demonstrate an ability to use these words and phrases both regularly and correctly. The following is a list of connectives and linking phrases, according to function, which students can include in their sentences or use to link them.
Notice the verb patterns used with different connectives!

Giving examples
Most students can use for example. You can demonstrate a little variety by also using for instance and such as. The phrase in particular is usually used to give an example that is distinctive in some way. The word namely is usually used when listing (naming) a given number of examples. ‘The United Kingdom is made up of four countries, namely England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.’

Summary
Most students use in conclusion to end or summarise an argument. You can also use in summary and to conclude. In spoken English, you can also use to sum up and in short, though these are probably a little colloquial for the English required

in the IELTS writing module.

Preference
Rather than / instead of
We decided to fly rather than take the train.
She chose the red dress instead of the blue one her friend recommended.

Alternatives
Alternatively / on the other hand
The Xidan bookstore has a range of English books. On the other hand, you could try the Wangfujing bookstore.
The Xidan bookstore has a range of English books. Alternatively, try the Wangfujing Bookstore.

Time and Sequence
When students relate events that occur over a period of time, they can make what they say clearer by including phrases such as the following ones in their answers.

Before / prior to/ until / after / after that / afterwards / then
It is necessary to prepare well before (prior to) taking the IELTS examination.
Before (Prior to) taking the IELTS examination, it is necessary to prepare well.
Don't worry. We won't start until you are ready.
We went to the bar after dinner. After that, we went to a disco.
After eating dinner, we went to a bar. Afterwards (Then), we went to a disco.

Eventually / finally / in the end (These are used when something happens after a lot of time and/or many problems)
After driving for two hours and getting lost, we eventually (finally) found the hotel.
In the end, we found the hotel, after driving for two hours and getting lost twice.

As soon as (Two actions immediately follow each other)
I'll tell him as soon as I see him. As soon as I see him, I'll tell him.

When / once (two actions follow each other, but the time between them is not specific)
When / Once I arrive, I'll phone you. I'll phone you when / once I arrive.

While (whilst, when, as) / just as / meanwhile / throughout / during (Things

happen at the same time)
I told him while (whilst / when / as) we were having dinner. (Notice we use the past tense for the shorter action and the past continuous for the longer one!)
I saw him just as I was coming out of the office. (Two short actions)
The children cleaned the room. Meanwhile, I cooked dinner.
She cried throughout the film. (From the beginning to the end)
She cried during the film. (It is not clear exactly when or how long)
(Notice that 'throughout' and 'during' are followed by nouns.)

First(ly), second(ly), … / for one thing … (and) for another / (and) besides / (and) anyway (Giving a sequence of reasons)
"Why can't I watch TV, Dad?"
(i) "First(ly), (because) you have to do your homework and second(ly) (because) you have been watching it for two hours already."
(ii) For one thing, you have to do your homework and for another you have been watching it for two hours already.
(iii) Because you have to do your homework and besides (anyway), you have been watching it for two hours already. (Informal!)

Addition (Giving extra information or reasons)
In addition (to) / (but) also / as well (as) / not only (but also) / what's more
In addition to being fun, playing football also keeps you fit.
Playing football is fun, as well as keeping you fit.
Not only is playing football fun, but it also keeps you fit.
Playing football is fun and it keeps you fit as well.
Playing football is fun. What's more, it keeps you fit.

Furthermore / Besides / Moreover
I think the death penalty is morally wrong. Furthermore (Besides / Moreover), there is no evidence that it is effective in discouraging crime.

Contrast
Although / though / even though / in spite of (the fact that) / despite (the fact that)
Although / Though / Even though they had only nine players, they (still) won the football match.
They (still) won the football match although / though / even though they had only nine players.
They (still) won the football match in spite of / despite having only nine players.
They (still) won the football match in spite of the fact that / despite the fact that

they had only nine players.

The word still is used to emphasise the contrast. It is usually stressed in spoken English.

However / on the other hand
I don't like playing sports. However (On the other hand), I enjoy watching them.

Whereas / on the other hand
My father plays chess whereas my mother prefers Go.
My father plays chess. On the other hand, my mother prefers Go.

Nonetheless / yet
I don't believe that your idea will work. Nonetheless, we should give it a try.
I don't believe that your idea will work, yet we should give it a try. (formal)

Compare / contrast
Britain is a small country compared with (in comparison with) China.
Comparing Britain with China, we can see that Britain is much smaller.
The value of Asian stocks fell today. In contrast, European stocks rose.
The value of Asian stocks fell today, contrasting with European stocks, which rose.

Similarities
Similar to / both / neither
I am similar to my father in many ways. For example, we both play the piano and love Japanese food. Neither of us enjoys playing tennis.

Condition
provided (that) / providing (that) / so long as / as long as
I'll buy the computer provided (that) / providing (that) / so long as / as long as you include the software for free.

'If' conditionals
Notice the different grammar structures used with 'if' conditionals according to the situation.

If you heat (present tense) water enough, it boils. (present tense) (If you do something, there is always a result.)

If you lend (present tense) me the money, I will repay (future tense with 'will') you on Monday. (You do something, there will probably be a result.)
If I had (past tense) a million dollars, I would travel (would + infinitive without 'to') round the world. (Something unlikely happens, a likely result would be …)
If it hadn't been (past perfect) foggy, we wouldn't have crashed. (would + present perfect) (Something would or would not have happened in the past if the conditions had been different.)

Unless/ whether … or not / otherwise
I won't continue working here unless you give me a pay rise.
I'm going to the party whether you like it or not.
We had to run to the station, otherwise we would have missed the train.

Depend(ing) on / It depends
We'll go on either Saturday or Sunday, depending on the weather forecast.
We'll go on either Saturday or Sunday. It depends on the weather forecast.
We'll go on either Saturday or Sunday. It depends. (A reason may not be given.)

In case
I'll take an umbrella in case it rains. (not in case it will rain!)

Reason
Because / since / as
Because / Since / As I am Brazilian and I love sport, I am very pleased that Rio will host the Olympics in 2016.
I am very pleased that Rio will host the Olympics in 2016 because / since / as I am Brazilian and I love sport.

Because of / owing to / due to
The factory had to close because of / owing to / due to a lack of orders for its products. (Note that due to and owing to are more formal and more common in written English.)

Purpose
The purpose of / so (that) / in order to / to*
The purpose of going to the doctor was to have a check-up. (formal)
I went to the doctor so that he could give me a check-up.
I went to the doctor in order to have a check-up. (formal)
I went to the doctor to have a check-up.

*The use of to in this way is called the ‘infinitive of purpose’.

Consequence
The goods had to be sent at once. As a result / Therefore / Consequently, there was no time to check them properly.
There is a chance that my English will not be good enough. In that case, I will take an intensive course before trying again.

Exceptions
Except
Everyone was at the party except her husband.
Banks here are open every day except on Sundays and public holidays.

Except (for) / apart from
Everyone was at the party except for (apart from) her husband. (Except for and apart from are always followed by nouns or noun phrases.)

Practice your linking words!

1. I’ll phone you when / while / just I get home.
2. You can go out immediately / as soon as / afterwards you have finished your homework.
3. The phone rang as soon as / while / just I was cooking dinner.
4. It began raining afterwards / while / just as I left the house.
5. That restaurant is very expensive. Too / Besides / After that the service is poor.

6. We got stuck in a traffic jam and got lost, but however / after / eventually we arrived.
7. The horse won the race despite / although / as it started badly.
8. I don’t like him. However / Despite / Moreover he is a good employee.
9. The company still lost money despite / even though / however the change in management.
10. The boy is good at music whereas / however / as the girl is good at science.

11. Although / However / Despite staying in the office all night, we didn’t finish the project.
12. Although / However / Despite we stayed in the office all night, we didn’t finish the project.

13. The house is beautiful. Whereas / However / In addition it has it's own swimming pool.
14. My father owns a shop. He also / in addition / too has a restaurant.
15. This computer is expensive. On the other hand / Furthermore / Such as it can do many things.

16. He didn't pass the test in spite of / whereas / even though his hard work.
17. I understood the foreign teacher, in spite of / whereas / even though she spoke quickly.
18. Tim and Tom both / neither / all passed their driving tests on the same day.
19. Unless / Whilst / When we leave now, we will miss half of the show.
20. I'll lend you my car whereas / unless / as long as you return it tomorrow.

21. We go to school every day except / apart / except from Sundays and holidays.
22. Neither / Either / Neither of Tim nor Tom did their homework.
23. Neither / Either / Neither of them did their homework.
24. We must go now unless / otherwise / as long as we will miss the train.
25. He missed work because / because of / owing to he was ill.

26. He missed work because / because of / owing illness.
27. The aircraft took off late due to / because / as engine problems.
28. The aircraft took off late due to / because of / as it had engine problems.
29. I am taking the course so / in order to / because of improve my English.
30. I am taking the course so / in order to / because of I can improve my English.

31. My wife cleaned the floor. Meanwhile / While / During I washed the dishes.
32. Afterwards / After / After that playing chess, we went to a bar.
33. I really like playing volleyball as well as / too / what's more watching it.
34. I really like playing volleyball as well as / too / what's more.
35. I enjoy eating out moreover / besides / furthermore cooking for myself at home.

36. She is the best qualified for the job. Moreover / As well / Even she has the right personality.
37. They lost even though / despite / besides they had better players.
38. They lost even though / despite / besides having better players.
39. He's enthusiastic about football, meanwhile / just as / yet he plays the game very badly.
40. I really like her neither / as well as / too.

41. He trained hard. As a result / Because of / In that case he won.
42. He trained hard the purpose to / in order to / so that to win.
43. There was a delay consequently / as a result of / because technical problems.
44. I can confirm this when / if / just as I have checked with my boss.
45. I cannot confirm this meanwhile / when / until I have checked with my boss.

Answers (Look at these after you have done the exercise, not before!)

1. when
2. as soon as
3. while
4. just as
5. Besides
6. eventually
7. although
8. However
9. despite
10. whereas
11. Despite
12. Although
13. In addition
14. also
15. On the other hand

16. in spite of
17. even though
18. both
19. unless
20. as long as
21. except
22. Neither
23. Neither of
24. otherwise
25. because
26. because of
27. due to
28. as
29. in order to

30. so

31. Meanwhile
32. After
33 well as
34. too
35. besides
36. Moreover
37. even though
38. despite
39. yet
40. too
41. As a result
42. in order to
43. as a result of
44. when
45. until

Adverbs of Frequency and Degree

These words are very useful, because things rarely happen all the time or never. You need to be able to express exactly how often and how much.

Adverbs of frequency

Adverbs of frequency indicate ‘how often’. Be careful about using the word always. ‘I always go swimming’ suggests that you swim all the time, every day. One alternative is to add a time phrase. Say ‘I go swimming whenever I have time’ or ‘I go swimming every Saturday morning’. Another is to say almost always.

Used in an answer, have ever has no meaning. Say either ‘I have (been/heard/etc.)’ in positive sentences or ‘I have never (been/heard/etc.)’ in negative ones.

Use the following words to indicate how often you do something: (almost) always, frequently, (quite) often, regularly, sometimes, occasionally, seldom, hardly ever, (very) rarely.

Exercise
How often do you …? (Answer using complete sentences)

eat Japanese food?
drink beer?
watch films?
meet your friends?
read books?
travel to other cities?
wear jeans?
use a computer?
chat online?
listen to music?
write letters?
play basketball?

Adverbs of frequency go before the main verb, except when the main verb is 'to be', in which case they go after it. 'Sometimes', 'occasionally' and 'often' can also go at the beginning or end of a sentence.

Adverbs of degree

Adverbs of degree indicate 'how much'. Use the following words to indicate how good, big, interesting or expensive something is: incredibly, extremely, very, pretty, quite, fairly, somewhat. The words a little, a bit and slightly are often used in negative situations, e.g. The dress was a little small. The restaurant was a bit expensive. It rained slightly.

Exercise. Answer the following questions using full sentences.

How was the film?
What's your boy-/girlfriend (husband/wife) like?
What's that book like?
What's the weather like in your city?
How was your trip to [London, New York, Dubai, Shanghai]?
Does [Chinese, Indian, Italian, Thai] food taste good?

Expressing probability

The ability to express probability is essential for communication. Use the following words and phrases to express your exact meaning. Remember that in spoken English, these words and phrases are often stressed.

Certainly
Foreigners in Beijing who speak Chinese clearly / obviously have an advantage over those who don't.
Madonna is undoubtedly / definitely one of the most famous female singers of our time.
Your wife will certainly be angry if you get drunk tonight.
I'm certain / sure I'll get the job.
I'll get the job for sure.
Without a doubt I'll get the job. I'll get the job without a doubt.

Very likely
I'll almost certainly buy a computer next year.
I'm almost certain I'll buy a computer next year.

Likely
There's a good chance I'll see my parents this Spring Festival.
Chances are I'll see my parents this Spring Festival.
I'll probably go to Thailand for my summer holiday.

Possibly
I may / might / could (possibly) go to Hong Kong next month.
Perhaps we'll eat at the Italian restaurant.
I think he's 26, but I'm not sure.
Maybe / Perhaps he's not here because he's sick.

Unlikely
I probably won't have enough money to buy a car until I'm 30.
I doubt very much (that) I'll have enough money to buy a car until I'm 30.
There's not much chance (that) I'll have enough money to buy a car until I'm 30.

Certainly not
I'm sure I will not get married in the near future.
I will certainly / definitely not get married in the near future.

Exercise. In your opinion, how probable is it that …? (Remember to answer using full sentences!)

aliens will land a spaceship in your home town in the next few days?
the Olympic Games will be held in Britain in 2024?
your country's economy will grow by 10% next year?
you will go to bed before midnight tonight?
you will get married next year?

Use of Impersonal Pronouns in Place of Nouns

Repetitious use of words is undesirable and therefore students should avoid saying things like, "I like swimming because swimming is very healthy and swimming is fun. I go swimming with my family. We go swimming near our home." This would be better said in the following manner. "I like swimming because it is a very healthy thing to do and it is also fun. I go swimming with my family at a pool near our home." Notice that the last two sentences have been combined. The word 'swimming' has been repeated in the second sentence only to make it clear that the speaker is still talking about the same topic.

Clauses

There are several types of clauses. A clause is a part of a sentence that usually contains a subject and a verb. The clause is usually connected to the rest of the sentence using a conjunction. A clause cannot be a complete sentence on its own.

The words which, where, who, whose, when, and that are conjunctions that can be useful for linking a clause to the main part of the sentence.

'Which' is used for objects. "I picked up the bag which (that) was nearest to me."

'Where' is used for places. "This is the hotel where I stayed on my last visit."

'Who' is used for people. "He is the man who (that) stole the bicycle."

'Whose' is used for things that belong to people. "Mary is the lady whose home we stayed at last summer." 'Whose' can also be used with people to describe relationships. "That's the woman whose boyfriend I stole last year."

‘When’ is used with time clauses. “October 1 is when Chinese people celebrate their National Day.”

‘That’ can be used instead of the conjunctions ‘which’, ‘where’, and ‘who’, but be careful using ‘that’ with places! Usually, a preposition is required, e.g. “This is the hotel that I stayed at on my last visit.”

However, the information following ‘that’ must be essential to the sentence, e.g. ‘He is the man that stole the bicycle.” ‘That’ can replace ‘who’ because the information following must be given so that the sentence has meaning. (For grammar lovers, this is called a ‘defining relative clause’!)

Look at this sentence. ‘Mrs. Bolton, who I met last week, is head of the company.’ In this sentence, ‘who’ cannot be replaced with ‘that’ because the fact that I met Mrs. Bolton last week is not required for you to understand the main idea of the sentence. (For grammar lovers, this is called a ‘non-defining relative clause’!)

Exercise

Choose the correct conjunction(s) to make relative clauses.

This is the computer I bought last week.
John is one of the people I am working with on the project.
She must be the lady bag I took by mistake.
The hotel we stayed was wonderful.
Is that the man lost his passport?
14th February is many people celebrate Valentine’s Day.
I was watching TV I heard a loud noise.
Here’s the cake I baked earlier.
There’s the girl I met at the bar last night.
That’s the park I used to play as a child.

Answers (Look at these after you have done the exercise, not before!)

1. which/that
2. who/that
3. whose
4. where
5. who/that

6. when
7. when
8. which/that
9. who/that
10. where

Expressing Opinions

Giving your opinion

(Personally,) I think / don't think cars are a good way to travel in cities.
It might / may be better to invest more money in education.
It might / may be better if we invested more money in education.
In my opinion, we need to change the way we think about this issue.
As far as I'm concerned, they can do what they like – it's their country.
I reckon (that) the situation will improve in the next few weeks. (informal)
I doubt (that) the situation will improve in the next few weeks. (= I don't believe)
I agree entirely with what you say.
I disagree strongly with what you say.

Giving the opinion of others

"According to the latest government figures, inflation is rising." (Note that we cannot say 'according to me'.)
"It is said that he killed his wife." People think this, but it is not proven.
"It is /has been reported that there has been an accident at a factory in London." (used with the media)
"Many (most, a lot of, a few) young people often (sometimes, frequently) say / think / believe / agree / suggest that something should be done about this issue."

Comparatives and Superlatives

The IELTS test requires students to be able to compare and contrast. Using such basic comparative phrases as 'bigger than', 'much smaller than', 'about the same price as', and 'a little more expensive than' will indicate to the examiner that you are able to compare and contrast.

Remember that shorter adjectives tend to be made into comparatives and superlatives in the following manner: small, smaller, the smallest; big, bigger, the

biggest; funny, funnier, the funniest.
Longer adjectives usually become comparatives and superlatives thus: beautiful, more beautiful, the most beautiful; modern, more modern, the most modern.

'More and more' means 'increasingly' and can be used with longer adjectives which use 'more' and 'most' to create comparatives and superlatives. You cannot say 'more and more bigger' or 'more and more large' ('bigger and bigger', 'larger and larger' are correct). You can say 'more and more beautiful' and 'more and more comfortable'.

Exercise. Compare and contrast the following pairs. In particular, include comparatives and connectives as often as possible.

your country – USA
food from your country – English food
men – women
your country now – your country 20 years ago
table tennis – football
clothes today – clothes 100 years ago
hotels – homes
farmers – managers
buses – trains
going to a bar – going to a cafe
teachers – police officers
a festival in your culture – Christmas
cities – the countryside
paying by credit card – paying in cash
mice – tigers
English – your language
children – adults
computer games – board games

Idiomatic English

Finally, let's take a look at an aspect of English that usually interests foreign students very much and is mentioned in the lexical resource (vocabulary) band descriptors for bands 7, 8 and 9 – idiomatic English. In this section, I would like to introduce candidates to idioms that can be used when discussing a variety of different topics. It is not worth spending time learning idioms that apply to only

one or two topics, because the chances of you being asked about those topics is so low. Do not use these idioms in the writing module as they are quite informal.

"When you first talked about it, I got the wrong end of the stick." (= misunderstood)
"When I received the news, I felt down in the dumps." (= very unhappy/depressed)
"This problem is a pain in the neck." (= very difficult – used with people and things)
"If we don't make a move now we'll be late." (= go/leave)
"She has a heart of gold." (= very generous/kind)
"I was on cloud nine on my birthday." (= very happy)
"I found myself in a tight corner." (= in a difficult situation)
"People need to sit up and take notice of the situation." (= face a problem/situation)
"We must get our act together." (= get organised)
"It was a turning point in my life." (= a time when things changed a lot)
"The concert was out of this world." (= fantastic/amazing/superb)
"Most people like to put their feet up after a long day at work." (= relax)

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First Topics in Part 1 of the Speaking Module

As mentioned earlier, there are five topics that examiners always begin with in part 1 of the speaking module. The five topics are:

Your home
Your hometown
Where you live now
Your work OR
Your studies

Your home – This topic is about the building that you live in – usually a house, flat or dormitory. If you have more than one home (e.g. you are a student living away from home) you can choose which home to discuss.

Your hometown – This topic is about the town or city where you grew up. If you grew up in more than one place (e.g. because your parents' work location

changed) you should choose the place that you feel had most impact on your childhood.

Where you live now – This topic is about the town or city where you are living at the moment. Students who are studying away from home should choose the place where they are studying.

Your work OR Your studies – The examiner will first ask you whether you work or are a student. Students with a part-time job should choose ‘studies’ and people who work, but study in the evenings or at weekends should choose ‘work’.

Of course, when you are choosing what to discuss, you may lie – but remember what you lied about, so that you don’t contradict yourself and make your answers confusing!

Your answers to these questions should be of a higher standard than for other topics. These topics are widely known to be in the test, so the examiner can reasonably expect you to have prepared for them more carefully than for other topics. A poor performance on these topics generally indicates to the examiner that you are going to find the rest of the test difficult.

Your Home

1. What kind of place do you live in – a house, a flat, or a dormitory?

House: detached, semi-detached, garden, garage, basement.
Apartment / Flat: block of flats (UK), apartment block (US), on the third floor, balcony, view from the balcony, stairs / lift.
Dormitory: on (a university) campus, with four other students.
Location: city centre, suburbs, outskirts, town, village.
You might have two homes if you work or study in another city.

2. Who do you live with?

Mention your relationship with the people you live with – family, friends, colleagues, classmates. Say whether you get on well with them and why or why not. Would you prefer to live alone or with other people?

3. Do you like living there?

You can talk about the noise level, whether you home is bright and spacious, what your neighbours are like and what the area is like. Are there plenty of facilities, green areas and transport connections?

4. What do you like about the rooms in your home?

Rooms: lounge / living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, study, games room, hall, converted loft (the space under the roof has been made into a room), laundry room.
Tell the examiner what rooms are in your home. Say what it is that you like about them. Perhaps you could mention one or two items of furniture from each, in order to demonstrate a wide vocabulary, e.g. “There is a large, soft, black sofa in the living room”. Use some adjectives to describe the rooms, e.g. dark, bright, noisy, quiet, big, small.

“My flat is on two floors. It is about 110 square metres in area. It occupies the top of a six-floor building in Chaoyang district. The lower floor has a large living room, kitchen, bathroom, hall, and small bedroom. I like the living room because it is spacious and stays bright all day. The kitchen is not very modern, but is good enough for me. The upper floor has the main bedroom, which is very spacious. The bathroom is small but has everything I need. There is also an outside balcony, which is great for parties! The flat is very bright, because it has windows on two sides. The area is usually quiet, but there has been some loud construction work going on in the neighbourhood recently so my flat can be quite a noisy place to live.”

5. How long have you lived there?

Use ‘for’ or ‘since’ in your answer.
“I have lived there for [period of time].”
“I have lived there since [month and/or year].”

6. What is the area like where you live?

You may have answered this question in response to question 3. If not, talk about facilities (shops, schools, restaurants, libraries, hospitals, museums and sports facilities), green areas (parks), decorative structures (e.g. fountains) and transportation (bus stops, railway/subway stations and roads).

7. Would you recommend this area as a place to live?

Remember to talk about the area, not your home! Your answer will be based on what you have said in response to question 6.

8. Do you think you will move anytime soon?

Your answer will not only depend on whether or not you like the area, but also on your future plans, particularly with regard to your work/studies. Remember that the question includes the word 'soon', so that should be your focus. However, you may talk about the more distant future if you develop your answer.

9. What kind of house or apartment would you like to have in the future?

Here, you can talk about your ideal home and whether you think you will manage to own it one day.

Your Hometown

1. Whereabouts did you grow up?

For Westerners, hometown refers to the place where you spent most of your time growing up. If you moved around a lot during your childhood, you could choose any place – the examiner doesn't know where your home town is!

2. How long have you lived there? (How long did you live there?)

Remember to use the correct tense in your answer. If you use the present perfect tense, say "I have lived there for/since …" If you use the past tense, say "I lived there for …" or "I lived there from … to …"

3. Do you still live there? (Does your family still live there?)

Develop your answer by saying why. The reason will probably be related to your (or your family's) work/studies.

4. Tell me about the town or city you come from.

Interesting sights – Give details about sights and tourism in your hometown. This question is excellent practice for making small talk with foreigners, as it is one of the first questions you will be asked by the new friends you meet abroad.

Transportation – Talk about the different types of transport that people use, both public and private (buses, trains, subway, light railway, taxis, bicycles, cars). How good is the public transport?

Industry – There are many types of industry in China, such as light industry, heavy industry, the IT industry, the clothing industry, and the chemical industry. Say what industries are located in or around your hometown and how important they are in the local and national economies.

Homes – What kind of homes do most people live in? Which parts of the city are the best areas to live in and why?

Facilities – Does your town or city have all the facilities it needs? Educational facilities include schools, libraries, museums, colleges and universities. Health facilities include hospitals and clinics. Recreational facilities include parks, zoos, sports facilities.

5. What kind of place is your hometown?

The focus of this question is a little different to that of question 4. Here, you should focus more on the feeling that people get from living in your hometown. Useful words include exciting, lively, boring, great, terrible, noisy and quiet.

6. What's the best thing about your hometown?

This could be something visible (a building or structure), something measurable (low crime rates or good levels of education), or something more abstract (friendly people or an international feel).

7. What's the most interesting part of your hometown?

Be careful when answering this question! This question differs from the previous one. Talk about an area of your hometown and what makes it special.

8. Is/Was your hometown a good place for young people?

Your answer will probably depend on the facilities there – particularly those related to education and recreation.

9. Has your hometown changed in recent years? / since you were a child?

Perhaps you are from one of China's dynamic cities where things seem to change incredibly quickly. Perhaps you are from a sleepy place where people still do things the way they have done for many years. Say what changes have taken place and whether they are generally for the better or not.

10. What changes would you like to make in your hometown?

Here's your chance to pretend to be the mayor of your hometown! Choose things that you are sure you have the vocabulary to talk about – you don't want to be struggling to find words half way through your answer! Say what the change would be, what the situation is now, what the situation should be, how you would make the change, and why you would make the change.

Where You Live Now

1. Which town or city do you live in now?

Answer directly and give a brief description of you town/city, including its location.

2. Do you like the town or city you are living in now?

Things to consider – level of educational facilities (high/low), sports facilities (many/few), polluting industries (many/few), public transport (good/poor), people (nice/unfriendly), green areas (many/few), pollution (high/low), traffic jams (many/few), buildings (beautiful/ugly), shopping facilities (many/few), streets (clean/dirty).

3. What do you like about your part of the town/city?

Answer in the same way as for question 2, but remember to only talk about your part of the tow/city, not the whole town/city. Focus on the good points in this

answer.

4. Are there any things you don't like about your area?

Now focus on the bad points.

5. How do you usually travel around this town/city?

Talk about whether you use public or private transport and how often. Is the transportation system good/expensive/quick/convenient?

6. Would you prefer to live in a larger or a smaller town/city?

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of this? Think about it from a personal standpoint, considering your future plans and wishes.

7. Do you think you will continue to live there for a long time?

This will most likely depend on your future work/study plans. If you decide that you need to leave, will you consider returning at some point in the future?

Your Work

1. What kind of work do you do?

When you say what you do, make sure that you know the correct name of your job or field of work! This may sound obvious, but many people say "I am account / economy" rather than "I am an accountant / economist."

2. What work do you do in your job?

Now is your chance to show off your vocabulary! However, be careful not to use uncommon or specialized terms. The examiner will almost certainly not be an expert in your field! Talk about your responsibilities at work.

3. How long have you been doing this work/job?

You may have answered this question already. Remember to use the present

perfect tense – “I have been doing this job for 5 years.” Say whether you wish to continue this job in the future (“I’m leaving next year. I will have been doing this job for six years then.”) or return to it after completing your studies abroad.

4. Why did you choose this kind of work?

Did you choose it? Sometimes, young people are “encouraged” to take up certain careers by members of their family. Did you choose this job because you had studied a certain subject at school/university? Perhaps you were offered the job by a friend. Have you always wanted to do this kind of job?

5. Where do you work?

Give the name of the company – even if it is in Your language – and develop your answer by giving the location of your workplace.

6. Do you think … is a good place to work?

Give your opinion of the company and the working conditions. Think about the offices where you work. Does the company offer certain benefits, such as free lunches?

7. What kind of training did you have to do for your job?

Think about your academic studies and any professional courses you have taken. When you joined the company, was there an orientation or did you have a mentor who showed you what to do?

8. Was it difficult to get this kind of job?

What was the selection procedure like? Were there many other candidates? Some companies ask potential employees to take psychological tests. Did you have to attend an interview or was a friend’s recommendation enough?

9. How do you feel about your job?

Almost everyone has problems at work. This does not mean that you do not like your job or that you want to change it. If you are satisfied, point out a couple of things that you would like to change, then stress your overall satisfaction with the

job. If you are not satisfied with your job, what are you going to do about it?

10. What is the most interesting thing about your job?

Focus on one thing only.

11. Do you meet interesting people in your job?

You might meet a lot of people, but are they interesting?

12. How do you and your colleagues help each other at work?

Do you work on projects together? Do you give each other advice? Do you go to meetings together because “two heads are better than one”?

13. Do you often get together with your colleagues after work?

It probably depends on your personality, the personalities of the people you work with, your other responsibilities (family, free time activities), whether you get on with your colleagues and how you feel at the end of the working day (tired or energetic?).

14. Would you like to change your job?

The question isn’t asking whether you plan to change your job soon. It is asking if you would be interested in doing something else at some time in the future.

15. What other jobs do you think you would enjoy?

Give one or two suggestions and say why you might like them. Would you have to undertake further studies or training before doing this job? How would they be different to your current job? How would your life change?

Your Studies

1. What subject are you studying?

When you say what you study, make sure that you know the correct name of your

subject! This may sound obvious, but many students say “I study account / economy” rather than “I study accounting / economics.” If you study at university, you have your main subject (major), but you take different courses, perhaps for a semester/term or for a year. If you are at secondary school, you study a range of subjects.

2. Do many people from your country choose this subject?

Why do/don’t people study it. Is it more to do with personal choice, or the choice of parents, or does it depend on the number of places available on courses.

3. Why did you choose this subject?

Was it your choice, your parents choice, a teacher’s recommendation, a friend’s recommendation or for some other reason?

4. How long have you been studying this subject?

Give your answer using ‘for’ or ‘since’. You can develop your answer by adding how long remains until you finish your course.

5. Which part of your studies do you find most interesting?

In your answer, refer only to one thing that you find interesting.

6. What is the most difficult part of your studies?

Again, only refer to one thing in your answer.

7. Have you always wanted to study this subject?

If you chose the subject, then say how long you have wanted to study it for. If the subject was chosen for you, perhaps you have never wanted to study it.

8. How do you think studying this subject will help you in the future?

If the subject is directly related the job you want to do, the answer is easy. If, however, the subject is not directly related to the job, then you might need to think more carefully. In Western countries, it is widely accepted that a university

education (regardless of subject) qualifies a person for a variety of jobs.

9. Where are you studying?

Describe the school, the facilities, the campus, and the buildings. Give its location. Is it a famous school/university? Large? Old? Have any famous people studied there?

10. Do you think it is a good place to study?

Consider the reputation, quality of the teaching staff, the campus and the facilities.

11. Why did you choose this college/school/university?

You may refer to the things you mentioned in answer to the previous question, though you may also talk about the selection process. University entrance scores – whatever you think of them – count for a lot in China!

12. What do you like about studying at this college/school/university?

With the previous question, you should talk about things you knew before you arrived at the school/university. With this question, you can also refer to things you have discovered since you began your studies there.

13. Is there anyone who helps you with your studies at school/university?

Consider the professors/teachers, your classmates, your friends and your family.

14. Do you often get together with your classmates after classes?

Say why (work or leisure?), where and how often.

15. What do you hope to do when you finish your studies?

Do you plan to find a job immediately or travel or do some volunteer work?

16. What kind of job do you want to do in the future?

This may not be the job you might get immediately after leaving school/university.

17. How easy will it be for you to get the kind of job you want?

This may depend on several factors, such as the general state of the economy, your contacts and the reputation of the school/university you have attended.

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Advertisements

1. Do you like advertisements?

Yes – provide information on products and services, provide breaks in films and programmes, colourful, funny.
No – persuasive rather than informative, misleading, encourage people to buy what they don't need or can't afford.

2. What kind of advertisements do you like most?

This question can be interpreted in two ways. The first way is to talk about different media (TV, newspapers, billboards). The second is talk about style (advertisements with children, animals, lots of information).

3. Do you prefer advertisements on TV or in magazines?

Say why. If you chose to talk about 'style' in answer to question 2, this gives you the chance to talk about different media.

4. Do advertisements ever influence your choice about what to buy?

You can almost certainly think of at least one example where it has – or at least started you thinking about buying something. Mention what kind of advertisement it was, how it influenced you and perhaps whether you are still happy you bought the product.

5. Do you think there are too many advertisements?

You can give a general 'yes' or 'no' answer and then expand it by saying whether you think there are too many of all advertisements or just certain kinds or just in

certain places.

6. What do you think is the purpose of advertising?

Generally, there are two reasons for advertising – information and persuasion. Do you think one is a more common reason than the other? You can develop your answer by saying whether you think the information is generally true or not and whether the persuasion aspect is effective or not.

Ages

1. When do people usually get married in your country?

Give a range. “People in China often marry when they are aged between 24 and 27.” Develop the answer to illustrate a trend. Are people getting married earlier or later than before? How about the trend in the future? Why is there such a trend?

2. When do people usually learn to drive in your country?

Do the same as with question 1.

“In Britain, most people learn to drive when they are between 18 and 21. Some really keen youngsters learn to drive when they are 17. At this age, you can get a provisional driving license. With this, I think you can only drive if there is a fully qualified driver in the front passenger seat. At the age of 18, you can get a full driving license.”

3. At what age(s) can people legally smoke, buy alcohol, and get married?

Don’t just give the ages in a list! “In Britain, people can legally smoke and get married when they are 16. However, they must wait another two years before they can buy alcohol.” The sentences are complex ones which are then linked using a connective. Notice that the speaker does not actually say how old you must be to buy alcohol in Britain, but the answer is perfectly clear. Develop the answer by saying if these ages are appropriate, in your opinion.

4. At what age do people usually retire from work?

First look at the legal retirement age and note any difference between that for men

and that for women. Develop the answer by considering if these ages are appropriate. Do some people prefer to retire earlier or later under certain circumstances?

5. What could you do when you were younger that you cannot do now?

A great opportunity to make a complex sentence using two tenses. “When I was younger, I could run a mile in five minutes, but now I’m out of shape, so it would take twice as long.”

6. How do you think your life will be different when you are retired?

This question is asking you to make a comparison. It is a little harder than you might expect most questions to be in part one. You can compare different aspects of your life, such as hobbies, likes and dislikes, and your daily routine.

Agriculture

1. What are the main agricultural products in your region (country)?

The main focus is on vocabulary, but don’t just list several products! Compare the amount of production, not by using figures but by using more general quantity words such as ‘some’ and ‘a lot of’. Develop your answer by noting any trends.
Vegetables: carrots, potatoes, peas, peppers, cabbages, cauliflowers, beans, turnips, tomatoes, eggplants.
Fruit: apples, oranges, watermelons, bananas, strawberries, peaches, mangoes, grapes, pineapples, lemons, cherries, pears, plums.
Meat: beef, pork, mutton, chicken, fish.
Grain / Cereals: wheat, millet, barley, maize (corn), rice, oats, .
Dairy products: milk, cheese, butter.

2. Do many people work on farms in your region (country)?

Here, you can also name some of the more usual or important farming jobs. Develop your answer by noting any trends, such as movement away from working on farms, and the reasons for such trends.
“In Britain, less than 2% of the population works in agriculture and this figure is dropping as farmers children often do not want to continue the family tradition of working on the land. One of the unusual jobs I have seen people do on farms is

sheep-shearing. It takes a lot of physical strength and skill to shear a sheep in less than a minute without cutting its skin! Surprisingly, the pay is not very good!"

3. Do students often work on farms during their holidays?

This is quite common in Europe and is a useful way for students to travel, earn some money, and get a little work experience. Of course, it is also fun to meet other young people. Give reasons why students in your country do (or do not do) this. What are the working conditions like? Is it worth it? Look at the question from another angle and say what students normally do during their holidays!

4. Is farm work well-paid in your region / country?

If you have developed your answer to question 2, you may already have answered this question! How does the pay for farm work compare with other occupations?

5. How important is farming in your region / country?

Does your government place great emphasis on farming? Why? The importance of farming may vary considerably from region to region.

Ambitions

1. What is your main ambition in life?

You can mention that you have many ambitions, but remember that the question asks about your main ambition! Explain what it is and how you can achieve it. Most people have ambitions related to their work (achieve a certain position, own their own company, make a lot of money), studies (get a certain qualification or level of knowledge about a subject or field), and personal lives (get married, have great children).

2. Do you think you will achieve your ambition?

If you developed your answer enough in answer to question 1, you should have already answered this! You can say that you do not think you'll achieve it – it's just a dream or wish!

3. Do you think that you are an ambitious person?

Why? Why not? Ask your friends what they think and include their opinions in your answer. “I don’t think that I am ambitious, but my friends disagree.” Are you overambitious?

4. Are your friends / family members ambitious?

Compare your friends and the different members of your family. Are people of similar ages, in similar situations, or from similar backgrounds often ambitious to the same degree?

5. Is it always good to be ambitious?

Discuss and compare the situations when this may be good or bad. Don’t forget to use connectives such as ‘on the other hand’ and ‘however’!
“It is a shame that if a person is ambitious nowadays, it often means that they are also selfish and even irresponsible. However, I think that ambition is basically a good thing. History shows that societies where people can be ambitious develop quickly and benefit the society as a whole, not only the ambitious individual.”

6. What do you see yourself doing in 5 / 10 / 20 years’ time?

Say what, then develop your answer by saying where, what your life might be like, how it may be better or worse, and what other changes may have occurred during that time.

Animals

1. Do you like animals?

This will probably depend on which kind of animal. Most people like certain animals, but dislike others.

2. Do you have a pet?

Why (not)? Which pet(s)? Have you had a pet in the past or would you like one in the future? If you have a pet, develop your answer by describing it in detail. If you

do not have a pet, why not invent one and talk about it?

3. What kinds of animals do people keep as pets where you live?

Name the most popular kinds of pets, then develop your answer by saying why they are popular (size, easy to care for, clean, quiet), How about in the past or in the future? Briefly mention some of the main advantages and disadvantages of keeping pets.
“Many people keep goldfish because they are pretty simple to look after. You just buy the food and put the recommended amount in the water each day. Still, most people hate cleaning out the fish tank.”

4. Are wild animals protected in your region / country?

Which animals and why? How are they protected? Is the protection effective? What more can be done? You may need to mention law enforcement, not law making.

5. Do you often visit zoos or wildlife parks?

If so, who do you go with? Mention age and relationship – “I go with my 12 year old daughter.” If not, why not? Maybe you don’t like the idea of zoos, or they are too expensive, or too far away. Develop your answer by briefly discussing the (dis)advantages of zoos and wildlife parks.

6. Are animals important in farming in your country?

How much do farmers rely on animals to help with farm work and how much do they use vehicles such as tractors? Which animals are used as sources of food?

Art

1. How do you feel about art?

It probably depends on what art you are looking at. It might depend on the form (painting, sculpture, photograph), the style (modern, old, colourful) or even on your own mood (happy, sad, excited).

2. What form of art do you like most?

Develop your answer by saying why you like it, where you can find this form of art and perhaps by naming one or two of your favourite artists. You could then go on to say whether there are any other forms of art that you like or dislike.

3. What form of art are you best at?

Plenty of people are quite good at drawing. Personally, I'm pretty good at taking photographs. Talk about what your subjects are, how often you create art and how long you have been doing this.

4. Did you learn any artistic activities when you were a child?

Most children have drawing and painting classes at school. If they show talent, they might have extra classes after school or at weekends. How good were you at art as a child? Better than me, I hope!

5. What (other) kinds of artistic activities do children learn in your country?

This gives you the opportunity to talk about any artistic activities that you haven't yet mentioned. Do all children learn them or just some? Why do they learn these artistic activities in particular?

6. Do you ever buy art?

You probably don't buy expensive pieces, but you probably do have a print that you have bought. How much did it cost? You can develop your answer by saying whether you plan to buy any art or whether people have given you art as a gift.

Bicycles

1. Are bicycles popular where you live?

Bicycles are generally suited to flat areas rather than hilly ones. Say when people use them and what kind of journeys they make.

2. Do you often ride a bicycle?
Answer this question in a similar way to question 1, but make your answer

personal, rather than talking about people generally.

3. When do you ride a bicycle?

You could answer this question in a few different ways. You could refer to the time of day that you usually ride a bicycle or you could refer to days when you use one.

4. Where do you ride a bicycle?

Do you ride near your home, from home to work/school, or do you ride further, perhaps into the countryside or to visit friends and relatives in other towns?
"I ride my bike to and from school each day. It takes about 15 minutes. At weekends, I go cycling with friends in the countryside and once a month, I cycle to my grandmother's home in the next village."

5. Would you say that bicycles are suitable for everyone?

Here, you might mention whether you think that bicycles are suitable for very young children or old people. Clearly, bicycles are not suitable for blind people, but what about deaf people?

6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of travelling by bicycle?

Advantages: causes no pollution, good exercise.
Disadvantages: weather problems (wind, rain, snow, icy roads), chances of being hit by a car or other vehicle, slow, get sweaty in hot weather, breathing pollution from cars and other vehicles.

Birds

1. Do you like birds?

Perhaps you like all kinds of birds. Perhaps you don't like them. Perhaps you only like some kinds. Name two or three kinds of birds that you like and/or dislike. For this question, you don't have to limit yourself to birds where you live, so feel free to mention penguins, swans and eagles.

2. Are there many birds where you live?

Try to find out the names of the most common two or three types of birds where you live. Common types of birds in Britain are pigeons, blackbirds, sparrows, finches, ducks and seagulls.

3. How do people in your country generally feel about birds?

“In Britain, most people like birds. In fact, many people feed them and even provide them with bird boxes to live in. Most people think birds are useful because they keep insect populations under control. However, farmers don’t like them because they eat a lot of seeds.”

4. Do people often keep birds in your country?

You may have answered this question already (see questions 2 and 3). Why do people keep them? As pets? For food? For sport? (Pigeon racing) Perhaps because they like their singing?

5. Do birds have any special meanings in your culture?

You may have answered this question already (see questions 2, 3 and 4). Simply name the birds and mention what they represent. Don’t forget to mention the mythical phoenix! Do people pay much attention to these special meanings nowadays?

6. Do you think people should try to protect birds?

If so, why and how? If not, why not?

Birthdays

1. Do you prefer to be with your family or with friends on your birthday?

Give your answer and say why. You can add what you do with your family/friends on your birthday.

2. What do children generally do on their birthdays in your country?

Do they have parties at home? Do they go for a special meal, perhaps at McDonald's?

3. Are birthdays important where you live?

Birthdays are pretty important to most people. Say why.

4. What is the most important age or birthday which is celebrated in your country?

Important birthdays in many Western cultures are 16, 18, 21 and then birthdays ending in a zero (30, 40, 50, 60, etc.). Say why the particular birthday is considered more important.

5. Do people in your family celebrate birthdays in different ways?

You may have answered this question if your answers to questions 1 and 2 were well-developed. Use comparisons and gives reasons for any differences.

6. What kind of presents do you get people for their birthdays?

Talk about gifts for family members and for friends or colleagues. How much do you spend? Where can you find the gifts? This question offers good opportunities to use adverbs of frequency, complex sentences, and connectives. "I usually buy something which is both inexpensive and practical for my colleagues. However, I like to splash out (= spend a lot of money) on gifts for my wife, in order to show her how much I love her. I often go shopping for gifts at Guo Mao which has a great selection of shops." Demonstrate your wide vocabulary by giving examples of gifts you buy.

7. What would you do with a birthday gift you didn't like?

An excellent chance to use a conditional sentence! "If I received a gift which I didn't like, such as a CD by an artist I hated, I would probably just bury it in my collection. I suppose I could give it to someone who liked that music, but what if the person who gave me the CD came to visit and said 'Play that CD I gave you for Christmas'?"

Books

1. How often do you read books?

Don’t only mention how often you read books, but how often you read different types of books. Remember to use connectives when doing this! Compare books you read now with those you read when you were younger. Why do (don’t) you often read?

2. Who is your favourite writer?

You may have mentioned this in answer to question 1. Add more information about why you particularly like them and perhaps something about their life. Remember that if someone is your favourite writer, you like several books by that person. The writer probably concentrates on a certain type of book, e.g. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is best known for the Sherlock Holmes detective stories, but he also wrote adventure stories, such as ‘The Lost World’.

3. When do you usually like to read?

You may have mentioned this in answer to question 1. Give reasons for your answer. “Many people like to read a newspaper or magazine when they have a short period of free time, such as when they are travelling on the subway or eating a snack. I also know many people who enjoy reading a book in bed before they go to sleep.”

4. Do you read more for pleasure or to get information?

You should have answered this question by now, either directly or indirectly. Compare yourself and other people you know. Don’t just say that you “can learn many things from books”. Say exactly what you can learn or have learnt. Remember that giving detail enables you to show the examiner your vocabulary.

5. Do you often buy books as gifts for family or friends?

What kind of books do you buy? Where do you buy them? Are they cheap or expensive? Do you only buy books in Your language or in other languages, too? Are the answers to these questions different for family and for friends? If you don’t buy books as gifts, what do you buy instead?

6. Would you like to write a book one day?

What kind of book would you write? Do think it would be difficult to write? How long might it take? Would you write it just for fun, to try to become famous, or to make some money?

Buildings

1. What kind of buildings do you like?

This is a great opportunity to use adjectives – tall, big, small, colourful, modern, old. You can talk about the types of buildings you like – libraries, shopping centres, houses, office buildings, theatres. You can use words to describe architecture if you know any.

2. What kind of buildings are there near your home?

You can describe them as with question 1. Focus on how the buildings are used (offices, housing, industry, recreation, public services).

3. What kind of buildings do you often go to?

This will depend on your daily routine, your work/studies and your free time activities. Talk about how often you go there, who with and why.

4. In your opinion, what makes a building beautiful?

You may have mentioned this in answer to question 1. Be as specific as you can, because different people have different ideas about what is beautiful.

5. In your opinion, what facilities should [name of building] have?

Consider the facilities that different kinds of buildings should have – hotels, libraries, universities, offices, shopping centres, fitness centres). This is another opportunity to use detailed vocabulary and perhaps even a few specialised words.

6. Are there many old buildings in your area?

Consider tourist sights like temples and palaces. Are there any old houses where

you live?

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Change

1. Do you like change?

It probably depends on what the change is! Think of one or two examples of change that you like and one or two examples of change that you don't like. Explain why you like or dislike them.

2. How has your life changed in recent years?

Most people will give examples of major change (which is fine) but you can also give examples of smaller changes – perhaps ones that were still significant for you, though thy might not appear so to others.

3. How do you think your life might change in the near future?

The question specifically asks about the 'near' future, so don't talk about changes more than a year away, unless they are connected to changes that you expect in the next year. Think about how the change will probably happen and what the consequences are likely to be.

4. Do you find it easy to make changes in your life?

This is probably related to your answer to question 1. Generally, changes that we expect and are happy with are easier to make than ones that are unexpected or considered undesirable.

5. How do other people help you with change?

Do they give you help and/or advice? Do you accept it? How does their help make the change easier (more difficult?) for you? Why do they help you? Do you help them in return? Would you like more (less?) help with change?

Cities

1. Do you (Have you ever) lived in a city?

Say a few sentences about the cities you have lived in. There's plenty to talk about – buildings, history, entertainment, people, transport and how long you lived there.

2. Do you like living (Would you like to live) in a city?

Most people have mixed feelings about living in cities. Mention some of the advantages and disadvantages. Your answer may also depend on your age, your family status, your job and your interests.

3. What facilities are there in cities?

Sport, entertainment, culture, education, health, parks, transport. A sentence or two about a few of these should provide a developed answer.

4. What is the transport like in cities?

As with question 2, there are likely to be good points and bad ones. Consider transport not just within the city, but also between the city and other places. Think about different forms of transport – both public and private. Are there any ways in which the transport could be improved?

5. What kinds of jobs do people do in cities?

This is a simple vocabulary question. Name some jobs and then add to your answer by saying which jobs are most common and which are rarer.

Clothes

Be careful to pronounce the word 'clothes' correctly, not as 'cloth-is' or 'clothes-is'.

1. How interested are people in clothes where you live?

Do people follow fashion carefully or do they just buy what they like or can

afford? Do people often read fashion magazines or follow what famous people wear or are they happy with a pair of jeans and a T-shirt?

2. Would you ever buy someone clothes as a present?

Common clothing items: skirts, shirts, sweaters, trousers, jackets, coats, dresses, suits, t-shirts, jeans, blouses.
Clothing accessories: belts, jewellery, shoes, boots, sports shoes, gloves, caps, hats, scarves, earmuffs, ties, sunglasses.

3. What kind of clothes do you like to wear?

Styles: modern, traditional, Western, formal, informal, casual, sports.
Patterns: plain, striped, flowery, multicoloured, patterned.

4. Do your friends wear the same kind of clothes as you?

Use the same vocabulary as for question 2, but also remember to use connectives to compare your clothes and the clothes your friends wear.

5. Do you think you will wear the same kind of clothes when you are older?

Again, mention styles, colours, patterns and perhaps also brands.

6. Is the brand of clothes important to you?

Which do you pay more attention to – the brand, the style, the price? Why do you pay particular attention to that? Does that influence where you go to buy clothes?

7. Do you wear a uniform to school/work?

You may need to use the verbs ‘must’, ‘have to’, and ‘should’ when saying what you wear to school or work.

Collecting

1. Have you ever collected anything?

Most people have at some time in their lives. If you collected something in the

past, but don’t now, say why you stopped.

2. Do any of your friends collect things?

Even if your friends don’t collect anything, you could just make something up to provide an answer to this question. The examiner doesn’t know your friends!

3. What things are popular to collect in your country?

Try not to repeat the things you mentioned in answer to questions 1 and 2. Take the opportunity to show the examiner your vocabulary. However, remember that the question specifically says ‘popular’!

4. How do people get things for their collections?

They buy them from specialist shops, markets or fairs (stamps, coins).
They might also buy online or at auctions (works of art, stamps).
They inherit them from family members or perhaps friends (stamp or coin collections).
They receive them as gifts for birthdays (dolls, badges).
They buy them on holiday (postcards, teaspoons).
They get them for free (beer mats, matchboxes).
They find them (fossils, insects).

5. Are there many magazines for people who enjoy collecting?

If you don’t know, take a look at the news stand next time you go to buy a newspaper! What kind of articles and advertisements do these magazines contain?

6. Why do you think, in general, people collect things?

To learn more about the world, e.g. by collecting stamps.
As an investment, e.g. by collecting works of art.
Family tradition – maybe their parents and grandparents collected something.
As a way of meeting people, e.g. through fairs and conventions.
Because they have a lot of free time – collecting can be time-consuming.
Simply out of personal interest.

Computers

1. How often do you use a computer?

The question asks ‘How often …’, so do not answer ‘Yes, …’ or ‘No, …’ You may need an adverb of frequency (often, sometimes, rarely) or a phrase such as ‘every day’, two or three times a week’, ‘twice a day’. Develop your answer by saying what you use computers for (sending emails, chatting online, producing documents and graphs) and where you use them (at home, at work, at an Internet café).

2. Which websites do you often visit on the Internet?

Most students answer this question by either naming a search engine (incorrect) or by naming a very large site with many links and functions (such as sina.com), which misses the point of the question. The question is designed to find out what you find interesting on the Internet.
“Every evening, I like to visit www.purple.com because I find it very relaxing to look at this colour on the screen for a few minutes before going to bed. The website is just a purple screen – there is nothing else there at all.”

3. In what ways do people use computers in your country?

Compare how other people use computers to how you use them yourself. Show the examiner your vocabulary by mentioning some special ways that computers are used, e.g. by the police to control traffic lights, by banks to keep track of accounts, and by scientists to record data from experiments.

4. How ‘computer literate’ are you?

The question asks ‘How …’, so do not answer ‘Yes, …’ or ‘No, …’ You need an adverb of degree (extremely, very, quite). Develop your answer by saying how you came to be computer literate or what you could do to improve your computer literacy.
“I’m pretty good at using computers, considering I have never actually taken a computer course. I’m lucky because I have a few friends who are very patient and explain to me how I can do the things I need to do with my computer. My job involves using a computer, but just for routine things, like creating documents.”

5. How much have computers changed your life?

The question asks ‘How much …’, so do not answer ‘Yes, …’ or ‘No, …’ You need an adverb of degree (completely, a little, not very much). Develop your answer by saying in exactly which ways computers have directly and indirectly influenced your life, particularly your daily routine. Compare ‘before’ and ‘after’.

Cooking

1. Are you good at cooking?

Be honest! Use adverbs of degree – quite good, really bad. Mention some of the things you cook and how (when) you learnt to cook. Perhaps you are good at cooking some things but not so good at others. Does cooking take up a lot of you time or do you cook simpler, faster things?

2. Who usually does the cooking in your home?

Use adverbs of frequency to express how often each member of the household cooks. What do they usually cook?

3. How often do you cook?

You may have answered this question in response to question 1. Develop your answer by saying whether you would like to cook more/less often and what you do when you don’t cook (someone else cooks, go to a restaurant).

4. Have you ever thought about learning to cook?

This question is possible if you provided a negative answer to question 1. Talk about why you might learn to cook, where you could learn (or who from).

5. Do children in your country learn to cook at school?

In Britain, the vast majority of children do learn to cook at school. Do schools have the facilities? Is cooking considered important? Should it be? This could lead to you expressing your opinion on whether schools should focus on academic subjects or also cover practical ones.

Crime

1. Is crime a problem in your city / region / country?

Develop your answer by noting any trends and by saying which crimes are the biggest problems. Who are the victims of crime? You could also mention the response from the police, government or citizens.
Common crimes: theft, car / bicycle theft, pick-pocketing, burglary (stealing from a home), drug-taking, smuggling, taking bribes, murder, assault, bank robbery, tax-evasion, and fraud.
If you have any ideas why people commit crimes, you can mention these, too. For example, many drug addicts steal money to buy drugs.

2. Which kind of crime do you think is the biggest problem in your region?

You should have answered this question already! Answer in a similar way to question one.
"I think theft is the biggest problem in my city. Violent crimes are actually dropping in number where I live, but theft is constantly on the increase. I think that the people who steal often really need the money, but not for essential, useful things like food and clothes. No, they usually need it to buy drugs, or finance other bad habits. People need to be more careful and vigilant in response to the threat of theft, but it's a crime that will never be eliminated."

3. Have you ever witnessed a crime?

If so, say what you witnessed, but don't turn it into a long, poetic story! If not, you could either talk about a crime that someone you know witnessed or simply state that you hope you never witness one!

4. What do you do to protect yourself and your home from thieves?

Theft is a problem in most countries. It has many forms, e.g. pick-pocketing, burglary, car / bicycle theft. You can prevent the risk of theft by putting money in your front pockets, locking doors and windows, using a bicycle chain, and having a safe in your office. Add some of your own ideas.

5. Do you often read newspaper articles about crime?

Newspapers in most countries contain several articles a day about crime. Even if you don't read them, you should still know what they are about. Are the articles long and detailed or they short? Do they form a major part of the news in your country / region?

Cultural events

1. Do you often go to the theatre / the opera / concerts / exhibitions?

Say which ones, how often and why. Is it expensive? Develop your answer by saying who you go with (perhaps different people depending on the event). Don't just say "I go to exhibitions to get some information." Say exactly what information you get and why it is useful to you.

2. Tell me a little about the last time you went to a cultural event.

Don't make this answer a long story! Answer in a similar way to question one, but add more specific details, such as how long you were there and what was special about this event. Cultural events often involve people wearing traditional or special clothes and making special performances, such as dances. Don't forget to use the past tense!

3. What kinds of cultural events do people like to go to in your city / region?

The focus of the question is your city or region, so you need you be specific. This is an easy question if you live somewhere like Harbin! Compare yourself with other people from your city or region.

4. Is it expensive to go to such events?

You should have already answered this question! You could express the price in relation to the average salary.
"Going to the opera in Britain quite expensive. I doubt that you can get tickets for less than £20. That would be for tickets right at the back of the opera hall. Many of the expensive tickets (perhaps £200 for the best seats!) are bought by companies who want to impress existing or potential clients."

5. Do you think that such events are important in people's lives?

In particular, distinguish between the 'practical' and 'emotional' benefits of cultural events and entertainment. Practical benefits could include promoting tourism whereas 'emotional' benefits could include relaxing people.

6. Have you ever participated in a cultural event (or exhibition)?

Say what kind of event it was and where. Say what part you played in the event. Add more information, such as if you knew anyone else who was there, and whether the event was a success. How long did the event last and how many people went to it? Is it a regular event and will you be taking part in it again next time?

Daily Routines

1. Could you tell me a little about your daily routine?

You might mention when you get up and go to bed, the times you work/study and when you have free time. You could also say when you do things like watch TV, read a newspaper, have a coffee, check your email, etc.

2. At what times do you usually eat your meals?

Give the times when you eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner, then develop your answer with reasons for eating at these times, mentioning where (canteen, home, fast food restaurant) and what you usually eat. Say who you usually eat with, too. Compare yourself and close friends or family.

3. For you, what is the best time of day for work or study?

Some people find it better to work in the mornings when they are fresh, but others still feel sleepy at that time. Others prefer to work in the late evening, when it is quieter. Some people feel lazy after lunch or dinner.

4. Which part of your daily routine do you like best?

Getting ready for school/work in the mornings? Mealtimes? Relaxing in the evenings?

5. Are your weekday and weekend routines different?

You should aim to compare your weekday and weekend routines, not give one and then the other. Don't forget to use connectives in your comparison! If you do not work a standard five-day week with Saturday and Sunday free, explain the differences between your workdays and free days.

6. How would you like to change your daily routine?

Think of something you don't like about your daily routine and consider how you could change it. The thing you wish to change need not be directly connected with your work.

Dancing

1. Can you dance?

Remember to take the chance to use phrases such as 'quite well', 'fairly well', 'reasonably well', '(not) very well'. You might also mention the types of dances that you know – salsa, waltz, disco.

2. How often do you go dancing?

Once a year? Twice a month? Three times a week?
Where do you go (on the street, dance hall, disco) and who do you go with (family, friends, alone)? Do you go dancing to practise a dance you already know or do you go to learn new dances? Do you have to pay or is it free of charge?

3. When do people usually dance in your country?

Occasions on which people dance include weddings, engagements, birthdays, parties, birth of a child, New Year. In your culture, are there special or typical dances for these occasions?

4. How popular are traditional dances with younger people in your culture?

You can give your answer, then develop it by comparing the popularity of traditional and modern dances. You can also develop your answer by comparing the popularity of traditional dances with younger people with their popularity with middle-aged and older people.

5. What kinds of dancing do people like to watch in your country?

Name the dances if you can. Then develop your answer by saying whether people watch these dances live or on TV.

6. How important is dancing in your culture?

You can use your answers to questions 3, 4 and 5 to help develop your answer to this question.

Drawing and Painting

1. What kind of drawing or painting did you do as a child?

A good way to begin your answer would be "When I was a child, I …" Did you draw or paint in your free time or at school? Did you have classes or was it just for fun? Were you interested in drawing or painting? What did you draw or paint? Were you good at it?

2. Is it important for a child to draw or paint?

Drawing and painting could help develop artistic/cultural talents – life isn't only about making money and passing tests.
They might help hand-eye co-ordination in children.
They might encourage children to develop a sense of beauty.
They provide a break from studying from textbooks.

3. Do you ever draw or paint now?

Give your answer and say why. If you draw or paint, say how often and what you draw or paint.

4. Do any of your friends or family members draw or paint?

Answer in the same way as for question 3.

5. What kinds of things do people draw or paint?

You might like to distinguish between what amateur and professional artists draw and paint. You might also mention professions that involve drawing or painting, for example architects.

6. What are the benefits of drawing or painting for adults?

If you feel that the benefits for adults are similar those for children, you can refer to your answer to question 2.

Driving a car

1. Can you drive a car?

If not, talk about whether you would like to learn to drive one and why or why not. How would driving change your lifestyle?
If you can drive, say when you learnt, whether it was difficult, who taught you and how it changed your lifestyle.

2. Do you have a car?

If not, say what kind of car you might like to have.
If you do, say what kind of car you have, how long you have had it, how much it cost and whether you would like a different one.

3. Do you think it's important to learn to drive a car?

Give reasons for your answer. It may depend on a person's job, lifestyle, location and/or financial situation.

4. At what age do you think people should be able to get a driving license?

Give reasons for your answer. Studies show that drivers under the age of 24 are much more likely to be involved in accidents (hence they pay much more for car

insurance). Would it be realistic to increase the age at which people can drive to 24?

5. Do you think young people should learn to drive at school?

This opens the way for you to say whether you think schools should focus on academic subjects or whether they should include practical ones. Would learning to drive at school be better than learning at a specialist driving school?

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Education

1. What was your favourite subject at secondary (high) school?

Develop your answer by saying exactly why you liked it. Mention how often you had this subject, whether you liked the teacher, how you have benefited from learning this subject, and whether other students also liked it.

2. How many subjects do secondary (high) school students usually have to study?

Give a range (e.g. 10-12) and say which subjects are most commonly studied. Say whether students can select subjects (optional / electives) or whether they must study the subjects (compulsory). You can also divide the subjects into groups, e.g. social sciences (history, politics, geography), arts (music, painting, drawing), and natural sciences (biology, physics, chemistry).

3. Do many secondary (high) school students go on to university?

Develop your answer by giving reasons why or why not.
Why? Some young people must go to university to get better qualifications and have better job prospects.
Why not? Many young people feel that the education system has nothing practical to offer, and that getting more real life experience is more important. Others can get the job they want without further qualifications.

4. Is education in your country free?

If people have to pay, how much and what for? Does it depend on the type of

school or on the level / quality of the education?
Add your opinion as to whether education should be free or not.
Yes: Children should all have an equal chance and many parents can't afford to pay for their children's education. Children are the future of the country and the state should invest in them.
No: Education is a service / commodity, like everything else.

5. Do students have to wear uniforms at schools in your country?

Develop your answer by briefly giving your opinion on the issue.
For: all students look the same, no-one worries about what to wear.
Against: expensive, all students look the same.
Mention any other requirements that schools may have, e.g. regarding hair length or make up.

Email

1. How often do you use email?

Develop your answer by saying roughly how many emails you send and receive each day/week, what kinds of emails they are and who you send them to and receive them from.

2. Do you generally receive more emails than you send?

Compare the numbers and say why there is a difference, if any. Are you too lazy/busy to reply? Do you receive a lot of spam that you don't reply to?

3. What are the main reasons people use email in your country?

There are two possible interpretations of this question. The first is whether people use email for business or personal reasons – or both. The second is why they use email rather than other forms of communication, such as writing letters, telephoning or seeing someone in person (face-to-face).

4. Do you think there are any disadvantages of email?

Does it reduce personal contact? Does it make people too reliant on technology? Does it make communication too informal?

5. What do email accounts offer, apart from the ability to send and receive emails?

They can sort spam from other emails.
They can store a draft message for you to add to or edit later.
They offer folders so you can file emails in groups.
You can attach a file to an email, then access it from any computer that has an Internet connection.

6. Do you think email will ever completely replace letter writing?

Yes – People find it more convenient. It is much faster. Modern technology is particularly popular with young people.
No – Some people won't follow the trend of using technology for everything. People appreciate hand-written letters more. Letters feel more personal.

The Environment

1. How do you feel about protecting the environment?

This is a very general question that allows you discuss how you feel and what you think about different environmental issues.

2. What do you do to protect it?

Stay with what you do personally – not what organisations, the government, businesses and other people do.

Suggestions: use less electricity, recycle waste, join an environmental protection group, travel by public transport, write letters to influential people, reuse plastic bags, use renewable energy sources.

3. What else could you do to protect it?

Say what other things you could do. Refer to the ideas for question 2.

4. What state is the environment in where you live?

Start with a general comment, then give specific examples of how it is good and/or bad. Consider the air quality, water quality, wild animals, waste material, chemical pollution, industrial waste.

5. Are you a member of an environmental protection group?

You may have already answered this in response to question 2 or question 3. Say when you joined, why, which group you belong to and say what the group aims to achieve. You could also mention one or two members of the group.

Family

How big is your family?

This is a very simple question that you can develop your answer to by distinguishing between your immediate family (probably with 3 people because of the one-child policy) and your extended family (probably many more people).

Can you tell me something about your family members?

What do they like? What do they look like? You can link this question with virtually any topic – TV, clothes, books, music.

What kind of work do members of your family do?

The big mistake here is to say "My father work in a bank," or something similar. This type of answer clearly demonstrates both poor grammar and poor vocabulary. Remember, "He / She works …" Cleaners, security guards, clerks, software engineers, and bank managers all work in banks – so what exactly does your father do? Do they like their jobs? Why? How long have they had their jobs? When do they start and finish work? Do they work overtime? Are the jobs well-paid?

How much time do you manage to spend with family and relatives?

Many students think this question is asking "How much do you love your family?" It is not! Many people live/work/study far from their families. If you live away from home, the answer is probably 'not much' – perhaps just during the summer

holiday or during festivals.

What sorts of things do you like to do together?

What? Where? How often? Are these activities expensive? Do your friends do similar things with their families?

Do you get on well with your family?

Most people get on pretty well with their families, but some teenagers have disagreements with their parents and grandparents about how to live their lives – the generation gap!

Festivals

1. Do you often celebrate festivals in your culture / country?

Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and then give a few brief details of the main festivals, including meanings, dates, how people celebrate them, and special clothes worn at this time (if any). Notice that the question says “festivals”, so don’t just talk about one.

2. Do these festivals have special meanings?

You should have already answered this question in your answer to question 1. Are the old traditional meanings still widely observed or do people now treat these festival days as just a day off work?

3. Are there any festivals special to your city or region?

The key thing to remember here is that the festival(s) you mention must be special to your city or region! Mention why they are special to your city or region. For example, they might be associated with minorities.

4. What special things do people do during festivals?

The key word here is ‘special’. It does not mean ‘unique’, but do not say that “People meet their friends for dinner,” or “People talk about their lives with

members of their family." People do those things very often, even when no festival is being celebrated.

5. Which is your favourite festival?

Talk in detail about a festival which you particularly like. Say when it takes place, what people do during this festival, what the festival is for, why you particularly like it, and what special food people eat at this time.

6. Do you celebrate any foreign festivals?

Some people, particularly young people, celebrate Christmas or Valentine's Day, even though it is not part of their culture. How about you? Do you think that celebrating them is a good idea? Do you think that the "imported" festivals will become more important than traditional ones?

Films / Movies

IELTS tends to use British English, so you will probably hear the word 'film' rather than 'movie', but you should know both words.

1. How often do you watch films?

You can answer generally (quite often, very often, frequently) or more specifically (every Saturday evening, twice a week, three times a month). If it varies, say what it depends on.

2. What types of film do you like best?

Kinds of films: action, martial arts, historical, romantic, comedies, thrillers, war, horror, animated, artistic, sci-fi.
Why do you like them and how often do you watch them? You could select two kinds of films which you enjoy watching and compare them. You may watch different types of movies depending on your mood or who you are with. Do you prefer to watch films alone or with other people? You could mention the types of films that you don't like.

3. Do you prefer to watch films alone or with someone else?

Some people prefer to watch them alone because there is less chance of interruption or noise. Others like to watch with their friends or family to share the atmosphere or excitement or so they can talk about the film together afterwards.

4. How often do you go to the cinema?

Begin in the same way as with question 1, then develop your answer by saying which cinema you go to. If you never go to the cinema nowadays, say whether you did in the past.

5. Do you prefer to watch films at the cinema or at home?

Cinema – bigger screen, better atmosphere.
Home – more comfortable, can pause or rewind.

6. How much time do you spend watching films?

Most films last about 1 ½ to 2 hours, so …

Flowers

1. Do you like flowers?

Male candidates shouldn't be afraid to answer 'yes' to this question! Name two or three of the flowers you like, such as roses, sunflowers, lilies.

2. Do people in your country give flowers as gifts?

Develop your answer by saying when this usually happens and perhaps why. Don't forget to say which types of flowers are usually given. You can also say which types of flowers should not be given.

3. When was the last time you gave or sent flowers to someone?

Say what kind of flowers you gave or sent, who to and why. You could develop your answer by saying how often you send flowers, who to and why.

"I rarely send flowers to anyone. The last time I sent flowers to someone was last

year when I sent my girlfriend some roses. She was working in Southern China at the time and I was in Northern China, so we couldn't get together to celebrate her birthday. It was very expensive to send the flowers, but worth it!"

4. Do any flowers in your country have a special meaning?

Choose two or three examples. Most people will talk about roses in answer to this question, so you might like to prepare something more original.

5. How are flowers used for special occasions or festivals in your country?

Flowers can be used as gifts on special occasions or at festivals and also as decorations (on a thing or on a person).

6. Does anyone in your family like growing flowers?

If the answer is 'no', you can talk briefly about a friend or a neighbour who grows them. They might grow flowers in pots at home or in a garden. Perhaps you know someone whose job it is to plant and look after flowers in parks.

Food

1. What kinds of food are popular in your country?

Mention fruit, vegetables and types of meat. You might want to develop your answer by talking about how popular these foods are in different regions of your country.

2. What is your favourite food or meal?

Show your vocabulary by describing what the food looks like (colour, texture) and tastes like (spicy, tasty, salty, sweet, bitter). Is it healthy or fattening? Say how it is cooked and used with other foods to make a meal. Say where it is produced and if it is popular in your country / region. Do not base your answer on a long description of how the food is prepared or cooked.

3. Is it usual for the whole family to eat together in your country?

Think about different meals. For example, most families probably don't eat lunch together. Many families don't eat together because of work/study commitments.

4. Do you think it's important for families to eat together?

Develop your answer by saying why or why not.

5. Who cooks the food in your home?

You may have answered this question already. Say what they cook, whether the food is tasty, how long they spend preparing food and cooking it. If more than one person cooks for you, whose cooking do you prefer?

If you like to cook, say why, how often you cook, what, who for. Perhaps you like cooking with another person. As with question 1, do not talk too long about how to make or cook a particular dish.
If you do not, say why not, who cooks for you, what they cook for you, whether you wish you could cook, how and where you could learn. Perhaps you don't cook, but help with the cooking in other ways, such as cleaning or preparing the food.

6. What are some of the benefits of eating home-cooked food?

Is it healthier? Does it taste better?

Friends

1. Do you enjoy spending time with friends?

Which friends do you spend time with? How much time do you spend with them? Where do you usually go together? Are most of your friends male or female?

2. How do you spend your time when you are with friends?

You may have already answered this question in response to question 1. There are probably a few key hobbies and interests that you have in common. However, it is unlikely that you like exactly the same things or like them to the same extent.

Compare the different hobbies and interests you and your friends have. For example, you may all like the same music and films, but they may like sports more than you do.

3. Did you meet most of your friends through school / work?

These are the two most common ways of meeting new friends, but there are other ways, such as on the Internet, through clubs and sports teams, and through introductions by mutual friends.

4. Do you spend more of your free time with friends or with family?

Many students interpret this question as meaning "Do you love your friends more than your family?" or "Do you prefer to spend your free time with your friends or your family?" Both of these interpretations are incorrect. How much time do you spend with each group of people and why? The answer to this question probably has a lot to do with daily routines. Do you do different things with each group? Where do you spend time with each group?

5. How important are friends for you?

Most people think their friends are very important. Say why.

6. In what ways are you a good friend?

In what ways do you help your friends? Do you help them with problems? Which problems? Schoolwork? Relationship problems? Financial problems?

Fruits and vegetables

1. Which fruits and vegetables do you like?

Give a few names, perhaps mentioning how they taste (e.g. sweet, bitter), where they are from and (if you know) when they are in season (= available for purchase). Don't forget to mention dried fruits (sometimes sugared), which are very popular in some countries.

Fruits – peach, apple, banana, pineapple, kiwi fruit, melon (musk, Hami,

honeydew), watermelon, plum, cherry, pear, haw, grape, strawberry, raspberry, orange, tangerine, lemon, olive, mango, lychee, star fruit

Vegetables – potatoes, carrots, lotus root, garlic, onion, cabbage, cauliflower, spinach, lettuce, asparagus, eggplant, pepper (hot, sweet, green), tomato, pumpkin, cucumber, kidney beans, peas

2. What fruits and vegetables did you like when you were a child?

Answer in the same way as for question 1. Don't forget to use the past tense!

3. Are there any fruits and vegetables that you don't like?

Answer in the same way as for question 1, adding why you don't like them (e.g. taste, appearance, no particular reason).

4. How often do eat fruits and vegetables

At which meals? As snacks? At what time of day? How much? Which kinds?

5. Where can you buy fruits and vegetables near your home?

Market, supermarket, greengrocers, street sellers. In many cities you can see farmers bringing produce (= agricultural products) to the city using carts pulled by donkeys.

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Games

1. Do you often play games with your family or friends?

'Games' usually refers to non-sporting activities, such as poker, computer games, hide-and-seek, dice, board games. Don't only say what you play. Also say who you play with, why, when, how often, and where. If you don't play games, you could say what you played when you were younger.

2. Which is you favourite game?

Answer this question in a similar way to question one. If the game is quite simple, you can develop your answer by briefly saying how the game is played, but do not get involved in a lengthy explanation of the rules! Perhaps you are a member of a club where people play this game. How long does it usually take to play this game? Is it easy to learn?
"My favourite game is 'Twister'. You need at least 2 people to play (5 or 6 is better!) and another person to be the judge. There is a cloth on the floor with circles of different colours (red, yellow, green, and blue). The judge spins a special wheel which indicates which colour people must put their hands or feet on. If a person cannot put their hand or foot on the given colour, or if they fall over, they are out."

3. Does the winner get a prize?

If so, describe it. Does the prize depend on the level of competition? Does the winner of each game get a prize or must a person win a series of games? If no prize is given, say that you play 'just for fun'.

4. Are these games popular in your country?

The question asks about the games you have named – "Are these games …" Therefore, you must answer 'yes' or 'no'. Say which (other) games are popular and why. Who usually plays them? (Age, men or women) Are there clubs where people play these games? If you have been abroad, perhaps you could say whether they are popular in other countries.

5. Do people in your family prefer different games?

You should also try to give reasons or use 'could' to give possible reasons. "My sister likes to play computer games, but my mother prefers chess. It could be that younger people are more technologically minded, whereas older people prefer more traditional games." Do you think you will play different games when you are older or will you still like the same games as now?

Gardens and Parks

1. Are there any gardens/parks in your home town/where you live?

Develop your answer by saying where they are, perhaps in relation to your home

or place of work/study. Are they large or small?

2. How much time do you spend in parks or parks?

You can say how many times you go there each week/month or how many hours you spend there each week/month – or both!

3. What can people do there?

Relax, play or listen to music, sing, do exercises or tai chi, read a book, magazine or newspaper, take the dog for a walk, chat with friends, go boating, look at flowers, sunbathe, feed the ducks, play with children, take photographs.

4. Why do you think people like gardens and parks?

This question is similar to question 3. You might like to focus more on abstract ideas such as getting away from noise or regaining energy after a hard day at work. Perhaps people just like to be surrounded by greenery for a while, particularly in grey cities.

5. What things would you like to see in gardens and parks in your home town/where you live?

This question requires you to think of things that the parks don't have at the moment. Some parks hold exhibitions or concerts. Others have animals or plants that people wouldn't normally have the chance to see.

6. Do you think gardens and parks should be free?

If so, the local government will probably have to pay for them. If you think people should pay an entry fee, how much do you think is reasonable? Could gardens and parks raise money in other ways, perhaps through sponsorship or by holding events?

Gifts

1. Do you often give gifts to people?

Use an adverb of frequency (often, regularly, occasionally, rarely) to express exact meaning. You can talk about the gifts you give – type, cost, size, colour.

2. What was the last gift you gave to someone?

Describe it in some detail and talk about the occasion and how much the recipient liked it.

3. What was the last gift you received?

Answer in the same way as for question 2, adding what you have done with the gift.

4. How do you choose what gifts to give people?

Factors that could influence your choice are; price, people's interests (and/or likes and dislikes), size, weight, colour, fashion, usefulness, availability,

5. Are there any gift-giving customs in your country?

Do you wrap presents? When should the recipient unwrap them? Are there certain gifts suitable for certain occasions (weddings, birthdays, engagements, birth of a child)? Are there different customs for old people and young people? Is giving money acceptable/common? Do you know any of the origins of these customs?

Going Abroad Long-term

1. Why are you planning to spend a period of time abroad?

Work – experience, different style, good for career, higher salary.
Study – knowledge, learn a foreign language, get a better job when you return.
Travel – see the world, meet new people, visit distant family members, take a break.

2. How long do you plan to be abroad?

Give an honest answer, which for students will obviously depend on the length of the course they plan to take. Many students like to mention that they "will return to their home country." The examiner is not an immigration officer and is not really

concerned about that.

3. How have your family and friends supported you in this?

If you are a student under the age of 24, your parents have almost certainly promised you financial support. They have almost certainly supported you emotionally, too. People have also probably helped you with information, suggestions, and advice.

4. How exactly will you benefit from this experience?

Be more specific than in question 1. The examiner can reasonably expect you to have done some research to see how the course (job/trip) will benefit you more than other courses (jobs/trips). Mention things like specific courses and the location of the university.

5. What problems do you think you may have abroad?

Isolated from family and friends (homesickness) → socialize and meet new people.
Don't know the language → take a course.
Worried parents → write emails to them so they know you are OK.

6. How do you think the country you live in will be different to your country?

You can talk about so many things here! Food, climate, culture, entertainment (young people often go to bars and clubs in Western countries), education system, using public transport.

Going out with friends

1. Do you like going out with friends?

How does it make you feel? Where do you go? Which friends do you go out with? Do you go out together during the day, in the evenings or at weekends?

2. How often do you go out with friends?

Use an adverb of frequency or say how many times you go out with friends each

week or each month. You could develop your answer by saying whether you go out with family members more or less often than with friends.

3. What do you usually do when you go out with friends?

You may have answered this question in response to question 1.

4. Do you prefer to be with a large group of friends or a small group?

Extend your answer by saying why and perhaps giving one or two examples. Your answer might depend on the circumstances.

5. When was the last time you went out with friends?

Give details such as where you went, a description of the place, how many of you there were, what you did, what you ate and drank, how you travelled, what time you went out and how long you were out together.

Going Out in the Evenings

1. How often do you go out in the evenings?

Say how often you go out each week or each month and say which evenings you usually go out – probably Fridays and Saturdays.

2. What do you usually do?

Places that people often go out to in the evenings include parks (especially in summer), bars and clubs, restaurants, concerts, discos, cafes, fitness centres, sports centres, shops (for evening shopping).

3. Are these activities expensive?

Give an idea of how much you usually spend when you go out in the evenings and whether you consider this to be expensive or not.

4. Who do you usually spend your evenings with?

Family? Friends? Colleagues? Classmates?

Notice that this question doesn't specifically refer to going out in the evenings, but that is still the topic.

5. Is there enough to do in the evenings in your/this town?

If there is, describe the facilities that are available.
If there is not, describe the facilities you would like to see.
Note the use of the word 'enough' in the question. The question isn't asking if there is anything to do in the evenings.

6. How do you feel when you have to stay at home for a long period?

Many people feel bored, but others don't mind staying at home. Some people don't go out much but invite their friends over to their home. This is often true for people who have little extra money.

Grandparents

1. Did you have a lot of contact with your grandparents when you were a child?

Perhaps you lived together or near each other. Remember to include both pairs of grandparents – those on your maternal side (your maternal grandparents) and those on your paternal side (your paternal grandparents).

2. Is it common for grandparents to live with their children and grandchildren in your country?

This question is similar to the previous one, but is more general – asking about your country rather than your family in particular.

3. What part do grandparents play in family life in your culture?

Most candidates will refer to the role of grandparents in child rearing and in decision-making within the family. In each case, refer to the particular grandparent that is involved. Develop your answer to look at other aspects of family life, such as cooking, shopping, education, finances, interpersonal relationships (even marriage!) and free time activities. Although it is OK to refer to your family as an example, remember that the question asks "in your culture".

4. What do children often like about their grandparents?

Perhaps grandparents are not so strict or have more free time to play with children. Perhaps grandparents often buy treats for their grandchildren.

5. How can grandparents benefit from knowing their grandchildren?

Perhaps it makes them more active and helps them to feel younger. Perhaps it helps to reduce the generation gap.

6. How can grandchildren benefit from knowing their grandparents?

Again, perhaps it reduces the generation gap. It could also increase respect for elderly people. It might also help to pass culture from generation to generation.

Happiness

1. What sorts of things make you happy?

You can look at this question from two angles. One angle is the things that generally make your life happy, such as good health, your family, having free time, etc. The other is to be more specific and give examples such as jokes, comedy programmes on TV, watching animals play, your little sister, etc.

2. Which of those things makes you happiest?

Choose one thing and explain specifically and in detail why it makes you happier than other things do.

3. When do you experience happiness in everyday life?

You may have answered this in response to question 1. If you are stuck for ideas, just think about things that have made you laugh or smile over the past few days.

4. Do you think money is necessary for happiness?

The key word here is ‘necessary’. Most people will answer ‘no’, but be careful! Some people say that money cannot buy you happiness, but is that really true? Money can buy you a holiday, which makes you happy. It can buy you a ticket to a

comedy show, which makes you happy.

5. How important is happiness in life?

Compare the importance of happiness with other things. Is happiness connected to other aspects of life, such as having a good/interesting job, having a great partner, or having good health?

6. Is unhappiness always a bad thing?

The key word here is ‘always’. Most people will agree that unhappiness is usually bad, but is it always so? Try to give one or two examples from your life when unhappiness helped you in some way, perhaps by encouraging you to try something again after a failure.

Healthy Eating

1. What kinds of food do you think are healthy?

Most people will mention fruit and vegetables. Can you think of any others? Perhaps you could check on the Internet to see what the benefits of these foods are.

2. How often do you eat these kinds of food?

Develop your answer by saying, for example, at what times of day you eat these foods and how you eat them (raw, cooked).

3. Why do you choose certain types of food?

Do you choose them because they are healthy, because they taste good, or because they are cheap? Probably a mixture. Perhaps you don’t choose them if your parents do most/all of the shopping!

4. Do you take any vitamins or tablets to supplement your diet?

This is quite common in Western countries. Talk about which tablets you take, if any, how many, how often and why.

5. What would you like change about your eating habits?

Talk about the foods you would take out of your diet and what you would replace them with. Use the words ‘more’ and ‘less’ to talk about which foods. “I would like to eat more fruit and vegetables and less meat.”

6. Do you think people in your country eat more healthily now than they did 20 years ago?

Many people certainly eat more than 20 years ago, but how much healthier is the food? Certainly, some foods they eat are not so healthy, but remember that this question asks for your overall opinion.

History

1. Are you interested in history?

If you are, say which aspects or periods of history interest you most. You could expand your answer by saying how you became interested in the subject.

2. Did you study history at school?

Which periods and countries/regions? Did you learn about any historic figures from the history of your country or other countries?

3. Is history important subject at school in your country?

It seems that history is not as important as maths, science and English and relatively few students seem to be interested in studying it at university.

4. Are there any historical sites in your hometown?

Consider old buildings (e.g. palaces, temples), battle sites and the places of birth/death of famous people from history.

5. Are any historic figures from your hometown?

You may have answered this in response to question 4. Talk about what they did, when they lived and what people think of them now.

Hobbies and interests

1. What do you do in your free time?

What an easy question! There's so much to discuss! Mention where you do your free time activities, how often, and who with. Make one sentence for each activity. "My favourite hobby is reading detective novels at home in the evening after I finish my homework. I don't do much sport. However, I go swimming with my best friend once a week at a public pool which is near my home."
Popular hobbies: playing sports (football, basketball, table tennis), collecting things (stamps, postcards, coins), outdoor activities (hiking, horse riding, rock climbing), creative hobbies (photography, painting, drawing), games.

2. Did you have other hobbies / interests when you were younger?

Remember to use the past tense when you talk about past hobbies! You may find it useful to use 'used to' for activities that you did but do not do now, e.g. "I used to go horse riding when I was a child." Alternatively, you can use 'give up' mean that you finished a hobby.

3. What does your husband / wife / mother / father do in his / her free time?

Talk about the hobbies which people close to you enjoy. Remember to use 'he' / 'she' and 'his' / 'her' correctly! Answer in a similar way to question 1. You could even go further by answering in the same way as for question two.

4. Are these activities popular in your country?

Say which games are popular and why. Who usually plays them? (Age, men or women) If you have been abroad, perhaps you could say whether they are popular in other countries.

5. If you had more free time, what would you do?

Here is a chance to be really inventive! What'll it be? Hang gliding? American football? Photography? Painting? Window shopping? Use 'take up' to mean 'start doing'. Say whether these new interests would be expensive, time consuming,

useful, help you meet more people, not only ‘interesting’.
“If I had more free time, I would write a book about my travel experiences. I would only include short, funny stories from my travels, particularly those which show how differences in culture and language can cause hilarious situations. It would probably take a long time to write, but in the end I might make some money from the book.”

Holidays / Vacations

1. How often do you go on holiday?

Most students confuse ‘holiday’ and ‘festival’. You can take a holiday during a festival, but when you are discussing this topic do not forget that the main focus of your answers should be on holidays, not festivals.
Say how often you go on holidays, when, who with, where to, and for how long. Try to put two or three pieces of information into a single complex sentence.
“I usually go on holiday twice a year to Hainan, which is an island at the southern tip of China. I love sunbathing on the beach and drinking cocktails. My favourite hotel is right on the beach where it is reasonably peaceful.”

2. Where do you usually go? / Tell me more about where you usually go.

Give more information about the place(s) you go to on holiday. Say something about the environment. You may not usually go to the same place, but you can say which type of place(s) you usually go to (cities, rural areas, mountains, the coast).

3. Who do you prefer to go with?

This may not be the same as who you usually go with! Say why you prefer to go with these people.

4. What do you like to do on holiday?

Answer directly, then develop your answer by comparing your likes with those of other people you go with and by mentioning some different things you would like to do next time.

5. If you could go to any foreign country for a holiday, where would you go?

Remember, the question asks “for a holiday”! Do not begin a speech about how you want to go to Britain to study! It would probably be best to choose a country where you do not wish to study or work. Focus on tourist activities in that country. Would it be an expensive holiday? What would you do? What new places could you see? What new foods could you taste? Who would you go with? Remember to keep your speech reasonably short. Include a few pieces of information in each sentence.
“I would like to go to Japan with my girlfriend. She wants to pick up some fashion ideas in Tokyo whilst I’m interested in climbing Mount Fuji. Some people might think it’s strange to go on holiday with someone then not spend all the time together. The thing is that we both enjoy photography, but she prefers fashion photography whereas I prefer photographing the scenery.”

Hotels

1. Have you ever stayed in a really nice / expensive hotel?

If so, describe your experience. Was the service good? What facilities were there? Would you stay there again?
If not, describe another person’s experience or say what you think it would be like to stay in such a hotel.
“I’ve never stayed in a hotel, because I’m still at high school, so I have no real reason to travel much. Whenever I go on holiday with my parents, we stay with relatives. However, a classmate recently went to Moscow and stayed at the 5-star Lenin Hotel. She said that it had two swimming pools and sauna, which she used often, because they were free for guests. She also told me that the hotel had a revolving restaurant on the top floor, which gave wonderful views of Red Square. The restaurant served Russian and international specialties. Although the hotel and facilities were fine, she didn’t think that the service was very good. In particular, the waiters were extremely slow, she said.”

2. Do people in your country often stay in hotels?

If so, why? Business, holidays, or honeymoons (a holiday after getting married).
If not, where do they stay? With friends or relatives.

3. What services and facilities are usually available in hotels in your country?

This will depend on the quality of the hotel, but could include the following:
A TV, a bar, a swimming pool, a beauty salon, a restaurant, currency exchange, safety deposit box, post office services, laundry service, shoe-shine service, a hairdryer, a trouser press, air conditioning, wake up call, and a sauna.
This is a good opportunity to demonstrate a wide vocabulary.

4. How much does a hotel room in your town / city cost per night?

This will certainly depend on the quality of the hotel, e.g. a five-star hotel, a two-star hotel. Don't worry about an exact price – just give a general idea. Compare the prices with another city, particularly a large one like Beijing or Shanghai..

5. What factors are important when selecting a hotel?

There are many things to mention here – price, location (both for transport and for what you need to do), service (the politeness and efficiency of the staff), the hotel restaurant (type of food), and facilities (see question three). Say which are (or would be) most important to you and why.

Housework

1. Do you usually do any housework?

Housework includes; ironing, washing clothes (doing the laundry), polishing, cleaning (mopping) the floor, making beds and perhaps doing minor repairs.

How much time do you spend on housework? Does anyone else do any? Do they do more or less than you? Do you mind doing the housework?

2. Who does the housework in your home?

Answer in a similar way to question 1.

3. When you were a child, did you do any housework?

Remember to use the past tense! Did you enjoy it? Did your parents have to force or bribe you to do it? How did they do that?

4. Which housework do you least like doing?

Cleaning the toilet?

5. Do you think that children should do housework?

Do you think parents should give their children some money for doing housework or is the children's responsibility to help out around the house? What do you think of the idea of children doing housework for other people (e.g. neighbours) for money?

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Indoor Activities

1. What kinds of indoor activities do you enjoy?

'Indoor activities' is very broad. Consider why you enjoy these particular indoor activities.

2. How much time do you spend on these activities?

You can answer by saying 'hours per day/week'. You could also specify which days and at what time of day you do them. You can also say whether you think you spend too much time on them or whether you don't have enough time for them. As well as talking about the amount of time you spend on these activities, you might also complete your answer by saying how much money you spend on them.

3. Do you do these activities alone or with other people?

You may have answered this question in answer to questions 1 and 2. If not, talk about the kind of people you do these activities with (relationship to you, age, ability).

4. If you had more time, which other indoor activities would you take up?

The question specifically states 'other', so you must mention new indoor activities that you do not currently do. They may be ones that you did before (e.g. as a child) and wish to take up again.

5. Do you prefer indoor activities or outdoor ones?

Give reasons. Does it depend on the season/weather?

The Internet

1. How often do you use the Internet?

Does your use of the Internet vary according to (for example) the weather, your work/study load and/or other activities that you do (e.g. sport, playing a musical instrument, going out with friends)?

2. Where do you use the Internet?

At home? At an Internet café? (Note that 'Net Bar' is Chinglish!) At school/university? At work? At friends'/relatives homes?

3. What do you do on the Internet?

Most candidates will give very basic answers like 'I search for information' which are almost meaningless. What information do you look for? Fashion advice? Locations of bars? Weather forecasts? Reviews of computer games? Show the examiner your vocabulary by being as specific as you can.

4. Have you ever bought anything on the Internet?

Which site did you use? Was it cheaper than in a shop? Were you satisfied with the product/service? Do you often shop online? Have you ever sold anything online?

5. When did you first start using the Internet?

You don't need to give the exact date (unless you really do remember!), but you should be able to give the year or be able to say where you were (first year of high school, working for ABC Electronics). Say why you began using it.

6. How did you learn to use the Internet?

Did you take a class or receive training at work? Did a friend give you some tips or did you just learn through ‘trial and error’?

7. How has the Internet changed your life?

This should be an easy question to answer. You may find it better to use comparative language (before you used the Internet and after). You might find ‘used to’ to be useful. Take care with tenses!

Keeping Fit

1. Do you try to keep fit?

If so, what do you do? (sports, swimming, exercises, jogging, aerobics) Where do you do these activities? (at home, at a fitness centre / health club, outside) How often do you do them? What equipment do you use? Do you do these activities alone or with someone else?
“I think that I keep quite fit. I go jogging most mornings, but just along the canal behind my home. Luckily, there is a fitness centre near my office, which means I can drop in before or after work. I also like to go swimming at the weekends.”

2. Have you ever been a member of a fitness club?

If so, which one? Where is it? What equipment do they have and for what purposes? Is it a good club? Do many people go there?
Maybe you were a member of a club, but are not now. Why did you leave? Would you like to rejoin?
If you have never been a member, why not? Do you think that joining a fitness club could benefit you? How do you imagine a fitness club to be?

3. Are keep fit activities popular in your country?

You can use parts of your answers to questions 1 and 2 here, but remember that the focus has switched from you personally to people in your country.

4. What kind of exercise facilities are there in your local area?

In China, unlike in Britain, I have noticed that there are often basic exercise

machines in residential compounds, on streets and in parks. You can also mention the availability of running tracks, swimming pools and fitness centres.

5. How important do you think it is to keep fit?

Develop your answer by giving one or two reasons.

6. Do you think keeping fit is more important to men or women?

You might develop your answer by considering whether people keep fit because they want other people to think of them in a particular way.

Languages

1. How many languages do you speak?

You can include your native language! Talk about how long you have been learning them, where, and what your level is.

2. How often do you use your knowledge of foreign languages?

You can answer by saying (for example) ‘every day’, ‘twice a week’, ‘a few times a month’ or whatever. Notice that the question does not specify that you have to say how often you speak foreign languages, so you can also talk about how often you use your reading, listening and writing skills.

3. Which languages would like to learn?

Here, you should talk about languages that you have not yet spent time studying.

4. Do many foreigners speak your native language?

When answering the question, also consider how well (or badly!) foreigners speak your native language. Why do they learn to speak it?

5. Do you think your native language is easier than English?

Try to look at the question from a neutral point of view. Consider vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, writing.

Learning English

1. How long have you been studying English?

Use the correct tenses! “I have been learning English for/since …” “I began learning English in …”

2. Did you choose to study English or did you have to?

At first, you probably had to, but perhaps later you chose to continue. Say why.

3. Is there anything you find especially difficult about learning English?

Consider things like grammar, pronunciation, idioms and vocabulary.

4. What do you find easy about learning English?

Consider the same things as for question 3.

5. How important is English to you?

This is your chance to say why you are learning English.

6. How could you improve your English?

Refer to the ‘test preparation’ section of this book for ideas!

7. Do you think you will use English more in the future?

If you are going abroad long-term to study or live, hopefully the answer to this question is ‘yes’. What will you use your English for?

Leisure Time

This topic is clearly very similar to certain others, such as hobbies and weekends, so many of the questions will be similar.

1. Do you have any hobbies or interests?

Say two or three sentences about two or three of your main hobbies and interests. There's no need to go into too much detail.

2. How did you become interested in that?

Perhaps your parents encouraged you or your friends were interested in something, so you became interested in it too. Perhaps you saw something on TV or read an article in a newspaper or magazine that caught your interest.

3. When do you normally have free time?

The obvious times are evenings, weekends and holidays – unless your work/studies means that you have free time at other times.

4. How could you find more leisure time?

People do waste time and often work/study inefficiently. What could you do about this? Perhaps preparing a schedule would help.

5. Do you think it is important to have leisure time?

The answer is probably 'yes'. Give two or three reasons. Remember that this question is not only asking directly about you.

6. What is there to do in your free time where you live?

This question doesn't ask what you actually do – it asks what possibilities there are for free time activities where you live. You can mention free time activities that you participate in, but you should also mention those that you do not take part in.

7. How do you usually spend your holidays?

If you like to go travelling, you could mention where you like to go, why and what you do there.

Letters

1. Do you often write letters?

Say how often, who you write to and why. Do you write long letters or short ones? If you don't often write letters, why not? Is it perhaps because you use the Internet to send emails or is it perhaps because you live near to friends and family and so can meet them face-to-face?

2. Do you often receive them?

Answer this question in a similar way to question 1.

3. Who do you usually write to and what do you write about?

You should already have answered this in response to question 1.

4. Do you prefer to write letters or emails?

Say why you prefer letters or emails. You can develop your answer by saying whether you prefer to receive letters or emails.

5. What do you think is the most difficult letter to write?

Here are a few suggestions:
A letter giving someone bad news, e.g. about a death or serious injury/illness.
A letter asking someone for something they might not want to give, e.g. money.
A letter asking for a favour that might be difficult for the person to do, e.g. to look after your pet dog while you are on holiday for a month.
A letter asking someone to return something they borrowed to you, e.g. money.

6. What kind of letters do you most like receiving?

Here are a few suggestions:
A letter telling you that you have passed an exam.
A letter containing some money.
A letter for your birthday.
A surprise letter from an old friend telling you that he/she wants to invite you to his/her wedding.

Magazines

1. Which magazines do you read?

You can give the names in Your language, perhaps with an approximate translation, but you should be able to say what the magazines are about in English.

2. How often do you read magazines?

You can answer by saying (for example) ‘every day’, ‘twice a week’, ‘a few times a month’ or whatever. Notice that the question does not specify that you have to say how often you buy magazines, so you can also talk about how often you read magazines belonging to other people.

3. Which magazine articles or features interest you most?

Typical features in magazines include; puzzles, quizzes, questionnaires, top ten tips, letters and advice columns.

4. Did you read different magazines in the past?

Think about when you were a teenager or child. Do you still read the same magazines? Why has the kind of magazine you read changed?

5. Do you think magazines will be more popular in the future?

Will people read printed magazines or do you think they will read online magazines? What technological developments might allow this to happen? Do you think people’s tastes in magazines will change?

The Media

1. How do you get the latest news?

Newspapers: published daily, usually sold in the mornings, headlines, journalist.
Television: news programmes every hour or every few hours, top story, reporter, live / recorded reports, sound and pictures.
Radio: news programmes every hour or every few hours, top story, reporter, live /

recorded reports, sound, but no pictures.
Internet: news websites, updates, headlines, no controls.
Say how you get the news, using adverbs of frequency (usually, sometimes). You could also ad whether you think the news you get is informative and reliable.

2. Do many people in your country listen to the radio?

Answer and say why. Compare the use of radio to the use of other forms of media. "The great thing about the radio is that you can just leave it on while you do other things, like household chores. You don't need to look at it, like you do with TV, the Internet, or newspapers. Radio stations get the news quite quickly – even live from the scene. Radios are cheap to buy and easy to use, but they aren't modern enough for a lot of people who prefer to use the Internet."

3. What kinds of news stories are usually reported on TV in your country?

Types of news stories: political events, business, sport, domestic news, foreign affairs, weather, disasters, crime, exhibitions, wars, people's successes.
Don't just list the different types of news stories. Say which ones are usually regarded as the most important and how often these kinds of stories appear on the TV news (almost every day, a few times a week, occasionally).

4. What non-news items can be found in newspapers in your country?

Of course, newspapers focus on the news, but they also contain many non-news items, such as cartoons, jokes, competitions, features (quite long and detailed articles about a particular 'hot' topic), reviews (of plays, musicals, operas, new films, CD's, or products), TV and radio listings, and advertisements.
Say which of these non-news items you find interesting (if any!) and perhaps briefly compare yourself and other people you know.

5. Do you pay more attention to local, national, or international news?

Say which of the three you pay most attention too and which you pay least attention to. Then say why and briefly compare yourself and friends or family.

Meeting People

1. Do you often meet new people?

Say how often and where. What kind of people do you meet? Do they tend to be people of your age? Older? Younger? Do you usually stay in touch with them or not? Which kinds of people do you usually stay in touch with?

2. How did you meet most of your friends?

Ways that people commonly meet their friends are through school or university, when they go out (e.g. to a bar or sporting or cultural event), through mutual friends, through shared hobbies/sports, on public transportation, or though work. Less common ways are on the Internet, in parks (perhaps whilst walking the dog) and accidentally on the street (perhaps someone drops something and you pick it up for them).

3. Can you tell me about the places where young people meet?

You can use some of the ideas from question 2 here, but remember that the question is asking about young people in general.

4. In your culture, what are some of the things that people talk about when they first meet?

In Britain, they usually talk about work/studies or perhaps sport. The first aim is usually to find a common interest. Another way that people start talking is by making a comment about a person's clothes, etc. – "That's a lovely dress. Where did you get it?" Of course, the British are famous for beginning conversations about the weather! This is probably because the weather often changes in Britain and because it is a 'safe' topic – no one will be offended if you say "What a beautiful day!"

5. Is it possible to meet people from other countries where you live?

If you live in a major city, it shouldn't be too difficult to meet foreigners. However, if you live in the countryside, you may never meet one! Talk about the places where it is possible to meet foreigners – usually at tourist sites or at places of entertainment.

6. How do you feel when you meet new people?

Most people feel a little nervous and shy. Others are less so. If you are shy/nervous, perhaps you can think of ways to overcome it.

Memories

1. Do you keep photographs to remind you about the past?

You could mention how many (approximately) you have and whether you keep them in albums. Where do you keep these photographs? How often do you look at them and on what occasions? Do you show them to other people – perhaps friends or family? What kinds of things are shown on the photographs and where were they taken?

2. Have you kept anything from your childhood to remind you of it?

Some people keep the toys they enjoyed playing with or even items of clothing. Perhaps you keep some books that you particularly liked reading.

3. Is it common to do this in your country?

Think about your friends and members of your family. What things do they keep to remind them of their childhoods?

4. Do you buy souvenirs or other things to remind you of places or events?

Many people like to buy souvenirs – usually small ones – perhaps with a picture or symbol of the event on it. To get an idea of the kinds of things people buy as souvenirs, look at the items that are being produced for the Beijing Olympics – T-shirts, badges, caps, sunglasses, stamps, coins, toys, postcards, etc.

5. How do you feel when other people talk about their memories?

Do you find it interesting and informative or do you think it's boring and wish you could think of an excuse and politely leave? What kinds of memories do people usually talk about?

6. What can people learn from the past?

You might also add whether you believe that people actually do learn from the

past or not.

Museums and Art Galleries

1. Are there any museums or art galleries where you live?

If you live in a big city like Beijing or Shanghai, it should be easy for you to mention a few museums and art galleries. If you live in a place without museums and art galleries, you could talk about the nearest town or city that has one. Develop your answer by saying what kind of museums (history, natural history, science and technology) and art galleries (traditional, modern) they are and what exhibits they have.

2. Do you like visiting museums and art galleries?

Say why or why not. If not, how could museums and art galleries be made more attractive to you?

3. How often do you visit museums and art galleries?

You can answer by saying (for example) ‘once a week’, ‘twice a month’, ‘a few times a year’ or whatever. Would you visit more often if you had time/chance?

4. Did you visit museums and art galleries when you were a child?

Did you go with family, friends or on a school trip? Did you enjoy the visits? Where did you go and what did you see? Were any of the exhibits interactive?

5. Do you prefer visiting museums and art galleries alone or with other people?

Say why or why not. The question asks if you prefer going alone or with other people, so you can add whether you actually do go alone or with other people.

Music

1. What types of music do you like to listen to?

The question asks ‘types’, so you should begin with the style(s) – pop, rock, jazz, folk, country, classical, rap, techno, Latin American, heavy metal, instrumental, fast, relaxing, loud. Say not only why you like it, but also when you listen to it, how it makes you feel, and whether your taste in music has changed over the years.

2. At what times of day do you like to listen to music?

Develop your answer by saying whether you listen to music whilst doing other things, e.g. eating, working/studying, or doing housework.

3. Do you prefer to listen to recordings or live performances?

Say which you prefer and why. If you prefer ‘live’ music, say how often you go to listen to it and where. Talk about your feelings when you see a ‘live’ performance. Is it expensive to see ‘live’ music in your country?

4. What types of music are popular in your country?

Answer this question in the same way as question 1. Do not assume that people in your country like the same music as you! They may have different tastes, depending on their age in particular.

5. Do all children in your country study music at school?

Notice that the question contains the word ‘all’. Answer carefully! At what age do children study music? Do you think it is a useful subject or not?

Musical instruments

1. Do you play a musical instrument?

If not, talk about an instrument you would like to play. Describe the instrument. Say how long you have been able to play it, why you learnt it, what you like about it. Perhaps you have even played publicly.
Musical instruments: (electric) guitar, violin, piano, flute, drums, er hu, keyboards.

2. Did you learn to play a musical instrument when you were a child?

Say how long you played it for, how you got started (parent made you, teacher suggested it, inspired by a famous person), whether you enjoyed it or not and whether you know anyone else who plays/played it (or any other instrument).

3. What (other) musical instrument would you like to learn to play?

Say why and mention whether you know anyone who plays this instrument.

4. What musical instruments do children in your country often learn to play?

Mention them and perhaps describe them a little if they are traditional instruments.

5. Do you think children should learn to play a musical instrument?

Yes – cultural, non-academic subjects are important.
No – academic subjects are more important, many children have little musical talent.

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Names

1. Is your given name / family name a common one in your country?

This is a very straightforward question. You can say something about your family name. Why not go online and see what you can find out about it?

2. Do you like your name?

Answer directly and say what you particularly like or dislike about it.

3. Does your name mean anything or have a special significance?

Answer the question, but do not get into long explanations. The examiner may not understand them. If you have an English name, you could also answer in a similar way. Your name might have a meaning (perhaps one that you can directly translate

into English) or it might have a special significance in your family or culture. For example, many Chinese people have the name ‘hong’, which means ‘red’, because it is representative of ‘New’ China after 1949.

4. Have you ever wanted to change your name?

The question asks “Have you ever …”, so the answer is ‘yes’ even if it was for a short time and you didn’t actually go ahead and change your name. If you have ever wanted to change your name, what were the circumstances? Why did(n’t) you go ahead? Develop your answer further by saying under what circumstances you might change your name in the future.

5. Is it common to use special names for friends and family in your country?

In many cultures, the use of ‘nicknames’ is very common. These are often shortened versions of a person’s name or references to a person’s character or appearance. For example “Shorty” might be the nickname of a person who is not so tall. Very often, couples have ‘pet’ names for each other.

6. Who generally chooses a baby’s name in your country?

This might vary from region to region and from family to family, so you might use your family or friends’ families as examples.

7. What traditions for naming babies are there in your culture?

Answer in the same way as for question 6, if appropriate.

Neighbours

1. How often do you talk to your neighbours?

Develop your answer by saying what you talk about and perhaps what your other family members/cohabitants talk to them about. Examples: family, the neighbourhood, other neighbours, food, traffic, prices, school/work.

2. Do you and your neighbours take part in any activities together?

Perhaps there are some community events (e.g. at festival time) or perhaps your

neighbours have similar interests to you.

3. What do you think of your neighbours?

This is a good opportunity to use adjectives, e.g. kind, friendly, nice, polite, quiet, noisy, rude, wonderful, helpful. Give examples that illustrate these characteristics.

4. Do you and your neighbours ever have any problems with each other?

Common problems are noise, smells, and various kinds of arguments. If you have any of these problems, talk about how you could solve them or did solve them.

5. Do you think your neighbours have a similar lifestyle to you?

This probably depends a lot on their interests, their ages and their occupations. Talk about how your lifestyles are similar and how they are different.

The News

1. Are you interested in the news?

Say why, and how often you follow it. You could develop your answer by saying whether other people close to you also follow it.

2. Which news stories interest you most?

Examples: domestic, foreign, economic, funny, strange, fashion, science, technology, travel, food and drink, cultural, weather, art, music, entertainment.

Why do these stories interest you? Do they also interest other people you know? You could also mention news stories that don’t interest you.

3. How do you keep up with the news?

Examples: newspapers, magazines, the Internet, mobile phone, television, radio, talking with other people.

Do other people you know keep up with the news in the same ways? Which is your favourite way of keeping up with the news?

4. Are you more interested in domestic news or international news?

You may have answered this question in response to question 2. Say why domestic or international stories interest you more.

5. When did you start to keep up with the news?

Develop your answer by saying why. Did your parents, teachers or other people encourage you?

6. Does the news affect your life very much?

Give at least two examples of how it does, even if the effect is quite small. Your answer will probably depend on your lifestyle, interests and work or studies. Financial news is most likely to have an effect on your life.

Newspapers

Remember that for this topic it is acceptable to talk about newspapers that you read online, not only ‘paper’ ones.

1. How often do you read newspapers?

Hopefully you read one almost every day to keep informed!

2. Which newspapers do you read?

You can give the names of the newspapers in Your language, but if you know the translation into English, all the better. Are they daily newspapers, morning or evening ones? Say why you choose those particular newspapers to read.

3. Which kinds of articles or features interest you most?

Here are some types of articles that appear in newspapers: entertainment, crime, politics, disasters, domestic, international, strange-but-true stories, business, science and technology, travel.

4. Which are more popular – local or national newspapers where you live?

Give your answer and suggest why this is the case. Note that the question does not refer to you personally!

5. How important are newspapers in your country?

Develop your answer by comparing the importance of newspapers with the importance of other forms of news media, such as TV and radio.

6. Will newspapers be more or less important in the future?

Remember that newspapers published on the Internet can still be considered newspapers!

Noise

1. Are you often in places where there is a lot of noise?

Which places are they and how often are you there? Noisy places could include offices, streets, bars and cafes, discos. Do you mind lots of noise in these places?

2. How do you feel when you are working in a noisy place?

Most people don't like it. They feel distracted. They can't concentrate. Others don't mind the noise. They don't notice it.

3. Are there any kinds of sound that you particularly like or dislike?

Surveys regularly show that the most hated noise is the sound of babies crying! Of course, from the baby's point of view, that is the whole point – attract attention! How about when someone scratches the blackboard in class?

On the other hand, noises that you like might include music, birds singing, the sound rivers or waterfalls. We call sounds that help you feel relaxed 'soothing'.

4. Do you think daily life is becoming more noisy?

If so, what are the reasons for this? Can you identify specific reasons?
If you don't think that life is getting noisier, you will probably have to think of

something convincing to support your case!

5. Would you consider yourself to be a noisy person?

Be honest! Do you participate in any noisy activities? Do you play music loudly?

6. Do noisy people bother you?

Develop your answer by saying whether many of the people you know (family, friends, colleagues/classmates) are noisy. What do they do that is particularly annoying and bothers you?

Numbers

1. Do you have a lucky number?

Say which number it is and why you consider it to be lucky.

2. Do some numbers have special meaning in your culture?

These special meanings could be good, bad, or neutral. Try to give two or three examples and explanations.

3. What kind of numbers do you need to remember?

Numbers that people often need to remember includes birth dates, telephone numbers, house/flat numbers, and PINs for credit cards and bank cards.

4. Do you find it easier to remember numbers or names?

Say which and why. Develop your answer by saying how often you forget numbers and/or names.

5. Tell me about any methods you use to help you remember numbers?

If you don’t know any methods, this might be a good time to have a look on the Internet and find out what other people do!

6. Do people in your country usually write numbers, or use their hands to show

numbers, in the same way as English-speaking people?

In China, for example, people usually use a different system for using their hands to show numbers (at least from 6 to 10). Numbers are often written using the internationally accepted system, but not always.

Outdoor Activities

1. What kinds of outdoor activities do you like?

Outdoor activities do not only include sport. You might just like walking or you might enjoy taking photographs outdoors. Are there any particular reasons that you like these activities?

2. How often do you do outdoor activities?

Develop your answer by saying whether you would like to do them more often. Are there any restrictions on how often you can participate in these activities, apart from time? (Money?)

3. Do you do these activities alone or with other people?

Say which people you do these activities with (if anyone) – family, friends, or colleagues/classmates. Do you prefer doing these activities alone or with others?

4. Which outdoor activities would you like to take up?

Remember that any activities you name in answer to this question cannot be ones that you already do! This question gives you the chance to be inventive! Think of some unusual outdoor activities that you would like to try.

5. Which outdoor activities are popular in your country / where you live?

Remember that this question does not refer to you personally. Suggest reasons why these activities are popular. Perhaps it's simply because the facilities are nearby.

6. Do you think it is important to spend time outdoors?

Develop you answer by saying why. Most people will agree that spending time

outdoors is important. Give one or two of the benefits.

Parties

1. Do you like to go to parties?

Consider the following; meeting new people/contacts/old friends, music, food and drink, fun, jokes.

2. Do you often go to parties?

How often do you go? Every week? Once a month? Twice a year? Do you only go when there is a festival? A birthday?

3. Where are (these) parties usually held?

Parties can be held at a variety of locations, most often homes, hotels, offices, schools, universities, bars and restaurants.

4. What do you dislike about parties?

You might refer to question 1 for ideas.

5. Do you prefer family parties or parties with friends?

It probably depends a lot on what kind of people your family and your friends are!

Pets

1. Do you have (Have you ever had) a pet?

How long have you had (did you have) it? Describe it (e.g. size, colour, temperament). What do (did) your family/friends think of it?

2. What (other) kind of pet would you like to have?

Common pets; dogs, cats, rabbits, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, fish, birds (e.g. parrot, canary).

Unusual pets; snakes, spiders.

3. Do any of your friends or family members have pets?

Answer in a similar way as for question 1.

4. Is there anything you dislike about pets?

Things that people often dislike about pets include dirt/mess, noise, and smells.

5. Is it common to keep pets in your country?

Consider people of different ages, different social status and people from different areas (e.g. cities and countryside). Use adverbs of quantity (many, most, a lot of, a small number of, a few, not many).

Photographs/Photography

1. What kinds of photos do you like taking/looking at?

Do you prefer photographs of scenery, of historic buildings, or of people? Do you prefer looking at and taking different kinds of photos?

2. Would you prefer to buy a picture postcard or take a photo of a new place?

Postcard – usually a very good angle/view, vivid colours, photo taken professionally, it might be a cloudy/rainy day!
Photograph – taken yourself, can take many for less money, can download onto your computer.

3. Is photography popular in your country/where you live?

Say why and perhaps how many people you know who are interested in it or who have cameras. What do people like to take photographs of?

4. How do you organise your photographs?

Do you put them in albums? Are they sorted according to subject or according to when you took them?

5. What kind of photographs or pictures do you have on your walls at home?

Refer to question 1 to get some ideas. Do you frame your own photographs and put them on the walls of your home?

6. Do you like having your photograph taken?

Some people love it and others hate it! If you are having your photograph taken, do you check how you look first? On what occasions do you have your photograph taken? You might need some passport photos or have your picture taken at a party or celebration.

7. Do you think it would be interesting to be a professional photographer?

Give reasons for your answer.

Places of Interest

1. Which places in your city or province would you suggest a tourist visit?

The question asks “places”, so be sure to give more than one place!
Places of interest: palaces, temples, markets, bridges, tombs, pagodas, rivers, lakes, mountains, museums, wildlife parks, amusement parks, parks, famous buildings.
Say why the tourists should go there. Use the ‘infinitive of purpose’ to do this. “You should go there to see …, to do …, to experience …, to photograph …” Say if it is easy (expensive) to get there and if many tourists already go there.

2. Why are they significant?

Point out some special or unique features of about these places. Perhaps something historically significant happened there.
Significant events: a battle, the birth or death of a famous person, an important meeting of leaders.

3. Do you often visit such places?

Don’t only say how often and why. Add details to your answer such as who you go with, what time of the year you prefer to go, and what you like doing there. Some places are particularly significant during festivals or on anniversaries.

4. What kind of places of interest do you like to visit?

The question asks “kind”, so you should answer with a type of place, then perhaps give one or two examples. “I like visiting museums such as the military museum in Beijing.” Develop your answer further in the same ways as for questions one, two, and three.

5. Do you like to take photographs at places of interest?

People who take photographs do so for different reasons. Some like to photograph family and friends at a place, whilst others prefer to take photos of the scenery and historic monuments.

6. Do you often visit places of natural beauty?

Some places of interest are not significant historically. They have beautiful scenery (unfortunately often ruined by too much tourism and modern development) and are particularly good places to visit to get away from the city. Answer in a similar way to the questions above.

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Plans and goals

1. Do you often make plans for the future?

What kind of plans? In how much detail do you plan them? Do you write them down or just think about them? Do you tell other people your plans? Are your plans realistic or fantasy?

2. What plans do you have for the near future?

Don’t mention plans that are for more than a year ahead, unless they are directly connected to plans less than a year ahead. If your plans involve doing a series of things, make sure you explain them in a clear order.

3. What goals do you have in life?

'Life goals' are generally less specific, like 'stay healthy', 'find a good life partner' and 'get a good job'. Where possible, try to give some more detail to develop your answer.

4. What will you need to do to achieve your goals?

You may need to use modal verbs such as 'might', 'may' and 'could' and express probability using words like 'probably' and 'possibly'.

5. Will you need any help from other people to achieve your goals?

What help and from who? If you achieve your goals, how much of that success will be because of you and how much because of other people?

Possessions

1. Do you own something which was expensive to buy?

Don't talk about something that was cheap, but is now expensive – the question says "expensive to buy". Describe the thing and mention who gave it to you. How expensive was it and where was it bought? If you do not own something expensive, say so, then talk briefly about something expensive that you would like to own and say whether you think you will ever own it.

2. Do people in your country often buy expensive items?

What do they buy? Where? How much do they cost? Why do they buy them – to use, for decoration, or as a gift? Remember to try to put two or more pieces of information into a complex sentence and use connectives.

3. Do you own something which was a special gift to you?

Say who gave it to you and why it is special. Describe it. If you know, say when and where they bought it and whether it was expensive or not. As in question two, remember to try to put two or more pieces of information into a complex sentence

and use connectives.

4. Do you own any items which are very old?

These could be ‘family heirlooms’ – items passed from one generation to another. These are often jewellery or photo albums. Alternatively, they could be ‘collector’s items’, such as a vase or an old toy. Perhaps these items are collections of things like old stamps or coins. Describe the items and say roughly how old they are, e.g. “A stamp from 1860”, “A Ming dynasty vase”, or “A gold ring made in the 1920’s”.

5. How important are possessions to you?

Some possessions can be very important to people because they remind them of something or someone. Briefly, compare the importance of possessions and other things such as health, love, money, family, and friends.

6. What things do you own which you find particularly useful?

Answer in the same ways as for questions one and three. Try to be a little original and not talk about your computer or mobile phone!

Old Things That People Keep in their Family

What are some other things that people keep in their family for a long time?
Why do you think people keep these things?
Why do people pass these things onto the next generation?
Do you think it's good to recall the past?
Who do you think feels old family heirlooms are more important, young people or older people?

Primary school

1. How old were you when you started primary school?

Develop your answer by saying whether that is the usual age for people to start primary school in your country. You can also add when you finished attending primary school and what you thought of your time there.

2. What kind of clothes did you wear to primary school?

Did you have to wear a school uniform, was there a dress code, or could you wear what you wanted? Remember to use plenty of clothes vocabulary.

3. What subjects did you enjoy most when you were at primary school?

The question refers to ‘subjects’ so you should name more than one. Why did you particularly like them? You can also mention what you actually studied during those classes and what you thought of the teacher.

4. Where did you go to primary/secondary school?

Was it near to your home? Perhaps you could talk about how you went to school each day. If you went to a few different schools (perhaps because your parents moved) you have plenty to talk about. Develop your answer further by saying what the buildings were like? What did you think of the teachers? How were the classrooms decorated?

5. What were some of the popular playground activities at your primary school.

You may need to describe some of the games, as they are likely to be unfamiliar to people from English-speaking countries. Do this carefully so as to avoid any confusion!

6. Have you ever returned to see your old primary school?

If so, say whether you met anyone you knew and why you returned. If not, say whether you would like to.

7. Are you still in contact with any of your friends from primary school?

If so, say what you do together and how often you are in touch. If not, perhaps there is someone you wish you were still in contact with.

Private gardens

1. Does your family have a garden? Would you like one?

Give a brief description of your garden or the one you would like.

2. What do you (people) use your (their) garden for?

Examples; gardening, growing fruit and vegetables, relaxation, eating and drinking, parties, sunbathing.

3. Do many people in your country have a garden?

Perhaps in crowded cities, relatively few people have gardens, because they live in flats but the situation might be different in the countryside.

4. Is gardening popular in your country?

Say why or why not.

5. Do you think gardening will become more popular in the future?

Again, say why or why not.

Public Transport

1. What public transport is there where you live?

Trains? Buses? Underground/Subway? Light railway?

2. What public transport do most people use?

Say how often people use each form of public transport that you mentioned.

3. Do you use this public transport regularly?

Why do you use it? Because it's closer? Because it's faster?

4. Is public transport expensive where you live?

Say how much it costs to buy a ticket for the various forms of public transport.

This might depend on how far you travel. Then compare it to how much the average person earns each month.

5. When is public transport the most crowded?

You might give a period of time and days, e.g. from 5 o'clock to 7 o'clock from Monday to Friday. How crowded does it get? Do you have to squeeze up against other people or is there enough room to stand comfortably?

6. How could public transport be improved?

Common suggestions include making it cleaner, making services more regular, making it more comfortable and providing a better service at night.

Radio

1. Do you often listen to the radio?

How often? Why? If you drive (or travel by taxi), don't forget that many (taxi) drivers listen to the radio.

2. What kinds of programmes are on the radio?

Examples; news, transport information, music (which kinds?), cross talk, comedy, interviews.

3. Do you prefer to listen to the radio or watch TV (read newspapers)?

Say why and perhaps develop your answer by saying which media other people around you prefer.

4. Did you listen to the radio when you were younger?

Again, notice that there is a difference between 'young' and 'younger'! Compare your habits in the past and now.

5. In your country, are there any radio stations (programmes) in English?

What kinds of radio programmes are there in English in your country? News? Language learning? Do most radio stations have such programmes or only a few?

Rain

1. Does it rain much in your country / where you live?

Does it vary according to the seasons?

2. At what time of day does it usually rain?

Does it usually rain at a particular time of day or does it vary. Does it vary according to the season?

3. Which time of the year is the rainiest where you live?

Say which season or month is the rainiest.

4. What do you do on rainy days?

You probably have to stay indoors. Do you read or watch TV? Perhaps you listen to music or play a game indoors with family or friends.

5. How do you feel on rainy days?

This probably depends on what you like to do. If you are an outdoors kind of person, you probably don't like rainy days. If you usually stay indoors anyway, it probably doesn't matter much to you.

6. How does rain affect people's lives?

Rain usually doesn't affect people's lives too much. It might make the journey to work a little longer. If the rain is heavy, it might prevent sports events taking place. If it is extremely heavy, it can wash away soil, seriously affecting farmers.

Reading

1. What kinds of things do you read?

Things that people read include newspapers, books, textbooks, leaflets, notices, magazines, web pages, even timetables!

2. Why do you read?

Do you read more for information or for entertainment?

3. How much time do you spend reading?

Develop your answer by saying how much time you spend reading each thing and perhaps why you spend more/lees time reading each type of thing.

4. At what time of day do you prefer to read?

This probably depends on what you are reading. Most people read the news in the morning. People often read for pleasure in the evenings, when they want to relax after work.

5. Where do you like to read?

Do you prefer to read at your desk at work, in the library, in bed, or on the bus? Why do you like to read there?

6. How important is reading for you?

Reading is important to most people – whether they are students or working people. Give two or three reasons why reading is important to you.

Restaurants

1. Do you usually go out to eat or do you eat at home?

Most people say that there is a clear difference in taste between the food you get in restaurants and the food you get at home. Which do you prefer? Can you suggest why the food may taste different? Use a suitable adverb of frequency (sometimes, often, seldom) to say how often you go to restaurants. Alternatively, use a phrase like ‘once a week’ or ‘twice a month’. Then develop your answer by saying which type(s) of restaurant(s) you go to (Sichuan, Western, Cantonese, Imperial), who

you go with (family, friends, colleagues), the time of day you go (lunchtime, evenings).

2. Why do you go to restaurants?

Perhaps for special occasions, to try some different food, or to give your mother a break from cooking!

3. What kind of food do you like to eat when you eat out?

Types of restaurants: Beijing, Beijing Duck, Cantonese, fast food, Guizhou, Hakka, Huaiyang, Hunan, Imperial, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Shandong, Shanghai, Shanxi, Sichuan, Taiwanese, vegetarian, Western, Yunnan, Xinjiang (Muslim), Zhejiang.

4. What is important for you when you choose a place to eat out?

If you go to a cheap restaurant, the service is probably not very important as long as you get your food quickly, the restaurant is clean and the waiter or waitress is reasonably polite. However, in a more expensive restaurant you will expect something more. This is particularly true if you are with a guest (a boy-/girlfriend or a client, for example). Think about what makes a good waiter or waitress. Good service/waiting staff: attentive, quick, polite, cheerful, clean, well-trained. Bad service/waiting staff: inattentive, slow, impolite, grumpy, dirty, poorly-trained.

6. What kind of restaurants do young people in your country like?

Refer to question 3 for ideas about different kinds of restaurants.

7. Do you think eating out in restaurants will become more popular in future where you live?

Give your opinion and suggest one or two reasons why this might happen.

Science

1. Are you interested in science?

Give reasons for your answer. Perhaps you are interested in certain aspects of science, but not others.

2. Do (Did) you study science at school?

The answer is almost certainly ‘yes’. Talk about what you studied in class.

3. Did you do any science experiments?

You may have mentioned this in response to question 2. If not, briefly describe the purposes of one or two experiments. Do not go into detail unless you are confident that you have the language to do so!

4. Do you think you will study science in the future?

This will depend on your major and your future career plans. If yes, say what kind of science you will study.

5. Do you read science books or articles?

What kinds? Do you read about science on the Internet? With the widespread use of technology, you probably do read something about science even if it’s mixed with other information, about computing for example.

6. Do you talk about science with family, colleagues (classmates) or friends?

Again, you might not discuss it directly, but perhaps as part of a conversation about something else.

7. How has science affected your life?

Science touches every aspect of our lives, from food to transport, from computing to radio. Just give two or three examples. Choose examples where you can demonstrate a good vocabulary to the examiner. Avoid confusing detail.

The Sea

1. How much time have you spent near the sea?

Develop your answer by saying whether you lived by the sea or were just visiting a place by the sea. Did you go there to visit a friend or relative? You can develop your answer further by saying whether you think you move to a seaside town or city in the future.

2. When was the last time you went to the sea?

Develop your answer by giving details, such as who you went with, the reason for your visit, how long you were there and, of course, exactly where you went!

3. What do people enjoy about being near the sea?

This question is not only asking about you personally. Think about reasons that other people – your friends and relatives, for example – like being near the sea.

4. Would you like to live in a seaside town?

Develop your answer by giving reasons. You can give a particular seaside town or city as an example.

5. What interests you most about the sea?

This question is similar to question 3, but you should answer by giving only one thing.

6. Do many people in your country live near the sea?

There are certainly many cities on the coasts of many countries. One reason may be historic trade routes.

The Seasons

1. Describe the different seasons where you live?

Go through each season, giving a brief description of the weather that is usual at that time of the year.

2. Which is your favourite season?

Develop your answer by saying why. You can also mention the season that you like least and say why you don't like it.

3. What would be the perfect climate for you?

Be careful when answering this question! It asks about climate, so remember that you would have this all year round. If you prefer to live with different seasons or different kinds of weather, you will need to give a precise answer.

4. What's the weather like at different times of the year in your country?

If your country is large, with many different types of climate, this question gives you an excellent opportunity to demonstrate your vocabulary.

5. How does your lifestyle change in different seasons?

If the seasons vary a lot where you live, you will almost certainly do different things at different times of the year. You might use different forms of transport, go out more/less, or simply wear different clothes.

6. How do the different seasons affect the way you spend your free time?

You may have already answered this in your response to question 5. Many outdoor activities are not suited to cold weather. Others may be better in colder weather than hot weather, because you don't sweat so much!

7. Does the weather in some seasons cause any problems in your country?

Consider the effects of high winds, storms and heavy snow.

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Secondary school

1. What kind of clothes did you wear to secondary school?

Did you have to wear a school uniform, was there a dress code, or could you wear what you wanted? Remember to use plenty of clothes vocabulary.

2. What subjects did you enjoy most when you were at secondary school?

The question refers to ‘subjects’ so you should name more than one. Why did you particularly like them? You can also mention what you actually studied during those classes and what you thought of the teacher.

3. Where did you go to primary/secondary school?

Was it near to your home? Perhaps you could talk about how you went to school each day. If you went to a few different schools (perhaps because your parents moved) you have plenty to talk about.

4. What was your secondary school like?

What were the buildings like? What did you think of the teachers? How were the classrooms decorated?

5. What subjects did you study at secondary school?

Most students study quite a variety of subjects at secondary school. Did you study the same subjects each year or did they change?

6. What was your favourite subject at secondary school?

Why did you like that subject in particular? Were you good at it? Have you continued to study it or take an interest in it after finishing secondary school? If not, why not?

Shopping

1. Do you enjoy shopping / window shopping?

‘Window shopping’ means that you just go to the shops to look at the goods, usually to see what you might buy in the future or look at the latest fashion. Say what you go (window) shopping for, when, how often, and who with. Don’t forget to say why you enjoy it! If you dislike (window) shopping, say why.

2. Do you prefer shopping in modern stores or in traditional markets?

Note that the question doesn't ask where you do most of your shopping – it asks about preference. Develop your answer by saying why you prefer that type of place and how often you go shopping there.

3. What kinds of shops are there near your home?

Show your wide vocabulary by naming a few of the shops. Don't just give a list! Give a little description of each one and its location. Remember to use "There is / are …"
Some shops (US = stores): supermarket, chemist's (US = drugstore), butcher's, newsagent's (newspapers, cigarettes), camera shop, music store, DVD store, electrical store, hardware store (nails, hammers, wood), bookshop, greengrocer's, jeweller's, toyshop, boutique (fashionable clothes).

4. What sorts of things do you enjoy buying most?

Do you enjoy buying food, clothes, electronics, books, DVDs? Why? How often do you go shopping for these things and where do you go shopping for them?

5. Who does the daily or weekly shopping in your household?

Begin by saying whether you or your family tend to shop daily or weekly (and why). If you are student and live away from home, the chances are that you do the shopping yourself. How about during holidays when you go back home to your parents?

6. How often do you go shopping for things apart from food?

Do you do this regularly or as you need the things?

Sports

1. Have you ever played any sports?

Notice that the question begins "Have you ever …", so you should say which sports you play now (if any) and those that you have played in the past (e.g. as a child). Say which sports you play(ed), who with, and where. You could also mention how long you have played (or played) those sports and their importance

in your life. Remember to use the correct tenses in your answer! You can use the phrase “used to”. “I used to play football when I was younger.”

2. Are there any sports you would like to try?

Say which they are and why you would like to try them.

3. Which is the most popular sport where you live?

This question doesn’t ask about the sports that you play or enjoy. The most popular sport where you live is probably one for which there are good facilities. You should only name one sport as the most popular, but you can mention other popular ones too.

4. What sports are popular in your country?

Name a few of the most popular sports, remembering to say why they are popular and whether people just watch them or also play them. You could also mention some stars or teams, but don’t make them the focus of your question.

5. How important is it to do sport regularly?

Use the infinitive of purpose – to be with friends (to socialise), to keep fit (to exercise), to improve, to prepare for competitions, to work off extra energy.

6. Do you think children should learn to do sport in school?

Develop your answer by saying why or why not.

7. Where you live, do men and women feel the same about sports?

Do men and women do sports for the same reasons? You can also compare the sports men like and the ones women like. Sometimes they will be the same, and sometimes different. Use connectives to show similarities and differences. “Men and women both like football. However men also like rugby which women think is too violent.”

Sports teams

1. Have you ever played team sports?

Notice that the question begins “Have you ever …”, so you should say which sports you play now (if any) and those that you have played in the past (e.g. as a child). Say which sports you play(ed), who with, and where. You could also mention how long you have played (or played) those sports and their importance in your life. Remember to use the correct tenses in your answer! You can use the phrase “used to”. “I used to play football when I was younger.”

2. Have you ever played for a team in a competition?

Answer in a similar way as for question 1. Don’t forget to mention how successful your team was!

3. Do you support any sports teams?

A lot of young men follow the English Premier League and/or the American NBA. Even if you don’t support a team, you should be able to say something about the teams that other people support. You could also consider why people support sports teams.

4. Has this team been successful recently?

What competitions have they won in recent years?

5. How often do you go to watch sports teams play?

You might also mention how often you watch sports teams on TV, particularly if you don’t go to see any. Why do you go (or not)? What is the atmosphere like? Do you go alone or with other people?

6. Are there any sports teams you dislike?

Perhaps your favourite team has a rival!

Swimming

1. Can you swim?

Are you a good swimmer? Have you ever taken part in a competition?

Swimming strokes; front crawl, backstroke, butterfly, breast stroke.

2. Do you enjoy swimming?

How often do you swim? Do you swim alone or with other people?

3. When did you learn to swim?

How long did it take you to learn? Do you think it's easier for children to learn to swim than for adults?

4. Who taught you to swim?

You may have answered this in response to question 1 or question 3. Was the person who taught you a good teacher? Did you learn by yourself?

5. Why do many people like swimming?

Perhaps they find it relaxing. Perhaps they do it to keep fit (in shape). Perhaps they compete.

6. Are there opportunities for people to swim where you live?

Most people go to swimming pools to swim, though they could also go at the beach (in the sea) or in a lake/river/reservoir.

Teachers

1. Did you like your teachers at primary and secondary school?

Develop your answer by saying why, how the teachers taught and what kind of people they were. You could also mention one or two teachers that you didn't like.

2. Did any of your teachers have a strong influence on you?

How? Be as precise as you can rather than just giving a very general answer.

3. Were your teachers strict?

In what ways? Were they strict about some things or about everything? Did you like the fact that they were strict. (The opposite of ‘strict’ is ‘lenient’.)

4. Would you like to be a schoolteacher?

In what ways is being a teacher a good job and/or a bad one? Perhaps it depends on the school and/or the students.

5. What kind of teachers do students like?

Use appropriate adjectives – kind, strict, lenient, clear, funny, happy, knowledgeable, intelligent, relaxed, optimistic, well spoken, dedicated, charismatic.

Telephones

1. Who uses the phone most in your home?

Use adverbs of frequency in your answer and add extra information such as who that person calls and why. Do they call long distance or make local calls? Are they calls related to work or are they personal ones? You could also say how long the phone conversations are.

2. How often do you make or get phone calls?

Answer in the same way as for question 1. How do you pay for the calls?

3. Are mobile phones common in your country (region)?

Which types of people use them most? Think of age groups, occupations, and income levels. Which types of people rarely use them or do not use them at all?

4. Are there places/situations where mobile phones shouldn’t be used?

Many people think that using mobile phones in certain places or situations is impolite or disrespectful. Common places or situations where you would probably switch your mobile phone off or not use it are: in an aircraft, in a class

or lecture, during a religious gathering, during meetings, at the cinema, at a sports event, while driving, during a wedding ceremony.

5. Is there anything you dislike about talking on the phone?

Perhaps you are not sure whether anyone else is listening to you. Perhaps you prefer to talk to people face-to-face. Perhaps it is expensive.

6. Do you prefer using the phone or communicating in writing?

Phone – quicker, more convenient, can be used anytime.
In writing – email is fast, cheaper, you can take time to think about what to write.

Television (TV)

1. How often do you watch TV?

Say how often using a suitable time phrase such as '2 hours a day'. Giving a range is also a good idea – 'between 10 and 12 hours a week'. The amount of time you spend watching TV probably depends a lot on your schedule and may also depend on the time of year or the weather. Do you only watch TV at home, or do you also watch it at restaurants, or at friends' homes. Do you watch TV alone or with other people?

2. What kind of programmes do you watch?

Kinds of programmes: films, documentaries, wildlife, news, sports, children's programmes, game shows (the people play games to win a prize), quiz shows (the people answer questions to win a prize), comedies, current affairs (a closer look at social or political issues), drama, chat shows (talking with famous people), cartoons, light entertainment, variety (singing, dancing and humour together), series (the same characters in different situations each episode), serials / soaps (the same characters in situations which develop from episode to episode).

Why do you like them and how often do you watch them? Do you watch TV more to get information or more for entertainment? You could select two kinds of programmes which you enjoy watching and compare them. You may watch different types of programmes depending on your mood or who you are with. Do

you prefer to watch these programmes alone or with other people?

3. Is watching TV a popular thing to do in your country?

If so, is it popular with everyone or only certain age groups or with people of certain backgrounds. Is it more popular than before? Will it become more popular in the future? Which kinds of programmes are most popular?

4. Do you often talk about TV programmes with friends?

Which programmes do you discuss? Do you agree on what you think of them? Where do you discuss them? Do you think you talk about them too much?

5. Do you think that you watch too much TV?

Be honest! If you think you watch too much, think of how you could cut down on TV. Think of what you could do with the time instead.

Time and Times of Day

1. Do you always wear a watch?

Notice that the question uses the word ‘always’. Many people wear watches, but perhaps take them off when they go swimming, exercise or go to bed. If you don’t wear a watch, perhaps you use the clock on your mobile phone instead.

2. Do you ever feel that time moves too quickly/slowly?

Say under which conditions this usually happens. Most people find that time goes slowly when something is boring and that “Time flies when you are having fun.”

3. How do you feel when you are late for something?

People usually feel embarrassed, unless they are only a minute or two late. They might feel relieved if they are late but someone else is even later. However, in some cultures, being late is not considered impolite at all.

4. How important is it to be on time in your culture?

Answer with reference to question 3.

5. What is your favourite time of day?

Develop your answer by giving reasons. Then develop it further by saying whether this has always been your favourite time of day. How about when you were a child, for example?

6. When is the busiest time of day for you?

Say why this is the busiest time of day for you (probably because you have most classes or work to do). Develop your answer further by saying whether this has always been the busiest time of your day.

7. Do you think it's important to do the same thing at the same time every day?

This question is asking about the importance of a daily routine. Some people find a daily routine useful as it means they know what they will be doing, whereas others find a daily routine restrictive.

Transport

1. Which types of transport do you use most often?

Methods: bicycle, bus, underground (subway), light railway, taxi, car.
Say how much it costs, how long it takes, and what alternatives you have. This would be a nice opportunity to use a conditional sentence – "Alternatively, if I went by subway, it would be quicker, but more expensive." Do many people use the same method of transport to go to/from school/work?

2. Which types of transport do you most enjoy using?

What makes those forms of transport most enjoyable?

3. What would you most like to see improved about the transport you use?

Think about ways in which it could be made (for example) more convenient, faster, less crowded or more comfortable.

4. If you go on a long journey, how do you prefer to travel?

There are five main forms of long distance transport – car, air, train, bus, and water. Travelling by air is fast, but expensive. Travelling by train is quite fast and not too expensive. Going a long distance by bus can be very tiring, but the bus network is more extensive than the air or train networks. Usually, people only use boats or ships to travel a long distance if they are on a holiday, because they are so slow.

5. Is transport expensive in your city / region / country?

You may have partly answered this question. If so, use a phrase like "As I have said / mentioned …" Add more price information if you can. Remember that the prices do not need to be exact – say 'about' or 'between … and …'

6. Are traffic jams a problem where you live?

If you live in a city, the answer is almost certainly 'yes', though traffic jams are not always everywhere. They usually occur at certain places at certain times – and are thus often predictable. Say where traffic jams usually occur and why. Do not blame traffic jams only on the number of cars! Other common causes are traffic accidents, poorly designed intersections, and bad driving skills.

7. Do you feel transport systems in your country are getting better?

Develop your answer by saying in what ways – comfort, speed, convenience.

Travel

1. Do you enjoy travelling?

What do you like or dislike about it? Do you prefer short journeys and trips or longer ones? Do you prefer the actual travelling or spending time in a place away from home?

2. Which foreign countries / other cities in your country have you visited?

Develop your answer by saying when you went there and for how long. You can also say whether you enjoyed the visits or not and why. At the end of your answer,

you could also say which places you hope to visit in the future. (Remember: visit, not live in or study/work in!)

3. Do you like to travel alone or with someone else?

Say which you prefer and why. Notice that this question asks about preference, not whether you actually travel alone or with other people.

4. When did you last go on a trip?

Develop your answer by saying how long the trip took, where you went, who you went with and perhaps whether you bought any souvenirs from the place you visited.

5. Do you ever read books, magazines or newspapers about travel?

There are plenty of books and magazines about travel and most newspapers publish articles about it. Do you usually read about places you will probably visit or faraway places you will probably not get the chance to see?

6. Do you think it's good for young people to go travelling?

Develop your answer by giving the specific benefits for young people.

7. What do you think people can learn from travelling?

You probably mentioned that young people can learn a lot from travelling in answer to the previous question, but here you must be more specific. What exactly can they learn?

Visitors

1. Do you like people coming to visit you at home?

Say why or why not.

2. What do you and your visitors usually do together?

Having a drink (tea, coffee, beer) and something to eat (snacks) are very common

things to do. Almost all people will chat, but what about? Some people play games (Mah Jong, cards, a board game) with visitors.

3. Do you prefer having visitors or visiting other people's homes?

Give your reasons. One thing that many people mention is that they or their guests do not know when to leave. It is hard to judge when you should end a visit.

4. Where you live, is it more common to visit people at home or outside the home?

Do people prefer to meet at home or at another location – perhaps a bar, café or restaurant? What are the advantages of this?

5. In your country/culture, is it common to bring a gift when you visit someone?

In most Western countries, bring a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates or flowers is quite common, particularly when it is a special occasion or you haven't seen the person for a long time.

6. In your country/culture, how do people make guests feel welcome?

"Make you self at home!" is what most hosts say to guests when they arrive, but how exactly does making your self at home happen?

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Weather

1. What is your favourite type of weather?

Common types of weather are: sunny, rainy, snowy and stormy. Develop your answer by saying why you like it.

2. What do you usually do during this type of weather?

If you are an 'outdoors' type of person, you probably like sunny (or at least dry) weather, because it's better for sports and outdoor activities. People who like rainy weather usually prefer doing things indoors, such as reading or watching TV.

3. Would you like to have this sort of weather all year round?

Would it get boring if the weather was the same all year?

4. How does the weather affect the way people behave in your country?

It probably affects the things that they do. Does it also affect their moods? Think about your family and friends – and yourself! – for examples.

5. What is the weather like in your country / where you live?

If you are asked about your country, you will have plenty to talk about if your country is large. Compare the main parts of your country, particularly any differences between the north and the south.
Use the following words to refer to temperature: boiling (very hot), hot, warm, quite warm, not very warm, chilly, cold, freezing (very cold). You might also point out the effect of the wind, which can reduce the temperature quite a lot.

6. Is the weather ever unusual in your country / where you live?

Unusual weather might include high winds, storms, heavy snow or sandstorms.

Weddings

1. How do people usually celebrate weddings in your culture?

Weddings around the world usually have many things in common – toasts, speeches, photographs, dancing, and how could we forget the eating and drinking! When talking about weddings, distinguish between the ceremony and the reception (party/banquet).

2. Do people eat special food at weddings in your culture?

Some dishes may have special meanings in your culture. Other dishes may not have any meaning, but might be traditional. You could develop your answer by mentioning minority cultures in your country, and any differences between regions.

3. What gifts do people usually buy for the bride and groom?

Are people “assigned” to buy certain gifts? Are certain gifts considered traditional? Do people buy gifts which cost a certain amount?
In Britain, some couples make a scrapbook with pictures of the gifts they would like. People sign their names next to the pictures to indicate that they will buy that gift. What do you think of this idea?

4. What kind of clothes do people wear at weddings?

Describe the clothes and mention any special colours. People may wear different clothes according to their status at the wedding (bride/groom, best man, parents of the couple, ordinary guests).

5. Which people are usually invited to a wedding?

Close family, extended family, distant relatives, close friends, acquaintances, classmates, colleagues, bosses, important local people. Discuss the circumstances under which different people might be invited.

6. How important are weddings in your country?

Probably very important! Explain why.

7. How are weddings today different from weddings in the past in your country?

Explain any differences and changes in the ceremony, clothes, etc.

Weekends

1. How do you usually spend your weekends?

You probably have some free time, but many people have to work and others spend some of the time at weekends doing housework and homework. Then, of course, there’s sleeping!

2. Which is your favourite weekend day?

Do you prefer Saturdays or Sundays and why? Does it depend more on what you actually do on those days or is you preference based on the fact that Sunday is followed by work/studies on Monday?

3. Which is your favourite part of the weekend?

Be a little more specific than with your answer to question 2. Your answer will probably be influenced by what you do at that particular time.

4. Do you think your weekends are long enough?

Say why and develop your answer by adding whether you think weekends should be longer (or shorter!).

5. How important do you think it is to have free time at the weekends?

Having free time at the weekends gives you time to relax ("recharge your batteries"), but also to visit friends, take care of the household.

6. Do you think people should get paid more for working during weekends?

Think about this question from the point of view of the workers and the employers. It might depend on whether the people also have to work from Monday to Friday or not.

Writing

1. What kinds of writing do you generally do?

If the question asks about 'writing', with no specific kind of writing mentioned, you can talk about writing by hand or writing using a keyboard. Kinds of writing that people do include writing letters and emails, doing homework, writing essays, writing documents, writing notes to remind themselves of something (perhaps like a shopping list or a telephone number), or even writing books and articles for newspapers and magazines.

2. How often do you write by hand and how often do you write using a keyboard?

This question requires you to distinguish between two main forms of writing. You can develop your answer by saying which method you use for each type of writing.

3. What do you enjoy writing most?

Develop your answer by saying why you particularly enjoy it.

4. Are there any kinds of writing you do not like doing?

Develop your answer by saying why you don't like them and perhaps why you have to do them even though you dislike them.

5. Which language do you prefer to write in?

Probably your native language. Say why.

6. What do you find difficult about writing in English?

Some things that people find difficult are letter formation, spelling, finding the right words and using the correct grammatical structures.

Your country

1. Is your country large?

China has an area of about 3.6 (three point six) million square kilometres. It is the third largest country in the world after Russia and Canada. Compare China and the country you wish to go to.
China and Canada – China is a little smaller.
China and Australia – China is 20-25% larger.
China and Britain – China is 39 times larger!
Is the land area taken up by mountains, deserts, forests, agricultural land?

2. What is special or unique about your country?

Consider some special tourist sights that do not exist elsewhere.

3. Did / Do any world-famous people come from your country?

Who are they and what are they famous for? Give some details of what they have done or achieved. You could give some information about their personal lives.

4. What industries are there in your country?

There are many types of industry, such as light industry, heavy industry, the IT industry, the clothing industry, and the chemical industry. Say where they are located and how important they are in the national economy.

5. If you could change one thing about your country, what would it be?

Here's your chance to pretend to be the leader of your country! Remember that the question asks you to change only one thing about your country, so choose carefully! Choose something which you know you have the vocabulary to talk about – you don't want to be struggling to find words half way through your answer!
Say what the change would be, what the situation is now, what the situation should be, how you would make the change, and why you would make the change.

Part 2 Questions

People

Describe your parents.

You should say:
they do at work and in their free time
something about their characters
how they are similar and how they are different
and say how similar to your parents you think you are.

Appearance: tall, short, average height, fat, thin, slim, medium build, muscular, long hair, short hair, balding, well-dressed.

Character: loving, strict, open-minded, understanding, patient, encouraging, friendly, kind, warm, generous, cheerful, easy-going, hard-working, reliable, intelligent, reserved, shy, sensible, optimistic, sociable, relaxed.

When you speak, divide the time fairly evenly between both parents. A simple way to do this is to use connectives to show similarity and contrast. Another way is to use the comparative forms of adjectives (taller, more cheerful).

Describe a member of your family.

You should say:
what the relationship is between you and him/her
how much time you spend with this person
whether you think you have similar or different personalities
and explain why you chose to talk about that person.

Describe the person's relationship to you, how they look, what kind of personality they have and what they like doing.

Describe a family (not your own family) that you like.

You should say:
where this family lives
who the members of the family are
what each person in this family does
and explain why you like this family.

You could even just describe your own family with a few changes! The question even allows you to describe a family that is from a TV programme or film!

Describe two people from the same family.

You should say:
who these people are
how they are similar and different from each other
what other people in the family think of them
and explain why you chose these two people.

Notice that these two people do not have to be from your family!

Use connectives to compare and contrast the people – both, too, whereas, on the other hand, whilst, have something in common, share an interest in something, neither, identical, to differ, different, compared with, in contrast to.

Describe a child you know or knew.

You should say:
who the child is/was
whether you have had a lot of contact with this child
whether you and this child had/have any common interests
and explain what you think about children in general.

Age – toddler (about 2-4 years old), kid, at junior school (aged 7-11), at secondary school (aged 11-18), teenager.

Note that most teenagers in Western countries would not like being referred to as children, but you do not need to worry about that in IELTS.

Describe an elderly person you know.

You should say:
who the person is
how well you know that person
whether they live near to you
and explain how good your relationship with this person is.

Words and phrases – retired, retirement, still going strong, pensioner, enjoying an active retirement, doing community/volunteer work, mentoring young people, working part-time.

Describe a person you live with or once lived with.

You should say:
who the person is/was
whether you enjoyed living with that person
how long you lived together
and explain what you generally think of living with other people.

Possible advantages of living with someone else – help pay rent and bills, share housework, not alone, someone to talk to, share problems.
Possible problems of living with someone else – they don't do their fair share, noisy, often invite friends over, don't clean up after themselves, make a mess, play loud music.

Describe a person who took care of you when you were a child.

You should say:
when this person took care of you
what you and this person did together
how this person treated you
and explain what kind of person he/she is/was.

This person could be a parent, another relative (e.g. grandmother) or perhaps a family friend. This means that you can prepare an answer to this question that is almost the same as for other questions. However, remember the question and spend plenty of time on the 'took care of you' aspect. If the person is not one of your parents, you could also mention why this person took care of you instead of your mother/father.

Describe a person who has greatly influenced you.

You should say:
who the person is (was)
how you came into contact with this person
how they have influenced you and why
and whether this person has also influenced other people.

We influence almost everyone we have contact with, even if only in a small way. The question uses the word "greatly", so the person you choose will probably be someone you have had a lot of contact with, such as a parent, a friend, or a teacher. However, this person could also be a star who you particularly admire. Remember to focus on the 'influence' aspect of the question, rather than talking about what they look like and what they do.

Describe a person who you would like to be similar to.

You should say:
who this person is
how you know this person
in what ways you would like to be similar to this person
and explain why you would like to be similar to this person.

This should be an easy question once you have practised the various 'people' questions that are in part 2 of the speaking module. For your answer to this

question, you can choose any of the people you have already talked about (e.g. a member of your family, a famous person, a helpful person).

Describe one of your neighbours.

You should say:
who the neighbour is
how well you know this person
what this person looks like
and explain how you feel about this person.

Follow the usual pattern used when talking about people – describe the person's appearance (physical and usual clothing) and personality. Then move on to talk about things they like. Focus on the 'neighbour' part of the question by saying how often you see/meet them and where. Note that a neighbour doesn't have to be one of the people living immediately next door to you – a person a few doors away is acceptable.

Describe one of your friends.

You should say:
who the friend is and how you first met him / her
what you enjoy doing together
what he / she is like and looks like
and explain why your friendship is so special.

Appearance

Tall, short, fat, overweight, slim, medium build, stocky, muscular, beautiful, good-looking, handsome, ugly, plain, straight / wavy, curly hair, pale / dark skin, beard.

Character

Friendly, warm, kind, gentle, happy, pleasant, generous, cheerful, optimistic, relaxed, easy going, strong, sensitive, hard-working, punctual, reliable, clever, intelligent, bright, ambitious, sensible, caring, thoughtful, lively, interesting, talkative, funny, active, sporty.

Verbs and phrases

My girlfriend and I have (got) a lot in common. (Note that ‘got’ is not necessary.)
I get on very well with my colleagues.
I sometimes fall out with my best friend, but we always make up later.

Describe one of your classmates.

You should say:
who the classmate is/was and how you met them
what the classmate is/was like
whether you had a good relationship
and say whether other people in your class have/had a similar opinion of this person.

Note that the question does not specify whether you should talk about a current classmate or a past one! Nor does the question say that the classmate has to be someone you liked. You may choose.
You should be able to describe a classmate or colleague quite easily now using the same words for appearance and character as for other people.
There are several slang words used to describe school kids. A ‘swot’ or ‘teacher’s pet’ always studies. A ‘grass’ or ‘tell-tale’ tells teachers about pupils naughty activities.
One of my classmates is so stupid that when he took his dog to obedience school, the dog passed and he failed!

Describe a teacher you have had.

You should say:
who the teacher is/was and what subject(s) (s)he teaches or taught
what the teacher is/was like
how he/she taught
and say whether other people had a similar opinion of this teacher.

Subjects: language, literature, English, maths, physics, biology, chemistry, history, geography, civics, economics, computer studies.
Teacher’s characteristics: kind, fun, pleasant, strict, humorous, friendly, intelligent, cheerful, casual, inspiring, communicative, encouraging, fair, patient, well-organised, knowledgeable, qualified, confident, interesting, hard-working,

sensible.
Teacher's appearance: professional, well-dressed, formal, casual, neat and tidy, tall, short, average height, slim, overweight, average build.
Teaching style: interactive, lecture, discussion, traditional, fun.

Describe a happy person you know.

You should say:
who this person is
how you came to know him/her
whether you know him/her very well
and explain what makes this person such a happy person.

Vocabulary and phrases associated with happy people – laugh, laughter, comic, comedy, jokes, funny stories, funny actions/gestures, pull a funny face, make someone laugh, tell a joke, recall a funny incident/moment, humour, humorous.

Describe a person you know who often helps others.

You should say:
how you know this person
what kind of person he or she is
how this person helps others
and explain why this person (likes to help) helps others.

Ways of helping people: looking after them (especially the young, the old and the disabled), doing housework for them (cooking, cleaning, shopping, washing clothes, ironing), assisting at work or with studies, providing advice or suggestions, raising or giving money (e.g. charity work), doing volunteer work (e.g. medical workers in poor countries).

Describe a successful person you know or have heard of.

You should say:
who the person is
why he/she is considered to be successful
how his/her lifestyle is different to yours

and explain whether you would like to be like this person.

Successful people often work in the following fields – politics, academia, business, sport, entertainment or international organisations and charities.

Characteristics of successful people often include outgoing, determined, confident, ambitious, energetic, sensible, practical, realistic, rational, logical, passionate, dedicated, thoughtful.

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Describe a person you know who won a competition.

You should say:
what competition it was
when and it where it happened
how or why he/she won this competition
and explain how you felt when you heard about this win.

This person could easily be one of the people you have described in answer to another part 2 question, e.g. a member of your family, a friend, an elderly person, a child, a classmate or a teacher. Feel free to describe the person (appearance, character, etc.) but don't forget to focus on the fact that they won a competition. Note that 'winning a competition' is not the same as 'getting a place at university' or 'getting a job'.

Describe a famous person who you particularly admire.

You should say:
who the person is (was) and why they are (were) famous
why you particularly admire them
how they contribute(d) to society
and say what questions you would ask this person if you met them.

Famous people: politicians, actors / actresses, musicians, singers, sports stars, inventors, businesspeople.

Adjectives: successful, intelligent, admired, wealthy, ambitious, renowned, revered, hard-working, helpful.

Reasons for being famous and admired: broke a record, discovered or invented something, heroic, helped people / society, made a great film, wrote an influential book, has a special talent, made a lot of money.

Remember to use the past tense if you choose to talk about a person who is dead. Remember to focus on the 'admire' aspect of the question, rather than talking about what they look like and what they do. To show a range of vocabulary, you also can use the verbs 'look up to' and 'respect' in your talk.

Describe a leader you admire.

You should say:
who the leader is
what they do/did that made them a leader
what you would ask if you could meet him/her
and explain why you admire him/her.

Different types of leaders include political leaders, business leaders, community leaders and people who lead on social or environmental issues.

Characteristics that leaders often have – outgoing, confident, strong-willed, determined, dominant, ambitious, energetic, competitive, decisive, reliable, passionate, dedicated.

Describe your favourite actor or actress.

You should say:
who the actor or actress is and where (s)he is from
which films (s)he has starred in
why you like him/her in particular
and say whether other people you know have a similar opinion about him/her.

An actor/actress stars in a film or plays a part in a TV series. You can also say that they the film starred an actor/actress or that a part / role was played by an actor/ actress. If an actor/actress is in a film, you can say that they appeared in the film. You can say that an actor/actress portrays / plays a character. Later in their careers, an actor/actress might become a director. They direct films. You can also say that a film was directed by a person.
The dream of most actors/actresses is for their successful work to be appreciated.

The highest symbol of this is usually an award, such as an Oscar. It must be wonderful yet disappointing to be nominated for an Oscar and not win one. You can also say that an actor/actress (or film) received a nomination for an award. Years later, people will probably refer to the peak or high point of an actor's/actress' career. Actors/actresses sometimes retire, then make a comeback. Top actors/actresses sometimes make disappointing or unsuccessful films - or even 'box office flops' – which can damage their reputations rather than enhance them.

Describe a character from a film or TV programme.

You should say:
who the character is/was
how often you have watched him/her
what kind of person this character is/was
and explain what you think of this character.

Films and TV programmes often contain the following types of characters – hero, detective, sidekick (= a person who regularly helps the hero), love interest (= the main character's boy-/girlfriend), villain (= the bad character).

The hero is usually – truthful, determined, energetic, sincere, helpful, modest, sensible, practical, fair, rational, logical, brave, courageous, adventurous, loyal, considerate, generous, understanding, thoughtful.

The villain is usually – determined, proud, boastful, selfish, stubborn, materialistic, aggressive, violent, brutal, impatient, unscrupulous, spiteful.

Describe a music group, musician or singer you particularly like.

You should say:
where you first heard of this group/musician/singer
whether he/she/they are popular in your country
what kind of music he/she/they play/sing
and explain what you particularly like about him/her/them.

Refer to the part one questions about music for types of music and musical instruments.

Music can make people feel – melancholic, nostalgic, full of longing, sentimental, hopeful, cheerful, optimistic, excited, calm, refreshed, relaxed, gloomy, lonely.

Useful vocabulary – vocalist, album, solo, concert, recording, track, high/low notes.

Describe a person you would like to spend a day with.

You should say: who the person is
what you would do together
what questions you would ask this person

and explain why you would choose to spend as day with them in particular.

Be imaginative! You can choose anyone you like (or even someone you dislike!). Don't focus on what the person looks like and their character, because then you will only use the same vocabulary as for the previous question. Since you are imagining a possible event, remember to use verbs such as 'would', 'could', and 'might'.

Describe someone you know who is good at cooking.

You should say: who this person is
how you know him or her
what kinds of food they cook

and explain why you think this person is so good at cooking.

You can spend a lot of time talking about the person, in the same way as you would answer the other questions about people in part 2 of the speaking module. However, don't forget to include plenty of information on their cooking ability. Talk about the different kinds of food they cook (be specific!), how they prepare it (verbs!) and what makes their food taste so good, in your opinion.

Describe an adventurous person you know.

You should say: who the person is
how you know him/her
what he/she looks like
and explain what they do that is so adventurous.

Words that can be used to describe adventurous people include active, enthusiastic, confident, outgoing, determined, energetic, passionate, brave, courageous and lively.

Adventurous activities include bungee jumping, snowboarding, diving (snorkelling), mountaineering, rock climbing, cliff diving, paragliding, parachuting and white water rafting.

Places

Describe your home.

You should say: when you started living there
what rooms it has and what you use them for
what your neighbourhood is like
and say how long you think it will be your home for.

Houses: detached, semi-detached, front / back garden, fence / wall, garage, roof.
Flats: block of flats (UK), apartment block (US), on the third floor, balcony, view from the balcony, stairs / lift.
Features: central heating, air conditioning
Rooms: Lounge / living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, study, games room, hall, converted loft (the space under the roof has been made into a room), laundry room
Useful adjectives and their opposites: bright / dark, comfortable / uncomfortable, convenient / inconvenient, modern / old, spacious / cramped, noisy / quiet, safe / dangerous, beautiful / ugly, clean / dirty, cheap / expensive, huge / tiny.

Furniture and appliances
Lounge – sofa, armchair, coffee table, drinks cabinet, TV, music centre, DVD

player.
Dining room – dining table, lazy Susan (revolving table often seen in Chinese restaurants)
Kitchen – cooker, oven, cupboards, dishwasher, sink, fridge, microwave,
Bedroom – bed, wardrobe, chest of drawers, bedside table, lamp,
Bathroom – bath, shower, washbasin, toilet, mirror,
Study – desk, bookcase, computer, phone,

Describe your ideal home.

You should say: where it would be and how much it might cost
what rooms it would have
how it would change your lifestyle
and say whether you think you will ever have a home like this.

You can use some of the same vocabulary as for the previous question. Remember that you must use verbs such as 'would', 'could', 'might', and 'should'.

You may find it useful to draw plans of both your current home and your ideal home in order to help organise your thoughts.

Describe a home you have lived in.

You should say: where the home is/was
how long you (have) lived there
whether you live(d) there alone
and explain what you like and dislike about it.

This could be your present home or a previous one. Talk about the design, decoration, features, rooms, furniture, appliances, location and level of convenience. If you no longer live there, perhaps you could explain why not. Perhaps (one of) your parents changed jobs or your family didn't like the neighbourhood.

Describe a room in your home.

You should say: where the room is in your home
how often you use it
what you use it for
and explain why you chose to talk about that room.

Rooms – living room, dining room, bedroom, bathroom, study, kitchen.

Useful vocabulary – wooden/tiled floor, double glazing, furnished/equipped with …

Furniture and fittings – sofa, armchair, bed, wardrobe, chest of drawers, wash basin, bath, shower, bedside table, stool, kitchen unit, cupboard, heater, fire, sink, cooker, refrigerator, desk, dressing table.

Adjectives – spacious, bright, colourful, modern, traditional, quiet, noisy, dark.

Describe a school that you have attended at any time in your life.

You should say: what you learnt at the school and who taught you
what the school campus was like
whether the school and teachers were as you expected

and explain how the school helped improve your future prospects (or did not!).

Types of schools: language, apprentice (students learn practical subjects or skills), primary, secondary (US = high school), boarding (students live at the school).
School vocabulary: timetable (US = schedule), homework, textbooks, exercise books, blackboard, chalk, classroom, cassette player, school reports, lessons, subject, term (US = semester), break, lunch break, extra-curricular activities (activities organised by the school / teachers for students outside normal lesson times, e.g. school trips, sports activities, chess club).
Describing the school: playground, assembly hall, gym, teachers' room (staff room), sick bay (school clinic), science lab, language lab, library, dormitory, classroom building, head teacher's office.
Likable teachers: friendly, helpful, communicative, knowledgeable, understanding, encouraging, patient, fair, interesting, responsible, well-prepared, humorous,

relaxed.
Teachers students usually do not like: strict, demanding, unhelpful, impatient, unfair, intolerant, boring, irresponsible, unprepared, old-fashioned, bad-tempered.
Exams and tests. You prepare (revise) for a test, then take it. A teacher will mark your test. You will either pass or fail.

Describe a building at your school or university.

You should say: where it is
what it looks like
what it is used for

and explain what facilities it has.

Buildings: library, teaching/classroom building, canteen, sports facility, dormitory, gym, lecture theatre, swimming pool, hall, administration/office building, science lab, language lab.
Objects: books, blackboard, whiteboard, chalk, marker pen, lectern, tables, desks, chairs, basketball court, table tennis table, volleyball net, weights, treadmill, projector, platform, computer, headphones, microphone, bookshelves, map, poster.

Obviously, it is possible to prepare one answer for more than one topic, since ‘library’ and certain other school/university buildings are covered by other topics.

Describe a library that you visited.

You should say: where it was
what the library looks like
what facilities it had

and explain why you went there.

Library vocabulary: book, magazine, newspaper, journal, magazine rack, bookshelves, notice board, catalogue room, borrow, lend, read, desk, chair, lamp, computer, microfilm, reading room, librarian, counter.

If you have trouble describing the library and its facilities, spend a little more time on its location – where it is and especially in relation to other buildings.

Describe the sports facilities in your town or city.

You should say: what sports facilities there are
how much people use them
whether they are expensive to use

and explain how the sports facilities in your town or city could be improved.

How many of these can you find in your town or city? Sports stadium, football stadium, athletics track, football pitch, swimming pool, tennis court, basketball court, exercise area, golf course, ice rink, ski slope, volleyball court, ping pong tables, squash courts.
How cheap (or expensive!) are the sports facilities in your town or city? Are there enough for everyone? Do the facilities match the interests of the people in your town or city? Are the sports facilities partly (wholly) paid for by the local government? Are they paid for by the people who use them? Do businesses contribute to the cost?

Describe an important building, structure or monument in the town or city you live in.

You should say: where the building/structure/monument is
whether people often go to see/visit it
what most people think about it

and explain why it is important.

Appearance – tall, short, beautiful, ugly, futuristic, traditional, impressive, magnificent, distinctive.
Materials – wood, stone, glass, concrete.
Features and facilities – revolving restaurant, viewing platform, tower, dome, shops, offices, flats, underground parking, fountain, waterfall.
Importance – memorial, historic, symbolic, business/commercial centre, entertainment centre.

Describe an important structure in your city or country.

You should say: what the structure is and what it is used for
what the structure is made of and what it looks like
how it has changed the area around it

and say what you thought of the structure the first time you saw it.

Structures: airport, office building, bridge, tower, temple, pagoda, shopping centre, government building, exhibition centre, power station, dam, railway station, stadium.

Measurements: a 50 metre high building, an area of 1000 square metres.

Describe a modern building that you have seen or visited.

You should say: what the building is
how often you go there
what most people think about it

and explain why you like it or dislike it.

Remember that you need to talk about a modern building, i.e. built fairly recently, but the building could be built in a more traditional style.

Appearance – tall, short, beautiful, ugly, futuristic, traditional, impressive, magnificent, distinctive.
Materials – wood, stone, glass, concrete.
Features and facilities – revolving restaurant, viewing platform, tower, dome, shops, offices, flats, underground parking, fountain, waterfall.

Describe an old place that is important in the history of your country.

You should say: where the place is
whether you have ever been there
whether people often visit this place

and explain why it is important in your country's history.

Places – palace, temple, battlefield, castle/fort, town/village.

Importance – important person/people lived there, scene of a battle, cultural features (e.g. traditional architecture or paintings).

Describe a shop you like to go to.

You should say: where the shop is and what it sells
something about the people who work there
why you like that shop in particular

and say whether other people have a similar opinion of this shop.

"Hamley's is one of the most famous toyshops in the world. It is located on Regent Street in the centre of London. The shop is now in a 6-floor building and it is estimated that over 5 million people go there each year. The shop only sells all kinds of toys – train sets, chess sets, toy soldiers, model ships, computer games, remote control cars, and, most famous of all, teddy bears! Hamley's has supplied toys to Royal children since 1938. The best thing about Hamley's for many children (and maybe adults!) is that you can play with many of the toys in the shop before you decide whether to buy them or not. Obviously, this policy ensures that the shop is almost always full of kids playing – and parents wondering how much credit they still have on their credit cards!"

Describe an open-air market that you have been to.

You should say: where the market is
what you can buy there
how often you go there

and explain what you particularly like about this open-air market.

The best-known open-air market in Beijing is probably the Panjiayuan antiques market. Things that markets frequently sell include antiques, clothes, second hand goods, gardening equipment, flowers and plants, household items, collector's items and books.

Describe a restaurant that you have either been to or heard about.

You should say: what kind of restaurant it is
what special dishes are served there
where it is located

and explain why this restaurant is special.

Eating at a Western restaurant
Aperitif – a drink before the meal, e.g. gin and tonic.
Starter – a light dish before the main meal, e.g. soup.
Main course – the main dish, e.g. steak.
Dessert – something after the main meal, usually sweet (e.g. ice-cream) or with fruit (e.g. a fruit salad).

Service
The waiter was unobtrusive (= he did not stand too close to us or bother us during the meal), but attentive (= ready to deal with our requests and serve us), so we were happy to give him a tip (a little extra money to show we appreciated his work).

Describe a place you know where people go to listen to music.

You should say: where it is
what kind of music is performed there
what type of people go there

and explain your impressions of this place.

Places: concert hall, disco, club, bar, opera theatre, open-air theatre.

Vocabulary: orchestra, musician, singer, melody, tune, song, stage, musical instruments, conductor, audience, seat, table, applause, lights, spotlight, dancer, props, ticket, lyrics.

The place you choose does not have to be somewhere that people only visit to listen to music, but listening to music should be an important reason for people to go there. For example, some people might go to a jazz bar to enjoy a drink or have a chat rather than listen to the live jazz band on stage there.

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Describe an hotel.

You should say: where the hotel is and what it is called
what the hotel looks like
what facilities the hotel has

and say whether you often stay in hotels.

“The Burj Al-Arab hotel in the United Arab Emirates, is widely considered to be the best hotel in the world. It has a distinctive shape - like a sail. It is 321 metres high, and stands on a man-made island, 280 metres from the shore of Jumeirah Beach, just outside Dubai. The hotel has 202 suites, including 2 Presidential Suites and 2 Royal Suites. The hotel has 7 restaurants, serving Arab, European, and International dishes. There is live music all day. As you would expect from such a wonderful hotel, there is a spa and a fully-equipped fitness centre. The hotel has three swimming pools, including one specially designed for families. Near the hotel, there are tennis courts, golf courses, and beaches. They are all lit at night, so you can enjoy yourself 24 hours a day, if you have the energy! Of course, being right by the sea, you can also enjoy several water sports such as sailing, water skiing, and windsurfing, or go scuba diving!”

Describe an hotel you have stayed at.

You should say: where the hotel is/was
how long you stayed there
what services and facilities the hotel has/had

and explain how you felt (or might feel) about staying there.

Hotel facilities – swimming pool, sauna, restaurant, underground parking, bar, fitness centre, games room, TV, radio, mini-bar, bath, shower, room service, laundry service, business centre, Internet connection.

Describe a place of natural beauty that you have visited.

You should say: where the place of natural beauty is
what the natural features of the place are
whether many people go to this place

and explain how you felt when you were there.

Note that the question asks about a place of natural beauty, so you must choose something like a waterfall, a seaside spot, or a mountain. You cannot choose something man-made like a building, monument or other structure.

When talking about a place of natural beauty, you might like to talk about the terrain – hilly, mountainous, rocky, steep slopes, valley, hillside, fields, wide, narrow, deep, shallow, coastal, forested, highland, lowland, altitude, volcano, flat.

Describe a lake, river or sea you have visited.

You should say: where the lake/river/sea is
whether you often go there
whether it is a popular place with other people

and explain how you feel when you are there.

Useful vocabulary – lakeside, riverside, seaside, beach, cliff, sand, sunbathe, rocks, waves, boat, hiking, fishing, rowing, sailing, suntan lotion, sunburn, holiday, day trip.

Describe a garden or park you have visited.

You should say: where the garden or park is
whether many people visit it
what people can see or do there

and explain why you like it.

Vocabulary – flowers, plants, pond, lake, boat, go boating, jogging, path, refreshments, refreshments stall, grass, ducks, birds, walk the dog, children playing, tai chi, singing, playing music, ball games, trees, shady areas, benches, sitting, reading, chatting.

Describe your idea of the perfect park for a city.

You should say: where it would be located in the city
what facilities it would have
what people would be able to do in the park

and explain why you think this would be the best kind of park for a city.

A good answer will include the use of ‘could’, ‘would’, ‘should’ and similar modals. You can refer to existing parks and the facilities they have.

Describe a place you often visit in your leisure time.

You should say: where you go and when you go there

what you do there
who you go with

and explain why you like this place.

The key word here is ‘often’. This means that the place you choose to talk about should be quite familiar. If the place is a building, park or sports facility, then you can use vocabulary associated with those places. Preparing for this question (which is very general) obviously gives you the opportunity to prepare for other (more specific) topics at the same time.

Describe a place where you often walk.

You should say: where and when you walk
what you see on this walk
who you walk with

and explain why you walk there.

Places: street, country lane, field, park, (botanical) garden, zoo, river, canal, lake, beach/seashore, shopping centre, hills.

Reasons: quiet, few people, relaxing, listen to birds/animals, wonderful views, trees/plants, scenery, be alone, appreciate nature, window shopping, exercise.

Synonyms for ‘walk’: stroll, tramp, amble, hike, stride.

Describe your favourite part of your hometown.

You should say: where it is
how often you go there
what you do there

and explain why that is your favourite part of town.

The key word is, of course, ‘part’. Possible choices include the centre, an historical area, an area devoted to the arts, an entertainment zone (e.g. a bar street) or your neighbourhood (neighbourhood = area, neighbour = person living near you).

Consider what the area looks like, the types of buildings (residential, offices, shops, museums, historic buildings), the architecture (modern, traditional, style), the people who go/live there, any businesses in the area, the environment (trees, parks, water, fountains, statues), the traffic (public and private transport, jams) and even how clean or dirty it is.

Describe a place you enjoy visiting in a city you know well.

You should say: which city the place is located in
how often you go there
whether it is popular with other people

and explain how you feel when you go to this place.

Notice that you have to talk about a place in a city, not a city! This could be a park, zoo, museum ,art gallery, palace, bar street, amusement park, library, temple, shopping mall/centre, square or market.

Also notice that you have to talk about a place you visit and know well, so it cannot be a place you live or work in or are unfamiliar with.

Describe a place you have visited.

You should say: where the place is and why you went there
if it is a popular place for people to go to
how it has changed or may change

and explain how you felt when you went there for the first time.

Places: palaces, temples, markets, bridges, tombs, pagodas, rivers, lakes,

mountains, museums, wildlife parks, amusement parks, parks, famous buildings.
Why go there?: to see, to do, to experience, to photograph, to enjoy.
Adjectives for describing scenery: mountainous, forested, hilly, flat, rocky, coastal, breath-taking, awe-inspiring, wonderful, incredible, picturesque.

Example: Hong Kong
People: speak Cantonese (not Mandarin) and some English; some Westerners, Filipinos, and Indians live in HK.
Sights: Man Mo Temple, Kowloon Mosque, Kam Tin walled villages, Tung Chung Fort on Lantau Island.
Things to do: shop in Kowloon, ride tram to Victoria Peak, hike in the New Territories, try Indian food, take a ferry to the islands, enjoy the nightlife in Wanchai, take the children to Ocean Park (aquarium and funfair).

Use this only as an example! Many of the things mentioned can be done in other places (visiting temples, shopping, enjoying the nightlife).

Describe a place you would like to visit.

You should say: where the place is and what you would do there
if you know anyone who has already been there
how you first heard of this place

and explain why you would like to go there so much.

Although the things "you should say" are quite different, you can actually answer this question using much of the same vocabulary as for the previous one, but remember to use 'would' and appropriate sentence structures. You can find out about places from English language magazines – articles about travel are in most of them.

Describe a city you have visited.

You should say: where the city is and when you went there
what people can see and do in that city
why that city is special

and explain why your visit to that city was memorable.

Areas of a city: commercial centre (Central Business District), heart of a city (the centre), inner city (the area around the centre), suburbs, periphery / outskirts, residential district, economic development zone, industrial area.

Buildings: shopping centres, bars, factories, libraries, shops, exhibition centres, office blocks, apartment blocks, universities, cinemas, discos, cathedrals, sports centres, swimming pools, theatres, art galleries, restaurants, hotels, libraries, banks.

Traffic: public transport (buses, trains, ferries, light railways), ring roads, car parks, railway station, bus station, airport, port / docks.

Adjectives: noisy, busy, exciting, vibrant, commercial, crowded, convenient, expensive, stressful, polluted, dirty, large, historic, lively, hectic.

'Lie' and 'located'
Shanghai lies on the eastern coast of China.
Wuhan lies on the Yangzi River.
Guangzhou is located near the mouth of the Pearl River.
Shenyang is located in Liaoning province in north-east China.

Describe a place in another country that you would like to live in.

You should say: where this place is
what you know about this place
what work you would do there

and explain why you would choose to live there.

Location: north, south, east, west, on the coast, inland, lake, river, mountain, hill.
Climate: hot, cold, wet, dry, temperature, rainfall, snow, ice, sunny, sunshine, rain.
Facilities: stadium, park, hospital, school, university, shopping centre, bar, theatre, swimming pool, temple.

Describe an interesting historic site (in your country) that you have visited.

You should say: what you saw at this site
what role it played in history
who you went there with

and explain what interested you about that place.

In answer to this question, you could choose a similar place to that for the question about an interesting place you have visited. Most interesting places have some historical significance. For example, the Terracotta Warriors and The Great Wall would be suitable for both questions. An historic site could also be a building or structure. For example, in Beijing the Summer Palace and The Temple of Heaven would be suitable.

Describe a quiet place you know.

You should say: where the place is
how often you go there
how you discovered this place

and explain what you like about this place apart from the quiet.

Quiet places – parks, gardens, woods, forest, room.

Feelings – relaxed, calm, thoughtful, sentimental, introspective, refreshed, content, weary (= very tired), exhausted, gloomy, depressed, lonely.

Describe a place that you have been to that is/was particularly polluted.

You should say: when you went there
why you went there
what the pollution was like

and explain what you think were the causes of this problem.

Almost the whole world has been polluted by humans. Even parts of oceans where few people travel and Antarctica where there are very few people have been polluted. Focus on a place that has a particular problem with pollution. Consider places that produce and/or use a lot of coal, causing great air pollution or a river that has been polluted by a factory.

Describe a strange or unusual place you have visited or heard about.

You should say: where the place is and why it is unusual
if the people there are also unusual or special
what you can see and do there

and explain how you feel about this place.

Iceland – North-Western Europe, island (100,000 square kilometres, 250,000 people), cold, glaciers, geysers, fishing.

The Sahara Desert – North Africa, largest desert in the world, expanding, largely uninhabited, hot and dry (arid), few animals and plants (cacti, lizards, camels), mainly sandy, rocky in some parts.

The Amazon Rainforest – South America (mainly in Brazil), jungle, Amazon – the longest river in the world, tribal people, hot, wet, largely unexplored, thousands of species of plants and animals (crocodiles, snakes, monkeys, parrots, butterflies).

Things

Describe something you own which is useful or important to you.

You should say: what the thing is and how you got it
why it is useful or important to you
if it is also important or useful to others

and say how your life would be harder without this thing.

Don’t choose to talk about your computer! There must be something else you have which is useful or important to you, such as your mobile phone, camera, or CD player. Mention things such as brand, cost, and special features.

Describe something very expensive that you wish you could buy.

You should say: what the item is
how much it would cost
whether many people in your country have this item

and explain how you would use this item.

This thing might be a large house, a car, a piece of equipment or perhaps a piece of clothing or jewellery. Describe the item in detail, giving an idea of the materials used to make it and how it is coloured and decorated.

Describe something special you want to buy in the future.

You should say: what it is like
how long you have wanted to buy it
when you intend to buy it

and explain why you want to buy it.

This question can be answered in the same way as other things in part 2 of the speaking module, e.g. something expensive, a vehicle or ideal home. Focus on why this item is special for you.

Describe something old that you or your family possess.

You should say: what the item is
how old it is
how it came into your family’s possession

and explain the importance of this item for you or your family.

Family heirlooms – a piece of antique furniture, a piece of jewellery, a coin/stamp/banknote, a collector's item, an antique vase.

How it came into the possession of your family – a gift/present, found it, dug it up in a field, bought it at a market, made by a member of the family.

Describe something that you made yourself.

You should say: what the thing was
why you made it
how you made it

and explain what other people thought of it.

Materials – wood, paper, plastic, metal, cardboard, glass, wire, clay.

Things you use to make something – scissors, glue, knife, rubber bands, bottle, discarded package, bag, toolbox, tools, ruler, paint, pencil.

Describe something you bought that you were not happy with.

You should say: what it was you bought
what the problem with it was
where you bought it

and explain how the situation was resolved.

Words and phrases associated with customer complaints and customer service – not working (properly), something wrong with X, broken, refund (money), replace an item, customer service department, complain, complaint, return (to a shop), show your receipt, making a strange noise, request, take a look at something.

Describe an electronic item that you own or owned.

You should say: what the item is/was
how much it cost
where you bought this item or who gave it to you

and explain whether you would buy this item again if you needed to.

Computer – hard drive, play DVDs, CD ROM, memory, monitor, screen, programme, load, documents, image, software, hardware, download, website, Internet connection, wireless, presentation.

Mobile phone – call, SMS, games, ring tone, messages, phone book, dial, buttons, battery, display.

MP3 player – music, download, headphones, earphones, songs, tracks, memory.

Describe a vehicle you would like to buy.

You should say: what the vehicle is
whether it would be expensive
whether this vehicle is common in your country

and explain how you would use this vehicle.

Most people will choose to talk about a car, naturally, but you could talk about most kinds of transport, e.g. a motorbike, a bicycle, a truck or a boat of some kind.

Things to consider include the design, colour, special features, speed, number of people it can carry, how expensive it would be to run and how much help you would need to maintain it.

Describe an item of furniture, either modern or traditional.

You should say: what material it is made of
what style it is
who bought it

and explain why this piece of furniture was bought.

Furniture: table, desk, chair, armchair, sofa/couch, bookcase, chest of drawers, bedside table, bed, cupboard, stool, bench, cabinet, bunk bed, crib/cot, dressing table.

Materials: wood, plastic, metal, rubber, bamboo, glass.

Adjectives: big, large, small, tiny, medium-sized, soft, hard, heavy, light, old, new, modern, fashionable, colourful, broken, stained, dark, bright, traditional.

Objects associated with furniture: cushions, mirror, pillow, blanket, sheet, duvet, lamp, ornaments, plant, TV, picture, photo, alarm clock, utensils, radio, vase.

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Describe an item of clothing or jewellery you wore for a special occasion.

You should say: what the item of clothing or jewellery was
what the special occasion was
what other people thought of it
and explain why you wore it for that occasion.

Choose an item of clothing or jewellery carefully – talking a bout a pair of socks is probably not a good idea!

Items of clothing – skirt, dress, suit, sweater, coat, shoes, gown (e.g. for a graduation ceremony).

Items of jewellery – watch, necklace, ring, bracelet, earrings.

Special occasions – wedding, engagement party, birthday party, graduation ceremony, school reunion.

Describe a product that your region or country is well-known for.

You should say: what the product is
how it is made
whether it is exported

and explain why it is well-known.

Mining – coal, gold, silver, copper, iron.
Agriculture – wheat, rice, beef, pork, lamb/mutton, duck, fruit, vegetables.
Light industry – computers, televisions, washing machines, refrigerators.
Heavy industry – cars, ships, trains, aircraft, chemicals.

Useful vocabulary – production line, factory, manufacture, brand name, pollution, employment, export, trade, transport, local economy, business, electronics, output, plant (= factory), private sector industry, state owned industry, crops, harvest.

Describe a work of art you have seen or heard about.

You should say: what the work of art is
where it is or where you saw it
whether you are generally interested in works of art

and explain what particularly interests you about this work of art.

Useful vocabulary – sculpture, painting, drawing, calligraphy, still life, portrait, landscape, sketch, abstract, art gallery, museum, display, watercolour, oil painting, colour, foreground, background, masterpiece, artist, sculptor, art lover, view, contemplate (= to think deeply about something, e.g. a work of art).

Describe a photograph that you particularly like.

You should say: what the photograph is of
who took the photograph
how you got the photograph

and explain how you feel when you look at it.

When describing the photograph, talk about the subject (= what is in the photograph). Say what is in the foreground and what is in the background. Is the photograph in colour or in black and white? What are the measurements of the photograph? Does the photograph show people, an event or a landscape?

Describe a family photo that you like.

You should say: who is in the photo
who took the photo
why this photo was taken

and explain why you like that photograph.

People: parents, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, family friends, acquaintances, photographer.

Event: wedding, party, bringing home a new-born child, birthday, wedding anniversary, traditional festival.

Location: at home, in the garden, in front of the home, at an historical site, at a cultural monument, in the countryside, beside a tree, by a lake/river.

Describe a toy you had when you were a child.

You should say: what the toy is/was
when you first got it
whether this is/was a popular toy with children

and explain whether you would give this toy to your own child.

Toys that children often have include dolls, action figures, cars, building blocks,

PC games, stuffed toys and jigsaws.

Describe a story you remember from your childhood.

You should say: what the story was about
what happened in the end
how often you read or listened to this story

and explain how you felt when you heard or read this story.

Be careful if you decide to relate the whole story. If you miss out any information, the story might not make sense and the examiner may be confused by what you say. It's better just to give the basics and then focus on other aspects of the question, such as how often you read/heard this story, who told it to you and your feelings about it.

Children's stories commonly involve princes and princesses, magic, magicians, good and evil, helpful animals, journeys, palaces, vivid scenery (mountains, lakes, seas, rivers), triumph, joy, sadness and, of course, a happy ending.

Describe an important letter that you received.

You should say: who wrote it
what the letter was about
how you felt about the letter

and explain why it was important.

Nowadays, letters seem to be becoming less common, so you could describe an email you received and change it to a letter. Remember to use the past tense! You will probably also need to describe the circumstances surrounding the letter. For example, if the letter was connected with your work, you should mention your job at the time.

Purposes: complaint, asking for advice, a thank you letter, an apology, a suggestion, a recommendation, a proposal, a love letter, bad news, good news, job

offer, a notification.

A letter from: a friend, a relative, the bank, a university (professor), a school (teacher), a company, your boss, a colleague, a client, a business associate, the police, the hospital, a doctor.

Adjectives: long, short, to the point, rude, polite, flattering.

Describe a postcard or letter you received.

You should say: when you received the postcard or letter
who it was from
why they sent it to you
and explain how you felt when you received the postcard or letter.

Types of letter – letter of congratulation, a letter informing you of something, a letter from a friend or relative you haven't seen for a long time, a letter with good news, an official letter.

Describe a newspaper or magazine you read regularly.

You should say: how often you read it
how much it costs
whether it is popular in your country

and explain why you like this newspaper or magazine.

Useful vocabulary – daily, evening, weekly, monthly, local, national, articles, news, opinion, features, announcements, reviews, reporter, journalist, headlines, sports news, business news, gossip column, fashion news, travel news, advertisements, competitions.

Describe a book you have read.

You should say: which book it was and when you read it

what feelings you had whilst reading it
if you have read other books by the same author

and how it influenced you, if at all.

Types of books: short stories, thrillers, horror, comics, detective, classics, novels, school textbooks, children's books, a collection of poems, fairy tales.

Writers: novelist, poet, philosopher, historian.

Books often have comments on their covers. Here are some examples.

"A terrific novelist. He's in a class of his own. You'll love his third bestseller"
"The action unfolds at a breath-taking pace. You won't want to put this book down."
"A tale of heroism and determination which will hold the reader."
"This book will bring you to a new level of fluency in English."
"Anyone who wishes to explore this culture will find this book useful."
"You'll read through this maze of plot twists from cover to cover in record time."
"A moving story of love and self-discovery. Based on a true story."

Describe a book that you learned something from.

You should say: what the book was about
who wrote the book
how long it took you to read the book

and explain what you learned from it.

Textbooks – used in schools and universities, often contain diagrams, photographs and pictures, recommended by professors, set school textbook (i.e. all students must use it at school), often contain exercises, many students find textbooks boring!

Non-fiction – tell about true events, usually historical events or the lives of people during historical events, autobiography (a book written by a person about his/her own life), biography (written by a person about another person's life), often contains photographs, generally designed to be read by non-specialists with an

interest in a particular person or subject.

Manuals – often used by people working in technical fields (e.g. IT or engineering), contain many diagrams explaining how things work or how to do things, can be confusing for many people.

Describe a book you might like to write.

You should say: what you would write about
how long you think it would take to write the book
whether you think it would sell many copies

and explain how you feel about the topic you would write about.

Use the types of books mentioned in the previous question. Alternatively …

Fiction – involving a story and characters that are either completely imaginary or are perhaps very loosely based on real people and real life, e.g. detective story, spy novel, children's story book, fairy tales, sci-fi, adventure.

Describe a film you have seen.

You should say: what the title of the film was and where you saw it
what the story (plot) involves
whether you have seen other films by the same director

and explain how you feel about this film.

Types of films: thrillers, horror, animated (cartoons), detective, comedies, historical, martial arts, action, sci-fi, documentary, western (cowboys and Indians), war, musicals, romantic.

People: actor, actress, director, star, cast (all the actors and actresses in a film).

Adjectives: moving, violent, powerful, gripping, funny, slow, fast-paced, exciting, boring, thought-provoking, emotional, entertaining, sad, inspiring.

Verbs
Forrest Gump stars Tom Hanks. / Tom Hanks stars in Forrest Gump.
E.T. was directed by Steven Spielberg.
This film was first shown in 1998.
The film is set in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century.

Describe the type of film that you most enjoy watching.

You should say: what this type is
what the characteristics of this type are
when and where you usually watch this kind of film

and explain why you like this type of film.

The key word here is ‘type’. Of course, you should mention a few of the films of this genre (= type) that you particularly like. You can give a brief outline of a plot and/or name the main actors/characters. Another simple way of extending your answer is to say whether other people you know (family/friends) also like this kind of film.

Describe a TV programme that you watch regularly.

You should say: what the programme is and when it is shown
what kind of people watch this programme
how it is set out and who presents it

and say how you feel when you watch this programme.

TV news: news reports, reporters, newsreader (US = anchorman), news clips, weather forecast, domestic news, foreign news, live reports, sports highlights.

Quiz shows / Game shows: host (presenter and question master), contestants, prizes, questions, correct / wrong answers, a round of questions, turns, win points, audience, applause.

Chat shows: presenter / host, guest, stars, sofa, audience, personal (intimate) questions.

Variety shows: singing, dancing, magician, cross-talk, games, music, musicians, acrobatics, audience, (piano) soloist, band, stage, puppeteers, shadow play, Beijing opera, masks, costumes, sword dancing, comedians.

Soaps: characters, love affairs, relationships, families, neighbours, accidents, fights, arguments, shocking news, intrigue, business deals.

Describe a radio programme you have listened to.

You should say: what the radio programme is/was about
whether you listen to it regularly
whether you know other people who like listening to it

and explain why you listen(ed) to it.

Vocabulary – radio show, news, weather forecast/report, traffic news/report, music, songs, competitions, talk show, cross-talk, interview, host, guest, local, national.

Describe a piece of music or a song that you particularly enjoy.

You should say: what the music/song is and where/when you first heard it
who wrote it or sings it
if it is popular with other people

and explain your feelings when you hear this music or song.

Kinds of music: pop, rock, jazz, country, classical, rap, techno, Latin American, heavy metal, instrumental, folk.

Adjectives: moving, powerful, slow, fast, relaxing, loud, fast-paced, exciting, emotional, sad, inspiring, traditional.

Vocabulary: lyrics, instruments, perform, composer, songwriter, orchestra, musician, singer.

Describe a song or piece of music that you remember from your childhood.

You should say: where you first heard this song or melody
what kind of song or melody it was
what the song or piece of music is/was about

and explain how you felt (or feel now) when you heard (or hear) this song.

This question is simply a variation on the more general part 2 question (above) about a song or piece of music. Answer it in the same way, but remember to use the past tense.

Describe a website you have visited.

You should say: what the website is about
whether it is a popular website
how often you go there

and explain what you like about it.

This should be quite easy, given that most candidates use computers regularly. Is the website mainly concerned with general news or a particular area of interest? How is it laid out? Is it easy to navigate (= find your way around the different web pages)? Does it have lots of advertisements? Can the people who visit it also contribute to it?

Describe an advertisement.

You should say: what product or service is advertised
what the advertisement shows or showed

why you remember this advertisement in particular

and say whether you think the advertisement is/was effective.

“In Britain, there was a memorable television advertisement for a chocolate snack. A photographer set up his camera on a tripod in front of the panda cage at a zoo. Pandas are notoriously shy and so the man expected a long wait before the panda came out and gave him the chance to take a photograph. The man waited patiently behind his camera. Phrases at the bottom of the screen such as “2 hours later …” told you that the man had been waiting for a long time. Eventually, the man decided to take a break and turned around to sit down and eat the chocolate snack being advertised. When he did so, the panda came out and danced and roller-skated around the cage, making faces at the man. The man was sitting with his back to the cage, so he couldn’t see the panda doing this. As the man finished his snack and resumed his wait behind his camera, the cheeky panda hid once more. And so the man continued waiting for his chance to take a photograph …”

Describe a gift you received.

You should say: what the gift was
whether you think it was expensive
who gave it to you

and explain what your reaction was when you got it.

Words associated with gifts/presents – wrapping paper, birthday, wedding, engagement, Valentine’s Day, thank you gift, graduation, ribbon.

Describe a gift you gave to someone.

You should say: what the gift was
whether it was expensive
what the occasion was

and explain why you chose that particular gift for that person.

Describe a subject you enjoyed studying at secondary school.

You should say: what the subject was and why you liked it
how the teachers taught this subject
how important it has been, or will be, in your life

and say if you are good at this subject.

Subjects: literature, mathematics, computer studies, physics, biology, chemistry, history, geography, sociology, art, music, English.

Maths: sum, equation, graph, angle, calculate, calculator, measure, shape.
Science: lab, Bunsen burner, test tube, beaker, filter paper, gas, crystal, scales, specimen, sample, dissect, microscope, lens, magnet, magnifying glass, voltage.

Describe a game that you have played.

You should say: what the game was and what you need to play
if it is widely played in your country
how it is played

and say why you think it is a good way to spend time.

If you chose a game as your hobby for the previous question, choose a different game in order to practice using different vocabulary.

Popular games

Chess, hide and seek, card games (e.g. poker and bridge), musical chairs, ludo, checkers, computer games, snowball fights, dominoes.

Vocabulary

Take (capture) a piece (e.g. in chess), move (a piece), jump (over a piece), throw

dice (a die), move the mouse (computer), click on the mouse, suits (in Western card games, hearts ♥, spades ♠, clubs ♣, and diamonds ♦), tiles (Mah Jong pieces), keep score, score points, win, lose, draw, take a card / tile.

Describe a sport that you either watch or play.

You should say: what the sport is and why you like it
if it popular with other people in your family / city / country
where and when you play or watch it

and say how you feel when you play or watch this sport.

Sports vocabulary
equipment (slang = kit), fans, supporters, bat, net, referee (football / ice hockey), umpire (baseball, tennis, volleyball), track, goal, racket, league, (football) season, points, players, teams.

How you feel when you watch sports
excited, amazed, thrilled, proud, disappointed, happy, anxious, shocked.

Verbs
throw, pass, ride, head (a ball, e.g. in football), hit, catch, kick, run, score, win, lose, draw, beat, defeat, lead.

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Describe the sports facilities in your town or city.

You should say: what facilities there are
where they are located
who uses them

and say whether you feel there are enough sports facilities in your town or city.

Vocabulary – stadium, gym, running track, playing field, basketball courts, tennis courts, football pitch, table tennis tables, equipment, clothing, instructors,

coaches, competitions,

Describe a form of transport that you enjoy using.

You should say: what the form of transport is and how often you use it
its advantages and disadvantages
how much other people use it and why
and explain why you enjoy using it so much.

Forms of transport – buses, trains, ferries, planes, bicycles, cars, motorcycles, taxis.

We caught the bus at 10 a.m., but George missed it.
You should pay the fare when you get on a bus.
You can buy an air ticket at a travel agency.
The flight leaves at 9 o'clock and arrives an hour later.
You can take a train, but they are not very punctual.
The buses are often full, especially during the rush hour.
At airports and train stations, listen for announcements about flights and trains.
The trains to Beijing run every hour.
If you use buses, a map of the bus routes is very useful.
You can catch a bus at a bus stop and a train from a platform at a railway station.

Describe the public transport system in your town or city.

You should say: what forms of public transport are available
whether you use the public transport system often
how it is developing
and explain how the public transport system in your town or city could be improved.

Public transport does not include cars and bicycles!
"Buses travel on bus routes, and are usually numbered. They stop at bus stops, where people get on and off the buses. How far apart are the bus stops in your city? Bus stops usually show the bus routes and names of bus stops. Sometimes

there are bus lanes, which allow the buses to move faster during rush hours. Most buses are single-deckers, but some are double-deckers, like the famous London buses. When you get on a bus, do you pay the driver or the conductor? When you pay the fare, do you get a ticket? Are the buses often crowded or can you usually find a seat? Some cities have trolleybuses or trams. Subway trains travel along subway lines. Subway lines are normally in tunnels, but sometimes they also go above ground. You normally enter or leave a subway station by using stairs or escalators. There is a small ticket office where you queue to buy a ticket. Some cities now use ticket machines. You have your ticket checked by a ticket collector at the entry to the platform or put it into a machine. On the platform, while you are waiting, you can check the subway map to see how many stops you have to go to your destination.

Describe a domesticated animal.

You should say: what the animal is
whether it is common in your country
what it is used for

and explain whether you like or dislike this animal.

Dog – usually friendly, occasionally aggressive (e.g. a guard dog), can be trained, listens to commands, eats meat, take it for walks, chews bones, growls, barks, sniffs, lives in a kennel.
Pig – eats almost any kind of food, often considered dirty, lives in a pigsty, used as food (bacon, ham, pork, ears, trotters (= feet), sausages).
Horse – can be used for transport or pulling things (e.g. a cart), can be used for sport (riding, racing), expensive, time consuming, eats grass and hay, quite a large animal, saddle (the seat on a horse), reins (to hold when riding), stirrups (for your feet when riding), lives in a stable.

Describe a wild animal.

You should say: what the animal is and where it lives
what the animal looks like and how it behaves
how this animal is special

and explain why you chose to talk about this animal.

Elephant: Lives in Africa, India, and south-east Asia. Large, grey, mammal. Four-legged, with a short tail, big ears to keep them cool and ward off flies, a trunk for gathering food, tusks. Eats vegetation. Symbol of power, authority, and luck in many cultures. Used by people for clearing forests and for transportation. Can be trained to do tricks, e.g. in a circus. Used by armies in the past. Usually slow-moving, but can run quite fast.

Great White Shark: Lives in the oceans. Sharks have existed since before the dinosaurs. Carnivorous (meat-eaters). Breathe like fish. Poor vision, but incredible sense of smell – can detect blood in water from far away. Uses its tail to move though water and fins to control direction. Can move and change direction very quickly.

Rat: Lives almost everywhere that humans live. Usually considered dirty and a spreader of disease. Small, but can be the size of small cats. Usually live in large groups. Eat almost any type of vegetation or meat. Have been known to eat people.

Events

Describe a birthday (your own or someone else's) that you enjoyed.

You should say: what the occasion was
how you celebrated the birthday
whether you usually celebrate birthdays in this way

and explain how you felt at this birthday celebration.

Vocabulary associated with birthdays – party, cake, food and drink, buffet, celebration, celebrate, guests, presents/gifts, wrapping paper, ribbon, birthday cards, congratulations, music, party games, dancing.

Describe a party you have been to.

You should say: where the party was held and who went

what the party was like
what happened at the party

and say whether you often go to parties.

Places where parties are held: outdoors, at a flat (apartment), house, dorm, bar.
Things people do at parties: drink alcohol, eat, make new friends, chat, play loud music, make dates, meet old friends, dance, relax, make a lot of noise.
Why some people don't like parties: noisy, hate loud music, drunk people, can't chat in private, they are shy.
Things that can happen: people get put in a bath of water, food (or pillow) fight, people throw up, neighbours complain, furniture (or other things) get ruined or broken, people argue, people meet a new boy-/girlfriend.

Describe a family event that you attended.

You should say: what the event was
which members of your family were there
whether this is a regular family event

and explain how you generally feel about family events.

Family events – birthday, wedding, engagement, family get-together, anniversary.

Describe a wedding you attended.

You should say: who was getting married
who went to the wedding
whether you often go to weddings

and explain how you felt at this wedding.

Vocabulary – ceremony, reception (= wedding party), bride and groom, toasting the new couple, food and drink, champagne, wine, wedding dress, suit, guests, music, live band, honeymoon, photographer, hotel, chauffeur driven car,

firecrackers.

Describe an important piece of family news that you found out recently.

You should say: what the news was
when you heard about it
how you heard about it

and explain how the members of your family felt when this news arrived.

It is probably better to choose a good piece of news. If you choose a bad piece of news, you will probably get emotional and this might affect your performance.

Good pieces of news that families receive include news of a wedding, engagement, birth, a forthcoming visit, a graduation, a promotion at work, a new job for someone, getting a visa to go abroad or perhaps even a tax refund!

Describe a piece of good news that you received by phone.

You should say: what the news was
where you were when you received this news
who gave you this news

and explain why you felt this was good news.

The “received by phone” part of this question could be very limiting for some candidates. In this case, I suggest talking about a piece of good news you received by another form of communication and simply lie about how you got it. Just don’t forget what you lied about or your speech could confuse the examiner.

Describe a piece of news you heard or read recently.

You should say: what the news was and where you heard or read it
if it was significant for many people
how it has changed, or will change, people’s lives

and explain how you felt when you heard or read this news.

Common news items
Crisis – a dangerous or problematic situation.
Conflict – groups of people or countries are fighting.
Row – an argument about an issue (usually used in a negative sense).
Talks / Negotiations – discussions about an issue between people or countries (usually used in a positive sense).
Disaster – something terrible happens, usually by accident or naturally.
Agreement – a decision made after talks and usually presented as a signed document.

The word ‘recently’ in the question should be taken to mean ‘in the last week or two’.

Describe a piece of foreign news you heard, read or saw recently.

You should say: what the news was
where it happened
whether the news could affect your country

and explain how you felt when you heard, read or saw this news.

Remember that this question asks you specifically about something that happened outside your country. However, it could be news about someone from your country who was abroad at the time.

Do not talk about personal news! Talk about something from newspapers, TV or the Internet. It doesn’t have to be a serious or important news story.

Use the same vocabulary as for the previous question.

Describe a happy event from your childhood.

You should say: what the event was
why you remember it in particular

who was with you at the time

and explain why it made you feel so happy.

You might make your answer to this question the same as your answer to the "memorable event from your childhood" question. Refer to that question for vocabulary.

Describe a happy memory from your childhood.

You should say: what the memory is
who you shared the happy event or moment with
whether you often remember this event or moment

and explain why you remember it in particular.

Happy things that people remember from their childhoods include holidays, trips (e.g. to a zoo), celebrations (e.g. weddings, birthday parties) and particularly interesting days at school.

Words and phrases that express happiness include excited, enthusiastic, thrilled, exhilarated, elated, triumphant, on top of the world, ecstatic, up in the clouds.

Remember to use the past tense throughout your answer!

Describe a memorable experience you have had.

You should say: what the experience was
if you experienced it alone or with other people
where and when the experience took place

and explain how it has influenced you afterwards.

Memorable experiences could include many things:

Successes: getting into university, winning a competition.
Changes in life: getting married, starting a new job.
Good times: going on holiday, a party.
Special opportunities: meeting a famous person, being on TV.

Useful words for discussing feelings
ecstatic (= extremely happy or excited), delighted, inspired, thrilled (= very excited), enthusiastic, proud.

Describe a positive experience you had when you were a teenager.

You should say: what the experience was
why it was a good experience
whether many teenagers experience this

and explain how it influenced you as a teenager.

Our teenage years are often filled with the problems of growing up and becoming an adult. This question asks you to think of something positive rather than negative. Perhaps it was a change, meeting a person who influenced you or a visit to an interesting place.

Describe a change you would like to make to your life in the future.

You should say: what change you would like to make
how you would like to make this change
how easy or difficult you think this change might be

and explain why you would like to make this change.

Possible changes: get married, find a better job, move into a new home, have children, improve or change your personality, learn a new skill.

Many of the suggestions made above are covered by other questions.

This question (and similar ones) gives you the opportunity to use complex conditional sentences – 'If I [mention change], I would [mention result]'. The ease or difficulty of the change might depend on various factors – 'If [mention condition or situation], then making the change would be [easy/difficult]'.

Describe an important stage of your life.

You should say: how old you were at the time
whether this is an important stage of life for many people
what changes were involved

and explain why that stage of your life was so important.

Important stages in people's lives include attending a particular school, officially becoming an adult, leaving home (e.g. to go to university in another city) and getting married.

Describe a school trip that you went on.

You should say: where you went and when
why your teachers took you on this trip
what you did on the trip

and say why it was memorable.

Where to?
a museum, an art gallery, an amusement park, a cinema.

Why?
educational, learn some more about a school subject, take a break from schoolwork.

Feelings
interesting, boring, exciting, fun, relaxing, tiring.

Describe an enjoyable activity that you took part in as part of your English study.

You should say: when and where you did this activity
what this activity was
how you benefited from doing it

and explain why you enjoyed it.

Activities: storytelling, listening to CDs, learning songs, watching a TV programme/film, listening to a story, doing puzzles, discussion, reading a book/article, singing, visiting a place, problem-solving, guessing game.

When you describe the activity, make sure you express yourself clearly by getting all the events in order. Use markers such as ‘first’, ‘then’ and ‘afterwards’ to help you.

Describe a science lesson that you had in school or at university.

You should say:

when and where you attended this lesson
what happened in the lesson
what you learned

and explain how the lesson was taught.

This is a great opportunity to use some less common vocabulary. A science experiment might be better to describe than a lesson where the teacher did the talking and the students just listened. Alternatively, you might be able to describe a science-related TV programme that you watched as part of a lesson.

Vocabulary: physics, chemistry, biology, microscope, laboratory, apparatus, test tube, liquid, solid, gas, measure, temperature, weigh, weight, calculate, work out, estimate, magnet, lens, specimen, magnifying glass, goggles, mask.

Describe a science experiment or a survey that you have done.

You should say: what the experiment or survey was about
which people were involved
whether you used any equipment

and say whether you think the experiment or survey was successful.

Make sure that you get the events in order – do not confuse the examiner! Make sure that the aims and results of the experiment or survey are particularly clear – do not over-generalise these!

Describe a course you would like to take if you have time.

You should say: what kind of course it is
where you would do this course
how easy or difficult you think it would be

and explain how you would benefit from taking this course.

Note that this question is clearly referring to a course you would like to take in the future. You could choose a course you have already taken if, for example, you failed that course in the past. Also notice that the question includes the words “if you have time”. This means that the course should not be one you are already intending to take if you get the required band score in your IELTS test. The suggestion is that the course would be one that is not essential for your future career, but might be useful. Consider courses in cross-cultural communication, stylish dressing and teamwork.

Describe a short course you have taken or would like to take.

You should say: what the course is about
where you did it / could do it
what the exact content of the course was / will be

and say how it has benefited or will benefit you.

The most popular short courses are computer courses and language courses. For this topic, ‘short’ normally means lees than six months.

Describe a project or piece of work you did as part of team.

You should say: what the project or piece of work was
how long it took you and your colleagues to do
whether you regularly work as part of a team

and explain how you feel when you work as part of a team.

People who work as part of a team usually need to be cooperative, open, realistic, rational, logical, well-spoken, clear, considerate, understanding.

Describe a group activity you successfully took part in.

You should say: what the activity was
who was with you
how easy or difficult it was

and explain how you felt about being part of this team.

Activities: sport, experiment, hike, trip, project, discussion, drama.

Talk about the things you used in the activity, where you took part in this activity and the different people who took part in this activity with you.

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Describe a piece of work you did quickly.

You should say: what work it was
why you did it quickly

how easy or difficult it was

and explain what the result was.

This question suggests that the work was probably either easy to do or you did it badly. ‘A piece of work’ could be associated with studies (e.g. homework or a project).

Describe a time when you were very busy.

You should say: what the situation was
whether people are often busy with this kind of thing
whether you received any help from other people

and explain how you felt when you were busy.

Times when people are very busy include just before exams, when nearing a deadline (e.g. for the completion of a project) and when they have several small jobs to do – each job may be small, but when they need to be done around the same time, it can make you very busy.

Vocabulary – overloaded, cram (do a lot in a short space of time, especially schoolwork), demanding, boss, team leader, assignment, project, complete, intensive work, (paid/unpaid) overtime, work unsocial hours, paperwork, documents, files, attend meetings, responsible for, in charge of, challenging, workaholic.

Describe a time when you helped someone with a problem or difficulty.

You should say: what the problem or difficulty was
who was having the problem or difficulty
whether this is a common problem that people have

and explain how you helped the person with it.

Use vocabulary from the question about a time when you received help from someone.

Describe some help that you received.

You should say: what the help was with
who helped you
whether you could help the person in return

and explain whether you often need help from others.

This ‘help’ might have been advice (see that question for vocabulary) or it might have been help with doing something, like homework, a project or constructing something. It may have been professional help, such as from a doctor/nurse, a lawyer or a financial advisor. Perhaps something went wrong at home and you needed to call a plumber (= a person who can repair water pipes, etc.) or an electrician.

If the person who helped you was a friend or family member, perhaps you later helped them in return. If you were helped by a professional person, you probably paid them for their services.

Describe some useful advice you received from a friend or family member.

You should say: what the advice was
who gave you the advice
whether you acted on the advice or not
and explain how this advice helped you.

The advice you received may have been related to a problem with your studies/work (couldn’t understand or solve something) or a personal problem (how to deal with a friend or boy-/girlfriend). Did you take (act on) the advice or did you take it into consideration or did you ignore it or take no notice of it?

Describe a great achievement your country has made.

You should say: what the achievement is (was)
why it is (was) a great achievement
how it was accomplished and over what period
and explain how most people in your country view this achievement today.

Economic achievement: reform, growth, low inflation, higher incomes, more opportunities, privatisation, foreign investment, technological improvements, higher GDP.
Improvements to infrastructure: better roads, more airports, faster and easier transportation, better telecommunications.
Sporting achievement
Scientific achievement

Useful vocabulary
Nouns: target, aim, projects, accomplishment, fulfilment.
Verbs: target, achieve, accomplish, fulfil.

Describe an important conversation you had in the past.

You should say: where you had the conversation
who you talked with
what you talked about

and explain why this was an important conversation to you.

Be careful with your choice. First of all, I recommend not choosing a particularly sad conversation (e.g. about love or death). Getting emotional during the test can only have negative effects on your performance. Second, make sure that you really do choose a 'conversation', not an interview or a speech. Third, make sure that the conversation really was important. A conversation about whether to eat at McDonald's or KFC is not really an important one!

Describe an interesting talk or speech that you heard.

You should say: who gave the talk
what the talk was about
where you heard it

and explain why the talk was interesting.

Subjects of talks and speeches: politics, lecture, social issue, self-improvement, historical site, skills development, education.

Try to be specific about what the speaker talked about. In other words, don't just say "The speaker talked about studying abroad. It was useful and interesting". What made it useful? What advice did the speaker give? What made it interesting? What made it more interesting than other speeches on the same topic by other people?

Describe something you learned from a foreign culture.

You should say: what you learned
why you learned it
how you learned it

and explain how you feel this has benefited you.

Refer to the question asking you to describe a foreign culture you are interested in before considering your answer.

Next, note the use and meaning of the word 'from' in this question. If the question asked you to describe something you learned about a foreign culture, it would be simpler. Something you learned about a foreign culture is a factual answer (e.g. I learned that most British people celebrate Christmas). Learning from a foreign culture suggests something like how people behave, react or interact.

Describe a time you met a person who spoke a different language to you.

You should say: who the person was

whether you have regular contact with him/her
whether you often meet people who speak a different language

and explain how you felt when you met this person.

Feelings – shy, nervous, frustrated (at inability to communicate), confused, unsure of oneself, excited, thrilled, confident, calm, relaxed, bewildered (= confused).

Describe a journey you would like to take with your friends.

You should say: who you would like to travel with
where you would like to go
how you would like to go there

and explain why you would like to make this trip.

Transport: train, plane (by air), bus, bicycle, on foot, motorbike, ship.

Locations: mountains, hills, coast, island, river, lake.

Reasons for going with friends: good company (= fun and interesting to be with), chat about life (or the journey or the scenery or sights), not to be lonely.

Describe a long-distance journey you would like to make.

You should say: where the journey would take you
who you would go with
what you would see on this journey

and explain why you would like to make this journey.

Notice that the question clearly refers to a long-distance journey, so this should be a long trip! As the journey is referred to, remember to talk about that and not the destination!

Consider the terrain that the journey would take you through, the sights you would see on the way, how long the journey would take and how you would travel.

Describe a holiday you have taken.

You should say: when and where you went on the holiday
if it is a popular holiday destination
what you did on the holiday

and what was special about it.

On holiday, you can do some sightseeing. If you go sightseeing, you can visit some of the following: temples, castles, cathedrals, markets, statues, palaces, museums, art galleries, historic monuments,
When you go sightseeing, you can take photos, have a look round the city, spend money, buy souvenirs,
To avoid getting lost, you should have a map or a guidebook. Alternatively, you could pay a tour guide to take you on (or give you) a guided tour.
If your friends have visited a place before, they might recommend some sights as worth seeing.
When we go on holiday, I like going on excursions (short trips to nearby places), whereas my wife prefers sunbathing (or to sunbathe) on the beach.

When you go on holiday, you need accommodation, such as a hotel, guesthouse, hostel, or campsite. You may need to book a room in advance (reserve a room), especially during the tourist season.

Describe a three-day holiday you would like to take.

You should say: what you would do on this holiday
where you would go
who you would go with

and explain why you would take this holiday.

This question is quite specific, but as you need to talk about three whole days, it should not be very difficult. You can talk about the holiday generally or give a breakdown of what you would do on each day or during each part of the day. Don't forget to mention things like how you would travel.

Describe what you did last weekend.

You should say: whether you spent the weekend alone or with other people
how long you spent on each activity
whether this is usually how you spend your weekends

and explain why you enjoyed or didn't enjoy last weekend.

This is quite an easy question because you have two days to talk about. you could either focus on one or two interesting things that you did over the weekend or you could say what you did in order from Saturday morning through to Sunday evening. The question doesn't say that you should only talk about what you did during your free time at the weekend.

Things that people do at the weekend – sleep, do housework, do homework, study, work, do some sport, read books, watch TV, watch a sports event, go to a museum or art gallery, meet friends, go (window) shopping, go out for a meal, visit friends and relatives.

Describe how you would most like to spend a free day.

You should say: where you would go
what you would do
who you would go with

and explain why you don't usually spend your free days like this.

Perhaps you would go to visit a friend or relative that you haven't seen for a long time.
Perhaps you would sit in front of the TV the whole day watching your favourite

films.
Perhaps you would go to see the sights in your own town/city that you have never had time to visit before.
Perhaps you would host a big party for friends and family.
Perhaps you would just spend the whole day in bed!

Describe a visit you made recently.

You should say: who you visited
whether you visit this person often
why you visited him/her/them

and explain how you usually feel when you visit people.

Reasons for visiting – to see a family member, to see old friends, to see a new-born baby, festival time.

Things people take when they visit others – flowers, chocolates, photographs, fruit, birthday present, a bottle of alcohol, a cake, something you made yourself.

Describe a visit you received recently.

You should say: who visited you
whether this person visits you often
why he/she/they visited you

and explain how you usually feel when people visit you.

Use the same ideas and vocabulary as for the question about a visit you made recently.

Describe a meal that you either cooked or ate.

You should say: what the meal consisted of and who made it

if it was for a special occasion
where you cooked it or ate it

and explain why the meal was so special.

When you answer this question, don't go into detail about how the meal was cooked or prepared. The word 'meal' does not only mean the food, but also the occasion.

Verbs associated with cooking
slice, cut, chop, heat, boil, fry, steam, grill, roast, bake.

Useful vocabulary
(cooking / kitchen) utensils, tableware, cooker (thing), cook (= chef), herbs, spices, greasy, starter, main course, dessert, dish.

Describe a picnic or meal that you ate outdoors.

You should say: where you had this meal
why you ate outdoors
what you ate and drank

and explain why you enjoyed this picnic or outdoor meal.

In this context 'outdoors' means 'in the open air', not 'away from your home'. I suggest spending a lot of time on describing the food (demonstrating vocabulary) and on how the outdoor meal was organised (who chose the time and place, who prepared the food and drink).

Vocabulary: paper plates/cups, plastic utensils, chopsticks, barbecue, grill, basket, snacks.

Describe a public event that you attended.

You should say: what the event was

what you and/or other people did at the event
whether this event is a regular one

and explain why this event is so memorable.

Public events could include sports events (e.g. a football match), exhibitions (of art, for example), public celebrations (e.g. a firework display or a parade).

Sports events – spectators, crowd, cheering, score, stadium, players, team.
Exhibitions – works of art, paintings, sculpture, drawings, gallery, display.

Describe a local event that takes place where you live.

You should say: what the event is
how often it takes place
whether many people take part in this event

and explain how you feel about this event.

The question says “takes place”, which means that the event must be one that takes place regularly. The question also specifies that you talk about a “local event”, so you should not talk about an event that takes place across the whole of your country, e.g. a festival.

Describe a cultural event that you either saw on TV or went to.

You should say: what the event was and where it took place
if it is a national event or only local / regional
if it attracted a wide range of people

and how you felt about it.

Cultural events
a play, an opera, a concert, a ballet, an exhibition, a puppet show, acrobatics, folk

dances, temple fair, circus.

Vocabulary
on stage, cast (actors and actresses), (to give) a performance, to perform, performer, audience, applause, based on (a short story or a novel), comedy, singing, dancing, music, traditional, modern, costumes, tragedy, sets (objects on the stage to create scenes), theatre, concert hall, art gallery, paintings, statues, tickets, masks, orchestra, band, musical instruments, lighting, sound effects, props (small items used by the cast on stage, e.g. glasses, hats), make-up, characters, clowns, animal tamers.

Describe a ceremonial event that you either watched or attended.

You should say: what the event was and where it took place
if it is a regular event or a 'one-off'
how you felt about it

and explain why you think it is special.

Ceremonial events: changing of the guard (e.g. at a palace), flag raising ceremony (e.g. in Tiananmen Square), coronation (a person becomes king / emperor or queen / empress), swearing-in ceremony (a person becomes president or prime minister), graduation (students receive their qualifications), an unveiling (something artistic, like a statue or painting, is shown to the public or the first time), an awards ceremony (people receive awards for their work or actions, e.g. for films, for music, for bravery), an official opening (a building or structure is opened to the public, e.g. a hospital, a museum, a bridge), military parade, wedding.

Describe a sporting event that you have seen or heard of.

You should say: what the event is and when it takes place
if it popular with other people in your family / city / country
where can find information about it

and say how you feel when you see or hear about this sporting event.

Sporting events
The Olympics, (the Monaco) Grand Prix, the World (Asian / National / Provincial) Championships, the World Cup, (the London) Marathon, (golf or tennis) tournament.

Spectator sports (sports people often watch)
football, basketball, tennis, table tennis, horse racing, motor racing, golf, boxing, skiing, baseball, ice hockey, volleyball.

Places where sporting events take place
(sports / football / baseball / athletics) stadium, (basketball / tennis / volleyball) court, race track (motor racing / horse racing), ice rink (figure skating / speed skating), ski resort (skiing, ski jumping), golf course, (football / rugby) pitch, boxing ring.

Describe an historical event.

You should say: what the event was and when and where it took place
which famous people were involved in this event
why this event was important

and explain why you find this event interesting.

When you answer this question, be careful not to get involved in great detail (the examiner may not know about the event or understand the historical situation. Keep things simple. Choose an event which you are familiar with. This will make it easier for you to talk about without getting confused yourself.

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Describe an interesting exhibition you have been to.

You should say: what the exhibition was about/of
how many people went to see it
where the exhibition was held

and explain how you felt at the exhibition.

Exhibitions show displays of a variety of things, e.g. paintings, sculpture, drawings, toys, clothes, new technology, cars and furniture.

At exhibitions, people often hand out leaflets and brochures. Sometimes, there are demonstrations of how things work or can be used.

Expressing interest or boredom – bored, fed up, weary, drained, exhausted, excited, enthusiastic, thrilled.

Describe a performance that you enjoyed watching.

You should say: what kind of performance it was
when and where you saw it
who the performer(s) was (were)

and explain how you felt about this performance.

Performances: concert, theatre, opera, play, acrobatics, dancing, cross-talk, storytelling, circus, magic, mime, puppet show, shadow play, ballet.

Vocabulary: stage, mask, ballerina, band, folk dance, traditional, modern, costume, character, lighting, sound, props, scenery, audience, applause, instruments, conductor, story, plot, juggling, magician, clown, animals, acrobatic troupe, balance, balancing act, wire walking, sword swallowing, form a human pyramid, stunts.

Describe something that made you laugh.

You should say: what the occasion was
where you were at the time
whether other people found the incident funny too
and explain why it was so funny.

Things that make people laugh include comedy shows/films, cross-talk, jokes, funny videos (e.g. of animals doing unusual things).

Useful vocabulary – hilarious, side-splitting, laughable, burst out laughing, I laughed so much I cried, see the funny side of something, chuckle (= laugh a little), keep a straight face (= not laugh when something funny happens).

It's probably best not to try telling a joke in answer to this question, because the joke might not translate well into English.

Describe something really exciting you have done in your life.

You should say: what it was and when you did it
whether you were alone or with other people
if you would like to do it again

and say whether you think your life is really exciting.

"When I was at university, I used to play paintball with a large group of friends. Paintball is rather like playing 'war games'. You dress in military style clothes and run around shooting each other with guns that fire small balls of paint – hence the name 'Paintball'. On either Saturday or Sunday we would get up early and drive out into the countryside to the paintball site. There, those of us who had our own equipment would put it on. The others would rent theirs from the site operators. Apart from the clothes and gun, everyone had to wear goggles to protect their eyes. More experienced players usually had a mask to cover the whole of their face, as getting shot there was quite painful. Then we divided into 2 teams and went to our part of the combat zone. Each team had a flag, which was fixed to a tree at head height. The objective was to capture the other team's flag and bring it back to the place where your flag was located. If you were shot, you were out of the game. Each game lasted a maximum of 20 minutes, so you had to be quick to get out, find the enemy flag, grab it and return. It was very exciting and really got your heart pounding as you ran through a wood or across open ground, getting shot at and occasionally shooting back, hoping to hit someone and not get hit yourself."

Describe a problem that you have met in your life.

You should say: what the problem was and why it arose
how you solved the problem
if you needed anyone to help you with it

and how you feel about the problem now.

Common problems in people's lives
not getting good grades at school, finding it hard to make friends, failing to get to university, failing to get a job you wanted, becoming unemployed, breaking up with a boy-/girlfriend, having little or no money, health problems.

Verbs and vocabulary
When I left school, I had to take a job I didn't like.
When I saw my boyfriend with another girl, I had no choice but to leave him.
My company failed and went bankrupt because of late payments from clients.
They cancelled the contract, so all my hard work came to nothing.
This problem is really beginning to bother me.
As time went by, the situation worsened / got worse.
The state of my health deteriorated rapidly and I had to go to a hospital.

Describe a difficult decision you made.

You should say: what the decision was
whether it is a common decision that people have to make
whether you asked for or received any help in making this decision

and explain what decision you finally made.

Difficult decisions that people often need to make include where to work/study/live, whether to get married, whether to leave home, what to study at university, how to invest money, whether to start a business.

People who can help you make decisions are friends, family members, teachers, professors, experts (lawyers, doctors, financial advisors).

Useful vocabulary – feel like, undecided, tempted to, make a choice, regret, intend, intention, options, alternatives, possibilities, committed to, long to (= wish to), look forward to, feel inclined to, to have your eye on something, plan.

Describe your first day on a new course, at a new school or in a new job.

You should say: what the course/school/job was
when the first day was
whether you met any interesting new people that day
and explain whether you enjoyed that first day or not.

Feelings – miserable, frustrated, fed up, confused, uncertain, unsure of oneself, hopeful, nervous, cheerful, optimistic, excited, enthusiastic, thrilled, confident, exhausted, bewildered (= confused), lonely, overwhelmed, over he moon (= very happy).

Describe something interesting you hope to do in the future.

You should say: what it is you hope to do
what you will need to do in order to achieve this
whether you will need help from other people to achieve this
and explain why you want to do this.

Interesting things that many people hope to do include going abroad to study, getting a particular job, visiting a foreign country for a holiday, travelling around the world, taking part in a competition on TV, learning to fly an aircraft, getting a PhD and running their own business.

Describe what you would do if you received a million dollars.

You should say: what you would spend the money on
how much you would save
how much you would give to other people

and explain how you would feel when you received the money.

Things you could do with the money include buy a house, give some money to relatives, donate some money to charity, set up a fund, lend some money to friends, pay off (bank) loans, hold a big party to celebrate.

Describe a great change that occurred at some point in your life.

You should say: what the change was and when it happened
if it was special for you or is usual for other people too
how it has changed your life

and explain your feelings about it.

Common changes in people's lives
going to a new school, leaving school, going to university, leaving home, getting your first job, getting married, having a child, changing jobs, getting promoted.

Verbs associated with change
replace, swap, convert, modify, differ, become, improve, benefit, develop, get better / worse, increase, decrease, expand, progress (stress on the second syllable), cause, effect, bring about, produce, create, give rise to, generate, lead to, result in, influence.

Describe an occasion on which you were late.

You should say: what the occasion was
why you were late
how the other people reacted to your lateness
and explain what you said to everyone.

Reasons for being late – my watch was slow, the bus/train was late (or didn't run), I overslept, there was a traffic jam, I forgot what time it was, my alarm clock didn't ring, my previous meeting lasted longer than expected, I got lost, my car

broke down.

The people I kept waiting were angry, annoyed, not bothered at all, restless, calm, disappointed, (un)sympathetic.

Remember to use the past tense throughout your answer!

Describe a time when you had to wait in a traffic jam.

You should say: when and where it happened
how long you were in the traffic jam
what you did while waiting

and explain how you felt when you were in that traffic jam.

If this happened to you on the way to the test centre, it will be fresh in your mind!

Vocabulary: vehicle, truck, van, car, motorbike, bicycle, pedestrian, traffic lights, bump, accident, injury, rubber-necking (people slowing down to look out of their vehicles at an accident), traffic police, police officer, police car, junction, side road, bridge, pedestrian crossing.

Describe a time when you lost something.

You should say: what you lost
when and where and you lost it
what you were doing at the time

and explain how you felt after you lost it.

Most of the questions in part 2 of the IELTS speaking module focus on positive events, but there are a few that are negative. When you are telling the story of how you lost the item, make sure that you are very clear and put events in a suitable order. Don’t forget to mention whether you found the thing that you lost!

Things that are commonly lost: mobile phone, umbrella, wallet/purse, bag, book, credit/ATM card, glasses, pen, hat, gloves.

Describe something you think is dangerous.

You should say: what it is and why you think it is dangerous
whether other people also think it is dangerous
whether this dangerous thing has any good points

and say if you think you are good at handling dangerous situations and things.

bungee jumping (i.e. jumping from a bridge with a rope around you)
motor racing (high speed crashes, need excellent timing)
being a soldier (going to war, using weapons, bombs)
making wildlife programmes for TV (snake bites, shark attacks)
fireworks (blindness, poor quality fireworks, factory explosions, child labour)
being a doctor (high risk of infection, dealing with new diseases)

Abstract

Describe a job that you have never had, but would like to have.

You should say: what the job is and why you want to do it
if it requires any special skills or abilities
how it would change your personal life

and explain how you might get this job in the future.

Remember that the question asks you about a job you have never had, so do not choose something you do or have done – choose something completely different and unrelated to any job you have done.

Describe how you could improve the way you work or study.

You should say: what the improvement would be
if it would be easy to do
if you would need other people to help you

and explain why this would improve the way you work or study.

become more efficient by [working out a schedule]
take more care [when doing paperwork]
take on more responsibilities [instead of explaining things to other people]
be more responsible
take a course in [study skills]
waste less time on [writing emails]
work flexi-time (= start and finish work at different times each day, according to requirements)
take short breaks to refresh yourself
set yourself targets and keep to them
make a plan before actually doing a piece of work

Describe an artistic skill you wish you had or wish you could learn.

You should say: what the skill is and where you could learn it
why you would like to have or learn it
how it might change you or your life

and explain how you would use your new skill.

Musical: play an instrument, e.g. a guitar, piano, er hu, play in an orchestra, perform for famous people, write songs or music, have them played by famous bands or singers, sing.
Artistic: paint, draw, design clothes, have your work exhibited at an art gallery.
Writing: write poems for your boy-/girlfriend.
Acting: act in plays, Beijing opera, in films.
Photography: take pictures of people, things, or animals, produce a book of photographs, take pictures for magazines.
Make things: use wood to make furniture, use clay to make pots and cups, use metal to create ornaments, use cloth to make clothes, use glass to make vases.

Describe your experience of learning English.

You should say: when you started learning English and why
how you have learnt English and with which people
how it has changed your life so far

and say why you think it will be useful to you in the future.

I started learning English 5 years ago.
I have been learning English for 5 years.
I have been learning English since 1998.

Listening – Understanding different accents, people speak too quickly.
Listen to cassettes, play a cassette recorder. Listen to other students.
Reading – Don't know many words, must look them up in a dictionary.
Read newspapers, magazines, and articles.
Writing – Not familiar with the style.
Practise writing letters and essays. Ask someone to correct your mistakes.
Speaking – Embarrassed, afraid of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence.
Meet people in social situations and speak to them.

Describe a practical skill that you have.

You should say: what this skill is
who taught you this skill
how long you learned this skill

and explain how this skill is useful to you.

Practical skills: drive a car, speak a foreign language, cook, swim,
use/programme a computer, repair cars/computers/toys, give first aid.

You could use an adverb of degree to say how good you are at this (remarkably,
extremely, very, quite, not bad, not very good, terrible, awful).

When explaining how this skill is useful to you, try to give one or two specific examples (including location, time, people involved, circumstances). Remember to use the past tense for these!

Describe a team, club, organisation or group that have been a member of.

You should say: what the team/club/organisation/group was
how many people were in it
how long you were (have been a member of this group

and explain how you benefited from being part of this group.

Groups – sports team, environmental/animal protection organisation, club for collectors, fan club (for a star), online group, health/fitness club.

Vocabulary – belong, membership, newsletter, website, membership card, benefits, discounts, meetings, trips.

Describe a small business that you would like to run.

You should say: what the business would be
where you would locate the business
whether it would cost a lot to start

and explain what you would need to do to make this business a success.

Things to consider – location, employees, buildings, equipment, advertising, market, customer service, finance, bank loan, communications, meetings, bureaucracy, permits, health and safety at work, company cars and storage.

People who run their own businesses are usually optimistic, confident, hopeful, determined, ambitious and energetic.

Useful verbs – plan, prepare, consider, weigh up (= consider), purchase, sell,

store, equip, employ, advertise, meet, apply for (e.g. a permit/loan).

Describe a business near your home.

You should say: how big this business is
what products it sells or what services it provides
how often you go there

and explain whether you like to use this shop or small business.

The list of businesses is almost endless – it could be anything from a small place that collects plastic bottles for recycling to a car plant. Note that a business has making money as a main objective, so don't talk about a police station or a state school (a private school is ok).

You can also consider the people who work there (perhaps you know some of them), how successful the business is, whether it has other premises (= locations) and how long it has been there.

Describe a company that someone you know works for.

You should say: what the company does
who you know who works there
where the company is located

and explain whether you would like to work for that company too.

You can talk about a company that a family member works for or one that a friend works for. Develop your answer by mentioning the size of the company, whether it is successful, whether you have ever visited the company's premises and whether the company is well-known.

Describe a large organisation that you know about.

You should say: where this organisation is
how you know about this organisation
what kind of people work there

and explain what this organisation does.

This organisation could be governmental (national or international, e.g. the United Nations), non-governmental (e.g. a charity or environmental protection group), or a company.

Pay particular attention to verbs when saying what the organisation does.

The United Nations tries to promote international peace and co-operation.
The Hope charity provides educational opportunities for poor children.
Advertising Unlimited markets products and services around the globe.

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Describe an important economic activity in your country.

You should say: what the activity is and where it takes place
how it is important in your life
how it has developed over the last 20 years

and explain why it is important to your country.

Some important economic activities: farming, food production, coal mining, oil production, steel production, mineral mining, automobile manufacturing, shipping, electronics, textile industry, paper production, cigarette production.

These activities could be important to you for several reasons. Perhaps members of your family are employed in these economic activities. Perhaps they are indirectly employed because the people who work at the nearby factory buy their everyday needs at your shop. Perhaps you need or use the products of this economic activity in your daily life. The activities listed above certainly contribute to the national economy and thereby help your country on the road to development.

Describe an economic issue that is facing your country.

You should say: what the issue is and why it is important
how it affects you personally
how the government is treating this issue

and explain how this issue may develop in the future.

Unemployment: Companies must make profits. Factories are automated and need fewer people. Unemployed must learn new skills.
Technological development: Factories are automated and need fewer people. Increases investment. New skills.
Corruption: Hurts fair economic competition. Crime. Sets a bad example to workers. Reduces foreign investment.
WTO membership: Legal, financial, and economic reforms. Dumping. Increased trade. Increased foreign investment.
Gap between rich and poor: People move to rich cities to find work. Social conflict. Jealousy. Division.
Tax cuts: Companies keep more of their profits for reinvestment. The government has less money to spend on education, health and infrastructure. People have more money to spend.

Describe the role money plays in your life.

You should say: how important money is in your life
what you spend money on and how much you save/invest
if you spend money in the same ways as most other people

and say whether you consider money to be the most important thing in life.

Verbs (Note the use of prepositions!)
I spend a lot of money on taxis.
I paid $50 for those shoes. I'll pay you the money back next week
My computer cost ten thousand yuan.
The bank charged me 100 yuan to send the money abroad.

My friend lent me some money. My friend lent some money to me.
I borrowed some money from my friend.
I waste a lot of money on things that I don't really need.
I'm saving up for a new car. I'm saving my money in order to buy a new car.
I save money by taking advantage of special offers.

Words and phrases
I can't afford it now. Maybe next month after I get paid.
Do you think this mobile phone is really worth 2000 yuan?
I prefer notes to coins because they are lighter.
The American dollar is the most important currency in the world.
Can I exchange these Yen into Euros, please?
The price of electricity has risen again.
The bank only pays me 2% interest on my savings. I should invest it in shares instead.

Describe a good law in your country.

You should say: what the law is
how you first learned about this law
who is affected by this law

and explain why you think this is a good law.

A lot of candidates have complained that this question is too difficult and too specialised. I think this is a perfect example of the lack of imagination of many candidates.

Examples of laws most people regard as good: the law against murder, the law against theft, laws against pollution.

Describe your favourite form of communication.

You should say: what the form of communication is
how often you use it
whether it is expensive to use
and explain why you prefer this form of communication.

Forms of communication – email, letter, telephone, SMS, speaking face-to-face, Internet telephone (e.g. Skype).

Describe a language that you might like to learn, apart from those you speak now.

You should say: where this language is spoken
how you would learn it
what difficulties you might have when learning this language

and explain why you would choose to study this language.

When saying where it is spoken, you will need to name countries or parts of continents. When saying how you would learn it, you can refer to how you have already learnt languages since the methodology is likely to be very similar. The difficulties you expect to encounter are probably more individual. Some people have greater problems with vocabulary. Others find grammar the most difficult. Others find pronunciation tricky (= difficult).

Describe the education system in your country.

You should say: at what ages students go to different schools
what the advantages and disadvantages of the system are
how the system is changing

and explain what changes you would like to see.

Schools: nursery school, primary school, secondary school (middle school / high school), university, college. Mention how old pupils/ students are when they attend these schools.
Exams: entrance exam, school-leaving exam, end-of-term exam, mid-term exam, finals (at the end of a university course). A ‘test’ usually refers to a short set of questions on a given topic, perhaps given by a teacher just to check if students understood a topic. An ‘exam’ is an important test which decide if you get a

qualification or can enter an establishment.
Changes: more focus on practical / vocational subjects, the role of ‘non-academic subjects’ such as sports and arts, teaching style (student participation in class, lectures, seminars), use of technology (computers, TV, language labs), amount of homework, school uniforms, relations between teachers and students, buildings (old / modern, heating / air conditioning), facilities (for sports, entertainment, meals).

Describe “youth culture” in your country.

You should say: what youth culture is
if it is different in different parts of the country
how it has changed since you / your parents were young

and explain your feelings about it.

Places where young people go: bars, discos, karaoke, shopping centres, fast food restaurants.

How young people look and dress: trendy, fashionable, casual.

What young people like to do: play sports, watch TV / films, read, chat with friends (at bars / on the Internet), go shopping.

When you answer this question, remember to focus on youth culture. Do not talk about your culture in general.

Describe a foreign culture that you are interested in.

You should say: what this culture is
what you know about this culture
how you learned about this culture

and explain why you feel this culture is interesting.

Describe something you have learned about a different culture.

You should say: what it was that you learned
which culture you learned this about
who (or what) you learned it from

and explain what interested or surprised you about it.

You have a wide choice when answering this question. Choose something quite important since it is more likely that you will be able to talk about it longer. You do not have to talk about something that is different in your culture and in the other culture – perhaps that is the thing that surprised you!

Describe a hobby or an interest that you have.

You should say: what the hobby or interest is
when and why you took up this hobby or interest
whether you expect to continue with this hobby or interest

and explain how this hobby or interest affects the other aspects of your life.

Verbs and phrases
When I came to this city, I joined a table tennis club.
I took up table tennis when I was a child, but recently I gave it up.
I collect stamps and coins. My stamp collection is very large.
I am mad about (= like very much) table tennis.
I am interested in many sports. My main interest is football.
My friends do not share my interest in sports.

Describe an outdoor activity that you enjoy.

You should say: what the activity is
how often you take part in this activity
whether you do it alone or with other people

and explain why you enjoy this activity in particular.

Make sure that you talk about an outdoor activity! It could be something that you take seriously as a sport or something that you just do for fun.

Outdoor Activities – cycling, football, basketball, table tennis, jogging, hiking.

Places – in the hills/mountains, on a river, on the roads, at a playground, at a sports centre, in a park.

Describe the way or ways in which you exercise.

You should say: what exercise you do
whether you exercise alone or with other people
how this exercise benefits you

and explain whether you think you do enough exercise.

Useful vocabulary – fitness centre, jogging, swimming, play sport, lose weight, build up muscles, lift weights, fitness instructor.

Describe a physical activity you do.

You should say: how often you do it
where and when you do it
what equipment is needed for this activity

and explain how you feel when or after you do this physical activity.

For most candidates, this will be a form of exercise or a sport. For a minority, it could be part of their work or a hobby such as gardening. A particularly useful aspect of this question is equipment. This gives you an excellent opportunity to show a wide vocabulary and to use some lexical items that other candidates are unlikely to use. For example, if you do gardening you can mention spade, fork, trowel, compost, and weeds. Don’t forget that you will also have the chance to use

verbs that are less commonly used.

Describe something you do that is good for your health.

You should say: when you began to do it
how often you do it
how much you enjoy doing it

and explain why you think this is important for your health.

Ideas: sport, exercise, take pills, have regular medical check-ups, eat healthily.

Don't forget to demonstrate your vocabulary by mentioning equipment you use or what exactly it is that you eat/take to keep healthy. If you can't think of more to say, talk about whether people you know also do this.

Describe something you do to relax.

You should say: what it is you do
how often you do it
whether you do this activity alone or with other people

and explain how this relaxes you.

This is a very easy topic. Most people will probably choose to talk about a hobby or interest, such as a sport, watching TV or listening to music. Refer to such topics in this book for suggestions.

Describe the role computers play in your life.

You should say: how often you use computers and why
how they are important in your life
how you personally might use computers in the future

and say what new developments in computers you expect in the near future.

Uses: playing computer games, writing and sending emails, writing documents (homework, reports, books, letters, contracts), storing information, making spreadsheets, keeping databases, storing and sending photographs, playing music / DVD's, creating pictures, printing, surfing the Internet.

Hardware: monitor, screen, CPU (central processing unit), keyboard, mouse, printer, CD / DVD burner, laptop, hard drive.

Vocabulary
Many young people are computer literate (= able to use computers).
Sometimes computers crash (= stop working) or catch a virus.
Be careful that there are no bugs in you computer system or software.
It's a good idea to save a back-up copy of any work you do, using a floppy disk.
I'm very satisfied with the graphics software on my computer.
Use the mouse to click on icons on the screen.
What brand is your computer?
Surfing the Internet is so much better with a broadband connection.
Is your computer software user-friendly? (= easy to use)

Describe the role TV plays in your life or your family life.

You should say: how much TV the people in your family watch
whether you enjoy the same types of programmes
how its role in your family has changed over time

and compare its role to other forms of leisure activity.

Positive aspects of TV: relaxing, informative, cheap, entertaining.
Negative aspects of TV: watch it too much, don't get out of the house.

TV vocabulary – TV commercials / advertisements, switch (turn) on / off, switch (turn) over (= change channels), satellite TV, cable TV, remote control.

Describe your favourite time of day.

You should say: what time of day it is
what you usually do at this time of day
whether other people you know also like this time of day

and explain why you particularly like that time of day.

You can add the word ‘early’ and ‘late’ to morning/afternoon/evening to say exactly which time of day you like.

Adjectives – quiet, busy, noisy, calm, relaxed, bright, dark.

Describe your favourite season or time of the year.

You should say: when this time is
what the weather is like at this time
what you usually do at this time

and explain why it is your favourite time of the year.

This question offers you a choice. You may either talk about one of the four seasons (spring, summer, autumn, winter) or a time of the year when something special happens (annually). The latter option offers the chance to talk about a major cultural event or festival. In either case, the second and third suggestions should be the focus of your speech.

Weather: sunny, cloudy, rainy, hot, cold, freezing, temperature, snowy, icy.

Activities: going out (for a walk), visiting friends/relatives, giving gifts, playing games, chatting, going shopping.

Describe the weather in your city.

You should say: what the weather is usually like in the different seasons

whether people often discuss the weather in your town or city
what people think of the weather in your town or city

and say whether you think the weather in your town or city is better or worse than in other places.

The seasons: spring, summer, autumn (U.S. = fall), winter.
Temperature: ℃ = degrees (centigrade), freezing, cold, mild, warm, hot, boiling.
The sky: clear, cloudy, overcast.
Rain: drizzle, a shower, rainy, a thunderstorm.
Winter weather: snow, frost, ice, sleet, hail.
Other weather conditions: sunny, foggy, sandstorm, lightning, rainbow, (high, strong, light) wind, breeze (= a light wind).

Describe an environmental problem that is facing your country.

You should say: what the problem is
how it has arisen
how it influences life in your country

and explain how this problem could be solved.

Air pollution: reduce smoke from factories, reduce car exhaust fumes, increase penalties, use alternative fuels.
Water pollution: reduce waste produced by factories, neutralize chemical waste before allowing it to enter water systems, increase penalties for causing water pollution.
Desertification: plant trees to bind soil, irrigation, careful use of agricultural land for crop growing and grazing.
Waste: recycle, reduce packaging.
Deforestation: manage forests better, plant new trees after fully grown ones are cut down, enforce laws against illegal logging.

Describe an important scientific development.

You should say: what the development is and who developed it
what the original idea behind the development was
how it has developed in recent years

and explain how it might influence society in the future.

There are many alternatives to talking about computer-related developments! Other scientific developments have taken lace in the fields of genetics (genetically modified food, cloning), robotics (the Japanese have created robots which look – and even act – like humans and dogs), and medicine (using lasers in operations). Try to find articles about the latest developments in field that interest you.

Describe a controversial issue in your country.

You should say: what the issue is an why it is so controversial
what the arguments are on this issue
what most people think about it

and explain what your opinion on this issue is.

'Controversial' means that there is a lot of discussion and disagreement, often heated, about a topic. The issue of transportation in cities is quite controversial. Many people believe it is their right to use their cars whenever and wherever they like. However, others point to traffic jams, traffic accidents, and polluting fumes as reasons to limit car use.

"The use of SMS messages to send advertisements is another issue – though less controversial as the number of people who don't mind them or welcome them is relatively small. The real issue seems to be how to deal with it. Controls could lead people to believe that the government is policing their communications. No controls mean that people could be annoyed by the number of advertising messages they receive. They could also be tricked by disreputable businessmen."

Describe something you are good at.

You should say: what it is that you are good at
whether you know other people who are good at this
why being good at this is useful to you

and explain how you became good at this.

This is another easy question. You can link the thing that you are good at to an aspect of your personality. Do you have an artistic talent, like painting or being able to play a musical instrument? Are you good at making something or cooking? Are you good at a sport? Perhaps you are good at a particular subject, like math or history. Perhaps you are good at something a little more abstract, such as making friends or remembering how to get to places without a map.

Describe a difficult thing you did well.

You should say: what the thing was
how long it took you to do
whether most people find this thing difficult to do

and explain how you managed to do it well.

This must be a thing you did well, so you cannot choose to talk about a decision you made. Perhaps you passed a hard test, completed a difficult project or won a competition.

Describe how you could make yourself a better person.

You should say: what the change or improvement would be
why you have not made the change or improvement yet
if you would need the help of other people
and explain how your life would be better as a result.

learn a practical skill (do something new, ‘exercise’ your brain)
join a club (meet new people, relax, enjoy yourself)

join a fitness club (keep fit, stay healthy, feel good about yourself)
meet new people (exchange ideas, make friends, have fun)
make yourself more attractive (new clothes, new hairstyle, improve your self-confidence)
become more hard-working (get promoted, be admired, earn more money)
take a course (learn new things, improve yourself)
don't be jealous (be satisfied with what you have, be happy for others' successes)

Describe one or two bad habits you have.

You should say: what the bad habits are and how long you have had it/them
why these habits are bad and what you can do about them
whether other people also have this/these bad habits

and say whether you think having bad habits is really so bad.

Common bad habits: spitting, eating a lot of unhealthy snack foods, smoking, chewing gum when talking to people, drinking alcohol, arriving late, using mobile phones during meetings, etc.

Snack foods: junk food, fattening, tasty, sweet, midnight snack, snacks between meals, bad for teeth, doughnuts, sweets, chocolate, crisps (U.S. = chips), cakes, biscuits (U.S. = cookies), munch on a snack, scoff (= eat quickly).

Smoking: cigarettes, pipe, cigars, tobacco, roll a cigarette, light a cigarette, take a drag (of a cigarette), smoke a cigarette (or pipe), a packet of cigarettes, a pouch of tobacco.

Drinking: beer, wine, spirits, cocktails, shots, can (or tin), bottle, draught beer, a pint of beer (= 0.568 litres), sober, tipsy, drunk, wrecked, under the table, sip a drink, knock back a drink.

Describe an ambition you have in life.

You should say: what the ambition is
whether you really believe you will ever achieve it
what you must do in order to achieve it

and whether you will need any help.

Typical ambitions: marry a dream man / woman, become rich, get a certain job, live a happy life, retire early, become famous, own your own business.
Useful vocabulary: realise a dream, overcome difficulties, reach a goal, manage.

Describe an ethnic minority in your country.

You should say: what the minority is called and where the people live
how the people are special or different to other ethnic groups
what traditions or festivals they have

and say whether you would like to live with this ethnic minority.

The following refers to China as an example.

China officially has 56 nationalities, but 'minority' excludes the Han, simply because they comprise over 90% of the population of China and cannot therefore be considered a 'minority' in any sense. Some of the best known minorities are probably the Mongolians, Koreans, Tibetans, Hui, Uygur, Bai, Dai, Naxi, Miao, and Zhuang.
Most of China's minorities live in the western half of the country, in Tibet and Xinjiang, or in the south, in Yunnan and Guangxi. Others, like the Hui, are spread throughout China.
Things that distinguish minorities from Han people are their traditional clothes (the Oroqen wear furs), customs (the Mosuo are a matriarchal society), festivals (the Yi people have a Torch Festival), music and musical instruments (Korean long drum), language (spoken and written Russian is totally different to Chinese), food and drink (Tibetans drink butter tea), sports (Mongolian wrestling), lifestyle (the Oroqen are hunters), crafts (decorated Uygur knives), and homes (Mongolian yurts).

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Part 3 Topics

Ability

1. Why do some children seem to be better at doing things than other children?

Is it a case of nature (parents' genes) or nurture (more practice, better lifestyle) or both?

2. How could parents help their children to develop their natural abilities?

Perhaps they could send them to special schools/classes, spend time with them on their abilities or provide financial help.

3. What problems might very clever children have?

Some might be bullied at school or not 'pushed' enough in class by teachers and materials.

4. What opportunities are there for learning new skills where you live?

Don't limit yourself to schools, colleges and universities. Think about companies that offer training courses in computing, business and language learning.

5. Can teaching can compensate for a lack of natural ability?

This is related to question 1. Perhaps teachers can offer encouragement, help explain things to students or suggest places that students can find information.

6. How easy is it for adults to learn new skills in middle and older age?

Most people think that younger people learn better and faster than middle aged and older people. Is this always true?

7. What sorts of things motivate people to do something very well?

Sources of motivation include the possibility of a better job in the future, gaining entrance to a top university and winning a prize/competition.

8. Which is more important for doing something well – ability or motivation?

Give reasons to support your opinion.

9. What might prevent people from developing their natural abilities?

Discrimination? An early failure? A physical injury might stop a sportsperson.

10. What abilities do children and teenagers learn at school?

Consider both academic and non-academic abilities.

11. What abilities do they learn outside school?

Consider practical abilities, social abilities and technological ones.

12. What other abilities do you think they should learn?

The question says ‘other’, so do not repeat abilities that you have already mentioned.

13. What are the most important abilities that people learn in your country?

This will depend on what you think is important – practical abilities, musical ones, social ones, linguistic ones, artistic ones, technological ones.

14. What abilities are most respected or admired in your country?

Develop your answer by saying why they are respected or admired so much.

15. What abilities do you think will be most in demand in the future?

You might like to refer to question 13 for ideas.

16. Do you think a person's abilities are biologically inherited from parents?

Or are they learnt? Are there other influences, such as friends and teachers?

17. What kind of person is good at learning new abilities?

Adjectives: intelligent, patient, dedicated, methodical.

18. If people want to develop their abilities, who should pay for it?

Individuals? The government? Companies? Perhaps it depends on the situation.

19. Can you give any examples of how ability in one area can help a person develop abilities in other areas?

For example, many people think that learning to play a musical instrument is useful in other areas.

Advertising

1. Which kind of advertising has most influence on shopping habits?

Consider TV, newspaper/magazine advertisements, leaflets, billboards, radio, etc.

2. Does advertising makes our lives more interesting or more stressful?

Perhaps it does both! Explain how.

3. Would it be better to reduce advertising costs to make products cheaper?

Lower prices might mean more sales, but how would people find out about these products?

4. How popular are brand names where you live?

Develop your answer by saying why they are or are not popular.

5. Why are people are prepared to pay more for certain brands?

Quality? Status symbol? Fashionable?

6. How are famous brands are aimed at children and young people?

Consider the use of children/young people/stars popular with them in advertisements.

7. Do you agree that advertising can be dangerous?

Some people believe that government controls ensure they are not. Others say it creates unnecessary demand, which can lead to pressures on the environment, and that companies often lie because sales and profits are all that matter.

8. What are the responsibilities advertisers have to the public?

To tell the truth? To ensure their products are safe? None?

9. What controls do you think should be on advertisers and advertisements?

Do you believe that no controls are needed, a few legal controls are necessary to prevent companies from lying, using pornography, excessive violence, unpatriotic images or language, or that tight controls should be placed on advertisements?

Methods of advertising

1. What are the different ways in which products and services are advertised?
2. What do you think the most effective way of advertising is?
3. What different kinds of advertisements can we see and hear in our daily lives?
4. In what different places can we see advertisements?
5. Is there more advertising in newspapers than on TV in your country?
6. What's the most frequently used method of advertising?
7. What do you think about advertising leaflets that are handed out on the streets?
8. What sorts of TV programs usually have the greatest number of TV commercials?
9. Do you think advertisements on the Internet only reach a limited audience?
10. In what ways do advertisements in different media differ from each other?
11. What effects does music in advertisements have?
12. What effects do pictures in advertisements have?
13. What visual effects make advertisements more effective?

Products and services advertised

14. Which kinds of people are advertisements usually aimed at?
15. Which products do you think advertisements are most useful for advertising?
16. In your country, which kinds of products are advertised the most?
17. Why do people want to buy these things?

Aims of advertising

18. Do you think we need to have advertisements?
19. Do you think there are too many advertisements?
20. Would it be better to reduce advertising to make products cheaper?
21. Is advertising on TV sometimes a waste of money?
22. Do you think people are easily influenced by advertisements?
23. Which kinds of advertisements do you think are the most effective?
24. Is science and technology used to help make advertisements more effective?

Developments in advertising

25. In your country, what changes have occurred in advertising in the past 20 years?
26. How is technology used to make advertisements more effective?
27. Do you think the number of advisements will increase in the future?
28. How might advertising change in the future?

The effects of advertising on society

29. What effects do you think advertising has on the economy?
30. Apart from the economy, what are the positive and negative aspects of advertising?
31. Does advertising make our lives more interesting or more stressful?
32. Do you think advertising makes people buy things they don't need?
33. How much do you think advertising influences people?
34. Do you think young people like advertisements more than older people?
35. Do you think advertisements affect or influence people's everyday lives?
36. Do advertisements make people feel they are under pressure?
37. Do you think it is good for famous people to appear in advertisements?

Advertisements and culture

38. Do you think advertisements affect the cultural life of your country?
39. Is it good to have advertisements that show the culture of foreign countries?
40. Do advertisements in your country reflect your national culture?
41. Should advertisements reflect the national culture of the countries they are in?

Controlling advertising

42. What responsibilities do advertisers have to the public?
43. Do people in your country trust advertisements to tell the truth?
44. Is there much dishonest advertising in your country?
45. Do you think advertising can ever have a negative effect on the environment?
46. Do you advertising has any negative effects on people?
47. Do you think there should be some controls placed on advertising?
48. What role do you think the government should play in advertising?
49. Do you think there are enough controls on advertising in your country?

Advertising and children

50. Do you think children are influenced very much by advertisements?
51. What effects do advertisements have on young children?
52. Are there any advertisements that it is not suitable for children to see?
53. How can we solve the problem of children seeing these advertisements?
54. Do you think companies should be allowed to advertise to children?
55. Do you think children's TV programmes should have advertisements?
56. Do you think there should be some rules for advertisements aimed at children?

Brand names

57. How popular are brand names where you live?
58. Why are people are prepared to pay more for certain brands?
59. How are famous brands are aimed at children and young people?

Advice

1. What kinds of advice do parents give their children?

Parents often advise their children about education, personal relationships, future careers, money, clothes, personal habits and free time activities.

2. How often is the advice of parents accepted by children?

Is it accepted because the children really think it is good advice or because the children have little choice?

3. Are children influenced more by advice from family members or from friends?

Be careful that your answer matches with your answer to the previous question.

4. Which professions involve giving advice as the main part of the job?

Lawyers, doctors, financial advisors, bankers, fitness trainers?

5. How valuable is the advice that these people give?

Develop your answer by saying whether you think these people charge too much!

6. What is the value of advice given by online experts?

Are these people really qualified? How do you know? What if two experts give different advice?

7. On what occasions have you been given advice at/about work/studies?

Think of two or three examples and say whether you acted on the advice and what the results were.

8. How was the person advising you trained to give such advice?

Were they trained at all or were they relying on experience?

9. Do you think that providing special training for giving advice is a good idea?

It could help them communicate in better ways.

Advice for young people

1. What sorts of advice do/did your teachers give you?
2. What advice have your parents given you?
3. Is the advice that young people receive from teachers the same as from their parents?
4. Do you think this advice is very useful?
5. Would you say young people are very willing to receive advice from others?

6. Would you say young people usually accept the advice of older people?
7. Do young people usually accept advice from their friends or from their parents?
8. Do you think young people should listen to the advice of older people?
9. What do you think is the best way for older people to give advice to young people?
10. If you were to give one piece of advice to young people, what would it be?

Advice for older people

11. What is the main difference between older people and young people when someone gives them advice?
12. Do you think older people more often receive advice from their friends or family?
13. Do you think older people prefer advice from their friends or from their family?
14. Do young people ever give advice to older people?

Independence

15. Why do some people find it easier to accept advice than other people do?
16. Would you say an independent thinking person finds it more difficult to accept advice?
17. Do you think men take advice from people less than women?

Professional advice

18. When adults have problems, where can they find professional advice?
19. Do these people usually give good advice?
20. How important is it for these people to be qualified to give advice?
21. Would you ever take advice from a fortune-teller?

Bad advice

22. Do you think there are any possible risks in following the advice of others?
23. Have you ever made a bad decision because you listened to someone's

advice?
24. Why do some people only listen to advice after they have made a mistake?
25. Is it good to let children and young people make mistakes and learn from them?
26. Why do some people give advice to others but not follow their own advice in their own lives?
27. In what situations do people sometimes follow bad advice?
28. If someone was giving you bad advice, what would you do?

Ages (Stages of Life)

1. At what age do young people legally become adults in your country?

In most countries, it is 18, but this age may vary according to different activities.

2. Do you think this age is suitable?

Here is an excellent opportunity to use ‘too’ and ‘enough’. “No, they are too immature and inexperienced.” “They are not experienced enough.” “Yes, young people are familiar enough with the modern world to make decisions.” If you answer ‘no’, you could also use ‘lack + noun’, e.g. “Young people lack wisdom.”

3. Do you think this age might be changed in the future?

Develop your answer by saying why or why not. Are young people growing up faster?

4. Do any celebrations take place when a young person becomes an adult in your country/culture?

If so, describe what happens.

5. Which other life events are celebrated in your country/culture?

Consider weddings, funerals, graduation ceremonies, etc.

6. Do people celebrate retirement from work in your country/culture?

If so, describe what happens. Is it celebrated at work, at home, or both?

7. When do people usually retire in your country?

The ages may differ for men and women. Do people often retire early?

8. How do retired people spend their time?

Name a few ways and say hwy these are popular with retired people.

9. How can an aging population affect a society?

Workers may have to pay more taxes to support the elderly. There will be a change in demand for different products and services.

Reaching maturity

1. At what age would you say a person becomes mature?
2. At what age would you say a person becomes responsible for their own actions?
3. Would you say young people today are more mature than young people when your parents were young?
4. Do you think young people should take more family responsibilities than now?
5. At what age should young people should start to take some family responsibilities?
6. If a young person who is not an adult commits a crime, should the parents be held responsible?
7. How do people become more mature?
8. What life experiences help people to mature?

Reaching certain ages in life

9. In your culture, which birthdays, representing reaching a new stage of life, are especially important?
10. In your culture, what are some of the important life events that are celebrated?
11. How do people celebrate these important life events?
12. In what ways might family relationships change when young people reach new stages in their lives?

Preparing for the next stage of life

13. How do you think people can prepare themselves for the next stage in their lives?
14. How do you think a person can prepare him or herself for university?
15. How do you think people can best prepare themselves for retirement?
16. How can people get help if they have questions about the next important stage in their lives?

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Animals

Do you consider people in your country to be “animal lovers”?

Yes: many have pets, protection of wild animals in wildlife reserves, panda research centre, laws protecting animals, many people visit zoos and wildlife parks.
No: cruelty to animals (bear at Beijing zoo attacked by student, bear bile used in traditional Chinese medicine. People try to kill pandas and Manchurian tigers. Fur coats are fashionable with some rich people.
We love animals – for food! Shark Fin Soup – sharks are killed and only the fin is used.

Do you agree with using animals for experiments?

Yes: human lives are more important. Experiments save lives in the long-term.
No: many experiments are for cosmetics, not medicines. Animals should have the same rights as humans.

If you could keep any animal in the world as a pet, which would you choose?

Zebra or camel – ride it to school or work.
Wolf or tiger – for protection.
Monkey – for fun and games.

Do you think that we spend too much time and money on environmental

protection?

Yes: people must come first, many poor people – we can't put animals before them.
No: we spend much more money on people – spending some money on animals is a sign of civilization.

Would it be better if people became vegetarians?

Yes: healthier, kind to animals, rearing farm animals uses more resources.
No: people need a balanced diet, the food chain is a natural thing. Besides, what would we do with the farm animals?

In what ways do people use animals?

Food, clothing, sport, medicine, experiments, entertainment (circuses), pets, labour (on farms), transport, education (zoos).
Try to give specific examples of animals for each of these.

Pets

1. What kinds of animals do people keep at home in your country?
2. Is it common to keep pets in your country?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of keeping animals as pets?
4. Why do some people think that keeping pets is good for children?

Pets in cities and in the countryside

5. Do you think it's good to keep pets in the city or is it only good to have pets in the countryside?
6. Which place do you think is better for keeping animals, the city or the countryside?
7. Which animals do you think it is not good to keep as a pet in cities?
8. Which animals are more suited to city life and which are more suited to country life?

Humans and animals

9. Do you think people are more important than animals?
10. Do you think some animals are more intelligent than other animals?
11. Do you think animals have 'rights'?
12. In general, do you think people treat animals well?
13. Do people today treat animals the same as they used to do, several decades ago?
14. How do you think the relationship between humans and animals has changed over the years?
15. Do you think that the way animals are shown in books today is different to the way they were shown many years ago?

Zoos

16. What are the benefits and drawbacks of keeping animals in zoos?
17. How could the life of animals in zoos could be improved?
18. How do you think zoos might develop in the future?

Animals and the Economy

19. What are some of the ways in which animals are used in your country?
20. Do animals play an important role in your country's economy?
21. Did animals play a more important role in your country's economy in the past?
22. Do you think animals will play an important role in the economy in the future?
23. What are the living conditions of farm animals like in your country?
24. How could these conditions be improved?
25. Should there be laws to protect domesticated animals?

Wild Animals

26. How do people in your country feel about wild animals?
27. Why could some wild animals become extinct?
28. How can governments and individuals protect wild animals?
29. Should extinction be dealt with nationally or globally?

Animal Experiments

30. Why are animals sometimes used in scientific experiments?
31. How do people in your country feel about using animals in this way?
32. Do you think animal testing will continue in the future?

Animals and Culture

22. Do any animals have a special significance in your culture?
23. What characteristics are associated with particular animals in your culture?
24. Why are animals sometimes used in advertising?

Art

1. How important is it to teach students to draw, paint, or sculpt?

Compare the importance of this with the importance of other subjects and of having free time – school time and free time are limited!

2. What can students can learn from studying the art of different cultures?

They can learn about the history of other cultures and about how people from other cultures view the world.

3. Do you think that art will be taught in schools in the future?

With increasing demands on students to learn other subjects, particularly those related to science, will there be enough time in the schedule?

4. What kinds of paintings do people enjoy in your country?

Types of paintings include landscapes, (self) portraits, still life and abstract. Describe what the paintings illustrate – scenery, animals, buildings/structures or people.

5. What makes some paintings so valuable?

Things that make paintings valuable may include the artist, the subject or the style.

6. Why do many people enjoy painting as a hobby?

They may like to keep/develop their artistic talent or they may find it relaxing.

7. What kinds of art can people see in public places?

You can mention art galleries, but this question requires you to think about the art you see in public buildings, statues you see in parks, etc.

8. Should governments spend money on providing art in public places?

Is this the responsibility of the government, individuals or should art be sponsored by businesses?

9. How important are art galleries in modern society?

What are their educational and cultural roles?

What is art?

1. What do you think the word ‘art’ means?
2. Can you give some examples of art?
3. What kinds of art can people see in public places in your town/city?
4. Would you say that handicrafts are a form of art?
5. Would you say the design of a car is a kind of art?
6. Do you think advertising is a kind of art?
7. What makes a work of art have a high price?

Art in your country

8. What are the most popular types of art in your country?
9. In your country, do young people and older people like the same art?
10. Do young people and older people have the same attitude towards art?
11. Is painting a popular hobby in your country?
12. Why do many people enjoy painting as a hobby?
13. What kinds of paintings do people enjoy in your country?

14. Are there any differences between traditional painting in your country and painting in other countries?
15. Do you think it's possible for anyone to become an artist?

Learning about art

16. How important is it to teach students to draw, paint, or sculpt?
17. What can students can learn from studying the art of different cultures?
18. Do you think that art will be taught in schools in the future?

Art and society

19. What is the importance of art for society?
20. Do you think there is any art that is worthless?
21. How do you think ordinary people can be helped to appreciate art?
22. What are the differences between modern art and traditional art in your culture?

Art as a career

23. Do you think art is a good way to make a living?
24. Why are few artists wealthy?
25. Do you think artists in society are undervalued?

Government and art

26. Do you think the government should encourage the arts?
27. What do you think of having art in public places?
28. Do you think the government should financially support artists?

Art galleries

29. Are there many art galleries in your hometown?
30. Why do some people like to go to art galleries?

31. Do young people like to go to art galleries as much as older people?
32. Do you think it's important to have places such as art galleries?
33. Where you live, are art galleries expensive to visit?
34. Do you think people should have to pay to enter an art gallery?
35. What do you think of art exhibitions in public parks where people can go free of charge?

Books

1. What are the main qualities someone needs to be a successful writer?

Knowledgeable about the subject, good at research, organised, motivated.

2. Why do some people choose to write for a living?

Perhaps they like working alone or enjoy spreading information/experiences.

3. What are some of the difficulties faced by people who write for a living?

Lack of a regular income, deadlines, getting motivated, becoming distracted.

4. How important are libraries in your country?

Think of their educational and cultural impact.

5. How can libraries encourage people to read more?

Make one or two suggestions.

6. Is it a waste of money for governments to pay for libraries for the public?

If so, should libraries become private businesses or be paid for by those who use them. Can libraries compete with societies where most/all people have computers?

7. What kinds of reading materials are available on the Internet?

Give a few examples and say how useful they are.

8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet as a source for reading materials?

There are many sources, but are they reliable? What if there is a power black-out?

9. Do you think that printed books will eventually be replaced by the Internet?

Yes: many people prefer to read on the Internet, computers are trendy, downloading will become easer and faster, distribution will be easier, useful in distance learning.
No: people like to hold a book while reading, books can be read anywhere.

10. Why do many people enjoy reading books?

The question uses the word ‘enjoy’, so this question does not refer to people who must read books whether they like it or not, e.g. children reading textbooks in class. Of course, many people must read and also like it, but (in answer to this question) say why they like reading books rather than why they must read books.

11. Do children and adults read books for the same reasons?

Here, you can combine why people like reading books and why they must read books. People generally read for entertainment, information or a combination of the two. Do adults read more for information and children more for entertainment?

12. Do men and women like reading the same kinds of books?

When giving your answer, remember that it is unlikely that only men or women read a certain kind of book.

13. Why are some books popular in many different countries?

What is the appeal of the Harry Potter books, for example, which are popular around the world, regardless of culture?

14. Do you think that people in different countries read similar kinds of books?

They probably do. There may be cultural differences, but around the world the

kinds of books that people read are often very similar.

15. How are books in your country different to books in other countries?

Many books from Britain are available in other countries, from Harry Potter to novels by the Bronte sisters, so you have the chance to make comparisons. You can make comparisons even if you have read the foreign books in Your language rather than their original language.

Buildings and Structures

Compare and contrast the residential buildings and the buildings where people work in your town or city.

When comparing, don't forget to use appropriate connectives in your answer. Remember that most differences will be related to the simple fact that the buildings are designed for different purposes.

How do you think the design of buildings has changed over the last 50 years?

Here, you can look at the materials used in construction, the size of rooms, the height of buildings, modern features necessary for the introduction and use of new technology, and the architectural styles. Remember to be careful with tenses. "50 years ago, residential buildings were rarely very tall. Actually, I can't remember a building having more than six floors. Rooms in flats have become a little bigger, but many offices are smaller than they used to be. All modern building have air conditioning, which was unheard of 50 years ago."

How do you think buildings of the future will differ from today's buildings?

Answer in the same way as above, but remember to use the future tense and verbs such as 'could', 'should', and 'might'.

In what ways do you think that the buildings in which people live and work influence them?

This is a great question for Chinese students, because many Chinese buildings are designed along the principles of feng shui. When you enter a modern office block, it has a completely different feeling to walking into a courtyard home.

If you could design your own home, what special features would you include?

The question asks about ‘special features’, so don’t start describing your ideal home (as in part two of the test). Focus on things that few other homes have. Aside from practical features, you could also mention decorative ones.

Some structures are designed for artistic purposes rather than practical ones. What do you think of this?

Good idea: they look nice, they can become a symbol of the city (e.g. the Eiffel Tower in Paris), they show we are cultured.
Bad idea: a waste of money, no practical use.

Commercial and residential buildings

1. Compare commercial and residential buildings in your country/where you live.
2. Compare the facilities that commercial and residential buildings have.
3. How important is the outward appearance of commercial and residential buildings?
4. Compare the buildings people live in today with those in the past.
5. How have people’s expectations about the buildings they live in changed in the past ten or twenty years?
6. How does the design of the buildings people live in affect their lives?
7. What requirements do companies have of the buildings they use?
8. How are people are affected by the buildings they work in?
9. What kinds of people live in tall residential buildings?
10. What are some of the problems encountered when people live together in the same apartment building?
11. Is the outside appearance of commercial buildings important?
12. Why do some companies pay a lot to construct office buildings for themselves?

Old buildings

10. Compare modern buildings and old ones in your country/where you live.
11. Do you prefer the appearance of old or modern buildings?

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in old buildings?
13. Should historic buildings be preserved?
14. What can the government do to protect historic buildings?
15. What do you think are some possible effects of having modern buildings in an old part of the city?

National monuments and public buildings

16. Why do many people like to visit national monuments/buildings?
17. Do you think that younger people and older people have different attitudes to national monuments/buildings?
18. Should governments spend money on national monuments/buildings?
19. Who should finance the construction of public buildings such as stadiums and railway stations?

Architecture

19. Compare the ideas that architects and the general public have about buildings.
23. How much is architecture influenced by the local climate?
24. Should architects design buildings to be practical rather than beautiful?
25. In general what is the architectural style of the buildings in your hometown?
26. What is a typical home in your country like?
27. Should the government make rules about the outside appearance of people's homes?
28. What qualities and skills should a good architect have?
29. How do you think buildings will change in the future?
30. How do you think homes of the future will be different to homes today?
31. When a building is being designed and built, what things should the designer or the builder pay attention to?
32. How have science and technology changed the way modern buildings are constructed?
33. What influence does modern architecture have on a city?
34. What are the characteristics of traditional architecture in your country?

Tall buildings

35. Does your city have many tall buildings?
36. What do you think of tall buildings?
37. What are some advantages and disadvantages of having tall buildings in a city?
38. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in tall buildings?
39. In cities, do you think there should be limits on the height of buildings?
40. Do tall buildings have any effect on the environment?

The environment and architecture

41. How do buildings in different parts of your country differ from each other?
42. How does the environment affect the design of the buildings in that place?
43. What environmental factors are important when designing a building?
44. In what ways can buildings be made more environmentally friendly?

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Business

Small businesses

1. What kinds of small businesses are found in your local area?
2. What kinds of small business are most popular in your country?
3. How can governments help small businesses?
4. What difficulties do people face when they try to have a successful small business?
5. What should be the government's role in how small businesses are run?
6. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of small businesses compared to large companies?
7. How have small businesses changed in recent years in your country?
8. Do you think there will be fewer small/local businesses in the future?
9. How do you think small business will change in the future in your country?
10. Compare owning and running a small business to being an employee in a large company.

Local businesses

11. How important are local businesses to a community?
12. Do you think there will be any changes in the employment situation in your area?
13. Do you think there will be fewer small/local businesses in the future?
14. What types of shops and small businesses are there in your neighbourhood?
15. What are the advantages of having local businesses in one's neighbourhood?
16. Compare small shops with big shops such as supermarkets and department stores.
17. Can you suggest any businesses that are needed in your neighbourhood?
18. What are the advantages of 24-hour convenience stores?

Having your own business

19. Do people today prefer to be self-employed or to work for others?
20. Do more people today prefer to be self-employed, compared to a few years ago?
21. What are the advantages of owning your own business?
22. Compare the benefits of running your own business and working for a company.
23. Are there any disadvantages of running your own business?
24. Do you think it's easier to be an employee in a company or to be a company owner?
25. What are the qualities of a good employer?
26. What personal qualities are needed to open and run your own small business?
27. What are the qualities of a good employee?
28. How do small businesses attract customers (clients)?
29. How do companies lose customers (clients)?
30. How does a person set up their own business?
31. What are the advantages and possible disadvantages for a female opening her own business?

Business ethics

32. What do you think of business owners who cheat their customers or clients?
33. What can be done to protect customers' rights?
34. Do you think it is a good idea for a customer or client to take a case to court?

35. Do you think it's right to make a profit at the expense of the environment?
36. If a company pollutes the environment, should that company be held responsible?
37. How can these companies reduce pollution?

The business environment in your country

38. Do you think it's easy to have your own business in your country?
39. Do you think running a business today is easier than it was before?
40. What effects have foreign businesses had on business in your country?
41. Are foreign companies are changing traditional ways of doing business?
42. How do you feel about business culture in general, for example, market capitalism?
43. How do you feel about the business culture that exists in your country now?

International business

44. What benefits do international companies bring to a country?
45. Are there any negative effects of international companies?
46. Do you think that in the future only international companies will survive?

Learning business skills

47. What are the skills needed to run a small business?
48. Which is more effective in developing business skills: practical experience or academic qualifications?
49. Should business courses include work experience?

Celebrations

1. Which birthdays have special significance in your culture?

In many Western countries ‘special’ birthdays for young people include 16, 18 and 21.

2. Do children and adults celebrate birthdays in the same ways?

Do they celebrate in different places? (At home, in a restaurant, at a bar.)

3. Do people's attitudes to birthdays change as they get older?

Suggest why they might be different.

4. How important is it for families to celebrate special events together?

Give one or two reasons to support your answer.

5. Compare spending time with family and spending time with groups of friends on special occasions.

This question is related to the previous one. Make sure that your answers do not conflict.

6. Do you think that family celebrations will become less common in the future?

Suggest why this may or may not happen.

7. What kind of national events are celebrated in your country?

Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, National Day and Worker's Day (May Day) are the main ones in China.
Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving are the main ones in the USA.

8. Do you think that people's attitudes to national celebrations has changed in recent years?

Suggest why attitudes have or have not changed.

9. How significant are national holidays and celebrations?

They are usually very significant, not least because most people get time off work during these times.

Parties

1. When do people in your country have a party?
2. What do people in your country do when they have a party?
3. In your country, are parties today the same as parties 20 or 30 years ago?
4. What is the importance of having parties?
5. Do older people have the same ideas about parties as young people?
6. When girls get together for a party, do they do the same things as when boys get together for a party?
7. Are parties in rural parts of your country the same as parties in the city?

Birthdays

8. Which birthdays have special significance in your culture?
9. Do children and adults celebrate birthdays in the same ways?
10. Do people's attitudes to birthdays change as they get older?
11. Do people's attitudes to birthday celebrations change as they get older?

Family celebrations

12. Are family celebrations very important in your country?
13. On what occasions do people in your country meet for family celebrations?
14. Do you think family celebrations are changing nowadays?
15. Have family gatherings changed much in the past 20 or 30 years?
16. Compare spending time with family and spending time with groups of friends on special occasions.
17. Do you think that family celebrations will become less common in the future?
18. Do people in the countryside have similar family celebrations to people in the cities?

Traditional celebrations

19. Why do people have celebrations at festival times?
20. Has the way people celebrate traditional festivals changed in the past 20-30 years?
21. Do you think globalisation is affecting traditional festivals in your culture?
22. What can people learn by observing the traditional festivals of other cultures?

23. What differences do you know of between foreign festivals and those in your culture?

Public celebrations

24. What kind of national events are celebrated in your country?
25. Have people's attitudes to national celebrations changed in recent years?
26. How significant are national holidays and celebrations?
27. What are the differences between watching a public celebration on television and actually being there?
28. What effects do public celebrations have on people living near to where the celebrations are being held?

Challenges

General challenges in life

1. What are the most difficult problems young people have to deal with when starting out in life today?
2. How have the problems that people face changed in recent years?
3. Is a certain amount of difficulty in life is good for people?
4. Are there more or fewer challenges for individuals in the modern world?
5. Are the most important challenges today intellectual rather than physical?
6. Why do some people avoid challenges?

Ambition and young people

7. What are the most common ambitions young people in your country have?
8. How important is ambition for young people's development?
9. What are the dangers of being over-ambitious for young people?

Taking risks at work and in free time

10. Which types of jobs which involve risk-taking?
11. Why do some people choose jobs where there are risks or danger involved?

12. Who should take responsibility when damage occurs in such jobs? (Consider, for example, loss of life and money)
13. What kinds of activities do adventurous people enjoy?
14. Why do some people choose to take risks in their free time?
15. Should society pay to help people who get into trouble when taking risks?

Independence in childhood

16. How do children develop a sense of independence?
17. Do children have more or less independence now than when you were a child?
18 How important is it for children to grow up with a sense of independence?

Change

Changes in working life

1. How have patterns of working life changed in recent years in your country?
2. How has new technology had an impact on work patterns?
3. How do you think that patterns of working life might change in the future?

Remember to keep your answers focussed on working life, rather than life outside work. ‘Work patterns’ refers to the way people work and the kind of work they do.

Social changes

4. Tell me about a social change which is taking place in our country.
5. What effects is this change having on society?
6. What are the causes of this change?
7. What other factors cause change in society?

Notice that the first three questions in this section refer to one change, with the fourth question being more general. For the first three questions, you should choose a social change that you know plenty about, so that you can discuss it for a few minutes.

Speed of change

8. How fast have things changed during your lifetime?
9. What effects can rapid change have on individuals?
10. Do you think that younger people and older people react to rapid change in similar ways?
11. Do you think that the pace of change will continue to increase in the future?

The pace of change in many countries over the past 15-20 years has generally been very fast (and will almost certainly continue to be very fast) and you should be able to fill your answers with good examples. Remember that the pace of life in the countryside may not have changed as quickly as that in the cities.

People's feelings about change

12. Why is it that some people like change while others don't?
13. How does change bring difficulties to some people?
14. What are some possible negative effects of change?
15. Who do you think likes change more, young people or older people?
16. What do young people want to change most when they become adults?
17. Do you think change affects children and old people the same way?

Controllable and uncontrollable change

18. What changes can people control and what changes do we have no control over?
19. How can people have more control over the changes that occur in their lives?
20. What changes do you think are inevitable in life?

Personal change

21. What are some examples of changes that adults choose to make to their lives or to themselves?
22. Why do people sometimes want to make these changes?
23. What are some personal changes that occur only over quite a long time?

24. Do you think it's easy for people to make changes in their lives or to make changes to themselves?
25. Why might adults find it harder to change than children?
26. Why do you think it is difficult for people in general to make changes to their lives?

Changes at different times in people's lives

27. What are some of the typical changes that people experience in their lives?
28. What do you think is the most important change in people's lives?
29. In what ways do people change when they move from being a child to a teenager?
30. In what ways do people change when they move from being a teenager to an adult?
31. How do people change when they enter university?
32. How do people change after they get married?
33. What are some things about a person that may never change?

Childhood and Memories

1. How important is childhood?

Give two or three reasons why you think childhood is important.

2. What can adults learn by looking back at their own childhoods?

Childhood gives us many experiences that we can use in our adulthood. Think of two or three examples and develop them.

3. How important is it to keep in touch with childhood friends?

Does it really matter if a person loses contact with their childhood friends?

4. What are some of the ways in which people remember their childhoods?

Many people recall funny stories from their childhoods or chat with their friends about things that happened when they were kids.

5. What things do adults often keep from their childhoods?

Many people keep photographs, toys, books, even clothes from when they were kids.

6. What are the advantages of keeping a photo album of childhood pictures?

It can help you to remember people and events from your childhood – things that you did, when you did them and who you shared those moments with.

7. How can people improve their memories or learning ability?

It might be a good idea to have a look online for some suggestions. Perhaps you can use them in your IELTS preparation!

8. How important is it to be able to remember things?

Some people suggest that, thanks to modern technology, it is not so important to be able to remember things. For example, your phone and computer can keep track of all the phone numbers you need.

9. What things do people often try to memorise?

Phone numbers, addresses, names, routes, quotations, parts of texts, formulae.

Childhood memories

1. How important is childhood?
2. What can adults learn by looking back at their own childhoods?
3. How important is it to keep in touch with childhood friends?
4. What are some of the ways in which people remember their childhoods?
5. What things do adults often keep from their childhoods?
6. Why do people keep those things?
7. What are the advantages of keeping a photo album of childhood pictures?
8. What are some good methods for remembering childhood experiences?
9. What are the advantages of keeping a photo album of childhood photographs?

Memories

10. How can people improve their memories?
11. How important is it to be able to remember things?
12. What things do people often try to memorise?
13. What are the advantages of having a good memory?
14. Can you think of any ways to improve one's memory?
15. Do children and adults have the same ability to memorise things?
16. What methods do most people use to memorise things?
17. Why do people remember some events and not others?
18. Why do some people write events in a diary?
19. Do you think that sometimes people talk about their memory of an event that didn't really happen?

Children and Childhood

Childhood in General

1. What do you think that young children need most in life?
2. Compare the behaviour of teenagers to that of young children.
3. What are the most common interests of teenagers in your country?
4. How important is school to teenagers?
5. How was your childhood different from children's experiences today?
Do children today do the same things as children 20 (50) years ago?
Are children today under a lot of pressure?
6. Why is childhood such an important stage in people's lives?

Children and Families

7. Compare the importance of mothers and fathers to a young child.
8. What makes a good parent?
9. What are some of the difficulties of being a parent?
What can parents do to help their children grow up to be good people?
10. Why are an increasing number of people choosing not to have children?
11. What is the role of grandparents in raising children in your country/culture?
12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having brothers and sisters?
13. How have parents' expectations of their children have changed in recent

times?
Do children have roles within families?

Development and Learning

14. What factors influence the rate at which children grow up?
15. What are some of the main influences that can affect how a child develops?
16. Compare how quickly children grow up today and grew up in the past.
17. Do you think parents should be children's models for how to think and act?
18. Do children today face challenges today that children didn't face in the past?
19. Are young people better able to cope with the modern world than their parents?
20. What effects can reading and telling stories have on children?
21. What are the benefits to children of making up their own stories?
22. What effect do electronic games have on children's play?
23. How important are indoor and outdoor activities for children?
24. How important is sport in children's social and physical development?
25. Compare the importance of what children learn at home and at school.
26. How effectively do schools develop children's creativity in your culture?
27. Should schools prepare children for work or for life?
28. How could schools more effectively prepare students for their future?
29. Do hi-tech entertainment things such as computer games affect children's development very much?
30. What role does science and technology play in children's development today?
31. What are some of the good and some of the bad influences that effect teenagers?
32. What do you think are the most important things for parents to pay attention to when bringing up children?

Traditional stories and other entertainment

26. What kinds of stories do older people tell younger people in your culture?
27. How important are these stories as a way of keeping culture alive?
28. Do you think that this kind of storytelling will continue in the future?
29. What other forms of entertainment for children are popular in your culture?
30. Do you think that these forms of entertainment will continue to be popular?
31. What effects can these forms of entertainment on young people's development?

Raising children

32. In your country, who generally looks after children?
33. Are there differences today in how children are brought up now compared to 50 years ago?
34. If parents are working, who looks after the children when the parents are at work?
35. Which is better, parents taking care of children or grandparents doing it?
36. Do you think grandparents have a responsibility to help take care of their grandchildren?
37. Do you think that if the grandparents take care of a child the result might be that the child's relationship with the parents will be weakened?
38. Besides being convenient for parents who are working, are there any other advantages of having the grandparents look after a child?
39. In what ways are old people very good for looking after young children and in what ways are old people not very suitable for doing that?
40. What do you think are the advantages of having both the mother and the father share in the raising of their children?
41. Do you think it's a good idea to ‘let the television take care of the children’?
42. Do you think it's good for children to spend a lot of time on the computer?
43. In the future, how might people take care of children differently?
44. What are the benefits and the disadvantages of a one child policy?
45. Are children in your country very independent?
46. What do you think is the biggest challenge when bringing up a child?
47. Do you think it's a good idea to attend a class to learn how to be a good parent?

Children’s play

48. Generally, do children prefer to play with other children or with adults?
49. Do children and adults like playing together?
50. What games do children like to play?
51. Do you think children generally do things because of their own interest or because their parents want them to do those things?
52. Are boys and girls interested in the same games or play activities?
53. Why do children often enjoy playing outside?

54. Do you think it's important for schools to have areas for outdoor play?
55. How does playing games help in the mental development of children?
56. Do you think children today get along better with other children than children did 20 or 30 years ago?
57. Do you think children today have enough choices for entertainment and relaxation?
58. Do you think it's important for schools to have after-school activities?

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Cities and Countryside

Compare and contrast life in cities and the countryside in your country.

Think of all the facilities that cities have. Are these common in the countryside? Urban and rural people have different jobs, lifestyles, interests, incomes, and methods of transport.
Cities: noisy, dirty, polluted, exciting, full of opportunities, stressful, crowded, many places to go to, dangerous, plenty of shops, busy.
Countryside: quiet, pleasant environment, clean, relaxing, plenty of open space, fewer people, friendlier, boring, little to do.

Do you think that people in the cities and in the countryside have different personalities?

Look back at question one and think how the differences could affect the people. Remember that there are various types of people wherever you go, so use phrases like “City people are often very active. Rural people are sometimes boring.” Then explain exactly what you mean by giving examples.

When you are older, do you think you would prefer to live in a city or in the countryside?

Many people prefer to move to the countryside when they retire. Why could it be better to do this? What about you?

In your country, are people moving to cities or from cities?

Why are people moving? (Better job opportunities, better education opportunities,

better standard of living) Is this causing any problems? Can anything be done to reduce these problems?

How do you think city (country) life will change in the future?

You can mention both good and bad changes. Remember to speculate using 'could', 'may', and 'might'. Also use 'become + more … / -er' to indicate change. Give reasons for the changes.

Do you think sci-fi films show a realistic view of future life on earth?

Relatively few sci-fi films show life in the countryside. Do all people live in cities? Many sci-fi films show the world in a poor state. Do you agree this will happen?

Development of cities

1. What changes have taken place in cities over the last 20 years in your country?
2. What are some of the major problems facing cities today?
3. How could the government solve some of these problems?
4. What developments are likely in the future?

Migration to cities

5. How important is it to control the growth of cities?
6. Compare job opportunities in cities and in the countryside.
7. What other reasons are there for people to move to cities?
8. How are countryside communities affected when many people migrate to cities?
9. What problems are caused in cities when large numbers of people migrate to them?
10. What are the positive consequences of this movement to cities?
11. How could people be encouraged to stay in rural areas?
12. What effects might increased population mobility have on communities in the future?

City Life

13. Why do young people usually prefer to live in a city?
14. What benefits are there for young people who live in a city?
15. What kinds of people like to live in cities?
16. How do you think a town grows to become a city?
17. What makes a city a good place to live?
18. Where can people go to relax or find entertainment in the city?
19. Is the city a good place for old people, i.e., retired people to live?
20. Is noise an important factor when considering the quality of city life?
21. Is pollution an important factor when considering the quality of city life?
22. How can a person choose between living in the country and living in the city?
23. How can a city develop while at the same time avoiding social problems?
24. Compare people who live in cities with people who live in rural areas.

Different Lifestyles

25. Describe the differences in types of home in cities and countryside.
26. Compare the lifestyles of people living in cities and in the countryside.
27. Compare the facilities and services in cities and in the countryside.
28. Compare the leisure activities of people living in cities and in the countryside.
29. Are there any differences between urban and rural community life?
30. Do you think it is better to bring up children in the cities or in the countryside?

Living conditions

31. What are the most important things that make cities worth living in?
32. What can be done to improve the quality of life in the countryside?
33. What do you think physical living conditions in cities will be like in the future?
34. What are the attitudes of city people towards people from the countryside?
35. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in densely populated areas?
36. If you were planning anew city, what things would you consider?

Agriculture and the Economy

37. What are the advantages and disadvantages of technological developments in farming in your country?
38. How important is the agricultural sector to the economy of your country?
39. Should governments give financial support to the agricultural sector?

Climate and Weather

The effects of climate on people

1. In what ways does climate affect people?
2. What effects does climate have on the economy?
3. How does the climate vary in different parts of your country?
4. Does the climate affect the design of buildings in different places?
5. Compare the differences in lifestyle of people in hot climates and in cold climates.
6. Do you think it is better to live in a place where the seasons are not so different?
7. Some say if you live in a city it doesn't matter what the climate is like. Do you agree?

Climate change

8. How do people in your country feel about climate change?
9. What do you think the effects of climate change might be?
10. What do you think can be done to prevent or slow down climate change?
11. What can individual people do to help prevent or slow down climate change?

Weather

12. Do you think weather forecasts are very important?
13. In what ways does the weather affect people?
14. What effects does the weather have on the economy?
15. Is there often ‘extreme weather’ in your country?

Clothes

Traditional or national dress

1. Describe any traditional or national dress in your country/where you live.
2. Why do people still sometimes wear traditional/national dress?
3. Compare the importance of traditional/national dress now and in the past.
4. Do you think people will stop using their traditional clothes in the future?
5. What are the differences between modern clothes and traditional clothes from your country?
6. Do you prefer traditional clothes from your country or modern clothes?

Uniforms

7. How popular are school uniforms in your country/where you live?
8. Are uniforms a good thing because hey make everyone appear equal?
9. What are the other purposes of uniforms?
10. Why do many school students and workers have to wear a school uniform?
11. Do you think employees should wear a uniform?
12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of wearing a uniform?
13. What are some examples of people who wear a uniform in your country?
14. Do you think school students should have to wear a school uniform?
15. Do employers in your country often require employees to wear a uniform?
16. What kinds of companies are more likely to require their employees to wear a uniform?
17. Why do some large companies or organisations require their employees to wear a uniform?
18. Do you think people who work in hotels and restaurants should wear uniforms?
19. Where employees wear a uniform, how do you think the colour of the uniform was chosen?
20. Should employees have the right to choose what they wear as a uniform?
21. Should employers have the right to decide what people wear at work?
22. Do you think wearing a uniform can affect a person's behaviour?

Fashion

23. Describe the modern styles of clothing in your country/where you live.

24. How much does influence does fashion have on children and young adults?
25. To what extent do young people follow fashion in your country/where you live?
26. Why do some people follow fashion?
27. Do you think that men and women have different attitudes to fashion?
28. What are some of the negative aspects of the fashion industry?
29. Do people in your country spend much money on clothes?
30. Have the clothes people wear in your country changed in the past 20 or 30 years?
31. Do older people and young people have the same ideas about fashion?
32. Do you think people's tastes in clothes change at different stages of their life?
33. Do you think a person's job affects the kinds of clothes that person wears?
34. Do people with different lifestyles prefer different styles of clothes?
35. Do you think you can learn anything about a person from the clothes they wear?
36. Why do some people like to buy expensive clothes?
37. Why do fashions in clothes seem to be constantly changing?
38. Do you think globalisation is having an effect on fashion?
39. Do you think clothes fashions in your country are influenced by foreign styles?
40. Who is more interested in fashion – men or women?

Clothes and people

41. Why do some people dislike shopping for clothes?
42. How important are clothes as an expression of personality?
43. How are people judged according to the clothes they wear?
44. What can we learn about people from the clothes they wear?
45. How is a person's choice of clothes influenced by different situations?
46. Do men and women have the same attitudes towards clothes?
47. What are the differences between the clothes older people wear and those that young people wear?

Formal and casual clothes

48. What are the differences between formal and casual clothes?
49. In your country, when do people wear formal clothes?
50. Do you think people today wear formal clothes today more often than they

used to?
51. Do you think restaurants should have a dress code?
52. What's your opinion of people who often wear formal clothes?
53. What style of clothing do you think is best for people working in an office?
54. If you were a boss, what rules would you have for the clothes that the employees wear at work?

The clothing industry

55. What changes do you think will take place in the clothing manufacturing industry in the future?
56. What factors do people consider when they buy clothes?
57. Do you think these influences are the same for men and women?
58. Do you think these influences are the same for older people and young people?
59. Does the media affect people's choices of clothes?
60. Compare the materials and fashions of today's clothing with those of the past.
61. Do men and women have the same buying habits when they buy clothes?

Brand name clothing

62. Do people in your country think that the brand name of clothes is important?
63. Why do some people prefer to buy brand-name clothes?
64. What are some fashion brand names that you are familiar with and what products do they sell?
65. Do you think the price of brand-name clothes is reasonable?
66. In your country, do older people often buy brand-name clothes?
67. How can a person show his or her individuality or personality through the clothes they wear?

Communication

Using telephones

1. Describe any problems people face when using phones (landlines or mobiles).
2. Compare talking on the phone and talking face-to-face.
3. In what ways do you think people might use telephones in the future?

Writing letters and emails

4. Why do some people write letters rather than sending emails nowadays?
5. How important are letters nowadays compared to a hundred years ago?
6. Do you think that emails will completely replace handwritten letters in the future?

Personal communication

7. Which are the most popular ways in which people communicate with each other in your country/where you live?
8. Do you think face-to-face communication is better than other methods?
9. Which do you think is the most effective way of communicating with other people?
10. What future developments in communication technology might there be?
11. What are some disadvantages of being able to be contacted at any time?
12. Do you think that modern communications technology has improved the quality of human relationships?

Communication in the workplace

13. Have modern communication methods have increased the amount of work employees have to do?
14. What other effects have modern means of communication had on work, workers and workplaces?

Mass communication

15. How do people get national and international news in your country?
16. Compare the effectiveness of TV and newspapers in communicating news.
17. Do you think that some important events are not reported by the media?

Communication skills

18. Why are communication skills are important?
19. Why are good communication skills important in the workplace?
20. What do you think are some important skills that people need to know in order to communicate well with other people?
21. In the communication process, what is the most important factor?
22. In the communication process, people need to continually make small changes in the way they communicate. Can you give any examples of this?
23. How do you know if someone has good communications skills or not?
24. Do you think people can learn new communication skills or are communications skills natural?
25. What are some ways that a person can learn to improve their communication skills?
26. Can very shy people learn to improve their communication skills?
27. How would you teach communications skills to a shy child?
28. How can a child learn good communications skills?
29. What do you think are the most important communication skills to teach children?
30. Are these skills taught in schools in your country?
31. Compare how adults speak to each other and how adults speak with children.
32. Compare the ways adults communicate and the ways children communicate?
33. What are the advantages of an adult speaking to a child as if speaking to an adult?
34. Can you think of any jobs where communication skills are especially important?
35. How has modern science and technology has changed the ways people communicate?

Non-human communication

36. Compare how animals communicate and how humans communicate.
37. Do you think there are ways that people can communicate with animals?
38. In the future, do you think robots or computers will be able to talk just like humans?
39. Do you think that robots will be able to communicate emotions in the future?
40. Do you think robot pets will one day take the place of real pets?

Competition

Competition in everyday life

1. What are some examples of competition that most people experience in their lives?
2. Do you think young people are more competitive than older people?
3. Do you think men are more competitive than women?

Competition at work

4. Are there any differences between men and women regarding competition at work?
5. How do you think that competition can affect the workplace?
6. Do different departments of the same company or organisation sometimes compete with each other?
7. How do companies compete with each other?

Children and competition

8. What are some examples of competitive situations for children at school?
9. Do you think competition at school is good for children?
10. How could children be encouraged to become more (less) competitive?
11. Do you think individual sports are important for children?
12. Compare competition at school with competition at work.

Psychology and competition

13. Do you think competition is good for a person?
14. How does experiencing a lot of competitive situations affect people?
15. Who do you think benefits more from competitive games, adults or children?
16. What are the characteristics of a good competitive game player?
17. Do you think people are naturally competitive or is it something they learn?
18. Why might some people not want to compete with others?
19. Why might some people not mind when they fail to win?

Computers

1. How have computers changed everyday life?

Think about how computers have changes work, communication, study, and what people do in their free time. The problem here is not in answering the question, but in producing a piece of coherent speech, putting your ideas in order and using connectives to answer. Use ‘become + more … / -er’ to indicate change.

2. What new developments in computers that are widely used in homes and offices do you expect to see in the near future?

The question asks about “new developments … widely used”, so talk about things that are only just starting to be developed or have only been considered ‘in theory’ or ‘on paper’.

3. Do you think that the use of computers should be restricted and how?

Think of a few negative ways in which computers can be used (spread viruses, fast communication between criminals, unhealthy images on the Internet). Then think of ways these negative uses could be reduced or eliminated. This may be more difficult than you think! For example, new laws will not stop criminals unless there are ways to catch them.

4. Do you think that people rely on computers too much?

Some people think that using computers has made people lazy, both physically and mentally. Others say that using computers has given us more free time to do sports and keep fit. Give some examples to support your opinion.

5. Many people say that computers are making children less intelligent. Do you agree?

This question is a little similar to the previous one, but the focus is more specific. Kids use computers both for education and finding information and for playing games and chatting on the Internet. Do you believe that these activities reduce intelligence or enhance it?

6. What new features would you like to see on personal computers?

These ideas do not need to be totally realistic! However, the question says “would you like to see”, so you must mention features which are not yet commonly or widely used. Your answer may be similar to the second one in this section.

Conversation

Conversation in society

1. Do you think conversation is important in modern society?
2. What are the most common topics of conversation for people in your country?
3. Do people speak about the same topics when they have conversations with family and with friends?
4. How do you think conversations between foreigners are different to conversations between people from your country?
5. How do people in your country feel about having a (casual) conversation with strangers?
6. What kind of person do people like talking to?

Conversations between different groups of people

7. Do people of different social status often have conversations about different things?
8. Do working people usually speak the same way with their bosses as they do with their colleagues?
9. Do students usually speak the same way with their teachers as they do with their classmates?
10. Do men and women usually talk about the same topics when they are speaking to people of the same gender and to people of the opposite gender?
11. Do men and women change their behaviour when they talk to people of the same gender and the opposite gender?
12. Are men and women different in this way?

Communication methods

13. What skills or qualities does a person need in order to communicate well?
14. What are the differences between telephone conversations and face-to-face conversations?
15. Do you think the use of SMS messages, emails and Internet chatting has an effect on people's language?
16. How do think online chatting is different to having a face-to-face conversation?
17. Do you online chatting will play a more important role in the future?

International communication

18. Do you think it's important for people from different countries to talk to each other?
19. Can you give any examples of situations when conversation between people from different countries is important?
20. What do you think are some of the benefits of communication between nations?
21. Do you think communication between nations can help to avoid war?
22. What do you think is the value of holding international conferences (e.g. an international conference of doctors or scientists or other experts)?
23. How might international conferences and domestic conferences be different?
24. When people from different countries or cultures are communicating, what important things do they need to consider?
25. What effect does the language barrier have in conversation?

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Crime

1. What do you think of capital punishment (the death penalty)?

Give your opinion, but also remember to take the opposite view into account. In this situation, use ‘however’, ‘on the other hand’ and similar connectives.
Good idea: criminal cannot commit more crimes, lesson to other potential criminals, victim / family and friends of victim get satisfaction.
Bad idea: morally wrong, you may kill the wrong person, no chance for criminal to change, criminal will be desperate not to get caught and may kill more people to prevent this.

2. Do you think that prison is an effective way to punish criminals?

Yes: prisoners have time to consider their actions, prison is not a nice prospect for most people, prison life is hard, prison life teaches discipline, prisoners can learn / study whilst in prison.
No: prisoners become bored with life, prisoners learn about committing crimes from other prisoners, prison life is too easy, prisoners cannot adjust / find jobs when they get out.

3. What are the alternatives to putting criminals in prison?

Prison may not be an effective way of dealing with criminals, but what are the alternatives? What do you think of rehabilitation schemes, training programmes, counselling, and community service?
"I think that for non-violent criminals there are several alternatives. The right one could be selected by experts after they have assessed the criminal. The important thing is to discover why the person committed the crime. If they stole money to buy drugs, then obviously the first thing to do is get them off the drugs. Violent criminals are clearly a danger and need to be dealt with in secure facilities such as prisons."

4. Do you think that increased violence on TV is related to increased crime?

Many people are convinced that this is true, but the evidence is not entirely clear. Other factors certainly contribute to crime, e.g. poverty, drug use, the desire for money and power.

5. Are the police sufficiently trained and equipped to deal with crime?

Modern police forces are equipped with everything from guns to computers in order to fight crime, but do they need more of anything? Could the police be better trained in any way in order to improve their capabilities?

Cross-cultural Communication

1. What are the benefits of having foreign people study in your country?

Consider this question from the point of view of your country rather than from the

point of view of the foreign student.

2. Which do you think is the best way to learn a foreign language?

Choose one way and develop your answer by saying why you consider it to be the best and whether you have actually used this method or not.

3. What misunderstandings can occur when people from different cultures meet?

They may have different habits, use different body language, or use similar words with different meanings. Perhaps you can give one or two examples from your own experience.

4. Why do people from your country go abroad to study/work?

This should be easy to answer – give your reasons, but say ‘they’ rather than ‘I’.

5. What are the challenges of living overseas?

Unfamiliar with the culture or language, finding a good place to live, dealing with financial issues, (initially) not having friends to support you.

6. What are the benefits that immigrants bring to a country?

Fresh skills, many immigrants are young and well-educated, mix of cultures.

7. What might people mean when they say that the world is getting smaller?

This is usually used when discussing communications and transport to say that things are much faster and easier in these areas nowadays. Give two or three examples.

8. How are foreign cultures influencing your culture?

Consider things like food, clothes, music, films and festivals.

9. How does your country encourage cultural links with other countries?

Newspapers often report on these, so buy one or read one online.

International communication

1. Why do some people want to study a second or third language?
2. Do you think it is necessary to study a second or third language?
3. How do people communicate with those who are living in other countries?
4. How has this situation changed, compared to years ago?
5. How do you think international communication will change in the future?
6. What do you think is the biggest challenge in when communicating with someone in or from another country?
7. What's the biggest gap that exists between different cultures, in your opinion?
8. What are some reasons why foreigners come to your country?
9. How can people make foreign friends in your country?
10. What misunderstandings can occur when people from different cultures meet?
11. How could people from different cultures come into conflict with each other?

Globalisation

12. Many people say that the world is getting smaller. What do they mean by this?
13. How are foreign cultures influencing your culture?
14. What do you think of American-style fast food restaurants coming to your country?
15. What is your opinion of foreign ideas and customs coming to your country?

Cultural exchanges

16. What are the advantages of having foreign students study in your country?
17. Are there any disadvantages of this?
18. How does your country encourage cultural exchanges with other countries?
19. How can cultural exchanges be arranged?
20. What must people consider when arranging cultural exchanges?
21. What are some of the main differences between your culture and foreign cultures?
22. What are the similarities?

Migration

23. Why do people from your country go abroad to study/work?

24. What are the challenges of living overseas?
25. What are the benefits that immigrants bring to a country?
26. Are there any problems associated with migration?

Crowded Places

1. What is the impact of population size on a city?

It might increase traffic jams and pollution, but it usually also means that a city gets more facilities and attention from the government.

2. What can governments do about any problems associated with the population size of cities?

Consider problems such as housing, traffic, services, facilities and pollution.

3. How might people be persuaded to live outside cities?

Consider things like better transport connections to cities, better facilities outside cites, lower taxes and the possibility of working from home.

4. How might living in a city affect the way in which people relate to each other?

Many people think that cities are impersonal, especially when compared to villages in the countryside. However, many people think that cities provide more opportunities for people to get to know each other.

5. Do people living in cities have enough individual space?

Notice that the question uses the word ‘enough’. People in the cities almost certainly don’t have too much individual space, but do they have enough?

6. How could people create more individual space for themselves in cities?

Perhaps you could find some suggestions online.

7. On which occasions are there large crowds of people?

Sporting events (football matches, Olympics). National celebrations (National

Day)

8. What are the possible problems of having large numbers of people at public events?

People can be crushed, a few may get angry/violent, expensive to provide security.

9. How could these problems be dealt with?

Perhaps only allowing a limited number of people into an area could help.

10. Would you say that the majority of cities in your country are overcrowded?

Don't just look at this from the perspective of the numbers of people – it is the density of people and the number of people relative to the services available that are important.

11. What are some problems that can result from overcrowded living conditions in cities?

Examples of problems include traffic jams and inadequate services such as hospitals and schools.

12. How can these problems be addressed?

The simple answer is for the government to spend more money on providing adequate facilities and services. Try to think about the problem a little deeper. Could the cities be expanded or would that take too much land from other uses, e.g. farming? Could people be persuaded to leave the cities and live in rural areas? Would better transport between cities and rural areas help?

13. Compare the advantages and disadvantages of living in a high-rise apartment.

If you live near the top, the views might be better. Many people would prefer a house, perhaps because houses are often larger or perhaps because they are often separate from other homes.

14. How does living in high-rise apartments affect the people who live there?

When you consider your answer, think carefully about whether your reasons are associated with living in high-rise apartments or whether they are connected with other things, such as living in a city.

Culture

1. What are the best ways of learning about other cultures/countries?

Consider meeting people, chatting online, reading books and articles and talking to people who have visited a place.

2. Is it easier now than in the past to learn about other cultures/countries?

Given the spread of the Internet and faster communications and travel, the answer is almost certainly ‘yes’. Discuss these things in more detail.

3. What are the benefits of knowing about other cultures/countries?

Can it help you with learning a foreign language or with other subjects such as history and geography? Is it also useful for a person’s general knowledge?

4. Is it easier to learn a language if you are interested in that culture?

The answer is probably ‘yes’. Consider why. Develop your answer by saying whether you think it is necessary to be interested in a culture in order to learn the language.

5. How necessary is it to go to a country to learn the language/culture?

This may depend on the level to which you want to learn about the language/culture.

6. How can contact with a new language and culture can benefit your understanding of your own?

Give one or two suggestions, perhaps based on your own or friends’ experiences.

7. What are the effects of increasing international mobility on people's sense of cultural identity?

Does it make people feel more different from, or more similar to, each other?

8. Is it a good thing to live in a multicultural society?

Look at both sides of the argument and give your own conclusion.

9. How might cultural diversity within societies change in the future?

Give your opinion with reasons for it.

Learning about other cultures

1. What are the best ways of learning about other cultures/countries?
2. Is it easier now than in the past to learn about other cultures/countries?
3. What are the benefits of knowing about other cultures/countries?
4. Is it easier to learn a language if you are interested in that culture?
5. How necessary is it to go to a country to learn the language/culture?
6. How can contact with a new language and culture can benefit your understanding of your own?

Keeping traditions

7. Why are many young people not very interested in traditions or in doing things the traditional way?
8. Do you think it is important to keep traditions (traditional ways of life)?
9. In your country, what traditions are in danger of disappearing?
10. What are some ways of helping to keep traditions?
11. How are traditions kept from one generation to the next?
12. Do emigrants from your country keep traditions in their new countries?
13. What traditions have already been lost from your culture and why did this happen?
14. Do you think it is inevitable that some traditions will be lost?
15. Is the loss of traditions a natural evolution of society?
16. Are there things that people do today that may become traditions in the future?

People and traditions

17. In what ways are people in your country traditional?
18. Are young people in your country traditional?
19. Do young people and older people have the same views concerning traditions?
20. Are young people in your country as interested in traditional events as older people?

Foreign cultures

21. To what extent do you think foreign cultures will affect your culture?
22. How could people in your country protect their culture from any negative foreign influences?
23. Do you think traditions from your country influence foreign cultures?
24. Why do some people think foreign cultures are better than their own?
25. What are the effects of increasing international mobility on people's sense of cultural identity?

Multicultural societies

26. Is it a good thing to live in a multicultural society?
27. How might cultural diversity within societies change in the future?

Decisions

Decision-making in families

1. What is the role of parents in making decisions in the family?
2. Compare this with the parental roles in earlier generations.
3. How much freedom do you think young people will have in the future?

Choice of profession

4. Which people influence young people when they are choosing a profession?
5. How could schools provide careers advice?
6. What are the main factors to consider when choosing a career?

The power of advertising

7. How much does advertising influence what you buy?
8. Is advertising more influential today than in the past?
9. What are the benefits and drawbacks of advertising?

Decision-making and young people

10. Do you think that parent generally know what is best for their children?
11. What are some important decisions that young people have to make?
12. How can people and society help young people to make important decisions?

University Choices

13. What are some of the factors involved in choosing a university?
14. What are the advantages and disadvantages of attending a university that not in your home town?
15. What might universities have to do to attract the best students in future?
16. What are the most popular subjects at universities in your country?
17. Are these subjects the same as 20 (50) years ago?

Decision-making at work

18. What are some of the skills people use when they make decisions?
19. How can people develop their decision-making skills?
20. How might computer technology change decision-making in the future?

Leadership

21. What are the qualities that make someone a leader?
22. What do you think of the suggestions that “leaders are born not made”?
23. What has been the impact of modern media on leaders in public life?

Education

How has the education system in your country changed over the last 20 years?

Say what changes have taken place and whether they have been good or bad changes in your opinion. Remember to use the present perfect and past tenses as appropriate. Refer to question three for ideas.

How do you think the education system will change in the near future?

Answer in the same way as for question one, but remember to use the future tense and use ‘could’, ‘might’, and ‘may’ to discuss possible changes. Refer to question three for ideas.

What changes would you introduce into the education system?

You are now the Minister of Education! In which areas would you make changes? (Teachers, teacher training, school buildings, subjects taught, teaching methods, teaching materials, administration, the examination system, payment for education.)

Do you think that education should be free?

Yes: equal opportunities for all young people, investment in the future of the country.
No: people without children get no benefit, cost is too high for government alone, businesses should also contribute to the cost.

What do you think are the qualities of a good teacher / school?

Give your opinion, with examples and details in order to show the examiner that you really know the meaning of the words you are using.
A good teacher: humorous, well-dressed, friendly, intelligent, kind, casual, strict, inspiring, communicative, encouraging, fair, patient, well-organised,

knowledgeable, qualified.
A good school: reputable, famous, old, modern, bright, friendly, well-staffed, clean, large, small, conveniently located, cheap, expensive, well-managed.

Do you think that the government needs to focus more on educating adults?

Many people feel that continued education for adults should be a major focus for the government, so that adults can learn new skills and keep up with the latest technological developments. Give examples and details to support your argument.

Teachers

1. What are the main differences between a good teacher and a bad teacher?
2. Do you think that students learn better when their teachers are strict?
3. What effects can a bad teacher have on his/her students?
4. Why do some people choose to become teachers?
5. Do you think that being a teacher is a good job?
6. What is difficult about being a teacher?
7. Why might teaching sometimes be an unpopular job?
8. What do people generally think of teachers in your country?
9. How could suitable people be attracted to the teaching profession?

Teaching Methods and Materials

10. What are the characteristics of a good learner/student?
11. Compare the benefits of studying alone and in a group.
12. How important is age as a factor in learning?
13. What teaching materials are used in classrooms in your country?
14. Compare the teaching materials used now with those used in your parents' (grandparents') time.
15. Do you think that textbooks will be replaced by other media in the future?
16. Compare textbooks and other media as teaching tools.
17. What has been the impact of modern technology on education?
18. How do you think school lessons could be made more interesting for students?

Learning at School

19. What are the aims of education in your country?
20. Should school be compulsory for all students up to the age of 18?

21. In what ways should schools reflect the changing needs of the world today?
22. Do you think that schools should make their facilities available to the general public outside school hours?
23. What do you think will be the main functions of schools in the future?

School subjects

24. Are there many different subjects available at your school?
25. Which subjects should all students study at school?
26. Compare the subjects that younger students and older students study.
27. Do you think students at (secondary) school should learn many different things?
28. How might the range of subjects taught at schools change in the future?

Classroom conditions

29. Do you think secondary school classes in your country have too many students?
30. What are the results of having so many students in a class?
31. What would be the best number of students in a secondary school class?
32. Do you think that classmates have an effect on a student's ability to learn?
33. What do you think is necessary for a comfortable study environment?

Homework

34. Tell me about the typical homework you had to do at secondary school.
35. Does students nowadays have more homework than previous generations?
36. Do you think students in your country have too much homework?
37. Do you think homework is important?
38. Why is homework necessary if students attend school during the day?
39. At home, how do you think parents can help their children learn?
40. What do you suggest a parent do if he or she doesn't understand what their child is studying but still wants to help their child?

Examinations

41. What are the important examinations for young people in your country?
42. Do you think using examinations is a good way to educate people?

43. Is there much cheating in examinations in your country?
44. Do you think this (cheating) results in examinations losing their usefulness?

School environments

45. Do you think that schools for younger children (e.g. 5-year olds) and older children (e.g. 15-year olds) need different types of buildings?
46. How important are children's playing areas in schools?
47. How might school facilities and buildings change in the future?
48. Describe the different types of schools in your country.
49. Compare the benefits of single sex schools and those of mixed ones.
50. What disadvantages do single sex schools and mixed ones have?
51. How important is it for schools to offer accommodation to students?
52. Do you think it is better to go to a secondary school in a city or in the countryside?

University education

53. Do you think that what students learn in university is important for their future working life?
54. Why do many students decide to go to university?
55. What do you think is the purpose of university education?
56. What are the differences between the purposes of secondary school education and university education?

Secondary schools

57. Do you think that what students learn at secondary school is useful?
58. Do you think a secondary school education is enough for people to get a job?
59. What kinds of things should students learn at secondary school that will make them useful to society?
60. What are the differences between high school education and university education?

Education and employment

61. Compare the usefulness of educational qualifications and practical experience for getting a job.
62. What employment problems might there be in the future for university

graduates?
63. What are the societal costs and benefits of a highly educated population?

Adult education

64. What types of education are available to adult learners in your country?
65. Why do some working people continue to take courses?
66. Who should fund adult education courses?
67. Do you think it's necessary for adults do any study?
68. In the future, do you think adults studying will be very common?
69. Do you think it is good for an adult to study at home, for example, for a university degree?
70. For adults, what are the advantages and disadvantages of studying at home?

Life-long learning

71. How important is life-long learning?
72. To what extent are people of different ages better at learning different things?
73. Is the ability to learn a gift of nature or the result of hard work?
74. What effect do you think a person's mood or attitude has on learning?

Financing schools and universities

75. How are schools and universities financed in your country?
76. Do you think this is the best way to pay for schools and universities?
77. How does the government fund education?

Home schooling

78. In some countries, some parents educate their children themselves, at home. What do you think of that?
79. Do you think children in poor areas, with poor school facilities or none at all, could benefit from studying at home?
80. Do you think modern technology could help these children study at home?

School and university buildings

81. How important are the buildings where students study?
82. How do you think the design of a school could meet the needs of the students?

83. In general, what essential facilities should a school have?

School holidays

84. Tell me about the main school holidays in your country?
85. Do you think these holidays are long enough?
86. Children usually have long school holidays but their parents still have to work. Do you think that is a good situation?
87. What are the benefits of parents and children having holidays at the same time?
88. Is it common in your country for school children to go to holiday camps?
89. What are the advantages and disadvantages to children going on holiday camps?
90. Do you think children should get homework to do over the school holidays?

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Elderly People

Elderly people and the family

1. What part do older people play in family life in your culture/country?
2. Is it the responsibility of families to support old people?
3. Compare family attitudes towards older people today and in the past.
4. How might family attitudes towards older people change in the future?
5. What part might older people play in families in the future?

Older people and society

6. What is the attitude of young people to old people in your country/where you live?
7. Compare the ways that young people and old people look at life.
8. Who do you think should look after older people?
9. What help does the government provide for old people in your country?
10. What measures could the government take to help the elderly?

Older people and work

11. Do older people in your country need to work?

12. Do you think older people should work?
13. How easy is it for older people to find work?
14. Is there any discrimination against old people if they are applying for a job?
15. What are the benefits (both for the employee and the employer) of hiring older people for some jobs?
16. What work do you think is suitable for old people to do?
17. Can you suggest how old people could find work (that is suitable for them)?

Retired People

18. Compare the quality of life of old people now and in the past.
19. What activities do old people take part in where you live?
20. How comfortable are the lives of old people?
21. Some old people feel lonely. What can they do to overcome this?
22. Do you think that the age of retirement should be flexible?

Population Changes

23. Compare the proportions of young, middle aged and elderly people where you live.
24. Do you think that this balance will change in the future?
25. How can changes in the age of a population affect the economy and society?
26. What are the possible economic effects of having more old people?

Old people's lifestyle

27. Are there any advantages to being old?
28. What do young people think about old people?
29. How do old people themselves feel about being old?
30. When a person is old, what makes him or her happy?
31. Why do elderly people sometimes feel lonely?
32. In your country, what are the living conditions for old people like?
33. Compare the lifestyle for old people nowadays with 20 (50) years ago.
34. When you are old, what kind of lifestyle would you like to have?

Old people and changes in society

35. Do you feel there's a generation gap between young and old people?
36. How has your country changed in the lifetimes of old people?

37. Do you think old people today can understand new things in society such as the Internet or recent social changes?
38. Why do you think many old people are not willing to adapt their lives to the modern changes that have recently taken place?

Living longer

40. Why do old people today live longer than in the past?
41. Do you think changes in social welfare have contributed to this longer life span?
42. What are some things a person can do to help them live longer?

Nursing homes

43. Some people think old people can be a burden on the family. What do you think?
44. Do you think it's a good idea to put old people in a nursing home if they become a burden on the family?

Classes for old people

45. What sorts of activities do old people in your country today do to pass the time?
46. In English we say ‘You are never too old to learn’. Do you think it is true?
47. In your country, are there opportunities for old people to attend classes?
48. Who pays for these classes?
49. Do you think the government should provide these classes?

Exercise

1. How important is physical exercise for a person’s health?

Give examples of particular exercises that aid health.

2. Compare the health advantages of working indoors and working outdoors.

This may depend on such things as the amount of fresh air and physical work.

3. How can very busy people find time to do physical exercise?

Perhaps they could make a strict schedule or do exercises at work.

4. What kinds of equipment do people need when they do exercise?

Things people use include weights, a treadmill, a bicycle, a mat and running shoes.

5. How important are brand names in promoting the exercise industry?

How much do brand names associate themselves with fitness? Are they more interested in promoting themselves as status symbols?

6. How can people do exercise without spending much money?

Cheap ways of keeping fit include jogging, skipping and playing basketball.

7. Do younger people and older people have different attitudes to doing exercise?

Perhaps older people take greater care of their health as younger people think they will “live forever”. Perhaps younger people are more energetic. Or perhaps younger people have been influenced by advertising to keep fit and lead healthier lifestyles.

8. What are some of the dangers resulting from too much physical exercise?

Common problems include sprained ankles, chest pains and pulled muscles. However, these problems are generally more common amongst people who do little exercise and then suddenly begin doing a lot.

9. Is it better to do exercise in a group or by yourself?

By yourself you can set your own schedule, but having friends around can be motivating.

Benefits of exercise

1. How important is physical exercise for a person’s health?
2. What benefits do people get from doing exercise?

3. Do you think people do more exercise nowadays than in the past?
4. Why do many people do so little exercise?
5. How can we inform people about the benefits of exercise?
6. Do you think it is better to exercise in a group or by yourself?
7. What are some of the dangers of too much physical exercise?

Children and exercise

8. What exercise do children usually do?
9. What can we do about the problem of overweight children?
10. What are the physical effects of children spending too much time in front of the TV or a computer?
11. Do children and adults have different ideas about doing exercise?

The fitness industry

12. What kinds of equipment do people need when they do exercise?
13. How important are brand names in promoting the fitness industry?
14. How can people do exercise without spending much money?

Exercise and work

15. Do you think companies should provide exercise facilities for people at work?
16. What benefits would there be for the company if it did that?
17. Compare the health advantages of working indoors and working outdoors.
18. How can very busy people find time to do physical exercise?

The government and exercise

19. Is it the government's responsibility to encourage people to exercise more?
20. How can the government encourage people to exercise more?
21. Should the government provide more exercise facilities for people?
22. Do you think the government should promote sport?
23. What is the government doing to promote exercise in the community?
24. To what extent do you think exercise is a personal responsibility?

Exhibitions

1. Why do many children enjoy going to exhibitions?

Of course, children learn things at exhibitions, but they more likely enjoy them because of models, pictures and life-size figures of dinosaurs and other animals.

2. Is going to exhibitions an important part of a child's education?

Compare it with school and other ways in which children learn, such as from TV.

3. Are exhibitions of children's work a good idea?

Children take part in competitions to get their work shown. They get a sense of achievement. It encourages other children to follow suit.

4. What types of museums and galleries are popular where you live?

Describe the things that they exhibit and whether they change the exhibits regularly.

5. How could museums and galleries attract more visitors?

Perhaps by changing exhibits regularly, by holding competitions, through better advertising or by inviting famous people to the exhibitions.

6. What impact might technology have on museums and galleries in the future?

Consider technological advances that can enhance our audio-visual experiences at museums and galleries, particularly virtual reality.

7. How important is it for adults to see evidence of their cultural history?

It's certainly educational, but what exactly do adults learn from such exhibitions?

8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of cultural exhibitions touring other countries?

It can be very expensive and care must be taken not to damage exhibits. On the other hand, it's wonderful when people have the chance to see something from a place they may never have visited.

9. Which aspects of contemporary life might feature in exhibitions of the future?

Give two or thee suggestions and say why they might feature.

Exhibitions in general

1. What kinds of exhibitions are popular in your country?
2. What is the purpose of exhibitions?
3. Do young people and old people like the same kinds of exhibitions?
4. Do men and women like the same kinds of exhibitions?
5. How do you think exhibitions, say, 20 years from now, will be different to exhibitions that we have today?

Children and exhibitions

6. Why do many children enjoy going to exhibitions?
7. Why might some children not like going to them?
8. Is going to exhibitions an important part of a child's education?
9. Are exhibitions of children's work a good idea?

Museums and galleries

10. What types of museums and galleries are popular where you live?
11. How could museums and galleries attract more visitors?
12. What impact might technology have on museums and galleries in the future?

Culture and exhibitions

13. How important is it for adults to see evidence of their cultural history?
14. What are the advantages and disadvantages of cultural exhibitions touring other countries?
15. Which exhibitions from foreign countries are popular in your country?
16. Which aspects of contemporary life might feature in exhibitions of the future?

Family

How has family life changed in your country / region over the last 50 years?

Consider the status and role of women in society. Other areas where change may

have occurred relate to attitudes to children, different generations living together, changes in divorce laws, sexual attitudes, and the constant competition between family and career. Say what changes have taken place and what you think of them.

Do you think that each person in a family should have a clear role?

This is not to suggest that women should stay at home and do the shopping and housework! In the West, some men are quite happy to take the role of house-husband whilst the wife goes out to work. Do you think that each parent should have a distinct role in the raising of a child? Should each of them have specific jobs to do in the home?

Do you think it is better for families to live close together?

Notice that the question says “close together”, not “together”. Give your opinion along with some reasons and specific examples.

How do you think that family life will change in the future?

Go back to question one and think about various aspects of family life. What changes could take place and do you think they will be positive or negative? When considering this, think about the possible changes from various viewpoints – the individual, the family unit, and society generally.

What do you think are the qualities of good parents?

Here are some qualities to consider: humorous, kind, strict, lenient, inspiring, communicative, encouraging, fair, patient, open-minded, understanding, loving, trusting, caring, attentive.

How do (will) you treat your children differently to the way your parents treated (treat) you?

Will you be more strict or more lenient? Will you give your children more freedom or less? In which aspects of family life will you behave in the same way or differently?

Family Structure

1. Describe the typical family structure in your country today.
2. Compare the benefits of a close and an extended family structure.
3. Do you think people will live separately from their extended family in the future?
4. Have there been any changes in family structure in your country in the past 20 (50) years?
5. Do you think these changes have generally been positive or negative?
6. In what ways do you think the number of people in a family affects the family?
7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a one-child policy?
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of big (small) families?
9. What are the problems people can have when they have many children?
10. In your county, are there any differences between family living arrangements in the cities and in the countryside?

Roles within families

11. What are the responsibilities of parents?
12. What are the specific responsibilities of parents bringing up children?
13. Compare modern parents with those of your grandparents' generation.
14. Should the government be responsible for teaching people about parenting?
15. Who makes the major decisions in a family in your culture?
16. Do only children have more family responsibilities than children with siblings?

Male and female family roles

17. After getting married, do you think the lifestyles of men and women change?
18. Do their lifestyles change in the same ways?
19. Who do you think should carry most of the responsibility for the family, the husband or the wife?
20. In typical families in your country, who is dominant, the mother or the father?
21. Do you think this has changed at all in recent years?
22. Do you think this might change in the future?
23. How might the family responsibilities of men and women change in the future?
24. Do you think it's important that the men and women have clear roles to play in families?
25. In your country, what are the typical roles of men and women?

26. Do different social groups have different ideas about the roles of married men and women?

Taking care of children

27. Should women who have young children stay at home and take care of the children?
28. In recent years, has the role of fathers changed much in families, compared to many years ago?
29. To what extent should married men do such things like taking care of children, cleaning, cooking and shopping?
30. Do men and women generally take care of children in the same way?
31. Do you think women are better suited to looking after children than men?

Family life

32. What types of activities do families often do together?
33. How has the quality of family life changed in recent years?
34. How may the balance between work and family life change in the future?
35. Do young people live with their parents as much/long as in the past?

The family and society

36. What kinds of social and economic pressure are on families today?
37. How might the quality of family life affect society as a whole?
38. How can governments help and support the family?
39. How can government economic policies affect families?
40. Is it the responsibility of the family or the government to provide basic needs?
41. Do you think government assistance to families will increase or decrease in the future?

Personal development

42. How important is the family to young children?
43. How can the family influence personal development later in life?

44. To what extent do you think children inherit characteristics from their parents?
45. How can parents influence the characters of their children?
46. Compare the influences of parents and friends on young people.

Family relationships

47. What are the benefits of having good family relations?
48. What factors influence the quality of the relationships within a family?
49. In general, what do families in your country do together at home?
50. Do people today spend more time with their family than about 20 (50) years ago?
51. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a very close family?
52. What are the advantages and possible disadvantages of young people living at home with their parents until they get married?
53. How can the generation gap be reduced?
54. Do you think there is less communication between family members today, compared to 20 (50) years ago?
55. Might relationships between members of families change in the future?
56. Do you think modern technology such as computers and the cell-phones play a positive role in family relationships?

Young people living away from the family

57. In your country, do most young people aged 20-30 live at home or away from the family home?
58. Why do some young people leave home?
59. Do you think it's better for students to live at the family home or away from home?

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Famous People

1. What kinds of people are famous today?

Pop stars, sports stars, politicians, businesspeople, scientists, TV stars, film stars.

2. How do people become famous nowadays?

By doing crazy things, by having great talent, by making discoveries, by being rich, by appearing on a TV show.

3. What kinds of things might people become famous for in the future?

If you think the reasons will change, say why.

4. What are the possible problems of being famous?

Paparazzi, reporters, can't make mistakes, security, lack of privacy.

5. Why do some people want to be famous?

Money, power, sign of success, enjoy media or other people's attention, to help charities.

6. How can having a famous parent affect a child?

Advantages – richer family, better education, good connections, get used to fame and media attention.
Disadvantages – may become spoilt, think they can do what they want, lack of respect for the less well-off.

7. How do famous people influence our lives?

Through advertising, by inspiring us, by making us aware of problems in the world, through TV shows/films/music.

8. How does the media in your country report on famous people?

Does the media often report on private matters or does it generally not?

9. Why is the general public often so interested in the lives of famous people?

Perhaps it's because their lives are so different or perhaps our lives are so boring!

Wanting to be famous

1. Why do some people want to be famous?
2. Are there any disadvantages of being famous?
3. What do people do once they become famous?
4. Do you think people change their ways of thinking when they become famous?
5. Do you think the personalities of people change after they become famous?
6. What changes do you think might happen if someone suddenly became rich?
7. If you became famous, how do you think you and your life would change?

Famous people

8. What kinds of people are considered famous or celebrities in your country?
9. Do older people and young people have the same feelings about famous people?
10. In general, what personal qualities do famous people have?
11. Do famous people in your country usually have a lot of money?
12. How do people become famous?
13. Who were some famous people about 20 (50) years ago?
14. Compare the types of people who were famous about 20 (50) years ago and the people who are famous today.
15. Has the kind of people that are admired changed in the past 20 (50) years?
16. How do famous people contribute to society?
17. What kinds of people do you think will be famous in the future?
18. How do famous people influence our lives?
19. How does the media in your country report on famous people?
20. Why is the general public often so interested in the lives of famous people?

Famous people as role models

21. What kinds of famous people become role models for teenagers?
22. Why do you think certain famous people become role models for young people?
23. Do you think this is a positive thing?
24. Are there any disadvantages of this?
25. What might happen if a famous person, who is a role model, does something wrong?
26. What kinds of mistakes do famous people make?

27. Why do people give famous people so much respect?

Heroes and role models

28. What kinds of people do children in your country want to be similar to?
29. Who are some of the heroes or role models that young people in your country like?
30. Why do sports stars or pop singers become role models for young people?
31. Is it good for children and young people to use entertainment stars as role models?
32. Do you think it's good for children to have heroes, people who they idolise?
33. What are some of the disadvantages of having heroes?
34. Do you think it is better for children to use their own parents as role models?
35. Compare the heroes of young people 20 (50) years ago with the heroes of young people today.
36. Why are there many famous film stars and sports stars but few famous scientists?

Famous people and privacy

37. Do you think famous people can keep their privacy after they become famous?
38. Do you think it is fair that famous people don't have as much privacy as average people?
39. Do you think that famous people have as much right to privacy as ordinary people?
40. Do you think people such as politicians who are famous because they are serving the people, have the right to privacy?
41. In general, do you think it's important for a person to have some privacy?
42. Do you think there should be laws to protect the privacy of famous people?
43. What would you suggest a famous person do to have privacy with their family?
44. Do you think the children of famous people can play with normal children?
45. Do you think the children of famous people can have a normal childhood?

Films / Movies

1. What are the most popular types of film where you come from?

Comedies, action, detective, thrillers, horror, sci-fi, documentaries, romances.

2. How important are films and the cinema to people in your country?

Which people are they important to and which are they not important to?

3. Do you think that film-watching habits might change in the future?

Which films may become more/less popular? Will foreign films become more/less popular? Will people watch more/fewer films at cinemas? Will downloading films become increasingly popular? Will more people watch films “on the move”?

4. How have films changed since you were a child?

There are certainly more computer generated graphics and other special effects. Are films more violent/horrific? Are the plots (stories) cleverer?

5. Do children and adults enjoy the same types of films?

There are certainly differences, but probably some types that both groups enjoy.

6. Why do many films nowadays seem to show a lot of violence?

Does it make the films more exciting, particularly to a male audience? Is the violence necessary or not? What kinds of violence are shown?

7. What types of actors and actresses become famous in your country?

What films do they act in? What roles o they play? What kind of people are they?

8. Compare the popularity of national and international film stars in your country.

At the moment, it seems that international stars are more popular. However, it would be fair to count Jackie Chan and possibly Gong Li and Zhang Zi Yi as international stars.

9. Which qualities help actors and actresses become famous film stars?

Ambitious, self-confident, talented, well-spoken, handsome/attractive.

Film watching

1. Compare watching DVD's on TV at home and watching films at the cinema.
2. Compare watching downloaded films on your computer and watching films at the cinema.
3. Do you think young people can afford the price of cinema tickets today?
4. When you watch a foreign film, do you like to have subtitles in your own language?
5. Which do you think is better, to watch foreign films in the original language, with subtitles, or to watch films that have been dubbed?
6. Do you think watching foreign films in English can help people to learn English?

Film preferences

7. How important are films and the cinema to people in your country?
8. What kinds of films do people in your country like to watch?
9. Do you think that film-watching habits might change in the future?
10. In what ways are the films that you watch today different to the films you watched when you were a child?
11. Do older people and young people in your country like the same types of films?
12. Do you and your parents like to watch the same kinds of films?
13. Do men and women in your country like to watch the same types of films?
14. Do you think people with different personalities like different types of films?
15. Do you think films can change the character of people who watch those films?
16. Why do many films nowadays seem to show a lot of violence?

Films and children

17. Do boys and girls in your country like to watch the same types of films?
18. Do adults and children in your country like the same types of films?
19. What sorts of films do you think are unsuitable for children?
20. Who do you think should be responsible for deciding what films children can

and cannot watch, parents or the government?

Changes in films

21. Are there any differences between the kinds of films people in your country watch today and the kinds of films they watched 20 (50) years ago?
22. How have films changed in the past few decades?
23. Do you thinks children's films today are the same as 20 (50) years ago?
24. What kinds of films do you think people will be watching 20 (50) years from now?

Films and education

25. In general, do you think films have any educational value?
26. Do only documentary films have any educational value?
27. How do you think films could be used at school or university?

Films and culture

28. What effects do you think films have on society?
29. Do you prefer to watch foreign films or films from your country?
30. What's the difference between foreign films and films from your country?
31. What are the most common themes of films today?
32. Are films from your country influenced by foreign films?

The film industry

33. What do you think makes a film successful?
34. What do you think makes a film memorable?
35. Do you think that the amount of money spent on making films is too high?
36. How could film makers attract people to their films?
37. How do you think more people could be attracted to watching films in cinemas, rather than on DVD, TV or on computers?

Actors and actresses

38. What types of actors and actresses become famous in your country?
39. Compare the popularity of national and international film stars in your country.
40. Which qualities help actors and actresses become famous film stars?
41. How important are famous actors in films?

Film production

42. What does one need in order to make a film?
43. What do you think is the most important thing when making a film?
44. How important is music in films?
45. How has modern science and technology changed the way films are made?

Film promotion

46. How do films become well known?
47. Do you think it's important for films to be advertised?
48. What do you think are the purposes of advertisements for new films?
49. Are people attracted by advertisements (or previews) for new films?
50. Do you think films are made for and promoted to a particular audience?
51. How do you usually decide whether to see a film or not?
52. How much influence do film reviews have in your country?

Food

1. What kinds of food do people in your country like to eat?

If your country is a large country, it may have several major food styles, as well as a selection of foreign foods for those who live in the major cities. Mention and compare the different types of food different people enjoy.

2. Do you think that most people in your country / region eat healthily?

Eating healthily relates to the different sources of nutrition, a balanced diet, and also regular eating habits. Mention a few examples of healthy and unhealthy food which people eat. Why do people eat food which is unhealthy?

How much does the body require the following? Fat, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, sugars, calories, fruit, vegetables, grain foods (bread, rice), dairy products, meat, water.

3. Do older people and younger people prefer the same kinds of food?

This question is a little similar to question one. Compare the food that young people and old people like. Then say why they prefer those types of food.

4. What kinds of food do you think will be more popular or less popular in the future?

Will people prefer healthier food? Will they eat more foreign food? What about organically grown food or genetically modified food? Will traditional meals be seen as boring and old-fashioned?

5. Is food an important aspect of cultural life in your country / region?

Food is important in most or the world's cultures. Many cultures actually centre on food! Think about how food (not what food!) is used in celebrations and festivals.

6. If you were preparing a special dinner for 6-8 people, what would you need to do and what food would you prepare or order?

Notice the use of the word 'would' in the question. Use it in your answer. You could also use 'would have to' to show what must be done. There are several things to think of, from invitations to organising the washing-up! Don't make your answer too long or detailed – just mention the key points and use your vocabulary to describe exactly what you would do.

Food in your country

1. What kinds of food do people in your country like to eat?
2. Do you think that most people in your country / region eat healthily?
3. Do older people and younger people prefer the same kinds of food?
4. What kinds of food do you think will be more popular or less popular in the future?

5. Is food an important aspect of cultural life in your country?
6. If you were preparing a special dinner for 6-8 people, what would you need to do and what food would you prepare or order?

Learning to cook

7. Do you think it's important to know how to cook?
8. Do you think children should be taught how to cook at home?
9. Do you think it's a good idea to have cooking classes at school?
10. Do you think it's suitable for boys to learn how to cook?
11. What do you think would result from having cooking classes in school?
12. In general, what kind of people do you think are good at cooking?

Food at school and at university

13. What's your opinion of the food in your school/university cafeteria?
14. Why do some students not like eating at school?
15. Do you think it's really necessary for students to eat their meals at school?
16. How do you think the food in your school/university cafeteria could be improved?
17. Do you think schools should make sure the food they provide is healthy?
18. Do you think school and university cafeterias should sell fast food?

Eating outdoors

19. On what occasions do people in your country eat outdoors?
20. Do people in your country often have picnics?
21. If you were going to have a picnic, what sort of place would you choose to go to?
22. Which do think is better, eating in a restaurant or eating outdoors?

Eating out

23. Do people in your country eat out very often?
24. When do people prefer to eat out rather than eating at home?

25. Where do you think food tastes better, at home or in a restaurant?
26. In your country, have there been any changes in recent years in where people eat their meals?
27. Have foreign cultures had an effect on the kinds of food that people in your country eat today?
28. How is eating at home different to eating in a restaurant?
29. What are the advantages and disadvantages of inviting someone to eat at your home (or at a restaurant)?

A healthy diet

30. Would you say that most people in your country eat a healthy diet?
31. What improvements could people in your country make to their diet?
32. Have there been any changes over the past 30 years in what food people in your country eat?
33. Do you think people today are eating a healthier diet than 20 (50) years ago?
34. Nowadays, more and more people are eating so-called ‘fast food’. What do you think of this?
35. Why do many children prefer eating American fast food to home cooking?
36. Do people today think more about eating healthy food than people before?
37. What are the possible effects on people who have an unhealthy diet?
38. What might be results of having many people who eat an unhealthy diet?
39. How can people be educated to eat a healthier diet?
40. Do you think the government has a responsibility to inform people about what is and what isn't a healthy diet?
41. Who do you think the government should educate more about healthy eating – children or parents?
42. In what ways do you think changes in society reflect the food people eat?
43. Do you think a country should bring in different styles of food from other countries?
44. Do you think advertisements for unhealthy food should be banned?

Nutrition and food safety

45. Do you think food was safer to eat in the past than it is nowadays?
46. Are you very interested in information about the food that you eat?
47. What information are you interested in knowing about the food you eat?

48. Is there any information that would cause you not to buy a certain food product?
49. Do you think supermarkets give people enough information about the contents of the food products they sell?
50. What are the possible results if most people were (or were not) very concerned about the food they eat?
51. Would you say that safe and healthy food is important?
52. Do you think people should know more about how the food they eat is produced?
53. Do you think the government should make sure that the food people eat is safe?
54. What is the government doing to make sure the food in your country is safe?
55. Can you suggest how food safety could be improved?
56. Do you think having laws is enough to ensure that food is safe?

Traditional food

57. What is traditional food in your country like?
58. Are any traditional foods in your country in danger of disappearing?
59. Do you think it's important to teach children how to prepare traditional dishes?
60. Can you suggest any ways to make traditional food more attractive to people?
61. Do you think advertising has an effect on what foods people eat?

Restaurants

62. What types of restaurants are there in your neighbourhood?
63. What are the most popular kinds of restaurant in your country nowadays?
64. How have restaurants in your country changed in the past 20 years?
65. What are some of the factors that make a restaurant good?
66. Are foreign restaurants very popular in your country?
67. Why do you think some people like the food from a particular country?
68. Are multinational restaurants changing the food culture of your country?
69. What personal qualities and skills are necessary for working in a restaurant?
70. In your country, what is the social importance of eating at restaurants with others?
71. What do you think is the best way to dispose of leftover food in restaurants?

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Free Time and Work Time

1. Which people work at weekends in your country / where you live?

Police officers, soldiers, doctors, nurses, drivers, some teachers, reporters, cooks.

2. How do people usually spend their weekends?

Working, relaxing, sleeping, doing housework, doing homework, visiting people.

3. How important is having free time at the weekend for working people and students?

A chance to relax, meet friends, visit people and places, spend time alone.

4. Is the amount of time that people are expected to work reasonable?

If you think it should be shorter (or longer!), say why.

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a three-day weekend?

Think of the (dis)advantages for employees, companies, families and the economy.

6. What are the problems associated with working too long?

Tiredness, stress, lack of family life, lack of contact with friends, become angry.

7. Should people work at night?

Some people have to – e.g. police officers, doctors, nurses, drivers, power station workers – but they usually work at night temporarily, in shifts.
How does that affect their personal lives?

8. Which people have to do shift work?

Refer to questions 1 and 7 for ideas. Many factory workers also work shifts, especially if the factory operates 24 hours a day.

9. What are the effects of working overtime?

Refer to question 5 – think about this from different points of view.

Friends

1. How do people meet new friends?

At bars and clubs, at school/university, at work, at fitness centres and sports clubs.

2. Why do people choose the friends they do?

Similar personalities, similar interests, work in similar fields – or perhaps because they are opposites!

3. What can cause people to lose contact with friends?

Perhaps they move to another area, develop new interests or meet new friends.

4. What are some of the responsibilities of being a good friend?

Make time for your friends, lend them money, give them advice, help them with problems, find them a (better) job.

5. Do friends or family have more influence on young people today?

In which ways does each have an influence on a young person? Think about fashion, choice of university/subject, choice of career, tastes in films and music.

6. How do friendships change as we get older?

You could give one or two examples from your own experience.

7. How important are friendships in the workplace?

Of course, it is important to get on well with the people you work with, but real

friendship is more than just getting on.

8. Do you think that parents and children can be good friends?

This is a question that people have great differences of opinion on. Give your own opinion and suggest in what ways this is possible or not.

9. Which is the most important relationship in a person's life?

With a husband or wife, with a parent, with a brother or sister, with a friend?

Friendship

1. Why is having friends important?
2. Why do people choose the friends they do?
3. What are the qualities of a good friend?
4. How do friendships change as we get older?
5. Do you prefer to have one or two close friends or many not so close friends?
6. How can we distinguish between a close friend and an acquaintance?
7. What would you do if you and a friend were having trouble with each other?
8. Why do some friendships last a long time and others only last a short time?
9. What can cause people to lose contact with friends?
10. Do friends or family have more influence on young people today?
11. How can people balance time spent with friends and time spent with family?
12. Which is the most important relationship in a person's life?

Making friends

13. How do people usually make new friends?
14. How is the way people make friends today different to the way people made friends years ago?
15. Do you think it's easier to make friends today than it used to be?
16. How long do you think it takes before you can say you know a person well?
17. Nowadays, which do you think is more important, old friends or new friends?
18. Are there any differences in the way you make friends now and when you were a child?
19. Are there any differences between childhood friends and friends in adulthood?
20. Do children and adults make friends in the same way?

21. Do you think children should be free to make friends with anyone they want?
22. Do you think that parents and children can be good friends?
23. Do different types of people often become friends?
24. Do you think it is necessary for people to have common interests before they become friends?
25. Do you think that friendships formed on the Internet can be very close friendships?
26. Why do some people choose to make friends on the Internet?
27. Why do you think so many people like Internet marriage introduction services?

The nature of friendship

28. What are the qualities of a good friend?
29. How can a person be a good friend?
30. What are some of the main differences between family relationships and friendships?
31. Do you think distance can affect a friendship?
32. How can people maintain a friendship when the two people are living far from each other?
33. What kinds of people make friends easily?
34. What are the benefits of being able to make friends easily?

Male and female friendships

35. Do you think a man and a woman can be best friends?
36. Do you think men and women can have close friendships with each other?
37. Do you think there are any differences when men are friends with each other and when women are friends with each other?
38. Do you think friendships between men are stronger or more stable than friendships between women?

Friendships at work

39. Do you think people can be friends with others in the same workplace?
40. Do you think work colleagues should also be friends with each other?
41. How important are friendships in the workplace?

42. Do you think it's possible for a boss to be friends with the people he/she manages?
43. Do you think the relationship between a boss and his or her workers is important?
44. What are the advantages or disadvantages of a boss being friends with his/her staff?
45. How do you think employees can get along with a boss they don't like?
46. Do you think a teacher can be friends with one of his or her students?
47. How do you think a person should react if they encounter an unfriendly person?
48. How can a boss have a good relationship with his or her employees?
49. Are there any differences between boss-employee relations in big and small companies?

Family Friends

50. What qualities does a person need to have to be a friend of a whole family?
51. How do you feel about cross-generational friendships?
52. Do you think it's easy for people of different generations to become friends?

Friendships at different stages of life

53. How is friendship different at different stages of a person's life?
54. What are some of the differences between the way older people and young people interact with their friends?
55. How is friendship different at different stages of a person's life?
56. Do you think friendships formed in adulthood are as strong as friendships formed in childhood?

Giving

Present giving

1. On what occasions do people give presents in your country?
2. What kinds of presents do people usually give?
4. What kinds of presents may become popular in the future?

5. What do you think is the best way to give a present to someone?
6. Compare the feelings of people when they give and receive presents.
7. How important is the cost of a present?
8. How important is it to give presents to friends and other people?

Gifts for children

9. What sorts of presents do adults usually give to children?
10. Compare the kinds of presents that are given to children now and were given 20 (50) years ago.
11. How are gifts for children different to gifts for adults?
12. Do children give gifts for different reasons than adults?
13. Do children usually give more gifts to adults than adults give to children?

Gifts between countries

14. Do you think it's a waste of money for governments to give gifts to the governments of other countries?
15. What would you suggest are some suitable gifts for countries to give each other?
16. Do you think it is a good idea for less developed countries to accept gifts from wealthier countries?
17. Are these gifts between countries simply displays of friendship or do you think the country that gives the gift has other reasons for giving?

Gifts in the business environment

18. Is gift giving among people who are doing business together a good idea?
19. What gifts do people give each other in a business environment?
20. What are the reasons why business people give each other gifts?
21. What's the difference between giving a gift out of genuine friendship and giving a gift with some business goal in mind?

Pressures to give presents

22. How much social pressure is there on people to give presents?

23. What influence have business and advertising had on the giving of presents?
24. How might social changes affect the giving of presents in the future?
25. Which media form do you think will have the biggest impact on future patterns of present buying?

Gift giving and charities

26. Tell me about some of the organisations in your country which help people in need.
27. How effective are the different methods of raising money for such organisations?
28. How might organisations such as schools and businesses raise money for charity?

Going Abroad Long-term

1. Why do many people want to go abroad for an extended period of time?

Work – experience, different style, good for career, higher salary.
Study – knowledge, learn a foreign language, get a better job when they return.
Travel – see the world, meet new people, visit distant family members, take a break.

2. What should these people do before going abroad?

Find out about the country, learn the language, meet people from that country or people who have been there, make a list of things to take, make friends online with people from that country.
Explain how important each of these is, referring to specific countries and reasons for going abroad. For example, studying English is essential if you are going to Britain to study, but may not be so important if you are travelling around several different European countries for a few months.

3. What would you miss most if you went abroad for an extended period of time?

Family? Food? Friends? Your pet dog? Your favourite TV programme?
Explain what could you do to minimize missing these people and things?

4. Which country or part of the world wouldn't you like live in?

Africa – too poor, unpleasant weather, dangerous animals, wars.
Antarctica – too cold and isolated.
Britain – terrible food and weather!
The United States – dangerous, competitive.

5. What are a few of the problems of living abroad and how can people overcome them?

Isolated from family and friends → socialize and meet new people.
Don't know the language → take a course.

6. Why do foreigners stay in your country for extended period of time?

Ask some foreigners this question and you may get some surprising answers!

7. What kinds of problems do foreigners living in your country experience?

Again, ask some foreigners this question. The most common problem will almost certainly be 'language', but they may mention some others you didn't think of!

Living abroad

1. Why do many people want to go abroad for an extended period of time?
2. What should these people do before going abroad?
3. What would you miss most if you went abroad for an extended period of time?
4. Which country or part of the world wouldn't you like live in?
5. What are a few of the problems of living abroad and how can people overcome them?
6. Why do foreigners stay in your country for extended period of time?
7. What kinds of problems do foreigners living in your country experience?
8. After someone returns from living overseas, what effects can they have on their home country?
9. After people who have lived overseas come back to their home country, what kinds of things knowledge and ideas can they bring back to their home country?
10. How can these new ideas, skills etc. benefit their home country?

Migration

11. Why do many people want to migrate to a different country?
12. What problems might migration cause in countries people migrate to (from)?
13. Should migration to different countries be limited?
14. How does international migration influence the economy of countries?
15. If a family migrates to a different country, could the education of the children be a problem?
16. Who do you think is better able to adapt to the environment in a new country, the parents or the children?

Groups and Co-operation

Groups and organisations

1. Which types of clubs and groups are popular today?
2. Why are these groups popular?
3. Which groups may become popular in the future?

Groups for different ages

4. What do children usually do in groups?
5. Why do many parents encourage their children to join groups?
6. What can children (and/or teenagers) learn from being part of a group?
7. How can older people benefit from belonging to a club or group?
8. What are the benefits of being part of a team?

Group behaviour

9. Do you think that people behave differently when in a group?
10. What is the function of uniforms for members of a group?
11. How important is it to maintain your individuality?

Team sports

12. Which is more popular in your country, team sports or individual sports?
13. Do you think children should be encouraged to play more team sports or more individual sports?
14. Why is it that some people don't play a sport but like to follow their favourite sports team?

Working together

15. Can working for a company give a person a feeling of belonging to a group?
16. What is the most important factor in order for a business to work well?
17. What qualities does a person need in order to work well with others?
18. What are the benefits of working with other people?
19. Compare these with the advantages of working alone?
20. How important is co-operation in your culture?

Education and co-operation

21. How can children learn to co-operate with each other?
22. In which areas could businesses and schools co-operate for the benefits of students?
23. How could businesses and schools co-operate for the benefit of the economy?

International co-operation

24. In what ways do countries co-operate?
25. In what ways can wealthy countries help less developed countries?
26. How much obligation do wealthy countries have to help poorer countries?
27. Do you think that the world will become more co-operative or less co-operative in the future?

Happiness

1. What effects can a person’s standard of living have on their happiness?

Consider situations where a person’s basic needs are not met, where they are met and where the person has a very high standard of living. Think about their

lifestyles and how they influence the level of happiness.

2. What changes in people's lives increase their happiness?

Getting married, finding a better job, getting a place at university.

3. How do people today try to achieve happiness?

By making money? By having lots of friends? By enjoying life?

4. Do children and adults show their feelings in the same ways?

Make lists of how children and adults express them selves. You may be surprised!

5. Do you think that people's feelings change as they grow older?

Does it depend on getting older or on other things?

6. How can the effects of early family life influence a person's later development?

Most people believe there is a clear link. Give examples to support your opinion.

7. How does the country or district where we live affect our happiness?

Most people want to live in a nice area or a good country – it's the main reason there is so much movement of people in the world. What are people looking for? Schools for their kids? Good jobs? Friendly people? Sports and entertainment facilities?

8. How can we contribute to other people's happiness?

Perhaps we need to be happy ourselves. Perhaps we need to perform more good deeds.

9. How can governments help to make people happy?

Get rid of politicians! No taxes! Free everything! No bureaucracy!
you might want to consider more realistic ideas!

The nature of happiness

1. What do you think is true happiness?
2. Can you give some examples of things (situations) that make people feel happy?
3. How do people today try to achieve happiness?
4. Is people's understanding of happiness today different to people's ideas in the past?
5. Are people who pay a lot of attention to their own happiness being selfish?
6. Do you think people who have more talent are happier than others?
7. Do you think people feel happier when they are good at something?

Families and happiness

8. Why do people feel happy when they are with members of their family?
9. In general, what do you think makes a happy family?
10. What are some examples of family activities that make people feel happy?
11. How can the effects of early family life influence a person's later development?

Happy people

12. What kinds of people do you think are most likely to be happy?
13. Do you think some people are born naturally happier than others?
14. Why do some people seem to be happy even in difficult circumstances?

Age and happiness

15. Do you think there is any relationship between a person's age and their happiness?
16. What are the times in a person's life when they are most happy?
17. What are the times in a person's life when they are least happy?
18. Do you think children today are happy?
19. Why do some people say the happiest time in their lives was when they were at school?
20. What kinds of people are most likely to feel that the past was happier for them than the present?

21. Do you think old people are very happy?
22. Do young people and older people find happiness in the same things?
23. When you are older, what kinds of things do you think will bring you happiness?

Happiness and society

24. Do you think people were happier in the past than they are now?
25. Do you think people become happier as their standard of living rises?
26. Do you think money makes people happy?
27. Are the things that make people happy nowadays the same things that made people happy 20 (50) years ago?
28. Is there any relationship between government and the happiness of citizens?
29. What could the government do to help increase the overall happiness of people?
30. How does the area where we live affect our happiness?
31. How can we contribute to other people's happiness?
32. How can governments help to make people happy?

Work and happiness

33. What factors affect how happy people are at work?
34. Do most people in your country expect to be happy in their work?
35. What kinds of work do you think make people feel happy?
36. How important is salary in deciding how happy a person is at work?
37. Would you say people today are happier at work than 20-30 years ago?
38. Would you agree that happy people work better?
39. What are some reasons why some people are unhappy in their work?
40. Do you think people should change their jobs if they are not happy with their job?
41. What do you think of workaholics?
42. Why do you think workaholics work so hard?

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Health

1. Who do you think should pay for health care?

Individuals through insurance, companies as a benefit, government – people's right.
The key thing to remember is that health care has become very expensive for most people, even in richer, developed countries. Governments are becoming unable to finance state health care schemes.

2. Do you think that people take enough responsibility for their health?

Yes: many go to fitness centres, do yoga, visit a doctor regularly, eat healthily. During SARS many people helped with public health.
No: most people don't do enough exercise, eat poor diets, only visit a doctor when they are ill (curative medicine, not preventative).

3. Do you think that the government should promote a national health drive?

Yes, people need to be more aware of their health. It could reduce costs by preventing people becoming ill. People could live longer. It is the responsibility of the state to take care of people's health.
No, because people are already aware enough. People should be responsible for their own health and not rely on the government. A health drive would be too expensive and only waste money. Besides, it might encourage people to believe they have illnesses which they really don't have!

4. How have health services improved in your country in recent years?

Think about the staff (doctors and nurses), organization of medical facilities, use of modern technology, waiting times for operations, cleanliness, and speed (many operations can be carried out and the patient sent home the same day!).

5. What more could be done to improve health care in your country?

Think about the same things as the previous question. You don't need to be a health care expert to answer this question! Read what people are writing in newspapers.

6. How well are health care staff (doctors and nurses) trained in your country?

Say something about the qualifications, training that health care staff get. Does it depend on where they are trained or working? Are they better trained now than in the past?

Health services

1. Who do you think should pay for health care?
2. Do you think that people take enough responsibility for their health?
3. Do you think that the government should promote a national health drive?
4. How have health services improved in your country in recent years?
5. What more could be done to improve health care in your country?
6. How well are health care staff (doctors and nurses) trained in your country?
7. Do you think doctors have a responsibility to give people advice about how to have a healthy lifestyle?

Healthy lifestyles

8. What are some of the things that people do that are harmful to their health?
9. What are some things that people can do to help them maintain good health?
10. Compare healthy food and junk food.
11. Do you think people are healthier today than people were 20 (50) years ago?
12. Do you think people today have a healthier lifestyle than people 20 (50) years ago?
13. In general do you think the lifestyle of people in your country is healthy?
14. What things do people in your country need to do to improve their health?
15. Why are some people not healthy?
16. Why do some people have unhealthy lifestyles?
17. Why are more and more people overweight?
18. Can you suggest some ways for a person to lose weight?
19. How do you think a person can help other people to improve their health?

Smoking

20. What do you think of people who smoke?
21. Why is smoking bad for health?
22. In your country, are most smokers men?
23. Why do you think people start smoking?

24. Do men and women usually start smoking for the same reasons?
25. Do you think many smokers want to stop smoking?
26. Why do you think people find it difficult to quit smoking?
27. Does the government have a responsibility to do something about people smoking or do you think it's a personal problem?
28. What could the government do?

Health and children

29. Do you think children in your country have a healthy lifestyle?
30. How do you think they could have a healthier lifestyle?
31. What could the government do to promote a healthier lifestyle?
32. Do you think it's important for children to learn about a healthy lifestyle?
33. How could schools teach children about health?
34. How could schools encourage their students to exercise more?
35. Who do you think has the main responsibility for educating children about health – parents or schools?
36. How do advertising and TV influence the health of children?

Promoting healthy lifestyles

37. What has the government in your country done to promote a healthy lifestyle among the people?
38. Do you think the media is promoting healthy lifestyles?
39. How can the media play a role in educating people about health?
40. In your country, are there laws prohibiting showing unhealthy things in the media?

Health and safety in the workplace

41. Do you think employers have a responsibility to ensure that their employees have a safe and healthy work environment?
42. Do you think it's a good idea for employers to encourage their employees to live a healthy life?
43. How can employers do that?

Health and safety at school

44. Do schools have a responsibility to protect the health and safety of their students?
45. How do schools protect the health and safety of their students?
46. In your country, do schools teach students about health and safety?

Help

Supportive environments

1. How important is it for individuals to have access to help and advice?
2. Compare the types of support given by family and friends.
3. What kinds of support might people need in the workplace or at college?

International support

4. In what ways do countries help each other today?
5. What possible problems are there with international aid today?
6. What kind of support should countries offer to each other in the future?

Helping others

7. What kinds of help do family members give each other?
8. How important is it to help visitors to your country?
9. Why do some people enjoy helping others?
10. Are people nowadays more willing or less willing to help others than before?
11. Do you think people have become more selfish than they used to be?
12. What local organisations are there in your area that provide help to people?
13. Can you think of any ways to improve the help that people in your area get?

Non-governmental organisations that help others

14. Which kinds of organisations do work to help people in your country?
15. Which groups of people should be given most help from aid organisations?
16. How important is it to have organisations that help others?
17. How do these organisations get money?
18. Do you think larger or smaller organisations are better at helping people?

Government Help

19. How can governments help the poorer members of society?
20. Has the help that your government gives its citizens changed in the past 20 years?
21. Is the help that government gives to people better now than in the past?
22. Do you think that everybody in the community who needs help can get it from either the government or from their family?
23. Do you think that government help is not needed as much today as in the past?
24. Do you think that people should be more responsible for their own care?

Help for Young People

25. In what situations do young people need help?
26. What are the causes of the problems that young people have today?
27. Besides parents, who do you think can best help young people who have problems?
28. Do you think the media can be used to help young people?
29. Do you think young people can find help on the Internet?

Help for Older People

30. In what ways do old people need help?
31. Why do old people need help in these situations?
32. Who do you think can help old people the most?
33. In your country, are there any special public facilities for helping old people?
34. Are nursing homes (old people's homes) a good way to take care of old people?
35. Has the way old people are given help changed in the past 20 (50) years?
36. In the future, do you think there will be any changes in the way old people are helped?

Comparing Help for Young and Older People

37. Do old people and young people need help in the same ways?
38. In the past, did old and young people need help in the same ways?
39. Do old people and young people find the help they need in the same ways?

Volunteer Work

40. Besides your friends and family, are there any other people who you give help to?
41. Why do some people volunteer to help others who need help?
42. In your country, do many people donate money to charitable organisations?
43. Is there much volunteer work done in your country?
44. What do these volunteers do?
45. Why do you think so many people volunteer to help when there is a natural disaster such as an earthquake?
46. Do you think society needs to have volunteers?
47. What are the benefits of volunteer work for the volunteers?
48. What are the benefits of volunteer work for society?
49. Do you think there are any disadvantages of having volunteers?
50. What sorts of problems do these volunteers face in doing this work?
51. What are some examples of work that are suitable for volunteers to do?
52. Do you think it's important to teach the importance of volunteer work to children?
53. Can you think of any examples of international volunteers?
54. Do you think everyone should do some volunteer work at some time in their lives?

History

Do you think that a knowledge of history is important for a well-rounded education?

Can a knowledge of history help us in our daily lives? If so, in what ways? Is history important if we want to know about culture or people? Why or why not? Is enough attention paid to history in the education system in your country?

Do you think that politicians and other influential people pay enough attention to history when planning the future?

Can history teach us any lessons? Do politicians and other influential people consider these lessons well? Give an example to support your opinion.

Which historical event do you think most influenced your country’s history?

Choose one, say something about what happened and why, then say how and why it influenced Your country's history.
"The bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in 1941 was certainly influential, because it demonstrated that the USA couldn't just isolate itself from world affairs. Even today, we can see the results of that event, as the USA tries to influence world events, not wait until events influence them directly."

Which historical events continue to influence the lives of people in your country?

Say which historical events you think do, then add how and why. If the influence is a negative one, explain how things would have been better if this event had not happened.

In the future, do you think that history will become less important as science and technology become more important?

In many countries, there is clearly a tendency to regard science and technology as 'more useful' subjects than history, for example. Talk about the importance of these subjects within the education system. What are the possible results of this trend? Can people involved in science and technology learn anything from people who study history?

If you could be an important historical figure, who would you choose to be?

Say which person then add why you would choose to be that person in particular. You could also say if you would have done anything different to the way that historical figure did something.

Family history

1. Do you think that it is important to know about family history?
2. How can people find out about their family history?
3. How can people use technology to record family history?

Local history

4. How interested are people in the history of where they live?
5. What are some good ways to learn about the history of your town/city?
6. Why are some people more interested in the history of other places than in the

history of their own town or city?

The importance of the past

7. Do you agree or disagree that you can't understand today's world without knowing about the past?
8. Are there any dangers in leaving behind past traditions?
9. What do you think people in the future will find hardest to understand about our world today?

Learning about history

10. Do you think it's important to study history?
11. Do you think it's important for people to know the history of their own country?
12. What (various) methods do (can) people use to get information about history?
13. Are people in your country more interested in modern history or ancient history?
14. Why does the interpretation of history often change over time?
15. Do you think people generally have an objective view of history?
16. How can teacher make history more interesting?
17. How is history is taught in school nowadays?
18. How is visiting an historical place different to reading about it?
19. Why is there often public interest in historical films and books?

History and museums

20. Should some museums be free for everyone to visit?
21. What are the benefits of using public money to finance museums?
22. How could museums be made more attractive to young people?
23. Do people in your country like to visit history museums?
24. How important are museums for giving people information about history?
25. What kinds of museums do people in your country like?
26. Do you think museums should charge entry fees (or should they be free)?
27. In what other ways could museums get money?
28. What is the value of collecting old things and putting them in museums?
29. What do you think is better to display in a museum, old photographs or old things?
30. Compare the works of art that you see in museums and art galleries with other

examples of art in everyday life.

National history

31. How important are historical monuments for attracting tourists to a country?
32. In what ways does oral history add to knowledge about the past?
33. How important are legends and heroes to a country?

Historic sites

34. What are the different types of historic sites in your country?
35. Do people in your country prefer visiting historic sites to visiting natural places?
36. What historical places in your country would you recommend foreigners visit?
37. Do many people today visit historic sites?
38. Why do people visit historical sites?
39. What kinds of people are interested in visiting historic sites?
40. Who do you think prefers to visit historic sites – older people or younger people?
41. Can you suggest any ways to make historic sites more interesting for those people who are not very interested in visiting them?
42. Are fewer people visiting historic sites and museums compared to the past?
43. Why do some people dislike visiting historic sites?
44. How can people get information about historic sites?
45. Should people have to pay to enter these historic sites?
46. Do you think the entry fees at these historic sites are reasonable?
47. Do you think children should have to pay to enter a historic site?
48. What is the importance of these historical places for people today?
49. What can people learn from visiting these sites?

Historical films and TV programmes

50. Do you think TV programmes about history can raise people's interest in history?
51. Do you think such programmes make people to want to visit historic places?
52. Do you think TV is a good way of informing people about history?
53. Can watching films about historical events help people understand history?
54. Do you think films give a complete and true version of history?
55. Do you think filmmakers should give an accurate portrayal of history?

Hobbies and Interests

1. Do you think men and women usually have different hobbies and interests?

Compare the types of films that are popular with men and those that are popular with women in your country. Why do they like similar or different types of films? If you are not sure of the reasons, remember to use ‘could’, ‘may’, and ‘might’ to express possible reasons.

2. Do you think that people’s hobbies and interests change as they get older?

Perhaps they do, because different age groups like different types of films. Perhaps they don’t, because people remain interested in the same things throughout their lives.

3. If you took up a new hobby or interest, what would you take up?

Remember to use a conditional sentence! Talk about the hobby, saying why you would choose it, how your lifestyle or daily routine might change as a result, how much time it would take up, who you might do this hobby with, and where you would do it.

4. In the future, do you think that people will have more time to spend on their hobbies and interests?

Some people think that our lives will get easier as technology takes over and people get richer. Others think that this may be true, but we will just do more work to take up the extra time, rather than having more free time. Give your opinion and any other reasons you can think of.

5. What do you think our hobbies and interests tell people about our personality?

Are people who go to discos more outgoing? Are people who enjoy reading quiet people? Are people who like painting creative? Are people who watch TV lazy? Are people who play computer games modern? Give your opinion and reasons.

6. Do people often have hobbies or interests connected in somehow to their work?

Do computer programmers like computer games? Do people who sell sports clothes like sport? Give your opinion and reasons.

Hobbies for different people

1. Do you think men and women usually have different hobbies and interests?
2. Do you think that people's hobbies and interests change as they get older?
3. Do children and adults usually have similar hobbies and interests?
4. What do you think our hobbies and interests tell people about our personality?
5. Do people often have hobbies or interests connected in somehow to their work?

The value of hobbies

6. Why do some people think that having hobbies is a waste of time?
7. What sorts of people might say that hobbies are a waste of time?
8. Are there things that it is more important to do than spend time on hobbies?
9. In the future, do you think that people will have more time to spend on their hobbies and interests?

Holidays and Tourism

What kind of places do people in your country / region like to go to on holiday to and what do they usually do there?

This is quite an easy question, but notice that it asks about "kind of places", not "places". You could also add extra information, such as when they usually go to these places and who with.

Do you think that where people go on holiday and what they do on holiday is related to their income?

If so, explain what wealthy and less wealthy people do on holiday. Perhaps they do the same things, but the standards are different, e.g. both groups stay in hotels, but wealthy people stay in 5-star hotels, whereas less wealthy people stay in 2-star hotels.

How are people's holidays different to 20 years ago and how are they still

similar?

This is a straight comparison question. Use appropriate connectives in your answer. Talk about where people go (went), what they do (did), who they go (went) with, why they go (went) there, and how long their holidays are (were).

In the future, what kind of holidays do you think will become popular?

Types of holidays: group travel, independent (individual) travel, activity holidays, special interest holidays (e.g. for people who like art galleries), cruise ship holidays, sightseeing holidays.
Say why you think these types of holidays will become popular.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of going on a “package holiday” where everything is prepared for you by a travel agency?

These holidays are very popular in some Western countries, but many other people prefer to arrange everything themselves. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages and then give your opinion and / or the general opinion of people you know or people in your country.

What is your idea of a perfect holiday?

Describe your ideal holiday in detail. Show the examiner your vocabulary. You will probably need to use ‘would’ in your answer.

Tourism

1. During their holiday time, do most people in your country prefer to stay at home or do they prefer to travel?
2. Compare relaxing at home to travelling as ways to spend a holiday?
3. Why are many people happy when they go travelling?
4. Do more people travel nowadays during their holidays than in the past?
5. What kinds of places do people in your country like to travel to?
6. Do you think your hometown is attractive to tourists?
7. Why do tourists often buy things at the places they visit?
8. What kinds of things do they buy?
9. Do you think travelling has any educational value for children?

Types of holidays

10. What types of holidays do people in your country generally take?
11. How does a person's personality affect where they go and what they do on holiday?
12. How does a person's income affect where they go and what they do on holiday?
13. Compare your experience of holidays with your parents'/grandparents' experience.
14. How do you think holidays may change in the future?
15. Do you think a holiday is a good thing to spend money on?
16. Compare going on short trips (a day or a weekend) with going on longer holidays.
17. What can people learn from visiting other places?

Working people and holidays

18. How much holiday time do workers in your country usually get?
19. What are the advantages and disadvantages to employers of giving their workers holidays?
20. Do you think that all jobs should offer the same amount of holiday?

The impact of tourism

21. How important is tourism to your country?
22. How does tourism affect the economy of your country?
23. What negative effects can tourism have on a place or on the people who live there?
24. What effects has tourism had on your town/city?
25. Do you think visiting other countries and places changes people?
26. What measures could be taken to increase/reduce tourism?
27. How can countries work together to increase tourism?

The holiday industry

28. What types of jobs are available in the holiday industry?
29. What qualities and qualifications are needed to do them?
30. What changes are likely to the holiday industry in the future?

Travel accommodation

31. What different kinds of accommodation can people use when they are travelling?
32. Which of these is the most popular in your country?
33. Compare living at home and staying at a hotel.
34. What facilities a good hotel should have?
35. How do people choose a hotel when they travel?
36. What kinds of people are best suited to working in a hotel?
37. How have hotels changed in recent years?
38. What is the service like in hotels in your country?
39. How could the service be improved?
40. What are some of the things that guests can do in a hotel?
41. Do you think a foreigner can get a good understanding of a country just from the hotel that he or she is staying in?
42. What can hotel employees do to help foreign tourists?
43. Do you think it's important for hotels to provide information for visitors?
44. Is the hotel industry an important part of your country’s economy?

Overseas travel

45. Do many people from your country want to travel abroad?
46. Compare the benefits of travelling abroad with domestic tourism.
47. Do you think travelling overseas can contribute to children’s education?
48. What can people learn from overseas travel?
49. Do you think people can learn anything about themselves from overseas travel?
50. What is the importance of experiencing different cultures?
51. How do people decide which country to visit?
52. Why do people like to buy things when they travel abroad?

Preparation for overseas travel

53. What are some things people have to do before they travel overseas?
54. Is it easy to get a visa to most countries?
55. Does it take long to get a visa now?
56. What do people need to do before going abroad to study?

Tour groups

57. Do people from your country prefer to travel individually or in tour groups?
58. How do you think individual travel (as a tourist) and travelling in a tour group are different?
59. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of travelling in a tour group?

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Homes

Types of housing

1. What kind of housing do most people in your neighbourhood/country live in?
2. Compare the kind of housing in cities and in the countryside in your country.
3. How does the climate in your country affected the design of homes?
4. How have homes changed over the last 50 years in your country?
5. How are homes likely to change in the future?
6. Why might people want to move to another home?
7. What factors do people need to consider when finding a place to live?
8. What main features would you look for in your perfect home?
9. Compare living in older housing and more modern accommodation?
10. Compare living in a newly built home and living in an old one.
11. How do people in your country like to decorate (furnish) their homes?
12. How do you think homes might be decorated (and furnished) in the future?

Accommodation and young people

13. Do young adults normally live in the family home in your culture?
14. Why might young adults want or not want to live with their parents?

15. Might young people in your country live with their parents in the future?

Housing and local facilities

16. What kinds of facilities are available near your home?
17. Which facilities is it important to have near the home?
18. How important are local facilities in creating a sense of community?
19. Compare the facilities found in urban and rural areas.

Town planning

20. Why do many people prefer to live in urban areas?
21. What aspects of a town can influence the lives of its inhabitants?
22. How might cities change in the future?
23. How could city life be improved for residents?

Technology and the home

24. In what ways is technology is used in the home?
25. What further advances may there be in the use of technology in the home?
26. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using technology in the home?

Living with others

27. What do people need to remember in order to get along when they live with others?
28. Which kinds of people are good and bad to live with?
29. In what ways do people influence each other when they live together?

Buying or renting a home

30. Do people in your country usually buy their homes or rent them?
31. Why do some people prefer to buy their own homes?
32. How can young people be helped to buy their first home?
33. What are some of the housing problems that exist in your country?
34. What is the government doing to try to solve these problems?
35. Is homelessness a problem in your country?
36. Are the prices of homes in your country too expensive for the average person?
37. Why are the prices so high?

38. What can the government do about this problem?
39. Do you think the government should help low-income people buy a home?
40. Do you think the government should supply low-cost housing for those people who have low incomes?

Furniture

41. What kinds of furniture do people in your country like to buy?
42. How do people decide what furniture to buy?
43. In families in your country, who usually decides what furniture to buy for the home?
44. How has buying furniture in your country changed in the past few years?
45. Do people in your country like to change the furniture in their home?
46. Has the style of furniture in homes changed in recent years?
47. What things should a furniture designer consider when designing furniture?
48. What are the qualities of a good furniture designer?
49. How do you think furniture will change in the future?

Rooms

50. Do you think children should have their own rooms?
51. How do children benefit from sharing a room with others?
52. In your country, do parents have rules about how children keep their rooms?
53. Is it important for parents to have rules for how children keep their rooms?
54. Are rooms in newly built homes larger than in older homes in your country?

Humour

1. How popular are comedy programmes on TV in your country?

The American TV series ‘Friends’ seems to be very popular with my students! Do people of different ages enjoy comedy programmes to the same extent?

2. What are the differences between comedy on the screen and comedy in books/comics?

Comedy on the screen often relies on ‘visual humour’ – funny sights or facial expressions.

3. Why is comedy often used in advertising?

Perhaps advertisements are more memorable if they are funny.

4. Why are some things funny to some people but not to others?

How much does a sense of humour have to do with mood, social situation and upbringing?

5. Do you think that men and women find different things funny?

Men seem to have a ‘dirtier’ sense of humour and will often laugh at jokes that contain bad language, whereas women usually do not.

6. How important is it to laugh together in relationships?

Give examples from relationships that you have or those of people close to you.

7. How can humour be used to help learn a language?

Humour can relax students and show them that learning a foreign language is not just about work.

8. Do you think that jokes can be translated from one language to another?

They often can, but not if the joke is a ‘pun’ – a play on the meaning of words.

9. What part can humour play in international relations?

Perhaps it can break down barriers between people.

Intelligence

Intelligence and talent

1. Do you think it's important for people to be intelligent?
2. Do you think people nowadays need to be more intelligent than people in the past?

3. Do you think it's important for people to have talent in some field?
4. How do you think a person can become more talented (or intelligent)?

Artificial intelligence

5. Do you think computers have intelligence?
6. What are the differences between the intelligence of a computer and of a human?
7. Do you think computers might one day be more intelligent than humans?

Highly intelligent children

8. Are there more highly intelligent children nowadays, compared to the past?
9. Do you think children in the future will be more intelligent than people today?
10. How can we know which children are highly intelligent and which are average?
11. Do you think it's best for highly intelligent children to go to special schools?
12. Can you suggest any methods for educating highly intelligent children?
13. Could weak students benefit by being educated with better students?
14. Are there any benefits for the better students if all students are educated together?
15. What do you think of the idea of replacing teachers in schools with equipment that has artificial intelligence?

Development of intelligence in children

16. Are people born with a given level of intelligence that cannot be changed?
17. How do you think children develop their intelligence?
18. Can you suggest any ways for parents to encourage the development of intelligence in their children?
19. Do you think TV helps children become more intelligent?
20. Do you think games can help children become more intelligent?
21. What sorts of activities do you think help children to develop their intelligence?
22. Which do you think is better for the development of intelligence, children playing alone or playing with others?

Languages

1. What do you think is the best way to learn a foreign language?

Most students give very general answers, such as “Speaking with a native speaker.” Say why it is the best way to learn a foreign language and also exactly which aspect it helps improve, e.g. pronunciation, fluency, grammar, reading speed.

2. Do you think that the education system in your country focuses enough on foreign languages?

Give your answer and develop it by saying why more (or less!) focus needs to be placed on foreign languages. Where does the focus need to be? (Primary, secondary, or tertiary education). If you think they are important, how can students be motivated to study foreign languages? If you think there is too much focus on foreign languages, say where the focus should be.

3. If you had the opportunity to learn another foreign language, which would you choose?

Name the language, then add why you would learn it, how useful it might be, and how knowing this language could improve or change your life. Do you know anyone who speaks this language or may like to learn it with you?

4. How are language and culture connected?

Think of both the spoken and written language. Spoken language, particularly slang, also reflects culture and cultural changes. Give one or two examples from languages you know.

5. In the future, do you think that English will become so important and dominant that other languages begin to die out?

Actually, according to the United Nations, other languages are beginning to die out, though it is not clear whether as a result of English. Give your opinion and reasons.

6. Would it be a good idea for people all over the world to learn a single, artificial language, such as Esperanto?

Give your opinion and reasons. Check out www.esperanto.net for more information.

Learning languages

1. Why are some people better than others at learning a foreign language?
2. What do you think are some good ways to learn a foreign language?
3. Do you think children can learn a foreign language faster than adults?
4. Who do you think is better at learning a language – boys or girls?
5. What influences how well a person learns a foreign language?
6. Do you think parents influence how well their children study a foreign language?
7. What makes studying a foreign language interesting or boring?
8. Do you think that the education system in your country focuses enough on foreign languages?
9. How could a teacher make learning a foreign language more interesting?
10. What do you think are some of the qualities of a good language teacher?
11. How does studying a foreign language help people to understand the culture of the people who speak that language?
12. Do you think it's possible to learn a foreign culture without learning the language?
13. How do you think people will study foreign languages in the future?
14. How can the Internet be used to help people learn a foreign language?

Reasons for learning languages

15. What foreign languages do students study in your country?
16. Do you thinks it is really necessary to study a foreign language?
17. What are some reasons why people learn a foreign language?
18. What are the advantages for a person who can speak a foreign language?
19. Is it more important to learn foreign languages nowadays than it was in the past?
20. Can learning a foreign language affect people’s attitudes towards their own country?

Methods of studying languages

21. What are the various ways that a person can learn a foreign language?

22. How have foreign language studies changed in your country in the last 20 (50) years?
23. What difficulties do people have when they learn another language?
24. What do you think is the most difficult part of learning another language?
25. How difficult do you think it is for foreigners to learn your first language?

Age and language learning

26. Is language learning more important for young people than for older people?
27. Who do you think finds it easier to learn a foreign language, children or adults?
28. How could older people learn a foreign language?

Language and culture

29. Do you think learning another language has changed your thinking (or your view of the world)?
30. Can learning a language change people's attitudes towards other countries and cultures?
31. Compare English and your first language.
32. Has English had any effect on your first language?
33. Compare the relative importance in the world today of your language and English.
34. How has English become the dominant language in the world?
35. What do you think of this?
36. Do you think a global language means a global culture?

Language and the Internet

37. Do you think the use of the Internet has changed language use?
38. Do you think the Internet has lowered the level of language use?
39. Do you think the Internet is affecting the use of languages other than English?
40. Do you think the use of SMS messages, emails and Internet chatting has had an effect on people's language?

A single international language

41. Do you think it is a good idea to have one main world language?
42. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of having a global language?

43. Do you think a world language would have a unifying effect on humanity?
44. Do you think English is most suited to be the global language?
45. Besides English, what other languages could be the global language?
46. In the future, do you think that English will become so important and dominant that other languages begin to die out?

The sounds of language

47. What do you think of the sound of English?
48. Do you like (dislike) the sounds of any other languages?
49. Which sounds in English (or in your first language) do you think are hardest to make?

Law

Legal ages

1. In your country, what is the legal age of adulthood?
2. Do you think this is a suitable age?
3. What sorts of things can people do when they reach this legal age of adulthood that they couldn't do before?
4. At what age can people get a driver's license in Your country?
5. Do you think that is a suitable age?
6. At what age can people drink alcohol (smoke cigarettes) in your country?
7. Do you think that is a suitable age?
8. Should the government make a law stopping young people under the age of 18 from drinking alcohol?
9. Since young people seem to be maturing faster than before, should the legal age for reaching adulthood be changed?

The legal age for marriage

10. What is the legal age for marriage in your country?
11. Do you think this age is reasonable?
12. What might be the advantages and disadvantages of girls getting married later?
13. Do you think the legal age for marriage in your country might change in the future?

The role of law

14. Can you give any examples of what is illegal in your country?
15. What role does law play in society?
16. How do laws affect the everyday lives of people?
17. Do you think laws have much influence on the economy?
18. If there were no laws, what do you think society would be like?
19. Do you agree or disagree with the death penalty?

Obeying laws

20. Do you think all laws are fair?
21. In many cultures there are stories about people who ‘rob from the rich to give to the poor’. Do you think it's suitable to tell this kind of story to children?
22. How successful do you think the laws are in your country?
23. Do you think most people in your country obey laws?
24. Has the number of crimes in your country increased in the last 20 years?
25. Do you think it's important for people to obey laws?
26. What are some ways in which people can be encouraged to obey the law?
27. Why do you think some people break the law?
28. Many people think that an occasional, minor breach of the law is ok. What do you think?
29. Are there ever any circumstances when it's acceptable to break the law?
30. Do you think it's a crime if somebody accidentally breaks the law?
31. Under what circumstances could a person who has committed a crime escape punishment?

The police

32. How do people in your country feel about the police?
33. Are many people in your country interested in becoming a police officer?
34. What kind of people are interested in working as police officers?
35. What are the working conditions of the police like?
36. What do police officers do in their job?
37. Why do you think there are more policemen than there are policewomen?
38. What personal qualities and skills) does a person need to be a good police officer?
39. Can you think of any ways that the quality of the police could be improved?
40. Why do we need to have police in society?
41. What do you think is the value of having ‘community police officers’?

42. What are the differences between the police and people that we see, for example, working as security guards in a bank?

The police and lawyers

43. Which job would most people prefer – to be a police officer or a lawyer?
44. Do police officers and lawyers have the same social status in your country?
45. Has the social status of police officers and lawyer changed in the last 20 years?
46. Compare police officers and lawyers.
47. Which does society need more – police or lawyers?
48. How do you think the police and lawyers play different roles in connection to law?
49. Compare the situations in which people contact a lawyer and those in which they contact the police.
50. What personal qualities and skills does a person need to be a good lawyer?

International law

51. Can you think of any examples of international law?
52. Do you think it is useful to have international laws?
53. Which areas should international laws cover?
54. In what situations do you think international law is most important?
55. Do you think international law is effective?
56. Do you think we need to have international laws to help protect the environment?
57. What effects does international law have on the behaviour of people/governments?
58. If there were no international laws or agreements, what do you think the world would be like?

Legal systems

59. Do you think it's important to have a legal system?
60. Why do different countries sometimes have quite different legal systems?
61. Why do you think different countries have different laws?
62. Do you think it is a good idea to have exactly the same laws for every country?
63. In the future, do you think all countries might have the same laws?

Preventing crime

64. How can people protect their property against thieves?
65. How can theft be reduced?
66. How could overall law and order be improved in your country?
67. How do the police catch criminals in your country?
68. Do you think it's a good idea to use hi-tech equipment to monitor people?
69. Do you think there is more theft in your city than there used to be?
70. Would you say your country is a safe place to live?
71. Why do some people steal things?
72. Have you personally been the victim of theft or do you just know about this from TV and newspapers?
73. Do poor people and rich people protect their possessions in the same way?
74. How should thieves be punished, in your opinion?

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Leadership

1. Would you like to be a leader?

Give reasons why or why not.

2. Why don’t some people want to be leaders?

You may have answered this in response to the previous question. Reasons might include not wanting responsibility or not feeling ‘qualified’ or ‘experienced’ enough.

3. Why do societies need leaders?

Societies are full of structures that need people at the top leading others and making decisions – hospitals, government, the army, schools, companies, etc.

4. What are the qualities of a good leader?

Determined, ambitious, charismatic, well-spoken, energetic, decisive, a good judge.

5. What are the responsibilities of a leader?

Apart from leading, of course! To take decisions, to inspire, to consider possibilities.

6. What impact do leaders have on people?

Leaders should be inspiring, able to motivate people to do things that they might not otherwise want to do or even consider doing.

7. How do people become leaders?

Do they work their way to the top, get there by accident, do they have personal connections or are they selected through a competitive process? Think about how different organisations select their leaders.

8. How can parents encourage leadership qualities in their children?

Many people think that encouraging independence in their children will result in leadership qualities. Would you agree?

9. How might future leaders differ from the leaders of today?

Make one or two suggestions. Your answer will probably depend a lot on how you view future developments in society and in organisations.

Being a leader

1. What different kinds of leaders are there in society?
2. Why do many people want to be leaders?
3. Why do some people not want to be leaders?
4. Why can't everyone be a leader?
5. Why do we need leaders?
6. What impact do leaders have on people?
7. What is the function of leaders in society?

Leadership qualities

8. What are the qualities of a good leader?
9. What are the differences between a leader and other people?
10. What are the responsibilities of leadership?
11. What are the responsibilities of a national leader?
12. Why do people respect leaders?
13. What is a bad leader like?
14. What are some ways that a bad boss can result in many people quitting their job?
15. In what ways should leaders help other people?
16. How should company leaders, such as managers, communicate with their staff?
17. How can leaders influence others?
18. Do you think leaders need to be an example for others?
19. How do some people develop leadership abilities?
20. Is it possible to be a good leader if one is not good at public speaking?
21. Why is important for leaders to have good communication skills?
22. Is it possible for someone who is not very intelligent to lead others who are more intelligent than him?
23. Which do you think is more important for being a leader, experience or academic qualifications?
24. What kind of experience does a person need before becoming a leader?
25. Does the media have any influence on who becomes a leader?
26. How do people become leaders?
27. How can leaders be selected?
28. What's the difference between a leader in the sports world and a leader in society?
29. What are some differences between current leaders and leaders of the past?
30. What do you think are the responsibilities of an assistant leader?
31. What are some possible results of having a bad national leader?

Training future leaders

32. Do you think some people are 'born leaders' or is leadership ability developed in childhood?
33. How can parents develop leadership abilities in their children?
34. How can society develop future leaders?
35. How can a spirit of leadership be cultivated in universities or society?
36. Do you think we should have special schools to train future leaders?

37. How do you think leaders of the future will be different to current leaders?
38. Do you think future leaders will be better than present ones?
39. What social/global issues/problems will leaders of the future have to deal with?

Leisure time

Leisure activities

1. What are the general facilities for leisure and entertainment like where you live?
2. What types of leisure activities are popular with families in your country?
3. What types of leisure activities are popular with young people in your country?
4. Are the leisure activities that are popular today similar to those that are popular with your parents' generation?
5. How serious are people about leisure activities where you live?
6. Which leisure activities do you think might be popular in the future?

The importance of leisure

7. How much leisure time is available to people in your country?
8. Do you agree or disagree with the idea that more leisure time helps people to work harder?
9. Do you think that people will have more or less leisure time in the future?
10. What might be the social effects of these changes?

Retirement

11. What age do you think is the most appropriate age for retirement?
12. What is the quality of life like for retired people in your country?
13. What may be the social and economic effects of an aging population?

Work and leisure

14. How can people who work together benefit from shared leisure activities?
15. Do you think that employers should provide leisure facilities for employees?

16. How does work impact on leisure time and activities?

Community facilities

17. What problems can a lack of leisure facilities cause to communities?
18. How can good community facilities motivate young people to achieve more?
19. Are leisure and entertainment facilities luxuries or necessities?

Choice of leisure activity

20. Do you think most people choose for themselves what to do in their leisure time or are they influenced by others?
21. Is there much pressure in society on people to do any particular leisure activities?
22. Do you think advertising (or the media) influences people's choice of leisure time activities?
23. To what extent do you think government should be involved with what people do in their leisure time?

Traditional Leisure Activities

24. What are some of the traditional leisure activities in your country?
25. How important is it to keep traditional leisure activities in your culture?
26. Can you suggest how to help keep traditional leisure activities in your culture?
27. Should the government try to keep traditional leisure activities alive?

Libraries

Using libraries

1. What is the purpose or role of libraries in society?
2. What information can people get from libraries?
3. Do you think libraries are useful for tourists who visit that town or city?
4. Which do you think are more useful for people, libraries or bookshops?
5. How do you think libraries could attract more people?

Old people and libraries

6. In your country, do older people like using libraries?
7. Do older people and younger people use libraries in the same way?
8. What benefits can older people get from using community libraries?
9. What particular facilities do you think a library should have for older people?

Children and libraries

10. In your country, do children like using libraries?
11. Do children and adults use libraries in the same way?
12. What benefits can children get from using libraries?
13. What particular facilities do you think a library should have for children?
14. How do you think libraries could be made more attractive for children?

Library facilities

15. Do you think it is important to know how to use a library?
16. How can people find particular books or material in a library?
17. What particular skills and knowledge should library staff have?
18. How have library facilities changed in the past 20-30 years?

The future of libraries

19. How do you think library facilities might change in the future?
20. How do you think libraries in your country could be improved?
21. How has the Internet affected libraries? How could the Internet affect libraries?
22. Do you think people's attitudes to libraries are changing?
23. In the future, do you think libraries will be used as much as they are today?

Public libraries

24. In what ways are public libraries and university libraries different?
25. Do you think there should be more public libraries in Your country?
26. Do you think government should pay for libraries or should the people who use them pay for them?
27. If there is a library fee, do you think everyone should pay the same amount of money?
28. Do you think it's possible to have public libraries all over Your country?
29. Do you think it would be a good idea if companies operated public libraries?
30. How can a town or city make best use of a public library?

Local Events

1. What kind of local events are common in your culture?

Remember to talk about local events, not national ones! Think of parades, fairs, celebrations and seasonal markets.

2. What makes some events more popular than others?

Does it only depend on what people are interested in or does it also depend on how well the events are advertised/publicised and who is attending?

3. Do you think local events are important for building a sense of community?

How do such events build a sense of community?

4. What sort of people enjoy helping to organise local events?

Energetic, helpful, hard-working, happy, friendly.

5. What is needed to put on a local event?

A good location, plenty of people (manpower), money, food and drink facilities, a stage, police and first aid.

6. Who should fund local events?

Local or national government? Local people? Local businesses?

7. How can hosting local and national events affect local areas?

Builds a sense of community, brings money to local businesses, “puts them on the map” (= makes them well-known across the country).

8. What part is played by the media in local and national events?

Them media can publicise the event, so that more people attend, both from the local area and beyond. The media could also inspire other people to do something similar.

9. What do you think such events will be like in the future?

Make one or two suggestions and give reasons why they might be like this.

10. Do you think it is important to take part in local activities?
11. Do you think it is important to have a sense of local community spirit?
12. What are the advantages of being part of a close-knit community?
13. In what ways do neighbours co-operate and help each other in your city?
14. How has people’s sense of community spirit changed in recent years in your city?
15. In your country, what different communities do people feel they are part of?
16. Do you think this will change in the future?

Making Things

1. What traditional crafts are still found in your country?

Seal cutting, paper cutting, embroidery, wood carving, pottery, stone carving, engraving, calligraphy, glass blowing.

2. Compare the pleasure given by hand-made items and machine-made items.

Most people prefer hand-made items, perhaps because each item is unique whereas mass-produced items are the same.

3. Do you think hand-made items will be widely available in the future?

Many people predicted years ago that hand-made items would disappear as mass-produced ones became more widely available, but this hasn't happened. In fact, hand-made items seem to be getting slowly more popular.

4. Which crafts or creative arts are taught in schools in your country?

Refer to question 1 for ideas and also consider metalwork, woodwork, dressmaking, painting and drawing.

5. Do you think schools should teach these creative activities?

These activities may be useful but is there enough time in the school schedule?

6. How important are these activities to individuals or society?

Give at least one example of each showing why they are important.

7. How has machinery taken over from humans in making things?

Give examples of products that were once made by hand, but are not usually made by hand any more.

8. What role do you think machinery will play in the economy in the future?

Consider costs and employment. Refer to question 3 too.

9. What are the effects of increased automation on people's lives?

Consider ways in which it makes people's lives better and worse.

Handicrafts

1. What traditional crafts are still found in your country?
2. Is your hometown famous for any handmade products?
3. Why do some people prefer to make something themselves rather than buy it ready-made from a shop?
4. Do people in your country make many things by hand?
5. Do many people in your country make their own clothes?
6. What skills does a person need to make their own clothes?

7. Do men and women make different things by hand?
8. Do you think hand-made items will be widely available in the future?
9. What things do you think will continue to be made by hand in the future?

Creativity

10. Which crafts or creative arts are taught in schools in your country?
11. Do you think schools should teach these creative activities?
12. What are the benefits of children learning how to make something by hand?
13. What is the value of encouraging the development of creativity in children?
14. To make something by hand, does a person need to have any special skills or talent?
15. What (things) does a person need to make something by hand?
16. How important are these activities to individuals or society?

Automation

17. How has machinery taken over from humans in making things?
18. What role do you think machinery will play in the economy in the future?
19. What are the effects of increased automation on people's lives?

Comparing handmade and machine-made products

20. Compare the pleasure given by hand-made items and machine-made items.
21. Compare handmade and machine-made products.
22. Which do people prefer to use?
23. Which are better quality?
24. What are some things that are best made by hand and some things that are best made using machines?
25. Compare the things that are handmade today with what used to be handmade 20 (50) years ago.
26. What have been some of the effects on your country of the globalisation of manufacturing?

Marriage

1. What kinds of wedding presents do people usually give in your country?

It is customary to give money when you attend a wedding reception (party), but do people (e.g. close friends and family members) also give other presents?

2. Compare the advantages of having a big wedding and a small wedding?

The question asks you to compare the advantages, so focus on those rather than the disadvantages.

3. Why do people enjoy celebrating events such as weddings?

Weddings celebrate the uniting of two families, they celebrate love, they provide a good reason to eat and drink a lot!

4. Do you think that there is an ideal age for getting married?

If you don't want to give an exact age, you can give an age range. Give reasons to support your opinion.

5. Do you think that men and women have different attitudes to getting married in your culture?

Be careful not to over-generalise by using the word 'always'!

6. How should family and work responsibilities be shared in a marriage?

Do you believe that the man should go out to work while the woman should stay at home or do you think that both can work and share housework?

7. How much interest do people show in the marriages of famous people?

There seems to be almost as much interest (in cities at least) as in Britain and America! What might be the reasons for this?

8. How important is marriage for a society?

Think about society, rather than the individuals getting married and their families.

9. Do you think that attitudes to marriage may change in the future?

Make one or two suggestions with reasons.

Marriage

1. Do you think that there is an ideal age for getting married?
2. Do men and women have different attitudes to getting married in your culture?
3. How should family and work responsibilities be shared in a marriage?
4. How much interest do people show in the marriages of famous people?
5. How important is marriage for a society?
6. Do you think that attitudes to marriage may change in the future?

Weddings

7. What kinds of wedding presents do people usually give in your country?
8. Compare the advantages of having a big wedding and a small wedding?
9. Why do people enjoy celebrating events such as weddings?
10. What happens at a wedding celebration in your country?
11. Do people eat, drink and dance at wedding celebrations in your country?
12. Why are wedding celebrations important?
13. Why do many people spend a lot of money on wedding celebrations?
14. Do you think people spend too much on weddings?
15. Do you think it is important to spend a lot of money on wedding celebrations?
16. Compare the advantages of small wedding celebrations and large ones.
17. What would be the ideal wedding celebration for you?
18. Compare modern weddings in your country with traditional ones.
19. Which would you prefer, a modern-style wedding or a traditional-style wedding?
20. Do you know of any differences between weddings in your country and those in English speaking countries?

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Men and Women

1. Generally, do you think that men and women have different characteristics?

Traditionally, men are viewed as being strong, decisive, ambitious, and determined, whereas women are seen as being docile, tender, quiet, and graceful. Do you agree with this traditional view? How is this view being challenged in modern society?

2. Do you think that men and women are often better suited to different jobs?

Often, this is connected to the previous question. Women have generally been considered to make better nurses, teachers, and secretaries, whilst men have become soldiers, policemen, and politicians. Do you think that these ideas hold water, particularly in modern society?

3. Why are women rarely well-represented in the higher levels of government and business?

Sexism – many men view women as inferior.
Laws provide insufficient protection for women.
Women often interrupt their careers to have children.
Women are "taught" to behave in certain ways when they still children.
Many women only entered the job market during the last 20 years and haven't had time to get to the top yet.

4. Many people believe that "a woman's place is in the home". Do you agree or disagree with this idea?

Agree: Children need to be cared for by their mothers. It is a woman's duty to take care of the home whilst the man earns money.
Disagree: Children can be cared for by grandparents or trained professionals. Men and women should be given equal opportunities. Often, the man cannot earn enough money to support the family.

5. Do you generally find that you get on better with men or women?

As well as giving general reasons, you could also give specific examples from your experience.

6. Do you think that men and women want different things from life?

Many people think that men and women basically want the same things. Others disagree. Also consider the ways that men and women try to get the things they want from life.

Money

Shopping

1. Why does shopping make some people feel happy?
2. Do men and women have different attitudes to shopping?
3. How might shopping change in the future?

Credit cards

4. How important are credit cards nowadays?
5. What effects have credit cards had on people and society?
6. Do you think that credit cards have changed people's shopping habits?
7. Are there any dangers of using credit cards for young people and for society?
8. Do you think that we will live in a cashless society in the future?

Money and work

9. Are there salary differences between different types of job in your country?
10. How important is salary when people are choosing a career?
11. Which jobs do you think will be highly paid in the future?

Money and children

12. What kinds of things do children spend money on?
13. Do you think that children today are given too much money?
14. Do you think that children should be given pocket money?

Teenagers and money

15. What impact do teenagers have on the economy?
16. What influence does money have on teenagers?
17. How important is money for teenagers?
18. What do teenagers spend money on?

19. Do you think teenagers generally spend money in a responsible way?
20. Do teenagers spend more money than old people?
21. Do you think teenagers should be given pocket money by their parents?
22. How much pocket money do you think is suitable?
23. What problems can result if a teenager has too much money?
24. How do you think children and teenagers could be taught how to use money responsibly?

Public money

25. How do governments raise money?
26. If public spending in your country was increased, what would be the priorities?
27. Who should pay for services such as education and healthcare?

Saving and spending money

28. How important is it to save money for the future?
29. Do adults and children have different attitudes to saving money?
30. What are some ways of encouraging people to save?
31. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages when young people do not save much money?
32. Why do some people like spending money so much?
33. In your country, do people in the cities and in the rural areas have different attitudes towards saving money?
34. How is the way people save today different to the way people used to save?
35. How do you think saving will change in the future?
36. How has the way people spend their money changed in your country in recent years?
37. What are some good ways to manage and save money?
38. What kinds of things should you not spend money on if you want to save?

Music

1. Where do people go to listen to music in your country?

This question is asking where concerts or other public displays of music are held.

2. What are some of the good and bad things about going to a concert?

Things to consider include the crowd, the atmosphere, the distance between the audience and the performer and the acoustics (sound quality).

3. How has technology changed the way people listen to music?

Consider CD players, MP3 players, iPods, etc.

4. Why do some people choose to learn to play a musical instrument?

Is it more of a personal choice or are they pushed to learn by their parents? Why do many people think that learning to play a musical instrument is beneficial?

5. What might be the best age to start learning to play a musical instrument?

Make suggestion – preferably an age range – possibly based on your own experience or the experiences of people you know.

6. Should music be studied as a school subject?

Give reasons to support your answer. Consider whether priority should be given to other, perhaps more important, subjects.

7. How important is music for a country?

In what ways does music provide a national identity?

8. Why a national song or anthem can create feelings of patriotism?

Such songs and anthems are strongly associated with love of one's country and singing them together with a crowd can create strong feelings of national unity.

9. How important do you think traditional music will be in the future?

Consider how music is becoming more international and the effects this could have.

Listening to music

1. Where do people go to listen to music in your country?
2. What are some of the good and bad things about going to a concert?
3. How has technology changed the way people listen to music?

Musical instruments

4. Why do some people choose to learn to play a musical instrument?
5. What might be the best age to start learning to play a musical instrument?
6. Why do some people like to play a musical instrument in the open?
7. Can you describe a traditional musical instrument from your country?
8. How do traditional musical instruments from your country sound?

Music and culture

9. Why a national song or anthem can create feelings of patriotism?
10. How important do you think traditional music will be in the future?
11. Is music an important part of the culture in your country?
12. Is there a relationship between people's culture and the music they listen to?

Different musical tastes

13. Would you say that people of all ages like the same kinds of music?
14. What types of music are popular with your generation?
15. What types of music are popular with people of your parents' generation?
16. Compare the music that young people and older people like to listen to.
17. Compare traditional music and modern music from your country.
18. Do people group others according to the music they like?
19. Do friends usually have the same tastes in music?
20. Do you think people's tastes in music change as they get older?
21. Why do you think people of different ages have different tastes in music?

Musical influences

22. Has music in your country changed much in the past 20 (50) years or so?

23. How might music change in the future?
24. Do you think people in different countries listen to different kinds of music?
25. Compare Western music and music from your country.
26. Has music in your country been influenced by Western music?
27. Has music in your country been influenced by other cultures?
28. Has the influence of Western music in your country been positive or negative?
29. Why has American music been such a big influence throughout the whole world?

Music and children

30. What kinds of music do (small) children in your country like to listen to?
31. Should music be studied as a school subject?
32. Why do some parents want their children to learn a musical instrument?
33. What are the benefits of music for (young) children?
34. What are the different ways that young children come into contact with music?
35. Do you think it's important for children to (learn to) sing?
36. What benefits do children get from singing with others?
37. On what occasions do children sing?
38. What effects do you think music has on the early development of children?
39. What are the benefits of including music in the early education of children?
40. What can people’s musical abilities tell us about their personalities?

The uses and effects of music

41. What effects can music have on people?
42. What are the different places where people can listen to music?
43. Why is music used in these situations?
44. Why do a lot of shops have background music?
45. What sort of music do you often hear in a shopping mall or supermarket?
46. What do you think of this?
47. Do you think it is a good idea to have music in workplaces?
48. Do you think it is a good idea to have music playing in a restaurant?
49. What kind of music do they usually have playing in restaurants?
50. What effects on people can this music in a restaurant have?
51. Can music ever have bad effects on people?
52. Do you think that music can sometimes be considered to be noise pollution?

Technology and music

53. How has modern technology influenced music?
54. Do you think people should be allowed to freely download and share music from the Internet?
55. What's your opinion on the question of the piracy of music?
56. Do you think copyright laws are important?
57. In what ways do you think technology will change the music industry in the future?
58. Do you think computers will ever replace music composers (and/or musicians)?

Neighbours

1. How important are neighbours in people's lives?

What kinds of things do people do with their neighbours? Do people ask their neighbours to help them in certain ways? How are relationships with neighbours similar or different to those with family members and friends?

2. How have relationships between neighbours changed in recent years?

Have they improved or worsened, or just changed?

3. What kinds of local community events are held in your neighbourhood?

Think about local festivals and celebrations. Do these take place on a regular basis?

4. What are the benefits of community events?

They might bring money to a community or help neighbours feel closer together or attract outside interest to the community.

5. Are there any disadvantages of being part of a community?

People feel part of a group that can support them and that they can share ideas

with.

6. Would you agree that TV communities (e.g. in soap operas) are popular because people no longer have real neighbourhood communities?

Or is it that the TV communities are more interesting and scandalous. Or perhaps it is simply entertainment for tired people after work.

7. Why have virtual communities (e.g. Internet chat rooms) increased in popularity?

Perhaps people feel that real communities are too hard to deal with on a personal level or perhaps it is the use of technology that has caught their imaginations. Perhaps chat rooms offer people to be the kind of person they fantasise about being rather than having to be their real selves.

8. What kinds of community people will identify with in the future?

Consider family, friends, neighbours, special interest groups, TV communities and virtual communities.

Neighbours

1. How important are neighbours in people's lives?
2. How have relationships between neighbours changed in recent years?
3. Do you think a people's relations with their neighbours are important?
4. How can people get to know their neighbours?
5. How can people get along with their neighbours?
6. What are some ways that neighbours can help each other?
7. What are some (other) ways in which neighbours affect each other?
8. Have relations between neighbours changed in the last 20 (50) years?
9. How do modern working and living conditions affect people's relationships with their neighbours?
10. Why do you think many people today are isolated from their neighbours?
11. What can be done about it?
12. Do you think people today are lonelier than people were in the past?
13. Why do some people choose to live alone?
14. Do people's relationships with their neighbours change as they get older?

Communities

15. What kinds of local community events are held in your neighbourhood?
16. What are the benefits of community events?
17. Are there any disadvantages of being part of a community?
18. Is it a problem that many people today are so busy that they don't spend much time at home or in their local communities?
19. How are people's relationships with their neighbours different in the countryside and in the city?
20. In what ways can young people show a sense of responsibility towards their communities?
21. Can you suggest any ways to encourage good attitudes in children towards their neighbours?
22. In your country, what are the responsibilities and duties of citizens towards their community?

'Unreal' communities

23. Would you agree that TV communities (e.g. in soap operas) are popular because people no longer have real neighbourhood communities?
24. Why have virtual communities (e.g. Internet chat rooms) increased in popularity?
25. Do you think there are any problems with people identifying closely with TV communities and online communities?
26. What kinds of community people will identify with in the future?

The global community

27. Would you agree that people in the world today live in a global village?
28. Do you think people today have more of sense of being part of the global community than a sense of being part of their local communities?
29. Which do you think is more important for people, to have a sense of being part of the global community or a sense of being part of their local communities?

Newspapers and Magazines

Newspapers and Magazines

1. Why are sales of newspapers generally higher than sales of magazines?
2. What different types of newspapers and magazines are available where you live?
3. Are newspapers and magazines more popular now than in the past?
4. In your country, would you say people prefer to read magazines or newspapers?
5. In general, what kind of people prefer reading magazines and what kind of people prefer reading newspapers?
6. What benefits do people get from reading newspapers and magazines?
7. What are the most popular newspapers and magazines in your country today?
8. In general, do people read a magazine the same way that they read a newspaper?
9. When do people read an article in a magazine or newspaper in detail and when do they just skim an article?
10. What are the main differences between (news) magazines and newspapers?
11. Can we believe everything we read in newspapers and magazines?
12. Why do many people believe what they read in magazines and newspapers?

Magazines

13. Do men and women usually read different kinds of magazines?
14. Why do some people prefer magazines to books?
15. Do people with different jobs read different magazines?
16. Are different magazines aimed at different age groups?
17. Do magazines have positive or negative effects on young people?
18. Which kinds of magazines do you think it is best for young people to read?
19. To what extent do fashion magazines influence what people wear?
20. What kinds of magazines do you think will be popular in the future?
21. Would you say magazines play an important role in people's lives?
22. Do people of different ages read different kinds of magazines?
23. What can people learn from reading magazines?

Newspapers

24. Do you think it’s important to read a newspaper every day?

25. What do you think is the purpose of headlines in a newspaper?
26. What different kinds of news stories are in newspapers?
27. Apart from news stories, what else is in newspapers?
28. Why do some people only read the headlines when they read a newspaper?
29. What's your opinion of people who only read the headlines in a newspaper?
30. What can we learn about other parts of the world from newspapers?
31. What benefits can we get from learning about what is happening in other countries?
32. Is the news that we get from different parts of the world different?
33. How do you feel about government censorship of the news?
34. Do you think older people like newspapers more than younger people?
35. Do you think young people and older people like the same kinds of news stories?
36. How could newspapers attract more readers?
37. Is there any value in reading old newspapers?
38. Why do some people just skim the headlines when they read a newspaper?

News and information on the internet

39. Why do many people nowadays use the Internet as a source of information?
40. Are there any dangers in using the Internet as a source of news and information?
41. What effect might the Internet have on the future of newspapers and magazines?

Journalists

42. How important are journalists in modern society?
43. Compare the job of a journalist on a magazine and a journalist on a newspaper.
44. What special skills should a journalist have?
45. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working as a journalist?
46. What pressures do journalists face?

The role of the press

47. How important are newspapers in influencing public opinion?
48. How reliable is the information given in different newspapers?
49. What responsibilities do newspapers have to their readers?
50. What effects can newspapers have on society?
51. What restrictions should there be on the press?

Organisations

Working in different organisations

1. Besides companies, what are some other types of places where people work in your country?
2. Do you think the size of an organisation has any advantages for employees?
3. Why are so many people willing to accept a job in a new organisation?
4. When managing an organisation, what are the most important things to pay attention to?

Shift work

5. Why do some jobs require employees to work during the day and at night?
6. Why do some companies work 24 hours a day while others don't?
7. Why do some people choose to do this kind of work?
8. Why are some shops open at night?
9. Should employees be given the choice of whether or not to do shift work?
10. How do you think doing shift work affects a person’s life?

Factory work

11. Would you like to work in a factory?
12. Compare working in a factory and working in an office.
13. Compare mental work and physical work.
14. If you were the managing a factory to make a product, how would you organise it?
15. Why are factories often on the edge of a city?
16. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having factories far from where people live?
17. What are the effects on people and the environment of having big factories?

Types of organisations

18. What effects on society do organisations have?
19. Do you think small businesses have much impact on the world?
20. What kind of organisation would you prefer to work in?
21. Compare working for a government organisation to working for a private company.
22. What effects do international organisations have on the world?
23. What effects do non-profit organisations have on the world?

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Outdoor Activities

1. What are the most popular outdoor activities where you live?

Do not only mention sports! There are also activities such as hiking, skipping, walking, tai chi, kite flying, taking the dog for a walk and numerous children's games.

2. What are the benefits of doing things outdoors?

Most people will mention health, but are there any other benefits? Consider meeting and/or making friends, getting (fresh?) air and getting to know the neighbours.

3. Do older people and younger people enjoy the same kinds of outdoor activities?

I have never seen a group of old people playing basketball and rarely see young people doing tai chi, but there may be other outdoor activities that both young and old enjoy.

4. What effects do climate and the environment have on what people do outdoors?

The climate probably has a great influence, since people are unlikely to participate in many outdoor activities in the snow and rain, though there are certain outdoor activities suitable under these conditions (e.g. snowball fighting!). The environment could have varying influences, depending on how you interpret the word 'environment'. If you mean pollution, people may not want to go outside

much in heavy polluted areas. If you mean ‘terrain’, then hiking is better suited to the countryside.

5. What kind of protection do people need if they spend a lot of time outdoors?

Think of the clothes they might need to wear – hat, gloves, sunglasses – and whether they might need creams (sunbathing) or other protection.

6. Which jobs involve a lot of work outdoors?

Consider manual workers, construction workers, police officers and firemen.

7. Compare working outdoors with working in an office.

Consider, for example, the level of comfort (heat and air conditioning in an office and good/bad weather outside.

8. Do people in your country prefer to work outdoors or not?

Give one or two reasons why you think this might be the case.

Outdoor activities

1. What are the most popular outdoor activities where you live?
2. What are the benefits of doing things outdoors?
3. Do older people and younger people enjoy the same kinds of outdoor activities?
4. Do people spend more time outdoors today than they did 20 (50) years ago?
5. Are there any outdoor activities that many people used to do but which most people don't do now?
6. What sorts of activities do children like to do outdoors?
7. Do boys and girls like to do the same kinds of things outdoors?
8. Do old people and young people like doing the same kinds of things outdoors?
9. Is it necessary for schools to have outdoor sports activities for students?
10. Compare outdoor sports and indoor sports.

Outdoor environments

11. What effects do climate and the environment have on what people do outdoors?
12. What kind of protection do people need if they spend a lot of time outdoors?
13. How does the weather (the environment) affect what activities people do outdoors?
14. Has the air quality in your hometown has improved in recent years?
15. Has noise pollution increased in recent years in your hometown?
16. Do you think it will be easy for governments to solve environmental problems?
17. How has the environment in cities (the countryside) changed in recent years?

Working outdoors

18. Which jobs involve a lot of work outdoors?
19. Compare working outdoors with working in an office.
20. Do people in your country prefer to work outdoors or not?
21. Why do more and more people work in offices nowadays?
22. Do you think it's healthier to work outdoors or indoors?
23. If you had to choose an outdoors job, what would you choose to do?

Peace and Quiet

1. How peaceful is your area?
2. Compare the noises people hear in the cities and in the countryside.
3. What are some of the problems that urban noise may lead to?
4. How might the level of urban noise be reduced?
5. What kinds of places do people go to when they want to be alone?
6. Why is it sometimes important for people to be alone?
7. How easy is it to find regular time to be alone nowadays?
8. At what age is being part of a group most important?
9. Are there any disadvantages of spending too much time in a group?
10. Do you think future societies will be based on community groups or individuals?

People

1. How would you like other people to view you?

Mention the characteristics you would like people to recognise in you. If you think you do not have a characteristic, which you would like to have, say how you could change.

2. Do you think that people are often influenced by material things (e.g. money, cars)?

Use an adverb of frequency (often, sometimes, occasionally) or and adverb of quantity (a lot, quite a lot, a little) in your answer. You could even mix the two – "I think people are sometimes influenced a lot …" Give your opinion and one or two examples to support it.

3. Do people's characters change as they get older?

People's characters depend on many things, including their experiences, relationships, health, and financial situation. These things change over time. How much does a person's character depend on their age and how much on other things? What character changes happen? Are these changes good or bad? Give examples to support your answers to these questions.

4. Some scientists say that people are products of their environment. How far do you agree?

This is a similar (but more difficult!) question. Do people from different backgrounds have different characters? In what ways are they still similar? Do all (or most) people have certain basic characteristics, regardless of their environment? When the environment changes, do their characters change, too?

5. What do you think are the most important qualities a person should have?

Give the most important ones and say why they are important.

6. Older people often tell their younger relatives to "lead a good life". What do you think they mean?

This is a tough question, but try to be specific. Do they mean you should be honest? Perhaps they mean you should act in traditional ways? Could they mean that you should do what you want to do ('go where your heart leads you')? Remember to use plenty of modal verbs in your answer to this question.

People in general

1. How would you like other people to view you?
2. Do you think that people are often influenced by material things?
3. Do people's characters change as they get older?
4. Some scientists say that people are products of their environment. How far do you agree?
5. What do you think are the most important qualities a person should have?
6. Older people often tell their younger relatives to "lead a good life". What do you think they mean?

Interpersonal relationships in society

7. Do you think people today are closer to other people or more isolated from other people, compared to the past?
8. In general, what are the factors that are most important for having good communication between people?
9. Do you think modern people have enough time to communicate with others?
10. Do you think relationships with other people are more complex than they used to be many years ago?
11. What are some of the different kinds of relationships that people in modern society have with others?
12. What types of people are easiest to become friends with?
13. What's the best way for two people to get to know each other?
14. Why are friendships and working relationships often mixed together?
15. What are some ways to get along well with other people?
16. What are some differences between spending time with friends and spending time with family?

Living with others

17. When people live together, what are the most important things to enable them to get along with each other?
18. What sorts of people are good to live with and what sorts of people are not good to live with?
19. When people live together, what are some of the ways they influence each

other?
20. Why do some people prefer to live alone?
21. What are some of the problems that people might have if they live alone?

Community size

22. Do you think the closeness of people to each other is related to the size of a community?
23. How are relationships between people different in cities and in the countryside?
24. What do you think future relationships between people will be like?

Modern technology and interpersonal relationships

25. How have mobile phones and the Internet improved the way people communicate today?
26. What are the advantages and disadvantages of, on the one hand, using mobile phones and the Internet to communicate?
27. In the future, do you think the use of high-tech communication equipment will improve co-operation between people?
28. Do you think the Internet has brought people closer together?
29. At home, do you think the computer has a good effect on family life?
30. In the future, do you think these inventions will lead to people spending time with other people less than they do today?
31. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of spending less time with other people?

The Performing Arts

The performing arts in general

1. What kinds of performing arts are most popular in your country?
2. Is it expensive to go to a live performance in your country?
3. Do you think the performing arts are important in life?
4. Do you think art forms such as dance and drama have an impact on people's everyday lives?

5. Do performing arts influence people’s beliefs and actions?
6. Do you think the government should financially support the performing arts?
7. Has globalisation had much impact on the performing arts in your country?

Traditional performing arts in your country

8. Are traditional art forms performed very much in Your country?
9. What relationship do traditional performing arts have to history?
10. Does your country have any traditional performing arts that are displays of sport or physical activities?
11. What are some of the differences between performing arts in your country and foreign ones?
12. Do young people in your country like the traditional performing arts?
13. If traditional performing arts disappeared, how would that affect life in your country?
14. What is the government doing to help preserve traditional performing arts?
15. Do you think they should receive financial support from the government?
16. Do you think people from one culture can appreciate traditional performing arts from other cultures?
17. Do you think it's important to see traditional performing arts from other cultures or countries?

TV and traditional performing arts

18. Do you think the popularity of TV has an effect on traditional performing arts?
19. Do you think TV increases the opportunities for people to see traditional performing arts?
20. Compare watching a live performance and watching it on TV.
21. Do you think television will eventually replace live performances?

The performing arts and children

22. What are the benefits of having children watch artistic performances?
23. What are the benefits of children learning to perform, such as learning to act, sing or dance in front of an audience?
24. Do you think it's good for parents to have their children learning how to

perform from a young age?
25. Do you think the performing arts should be included at all schools?
26. Do boys and girls have the same feelings about performing (watching) artistic performances?
27. Do you think the government should have programmes to help children learn about performing arts?

Dance

28. What can children learn from dancing?
29. How can children benefit from learning to dance?
30. Are there any differences between boys and girls when they learn dancing?

Personality

1. What are the qualities that a person needs to succeed in life?

Consider self-confidence, determination, ambition, intelligence, ability to make friends, ability to spot opportunities, good time management.

2. To what extent do you think successful people are happy people?

Success may not equal happiness, but this question is asking if you think there is a general link between the two.

3. Do people choose friends and partners with similar personalities to their own?

Answer this question by giving a general answer, since it is unlikely that every person chooses friends and partners in the same way.

4. What personality traits are considered to be typical of your culture?

you can answer this in to ways – first by saying what people from your culture think and second by finding out what people from other cultures think.

5. Which aspects of modern life have a bad effect on people's personalities?

Consider TV and films, music, clothes, consumerism, materialism, advertising,

politicians, wealth and the media. All of these things are considered by many to bad influences on people's personalities. Why might so many people think so?

6. Which personality traits might be most valuable to society in the future?

This will depend a lot on how you think society will develop, so think about that first. Will things continue much as they are now or will there be changes?

7. Are some characteristics are more typical of men than women?

Give your answer, but try not to be sexist and offensive!

8. How can a person's upbringing affect his/her personality?

Give examples, but remember that people react to situations in different ways.

9. How much can events change the personality we are born with?

This is a variation of the previous question, but can include adulthood.

Personality development

10. Are the characteristics of parents always passed on to their children?
11. Do children usually have personalities that are similar to their parents?
12. How do parents affect the development of their children's personalities?
13. Do you think people become more like their parents as they grow older?
14. Are young people more influenced by their friends or their family?

Photographs

1. Are photographs better than postcards as a record of travel?

Postcard pictures are usually taken by professionals and sometimes from the air. On the other hand, photographs are more personal and nowadays, using a digital camera, you can take plenty of shots very cheaply.

2. Why do some people use a professional photographer for family photos?

It's more expensive, but the quality should be much better. Think of the occasions on which people usually use a professional photographer.

3. How important are photographs as a record of family life?

You can see how people change as they grow up. You can record holidays and special events. They also provide a talking point for family get-togethers.

4. Why are photographs often used in advertisements?

Do advertisements tend to be more visual nowadays?

5. Assess the value of photographs in communicating the news.

Think of the different impacts of words and pictures.

6. How important are photographs as a record of history?

Again, consider the effects of reading texts and looking at pictures.

7. What is the function of the photograph of the author on a book or the performer on a CD?

Do people want to see who wrote the book, sings the songs or plays the music?

8. What are the similarities and differences between a good photograph and a good painting?

Think of at least one similarity and at least one difference to balance the answer.

9. How might technology affect the future of photographs and photography?

Make one or two suggestions based on the way that technology is developing.

Photographs in general

1. What is the importance of photographs?

2. Do you think photographs are more important for adults or for children?
3. Why do some people not like being photographed?
4. Are photographs better than postcards as a record of travel?
5. Why do some people use a professional photographer for family photos?
6. How important are photographs as a record of family life?
7. What are some differences between photographs today and photographs 20 (50) years ago?

Photographs in the media

8. Do you think photographs are a useful means of communication?
9. How are photographs used in the news media?
10. Why do newspapers sometimes have photographs with their news stories?
11. What qualities do you think photographs in newspapers should have?
12. Do you think photographs play a very important part in the media?
13. Why are photographs often used in advertisements?
14. Do you think a photograph can affect a person's opinions or beliefs?

Photographs of celebrities

15. Do you think photographs of people that we see in media such as newspapers and magazines can affect what we think of those people?
16. Do photographs help people to become famous?
17. What is the purpose of a photograph of the author on a book or a performer on a CD?
18. Why do some people invade the privacy of celebrities by taking photographs?
19. Do you think this should be illegal?
20. Why do people like to look at photos of celebrities?

Photography as art

21. In your country, do many people visit photographic exhibitions?
22. Do you think photographs can ever be called art?
23. What are the qualities of artistic photographs?
24. What benefits can people get from visiting a photographic exhibition?
25. Do artists and photographers use similar skills?
26. What are the similarities and differences between a good photograph and a good painting?

Photography and technology

27. Compare old photographs and new photographs.
28. How has photography changed over the past few decades?
29. What have been the results of these changes in photograph technology?
30. Why do some people prefer to take photographs while others prefer to take videos?
31. What are some different ways that people keep photographs?
32. When people buy a camera, what things do they consider?
33. Now that many people have digital cameras, what changes has this made to photography?
34. Have mobile phones with cameras changed photography?
35. Is it easier to take photos using digital cameras than it is using the old style cameras?
36. Do you think a person needs any instruction before they use a digital camera?
37. Do you think it is easy for everybody to get used to digital cameras?
38. How might technology affect the future of photographs and photography?

Attractive photographs

39. What makes a photograph attractive to people?
40. Do you think colour photos are more attractive than black and white photos?
41. What kinds of photographs especially catch people's attention?

Good and bad photographs

42. What are some of the differences between a good photograph and a bad one?
43. What would you say are the most important things to consider when taking a photograph?
44. Do you think photographs taken by professional photographers are better quality than the photos that average people take?
45. Do you think the quality of the photograph is always more important than the contents of the photograph?
46. What are some reasons why a person might throw away a photograph?
47. How could a photograph become worth a lot of money?

Photography and history

48. How important are photographs as a record of history?

49. What are the reasons for having old photographs in museums?
50. How can a photograph change a person's understanding of an historical event?
51. Do you think photography has any relationship to culture?

The impact of photographs on people

52. How can photos in newspapers leave a strong impression on people?
53. Do you think a photograph could change events?
54. Why do some people especially like looking at photographs?

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Places of Interest

1. What kind of places of interest do people in your country often like to visit?

This is quite an easy question, but notice that it asks about "kind of places of interest", not "places". You could also add extra information, such as when they usually go to these places and who with.
"British people often like to visit palaces and the homes of aristocrats (stately homes) in the countryside. People usually visit these places at weekends and on Bank Holidays during the spring and summer, when the weather is usually pleasant. The weather is important, as these stately homes usually have extensive gardens for visitors to walk in."

2. Do you think that a person's age affects what they consider to be 'a place of interest'?

People of different ages often have different interests, which will obviously affect the kinds of places they enjoy visiting. Discuss exactly what older and younger people consider places of interest to be and why they feel that way. Is age a more important factor than others, such as hobbies?

3. What modern-day places do you think that people in the future will consider interesting?

Perhaps they will be interested in seeing our homes and how we lived. Maybe they will like some examples of our architecture. They might be interested in our

shopping centres, because they do all their shopping online and don't have them. They may even be interested in (what they consider) our out-dated cars and aircraft, just as many people today are interested in old cars and aircraft.

4. Do you think that places of interest often also have some educational value?

What can we learn from places of interest, particularly historic ones? Do teachers often take their students to visit such places? Can you think of any places where students are not often taken, but should be?

5. What more can we do to protect places of interest?

The question stresses the word 'more', so you need to focus on things which are either not being done at all or not being done properly at the moment. Do not give a very general answer such as "The government must introduce some laws to protect places of interest."

Possessions

1. What kinds of possessions are important to people in modern society?

Name the items and say why they are important to people. You could also say whether you agree that they are important or not. Are these items the same as those that were important in the past? Do people of different ages and backgrounds have different opinions about which possessions are important?

2. Do you think that people's possessions reflect their personalities?

If you see a person in the street or meet them for the first time, you naturally judge them initially by their clothes, by the car they are getting into, or by what they are carrying. If we take cars for example, it is clear that different people prefer different types and brands. How do particular items or brands appeal to various people? Are there any other influences, such as income, fashion, friends and relatives, and location? Give one or two examples.

3. Do men and women like to have the same kinds of possessions?

Compare the possessions that men and women like to have. Say why they like these possessions and try to give reasons for any differences in preferences.

4. Do certain possessions give people status in your country?

In a similar way to judging a person's personality by their possessions, we also judge their status. Think of which possessions give people status and why. Possessions people often use to show their wealth or status include houses (big and luxurious!), cars (Ferrari, Porsche, Rolls Royce), jewellery (a Rolex watch, a diamond necklace), clothes by famous designers (Calvin Klein, Miuccia Prada, Giorgio Armani), artwork (e.g. paintings), and antiques (e.g. furniture).

5. In the future, what possessions do you think that people will value most?

Answer in the same way as for the first question, but use the future tense! You can also add ideas from your answers to questions three and four.

6. If you possess any item in the world, what would you choose?

Describe the item in detail, say why you would choose it, how it might change your lifestyle, and whether you think you will ever actually possess it.

Personal property

1. What kinds of possessions are important to people in modern society?
2. Do you think that people's possessions reflect their personalities?
3. Do men and women like to have the same kinds of possessions?
4. Do certain possessions give people status in your country?
5. In the future, what possessions do you think that people will value most?
6. If you possess any item in the world, what would you choose?
7. How have people's attitudes towards personal property changed in the last 20 (50) years in your country?
8. Do people have more personal possessions than before?
9. Do you think it's a good thing that people have more possessions than before?
10. Why do some people like to buy expensive things while other people prefer cheaper things?
11. Do people from different social classes have the same attitudes towards their possessions?

12. Do old people and young people have the same ideas about the value of things?

Losing possessions

13. How do people lose things?
14. In what situations is it easy for people to lose things?
15. What kinds of things do people most often lose?
16. Who more easily loses things, children or adults?
17. How do people manage when they lose something important?
18. What do people do when they lose something?
19. What are some things that people can do to reduce the chances of losing things?
20. What would you do if you found something valuable that someone had lost?

Products

Home appliances

1. What electrical appliances do people in your country usually have at home?
2. What benefits do people get from using these things?
3. What electrical appliances have made it easier for people to work or study?
4. Some people say that modern electrical appliances make people lazy. Do you agree?
5. Do you think there are any disadvantages of using electrical equipment in the home?
6. Who should take responsibility for the safety of electrical appliances in the home?
7. How do people manage when there is a blackout (= the electricity is cut off)?
8. How did people manage before they had electrical appliances in the home?
9. How was housework many decades ago different to housework today?

Product design

10. Do you think the design of the products people use is important?
11. Do you think the design of products is important for children?

12. Which do you think is more useful, a simple design or a complex design?
13. What qualities or skills do you think a good designer of products needs to have?

Inventions and technological development

14. What do you think are some of the most useful inventions that have been made?
15. How are the tools and equipment we use today different to those of 20 (50) years ago?
16. Would you say computers are ‘user-friendly’?
17. What skills and knowledge do you think people need to be a good inventor?
18. How do you feel about modern science and technology?
19. Do we really need to be continuously presented with new products and new inventions?
20. Why do you think we are constantly being urged to buy new products?
21. If you were the manager of a company that had produced a new invention, how would you promote it?
22. How should new products be tested before being sold to people?
23. In what ways do you think technology will develop in the next, say, 20 or 30 years?
24. Do you think there will be any negative effects resulting from future technology?
25. What conditions will be necessary to encourage the future development of technology in your country?

Consumerism

26. Do you think it's necessary for people to buy as many things as they do?
27. Do you think it's good for the national economy if more people buy more things?
28. What sorts of things do young people buy?
29. Do you think consumerism has any effects on the environment?
30. Do you think this damage to the environment is reversible?
31. Do you think excessive consumption can result in other problems?
32. Sometimes the more developed countries transport recyclable waste to less developed countries. What do you think of this?
33. Do you think there will be any changes to the way people buy things in the

future?
34. Do you think a high rate of consumption can be maintained into the future?
35. In the future, what changes do you think we will see in the things people buy?

Product quality

36. How can we be sure of the quality of things that we buy?
37. Which brands do people in your country trust to be of good quality?
38. What rights do consumers have?
39. How can the rights of consumers be protected?
40. How do you feel about food additives that are in food?

Radio

1. Are television programmes more popular than radio programmes?

They usually are. Give reasons why this is the case. You might even develop your answer by suggesting how radio could regain listeners.

2. What kinds of programmes are most suitable for the radio?

Give one or two ideas and reasons why.

3. What skills do you think you would need to be a good radio presenter?

Well-spoken, articulate, quick-thinking (especially for 'live' programmes – anything could go wrong!), punctual.

4. What are the benefits of having a national radio station?

Be careful to give reasons that refer to radio specifically, rather than to several different forms of media.

5. How can local radio serve the needs of communities?

Having a local radio station is certainly cheaper than having a local TV station. It can carry advertisements for local businesses, broadcast local news and keep people informed about local events.

6. How effective is radio as a means of advertising?

Compare radio with other forms of advertising, such as TV, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, billboards and leaflets.

7. How has radio influenced people's lives?

Make one or two suggestions and develop them.

8. Should governments pay for radio stations to operate?

Or should radio stations finance themselves through advertising revenue or funding from local people and businesses?

9. Do you think radio will be replaced by other forms of technology in the future?

This could happen unless radio can offer suitable advantages.

10. Is listening to the radio popular in your country?
11. Do you think radio is outdated now that we have TV?
12. Do young people and older people like the same kinds of radio programmes?
13. How have radio programmes changed in the last 20 (50) years?
14. How do you think radio programmes might change in the future?
15. Compare national and local radio stations in your country.
16. Which do you think is better for advertising – radio or TV?

Reading

Children and reading

1. At what age do children start learning to read in your country?
2. Should parents start teaching their children to read before they go to school?
3. Is this a suitable age to start learning to read?
4. How could learning to read be made enjoyable for children?

Types of reading

5. What kinds of books are most popular in your country?
6. How are books and magazines (newspapers) similar and how are they different?
7. What kinds of things do most people enjoy reading in your country?
8. What things do people of different ages enjoy reading?
9. How has the Internet influenced the way people read?
10. How might people's reading habits change in the future?

Libraries

11. When and why do you visit libraries?
12. What is the role of public libraries for people of different ages in your country?
13. Is it the responsibility of government to provide public libraries?

Reading Habits

14. What kinds of people like reading and what kinds of people don't like it much?
15. Do young people and old people like the same kinds of things?
16. Do men and women like to read the same kinds of things?
17. Do you think people read more or less today than in the past?
18. Compare people's reading tastes nowadays with those of the past.
19. How do you think people's reading habits will change in the future?
20. Do you think that people read enough nowadays?
21. Why don't some people enjoy reading?
22. What are the value of reading skills at different levels of education?
23. Compare the reading and watching television in terms of encouraging mental development.

Fictional characters

24. What kinds of fictional characters do children in your country like?
25. Do parents read stories to their children in your country?
26. What kind of stories do parents tell children?

27. Do secondary school students like the same kinds of stories as young children?
28. What can children learn from stories?
29. Can children tell the difference between real and fictional stories?
30. Do adults and children like reading the same things?
31. Compare the characters in children's stories with those in adults ones?
32. Why do adults like certain TV or movie stars?
33. Do girls and boys like the same kinds of characters in stories?

Relaxation (and Stress)

1. What are the most popular ways of relaxing in your country?

Make some suggestions and then develop your answer by talking about different groups of people, such as younger people and older people and people living in rural and urban areas.

2. Do men and women choose to relax in similar ways?

Give examples of how they relax in similar and indifferent ways.

3. What are the dangers of having no regular relaxation?

Give one or two possibilities and develop them. Most people will mention stress.

4. What are the main causes of stress that people experience where you live?

Consider pressures at work, pressure from the family, money worries and even apparently minor things that cause stress, such as being late or stuck in a traffic jam.

5. Do you think that people's lives are more stressful now than in the past?

Give a general answer then think of one or two examples of how society today is more stressful and one or two examples of how it is less so.

6. Do you think our lives will be more or less stressful in the future?

This depends on how you think society will develop in the future. Develop your answer by talking about the causes.

7. How can stress at work affect your personal life?

It can mean less tolerance of problems, reduced ability to interact with others, increased use of alcohol and/or tobacco.

8. What changes in lifestyle and work practises might help to reduce stress?

Better time management, more orderly work practises (e.g. not waiting until the last minute to do things), not working so much overtime, making sure you have sufficient relaxation and time alone.

Relaxation

1. Why is it important for people to relax?
2. In modern society, do you think it is easy to relax?
3. What are some of the more modern ways to relax?
4. Do people in cities relax in the same ways as people in the countryside?
5. Do young people choose to relax in different ways to older people?
6. Do you think doing nothing is a good way to relax?
7. Compare how men relax with how women relax.
8. Are there any differences in how people relax compared to 20 (50) years ago?
9. Are there more places to relax in your hometown than 20 (50) years ago?
10. Do you think the ways people relax will change in the future?
11. In the future, do you think people will have more time to relax?
12. Do you think that, in the future, robots and other hi-tech equipment will allow people to have more time to relax?

Stress

13. What are the main causes of stress that people experience where you live?
14. Do you think that people's lives are more stressful now than in the past?
15. Do you think our lives will be more or less stressful in the future?
16. Why is it sometimes difficult to relax?
17. How can people manage their lives so there is a balance between work and rest?
18. In the future, what might be the problems people will have that will make it more difficult for them to relax?

19. How can stress at work affect your personal life?
20. What changes in lifestyle and work practises might help to reduce stress?

Leisure facilities

21. Does your hometown have any facilities that people can use for relaxing?
22. What are the most popular entertainment facilities in your hometown?
23. What do you think of people who spend a lot of money on going to leisure facilities?

Science

1. What kind of person do you think makes a good scientist?

Consider qualities such as patience, creativity, experience, intelligence, and diligence. Give reasons why the qualities are important and specific examples where possible.

2. Do you think that modern scientific inventions have really improved our lives?

Yes: things are much more convenient; we can do things faster; we an do more things; we can travel further; we can get information quicker and easier; our homes are cleaner and better; we have solved many problems.
No: look at the environmental problems; new weapons kill more people; people have become more selfish; we work harder.
Don't forget to give examples to support your viewpoint.

3. Do we really need people like historians, philosophers, and sociologists in the modern scientific world?

Whilst I was writing this section, I noticed on CCTV9 that there was a conference being held between social scientists and natural scientists to discuss promoting cooperation between the two academic spheres. How can such cooperation help society? Do social scientists have a role in natural science and new scientific discoveries? Give examples to support your viewpoint.

4. What new scientific developments do you expect to see in the next ten or twenty years?

Use your imagination! It is not important whether the developments are realistic or not, because the question is quite theoretical. Who knows what will be developed by scientists in the near future. Even ten years ago, few people thought that cloning mammals was a possibility.

5. What do you think of laboratory experiments on animals?

For: human life is more valuable; research will help animals.
Against: animals have rights, too; experiments are unnecessary.

6. Medical science is constantly helping people to live longer. Do you think that is a good thing?

What if people stop dying, but keep having children?

Science and society

1. In general, what is the role of science and technology in society today?
2. In what areas is science and technology most important today?
3. Do you think people today are more aware of science than they were in the past?
4. Do you think that modern scientific inventions have really improved our lives?
5. Do we really need people like historians, philosophers, and sociologists in the modern scientific world?
6. What would you say is the most important branch of science today?
7. What do you think was the greatest scientific advancement of the 21st century?
8. What do you think of the speed of scientific and technological development today?
9. How have science and technology contributed to your country's recent development?
10. What effects does rapid technological change have on people in society?
11. Can you think of any examples of advanced technology that are not good for society?
12. Medical science is constantly helping people to live longer. Do you think that is a good thing?
13. What are some examples of modern technology in the home?
14. Can you give me any examples in the home, of the practical application of biological or chemical science?

Studying science

15. Do you think modern technology should be used in classrooms at school?
16. What are some examples of modern technology used in classrooms today?
17. Do you think it's important for secondary schools to have science classes?
18. How do people learn science in school in your country?
19. At what age do you think children should begin studying science?
20. Do you think it's suitable to start teaching science to very young children?
21. Do you think it's better for children to start studying science at an early age (at primary school) or when they are a bit older (at secondary school)?
22. Can you think of any examples of learning about science outside school?

Boys and girls studying science

23. On average, in the whole world, more males than females study science in high schools and at universities. Why do you think more males than females study science?
24. Do you think boys are better at studying science than girls?
25. Do you think males are, by nature more suited to studying science than females or do you think it's a result of culture?
26. Can you suggest how schools could encourage more girls to study science?

Scientific research

27. What kind of person do you think makes a good scientist?
28. What new scientific developments do you expect to see in the next 10-20 years?
29. What do you think of laboratory experiments on animals?
30. What does research in such fields as medical science, outer space and the environment contribute to society?
31. In your opinion, what areas of science most need most research at the moment?
32. Can you give me an example of a famous scientist and what breakthrough he or she made?
33. Who do you think should pay for scientific research – government or private companies?

34. Do you think the government should spend more money on scientific research?
35. What kinds of scientific research do you think are more suitable for government institutes to do and what kinds do you think are more suitable for private companies to do?
36. What areas of scientific research do you think would contribute most to Your country's development right now?

Sharing scientific knowledge

37. Do you think new scientific knowledge should be freely shared?
38. What do you think are some of the advantages and disadvantages of scientists freely making their research data available?
39. Do you think scientists ever cheat when they do their research?
40. How do you think this cheating could be prevented?
41. Should countries share the knowledge they gain from scientific research?
42. Should countries explore outer space together or do it separately?

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Shopping

Do you think that small shops can compete with large department stores and supermarket chains?

Yes, because they offer a more personal service and even special items which large ones don't provide. Often, they are very near to people's homes, so people are happy to pay a slightly higher price instead of travelling a long distance.
No, because they are more expensive and don't offer such a wide range of products and services. Many people like to buy everything they need for a week in one shopping trip.

Do young people and older people have different attitudes to shopping?

Think about what kinds of shop they prefer, whether they like to go to many different shops to look at products before buying them, and how often they go shopping.

How is shopping today different to shopping ten or twenty years ago?

Consider the number and size of shops, the service, the interior design and decoration of shops, payment methods, delivery, and advertisements.

How do you think shopping will be different in the future?

Think about the same things as for the previous question. Perhaps there will be "virtual shopping" on the Internet. Don't forget, as with all questions relating to possible future developments, to use modal verbs such as may, might, could, and should.

Do people in your country prefer buying things in several different small shops or in one or two large ones?

Perhaps they buy everything at one shopping centre or department store. Alternatively, they may do most of their shopping at one place, but go to other shops for specific things. Or, maybe they prefer to buy specific things at specific shops or markets. Say why they do this. Mention the kinds of things people usually buy from large shops and small ones.

When people are shopping, do they pay more attention to quality or price?

This probably depends on the people and what they are buying. Give some specific examples, remembering that the question asks about people, not you personally. Prices for some products (mobile phones and computers, for example) often depend on their features.

Small shops

1. What kinds of small shops are there near your home?
2. In what ways are small shops important to a local community?
3. In what ways are big shops and small shops different?
4. How can small shops increase the number of customers they get?
5. Might small shops disappear in the future?

Places to go shopping

6. How do shops nowadays compare with shops in the past?
7. What are the features of a successful shopping centre?
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of shopping in a large supermarket?
9. Could the growing number of supermarkets have any negative effects on society?

Markets

10. Compare shopping in open-air markets and in shops?
11. How often do people go shopping at open-air markets in your country?
12. Which products are better suited for selling at open-air markets?

Service

13. How does the quality of service differ in different types of shops?
14. How important is good service to customers in shops?
15. How could some shops provide a better service to customers?
16. In your country, do people who work in shops provide good customer service?
17. What services should shops provide?
18. Which do you think is more important – service or the quality of the goods?
19. What kind of person makes a good sales assistant in a shop?

Shopping habits

20. Do younger people and older people have similar shopping habits?
21. How have people's spending habits changed over the past 20 (50) years?
22. How might people's shopping habits change in the future?
23. Do you think some people spend too much time on shopping as a leisure activity?
24. Do you think men and women have similar attitudes to shopping?
25. What impact have international products and brands had on local cultures?

Online shopping

26. What effect has the Internet had on shopping?

27. What are the advantages and disadvantages of shopping online?
28. Do you think Internet shopping will become more popular in the future?
29. How could Internet shopping have negative effects on social relations?

Consumerism and advertising

30. Why has there been a rise in consumerism in many parts of the world?
31. How has advertising influenced shopping/society?
32. What are the possible consequences of consumerism?
33. What methods are used by advertisers to sell products?
34. What kinds of advertising could be harmful?

Consumer rights

35. Is there any special consumer protection office in your country where people can report their problems?
36. What rights do you think consumers have (or should have)?
37. How can customers influence companies?
38. How important are consumer rights?
39. What role does the government play in protecting consumer's rights?

Skills

1. Aside from those related to computing, what kind of skills do you think will be most useful for getting a good job in the future?

Remember – aside from those related to computing!
Look at job advertisements to see what skills and qualities employers are looking for.
Knowledge of a foreign language – work for foreign / joint venture company, higher salary, get to know new people, read information, attend international conferences.
Driving – convenient form of transport, useful for sales people, company car.
Ability to get on with people – essential management skill, useful in negotiating, make business contacts.
Leadership – ability to take tough decisions, inspire others, delegate tasks.

A ‘head for figures’ – the ability to deal with numbers, produce statistics, make projections and forecasts, deal with accounts.

2. Do you think that children should learn practical and artistic skills at school?

Yes – such skills can be useful in life and at work, provide an alternative to traditional subjects, makes young people more interesting.
No – need to spend more time on subjects directly related to future careers, children can develop such skills in their own time, each child has different interests.

3. Can having practical or artistic skills help develop people’s characters?

If you agree, give one or two specific examples to support your argument.

4. In the future, do you think certain practical and artistic skills may be lost?

Yes – people focus more on technology, people become more “Westernised”.
No – people, especially tourists, like to buy products made in traditional ways.

5. Which practical or artistic skills do you wish that you had?

Play a musical instrument – play for friends, e.g. at parties or on trips.
Understand modern technology – be able to fix computers and use software.
Be able to swim – overcome fear of water, enjoy seaside holidays more.

6. Do you think we can learn practical and artistic skills from books or do we really need teachers?

From books – very informative, written by experts, do it in our own time.
From teachers – can see it being done, correct mistakes, get more advice.

Skills

1. What kind of skills do you think will be most useful for getting a good job in the future?
2. Can having practical or artistic skills help develop people’s characters?
3. In the future, do you think certain practical and artistic skills may be lost?

4. Can we learn practical and artistic skills from books or do we need teachers?
5. What skills are most respected or admired in your country?
6. Do you think a person's skills are biologically inherited from his or her parents or are learned in early childhood?
7. Can you think of any skills that can be learned at home and are not taught in school?
8. Are there any skills you think should be added to university courses in your country?

Skills and income

9. What are some skills (or abilities) that people with a higher income often have?
10. Do you think it is reasonable that these people receive such a high income?
11. What skills do you think should be the highest paid?

Skills for children

12. Do you think that children should learn practical and artistic skills at school?
13. What skills do you think should be taught to children at home and what skills should be taught at school?
14. Should schools teach personal and business skills?
15. How can parents develop skills in their children?
16. What kinds of skills do you think are the most useful for children in everyday life?
17. Compare the skills girls learn with those that boys learn.

Space (Personal and Public)

1. How important is it to have a room of your own

Personal space, decorate it yourself, do private things without constant interruption.

2. How many rooms does a typical family need in their home?

For two parents and a child, how about five – a bathroom/toilet, a living room, two bedrooms and a kitchen/dining room?

3. Are there any advantages for children of sharing a room together?

Compare these with the advantages of each child having a separate room. A lot will depend on how well the children get along together!

4. What factors limit the amount of living space for people and for families?

The availability of suitable land and the demand for living space in a town/city/village affect the cost of property, which in turn limits what space and areas people can afford to live in.

5. Why do many people want to make their living space individual?

People are different and perhaps they need ways to express that.

6. Do you think the home of the future will be better than the home of today?

Make some suggestions regarding how homes may change, particularly with regard to design and technological developments.

7. Why do people go to public open spaces?

To get some (fresh?) air, to meet people, to relax, to take a walk.

8. What makes some public spaces attractive while others are not?

Greenery (trees, grass, flowers and plants), fountains, statues, benches to sit on.

9. How could growing cities ensure they continue to have public open spaces?

Perhaps land developers would have to set aside part of the land they were developing for public open spaces as part of the contract.

Living space

1. How important is it to have a room of your own
2. How many rooms does a typical family need in their home?

3. Are there any advantages for children of sharing a room together?
4. What factors limit the amount of living space for people and for families?
5. Why do many people want to make their living space individual?
6. Do you think the home of the future will be better than the home of today?

Public space

7. Why do people go to public open spaces?
8. What makes some public spaces attractive while others are not?
9. How could growing cities ensure they continue to have public open spaces?

Parks

10. Do you think there are enough parks in your city/town?
11. What do you think are the functions of public gardens in cities?
12. Do you think cities should provide parks for people to visit?
13. Do you think people should pay to enter parks?
14. Should parks be in the middle of the city or on the edge of the city?
15. Are there other places in your city that are similar to parks?
16. Which is more important – a park that is beautiful or a park that is functional?
17. Why are there usually fences around parks?

The cultural role of parks

18. Do you think that parks should have any cultural facilities?
19. What role do parks play in the life of a community?
20. Should a park represent the culture or history of the place where it is located?
21. Do you think it is good to hold events such as concerts in parks?

Different age groups and parks

22. What do people do when they go to a park?
23. How do people of different age groups use parks?
24. Do you think these gardens are more important for older people or young people?
25. Are parks important for children to play in?

Private gardens

26. What are some of the differences between a private garden and a park?
27. Which do you think is more important, parks or private gardens?
28. How do people in your country use their gardens?
29. Do people of different ages use their gardens for different things?
30. In your country, do many people do gardening?
31. Do they prefer to grow flowers or vegetables?
32. What are the advantages of growing your own food in a private garden?

Spoken Communication

Speeches and lectures

1. What are the different purposes of speeches and lectures?
2. Do you think listening to speeches and lectures is important at universities?
3. What makes a speech or lecture interesting to listen to?
4. Some people prefer to just listen to a speaker while others prefer group discussion. Which do you think is better?

Conferences

5. Why do people attend conferences?
6. Do you think conferences are very useful?
7. What are the benefits of holding international conferences, for example, an international conference of scientists?
8. How can international conferences be used as a way to enhance cross-cultural exchanges?

Visiting speakers at schools and universities

9. Do you think it's a good idea for universities to sometimes exchange lecturers with other universities?
10. Is it a good idea for school students to listen to talks at school given by

visiting speakers?
11. What kinds of people are most suitable as visiting speakers in schools?
12. What qualities should these visiting speakers have?

Giving a talk to very young children

13. Do you think it's good to give a talk to young children aged 4 to 9 years old?
14. Why do you many people find it hard to give a talk to young children?
15. Why do young children sometimes have difficulty listening to someone giving a talk?
16. How do you think a speaker could attract the attention of young children?
17. Compare a talk that is suitable for young children with a speech suitable for adults.

Speech-giving skills and methods

18. What qualities should public speakers have?
19. Why do you think some people are good public speakers and others are not?
20. Why are some people nervous before or while they give a speech?
21. Are there any ways for a person to control their nervousness in this situation?
22. Do you think people are born with or without the ability to give a good speech?
23. How can a person develop or improve his or her speaking skills?
24. What are some ways that a public speaker could make his speech or lecture more attractive to the audience?
25. Do you think it's useful to use visual aids such as slides and photographs when giving a presentation?

Sport

What kinds of sports are popular in your country now, but weren't popular 20 years ago?

This question is asking you to compare, not only give examples and reasons for the changes in popularity. Remember to use the past and present tenses correctly. You may also need to use the present continuous to indicate changes.

Do you think that young people spend too much time studying, watching TV, and playing on computers rather than getting exercise and playing sports?

Give your opinion and reasons. If you think that young people do not spend enough time on exercise and sports, think of ways to motivate them.

How can playing sports help us in other aspects of our lives?

Playing sports helps increase your level of energy, allows you to make new friends, helps prevent disease, and increases stamina. How are these things important in our everyday lives? Give specific examples.

Which sports do you think will become more (less) popular in the future?

Notice that the question asks "become more (less) popular". Give two or three examples and say why the sport will become more (less) popular. Use 'could', 'might', and 'may' where appropriate.

If you could be really good at a sport, which sport would you choose?

Say why. Would you choose to play it professionally or for other reasons?
"I wish I was really good at football. I like it, but the main reason I'd would choose that sport rather than any other is that top football stars are known all over the world. Wherever they go, fans cheer them. I would love the attention! In addition, football stars earn a lot of money and that's an attractive reason for most people to do something! I could also play for the national team, which would be a great honour, though I hope I wouldn't make a mistake and let the team down."

Compare the kinds of sports that men and women prefer.

Point out which sports are liked by both men and women, not just the differences. Give reasons for the differences. Do you think that more women are playing and enjoying sports that were traditionally for men (and vice versa)? What are the reasons for any changes in preference?

Children and sport

1. How important is it to provide sports activities at schools?

2. Do you think the amount of time spent on sports at school should be increased?
3. Why do boys and girls often play different sports?
4. Do you think schools should emphasise team sports over individual sports?
5. In your country, what sports are most popular with (young) children?
6. What sports do (secondary school) students play in your country?
7. Do you think sport is necessary in school?
8. Do you think boys and girls should play the same sports?
9. Do you think boys and girls should compete against each other or play together on the same sports teams?

Sport for adults

10. What are the benefits for adults of doing sports?
11. How could the government assist older people to keep active and healthy?
12. What do you think of the saying “a healthy body leads to a healthy mind”?

Competition

13. Do you think it is more important to participate in sport than to win?
14. What part does competition play in other areas of people’s lives?
15. Do you think that sport will become more competitive in the future?

Participating in Sport

16. Which sports are popular to play in your country and why?
17. Do you think that more people play sports nowadays than in the past?
18. Why don’t some people want to play any sport?

International sport

19. Do you think that advertising at national and international sports events should be discouraged?
20. Who should pay for national sports teams – the government or private businesses?
21. What are the benefits to a country of holding a major international event like

the Olympic Games?
22. What do you think is the value of international sports competition?
23. Do you think international sports competition can help different countries communicate with each other?
24. In general, is international sports competition very important to people in your country?

Sport on TV

25. Which sports are most often shown on TV in your country?
26. Does showing a sport on TV make that sport more popular?
27. Do you think that too much sport is shown on TV?
28. Which groups of people watch sport on TV most?

Extreme sports

29. What are some examples of extreme sports?
30. Are extreme sports popular in your country?
31. What are the major differences between extreme sports and ordinary sports?
32. Why do you think some people like to do these sports?
33. What qualities do people need to do these sports?
34. Some people think that those who do extreme sports are crazy. What do you think?
35. Do you think children should be encouraged to participate in extreme sports?
36. If someone is injured while doing an extreme sporting activity, who should pay the medical costs?
37. Do you think (some of) these extreme sports should be banned?
38. What are some ways people protect themselves when they do dangerous sporting activities?

Professional sport

39. Some people don't do sport as a leisure activity but as a way to make a living. What do you think of this?
40. Why do some young people want to play sport professionally?
41. Are famous sportspeople are good examples for young people to copy?

42. How important are good luck and hard work in sporting success?
43. What are the differences between sport as a career and sport as a hobby?
44. What are the most important qualities a professional athlete needs to have?
45. Do you think exceptional sporting ability is more the result of training or is it more the result of natural ability?
46. What relationship does professional sport have with the advertising industry?
47. Why do some professional athletes become celebrities?
48. Do you think most professional athletes do that work for money or because of their love for the sport?
49. Some professional athletes have extremely high incomes. What's your opinion of this?

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Success

1. Why do many people want to be successful?

It may bring them fame, money, plenty of suitors (= people who want to marry them). The money could certainly benefit their families too. there's also the feeling of personal satisfaction at having achieved something.

2. Can a balance be achieved between success and a happy personal life?

In my experience, many people say that only one or the other is possible, which is rather strange considering how many people are successful at both.

3. Do you think that being successful means more than becoming rich?

Success can be measured in several different ways. There is personal satisfaction for one and success, and indeed fame, do not always equal wealth.

4. Why is the public so interested in famous people?

Is it because famous people lead such interesting lives or because ordinary people live such boring ones? Perhaps we just like to see how the rich, famous and successful lead their lives. Perhaps we even feel jealous.

5. How much privacy should famous people expect?

Should they expect as much as ordinary people or not?

6. What effect can suddenly becoming famous have on a person’s life?

Consider how the person’s lifestyle would change and perhaps even how their personality might change.

7. What personal qualities or achievements are admired in your country?

Give a few examples and say why those are particularly admired.

8. How important are role models for young people?

How do they influence young people? Consider behaviour, clothes, even language.

9. What can you learn about a society from its role models?

Consider your own society and foreign ones.

The meaning of success

1. How would you define the success?
2. How do people in your country define success?
3. In your society, how is a person's social status evaluated?
4. Do you and your parents have the same ideas about success?
5. Do you think there is too much pressure on young people to be successful?
6. Do you think people should respect others who are successful?
7. Do you think this respect can ever be overdone?

Achieving success

8. Why do many people want to be successful?
9. Can a balance be achieved between success and a happy personal life?
10. Do you think some people achieve success in the wrong ways?
11. What do you think can be done to solve the problem of corruption?
12. In recent years, have people's ideas about success changed in your country?

13. How can people become successful in life?
14. What personal qualities are required for a person to become successful?
15. What do you think are the main factors that lead to a person being successful?
16. Do you think everybody can be successful?
17. What do you think is the most difficult part about becoming successful?
18. Do you think successful people are satisfied with their lives?
19. How do you think parents can encourage their children to be successful in life?
20. If people suddenly become very successful, how could this affect their lives?

Success at work

21. What do think is success is for an employee?
22. How can a person become successful at his or her job?
23. How can a boss make his or her employees feel successful?
24. How can a boss reward his or her employees for very good work?
25. How can a company encourage the employees to be successful?
26. What kinds of success in the workplace should be rewarded?
27. Do men and women place equal importance on their own success at work?

Success and reward

28. What are the benefits of success?
29. Are there any negative results of success?
30. Has the great financial success of some famous people ever made you feel envious?
31. How should parents reward their children for success, for example, for doing very well in exams at school?
32. Do you think this kind of reward is very effective?
33. Do you think rewards such as that are important?
34. How can teachers reward students for doing well?

Technology

1. How is technology used in schools in your country?

You could answer this question by thinking about how each kind of technology

(e.g. TV, Internet) is used or by looking at the way it is used in different subjects (e.g. history, biology, English).

2. What are the benefits of using technology for pupils and for teachers?

Again, you could answer this question by referring to each kind of technology or by looking at different subjects.

3. How is the use of technology in education likely to change in the future?

It will almost certainly be used more. Will this increase the amount of work students do on their own, with teachers only in a supervisory role?

4. How is technology used in homes in your country?

Think of the kitchen and of entertainment, since these have been two areas where there have been many technological developments. Bear in mind the differences between rural homes and urban ones!

5. How does this compare with the situation 20 (50) years ago?

There may have been massive changes in your country, partly because of global advances in technology.

6. Do you think that technology has improved family life?

It probably has, but give examples of how it has and how it has not.

7. What part does technology play in children's leisure activities?

Consider CD and DVD players, computer games, remote controlled cars, robot toys.

8. What effect has technology had on traditional games and activities?

Are these games and activities becoming less popular as kids have more choice?

9. What effects could using technology have on a child's personal development?

Do you think it is beneficial or not? In what ways?

Technology and education

1. How is technology used in schools in your country?
2. What are the benefits of using technology for pupils and for teachers?
3. How is the use of technology in education likely to change in the future?

Technology in the home

4. How is technology used in homes in your country?
5. How does this compare with the situation 20 (50) years ago?
6. Do you think that technology has improved family life?

Technology and children

7. What part does technology play in children's leisure activities?
8. What effect has technology had on traditional games and activities?
9. What effects could using technology have on a child's personal development?

Technology and change

10. What are the effects on people of modern technology?
11. What changes have taken place in society as a result of modern technology?
12. Do you think we rely too much on machines and modern technology nowadays?
13. What do you think is the most useful thing that man has ever invented?
14. What new technology do you think might be invented in the future?
15. How do you think technology will change the way people work in the future?

Technology and work

16. What are the advantages of using modern office equipment?
17. Do you think computers will ever be intelligent enough to replace human brainpower?

18. Do you think robots will replace humans for some types of work?

Teenagers / Young People

Relationships between young and old People

1. How much time do teenagers and older people spend together in your culture?
2. What can young people and older people learn from each other?
3. Do you think that misunderstandings between young and old people are inevitable?

Being a Teenager

4. What are some of the advantages of being a teenager?
5. What are some of the problems teenagers may have?
6. Would you agree that the teenager years are the best years of a person's life?
7. What do people generally think of teenagers in your country?
8. How mature do you think teenagers are nowadays compared with former teenage generations?
9. How much independence do teenagers have nowadays?
10. What is life like for teenagers in your country nowadays?
11. Are teenagers today happier than teenagers were 20 (50) years ago?
12. How does the life of teenagers today compare to 20 (50) years ago?

Responsibility

13. Would you say teenagers have a sense of responsibility?
14. At what age do you think young people begin to have a sense of responsibility?
15. What responsibilities do you think teenagers should have?
16. How can teenagers be taught a sense of responsibility?
17. Do schools today give teenagers enough responsibilities?
18. What could schools do to help teenagers become more responsible?

Getting young people started in life

19. How do parents support their children when they are young adults?
20. Compare this with the support parents gave in the past?
21. What challenges are young likely to face when getting started in life?
22. How do young people find jobs when they finish their education?
23. Is there a need for careers advice to be given by schools and colleges?
24. How could governments help people to find work?

Relationships between teenagers and other age groups

25. Do you think children and teenagers have the same attitudes and ideas?
26. Do young children and teenagers have the same attitudes towards older people?
27. In your country, what attitudes do teenagers have towards their parents?
28. How do teenagers in your country react to advice from older family members?
29. Do teenagers in your country like to be independent of their parents?
30. Why is independence is so important to many teenagers?
31. What do you think are the causes of the generation gap?
32. How do you think problems caused by the generation gap could be resolved?
33. Who is more suited to living in modern society – young people or older people?

Telephones

The use of telephones

1. Do you think telephones are important for communication?
2. Do people in Your country use telephones very much?
3. In which situations do people most often use telephones?
4. Which do you think are better – mobile phones or landline phones?

Mobile phones

5. Why are mobile phones so popular?
6. Why do some people prefer not to use mobile phones?
7. How important do you think mobile phones are in modern society?

8. What changes has the introduction of mobile phones brought to society?

Mobile phone conversations

9. Why do you think so many people use their mobile phone in a public place, where other people can hear what they're saying?
10. Do people like listening to other people's mobile phone conversations in public places?
11. Do young people and older people use mobiles for different kinds of conversations?
12. Do young men and young women use mobiles for different kinds of conversations?

Television

How much do you think that TV influences our lives?

Possible influences: brings us news, tells us about the world, teaches us new things, distracts children from their homework, entertains us, influences our emotions, allows us to see things in other places as they happen (live), destroys conversation, makes the world smaller, offers new possibilities, shows us new products and services, makes us want more, influence our political opinions. Say how important you think these influences are and give some specific examples.

Do you think that children watch too much TV?

The key words are “too much”. They do not necessarily mean “a lot”. Give reasons for our answer and also give some details such as when children watch TV, how much TV they watch, and which kinds of programmes they like. You could also say whether you think that adults watch too much TV.

Do you think that there is too much advertising on TV?

As with question two, the key words are “too much”. They do not necessarily mean “a lot”. Are the number or length of advertisements limited by law or by the TV station? If not, do you think they should be? Develop your answer by saying what kinds of advertisements are shown (too much) on TV and whether you think

the advertisements are informative or not.

Compare the kinds of programmes that young and old people watch.

By now, you should be able to deal with this question easily! Use connectives and give reasons.

Is there too much violence on TV in your country?

As with questions two and three, the key words are “too much” which do not necessarily mean “a lot”. Give your opinion on the issue.

Are many foreign TV programmes shown in your country?

This question is slightly different. It asks “many”, not “too many”. Say which kinds of foreign TV programmes are shown and what you think of them. Are they similar or different to TV programmes in your country of the same type?

The popularity of TV

1. Which are the most popular kinds of TV programme in your country?
2. What are the advantages of TV over other media?
3. How popular do you think TV will be in the future?
4. What do you think of 24-hour television?
5. How popular are foreign TV programmes in your country?
6. Do you think TV will become even more popular in the future?
7. Why do you think some people seem to be watching TV all the time?

TV tastes in your country

8. What kinds of TV programs are most popular in Your country?
9. Why do you think people like to watch TV?
10. Do you think people today watch more television than they used to?
11. Do old people like watching TV?
12. What types of TV programs do children like to watch?
13. Do people prefer to watch entertainment programmes or educational programmes?

14. Are the TV programs in your country different to TV programs in other countries?

TV and the family

15. Why do you think watching TV is such a popular activity for people to do at home?
16. How do you think TV influences people's relations with others?
17. Would you say TV plays a positive role in the lives of people?
18. Do you think TV has any effects on family relationships?
19. Do you think it's good for family relations if people watch a lot of TV?
20. What are the benefits for family members watching TV together?
21. What do you think are the benefits of having parents watch TV with their children?
22. Do you ever discuss a TV program with your friends or family members?
23. Do you think TV affects people of different ages in the same way?
24. Do you think parents should control the amount of TV their children watch?

TV and education

25. Does TV play a role in children's education?
26. Do you think watching TV has any effect on how well students do at school?
27. Would you say that TV has any educational value?
28. How do you think TV could be used to promote education?
29. Which do you think is better for children's education - the Internet or TV?
30. Do you think TV programme makers have a responsibility to reflect the traditional culture and values of society?

Characters on TV

31. What kinds of characters on TV do children admire or want to copy?
32. Do boys and girls admire or want to copy the same kinds of characters?
33. Which kinds of characters do adults admire on television?
34. How influential are education and advertising in creating such characters?
35. What kinds of characters might be admired in the future?

The effects of TV

36. What effects can TV have on a child's life?
37. How useful can TV be in education?
38. What effect can TV have on children's reading habits?
39. What effects does TV have on children's free time activities?
40. Do you think that TV programmes have become more violent?
41. What effects can TV violence have on people and on society?
42. How realistic do you think TV programmes are?
43. How can showing TV programmes from other countries affect local cultures?
44. How important are locally produced TV programmes?
45. Do you think that TV plays an important role in the globalisation process?

Government control over TV

46. Is there a need for government regulation of TV programmes?
47. How could the government implement these controls?
48. Are there any disadvantages of government controls over TV?

The Economy

1. Which industries are important in your country?

Some important economic activities: farming, food production, coal mining, oil production, steel production, mineral mining, automobile manufacturing, shipping, electronics, textile industry, paper production, cigarette production.

2. Which industries do you think will become more (or less) important in the future?

Give your opinion, perhaps using some of the industries mentioned above. Say why these industries will (could) become more (less) important. Generally, many countries are moving towards being a country where industries using hi-technology are considered important.

3. If your country wishes to attract more foreign investment, how can it do so?

Things countries do or need to do to attract foreign investment are: establish special economic zones, educate the workforce, encourage young people to work in hi-tech fields, lower taxes, reduce corruption, reduce controls on foreign investment.
Say how each of these things will help attract more foreign investment, do not just list them. You can get ideas and information from business related magazines and from newspapers.

4. How can companies improve conditions for workers and encourage them to work harder?

Some ways to improve conditions: improve safety, increase salaries, provide free lunches, award bonuses, make workplaces more attractive. Say how each of these things will encourage workers to work harder, do not simply list them.

5. What has been the most significant development in your county's economy during the last 10 years?

Be sure to answer the question! You must now choose one economic development which has really made a difference to that overall development.

6. If you were in charge of your country's economy, what main change(s) would you make?

You can get some ideas from newspapers, books on economics and television.

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The Environment

What measures should the government and individuals in your country take to improve the environment?

Think of ways to resolve issues such as air and water pollution, and waste management. Try to think of new ways if possible.
Notice that the question also says "governments and individuals", so consider measures which would be suitable for each to take.
"I think that there are several things that people can do as individuals. An obvious thing is to recycle whenever possible. This will enable us to use fewer resources.

People can aid this process by separating their waste into categories – plastics, metals, paper, organic waste (e.g. waste food) – even before the waste is collected. People can use fewer resources such as water and electricity. They can also reduce the amount of chemicals they use for, particularly for cleaning."

Can our environment ever be truly clean?

Yes, if we invest a lot of time, money, and effort in cleaning it up.
No, there will always be pollution from human activities.

What can we do to protect endangered animals?

Here are a few things that could be done: strictly enforce laws, create more reserves, biological research. How would each of them help endangered animals? Try to think of some other ways of protecting them. You can probably get some ideas from newspapers and magazines.

If we focus too much on the environment, won't our economy be less efficient?

Yes: the cost of looking after the environment is very high; countries which do not protect the environment may produce goods cheaper.
No: it will be better because people will be healthier; we could use alternative energy sources, new environment industries would employ people.

Do you think that older people and younger people have different views of the environment?

Yes: younger people care more because they have their lives ahead of them; younger people want modern things more than a good environment; older people have more time to enjoy the environment, whilst younger people are busy.
No: the wish to protect the environment does not depend on age; older people want to protect the environment for their children.

Protecting the Environment

1. What are the main dangers to the environment in your country?
2. How concerned are people about these dangers?
3. In what ways is the environment protected in your country?
4. How successful have these measures been?

5. What can individuals do to protect the environment?
6. Who do you think should pay for cleaning up pollution?
7. What role can education play in environmental protection?
8. Compare your attitude towards the environment with that of your parents and/or grandparents.
How is your government trying to educate people about the environment?
9. How effective do you think environmental education will be in the future?
10. What are the limits of environmental education?

Waste disposal

11. What are the sources of waste in society?
12. Compare how waste is disposed of today and how it used to be disposed of.
13. How do you think we could use waste in ways beneficial to society?
14. Do you think recycling is important?
15. Do young people and older people have the same attitudes towards waste disposal?
16. Do you think old people produce as much waste as young people?
17. How does advertising lead to the production of more waste in society?
18. Why do you think some people don't care where they put their waste?

National parks

19. Why do countries try to protect wildlife and the natural landscape in certain areas?
20. What are the advantages and disadvantages of allowing the public to visit protected areas?
21. What do you think the future holds for national parks and protected areas?

The Future

1. How do people generally choose their future professions?

Their own choice, their parent’s choice, teacher’s recommendation, friends’ influences.

2. How important is it to have goals in your life?

Are goals essential or can a person with no goals still manage to be a success?

3. What can make it difficult for people to plan their futures?

Uncertainties often make this difficult, particularly those about family, job security, qualifications and future demands from employers for different skills.

4. Why is it important for companies to plan ahead?

They need to know roughly what sales will be like to plan budgets. They need an idea of how many people they will need and in what positions. They may also need to make plans for opening new branches or factories.

5. How do schools and universities prepare students for the society of the future?

By providing knowledge in certain subject areas, by teaching skills and by providing an area for young people to interact.

6. Do you think that governments think more about the short term than the long term future?

Give examples to support your opinion. Note that the question uses the word ‘more’ to show that governments rarely think only about the short term or the long term.

7. What makes a society feel optimistic about its future?

Make one or two suggestions and say why to develop your answer.

8. Which developments in science and technology today will have the greatest affect on society in the future?

Consider how developments from today’s world might be adapted for use in the future.

9. What measures can be taken today to avoid global problems in the future?

The environment would be a good area to consider first.

Personal plans

1. Why do people often make plans for the future?
2. Is it important for people to have realistic plans for the future?
3. Is it important for children to have plans for the future?
4. How do people generally choose their future professions?
5. How important is it to have goals in your life?
6. What can make it difficult for people to plan their futures?

Plans for students

7. In your country, do teachers give students an individual plan for personal study?
8. When do students need to plan what to do in their study life?
9. When a student is doing a big assignment or project, why should they make some plans before they start?
10. How useful is it for students to decide on their future studies alone?
11. How do schools and universities prepare students for the society of the future?

Organisational plans

12. In general, what sorts of plans do companies (governments) usually have?
13. What are some of the specific plans that your government has?
14. Why is it important for companies (governments) to plan ahead?
15. Do you think that (companies) governments think more about the short term than the long term future?

Society and the future

16. What makes a society feel optimistic about its future?
17. Which developments in science and technology today will have the greatest affect on society in the future?
18. What measures can be taken today to avoid global problems in the future?

The Internet

1. How has the Internet influenced communication in daily life?

Consider communication in terms of getting the news, sending emails (with attachments!) and using the Internet to telephone people.

2. Give reasons for the increasing use of the Internet?

One reason is simply that more people are getting access to it, as more people buy computers, get access to an Internet connection and as it becomes cheaper. The Internet is also becoming more popular as more uses for it are invented, such as shopping, communication, learning, research and meeting people.

3. How useful is the Internet as a way of finding out news?

Compare the Internet with other forms of media, such as newspapers and magazines, the radio and TV.

4. How do you feel about buying things on the Internet?

Many people have no problem with this, but others are concerned about security and the quality of the goods that are sold on the Internet.

5. Which kinds of products are particularly suited to Internet sales?

Give a few examples and develop your answer by saying why.

6. Do you think shopping on the Internet will become more popular in the future?

It probably will, but refer to question 4 for problems that will have to be overcome or reduced.

7. How can students benefit from using the Internet?

Finding information (research) and contact with other students (perhaps from abroad).

8. Do you think the Internet will play a greater part in education in the future?

It almost certainly will. Consider distance learning, for example.

9. Do you think traditional libraries will disappear in the future?

Give your answer and develop it by saying why.

The development of the Internet

1. How has the Internet influenced communication in daily life?
2. Give reasons for the increasing use of the Internet?
3. How useful is the Internet as a way of finding out news?

Different Internet users

4. Is the internet used very much by people in Your country?
5. Why do people use the Internet?
6. Do different kinds of people use the Internet for different reasons?
7. Do different age groups use the Internet for different reasons?
8. What influence does the Internet have on children?
9. Do you think parents should control what Internet sites their children visit?
10. Compare the types of people who don't use the Internet with those who do.
11. What are the disadvantages of not using the Internet?
12. Do you think the Internet reduces distances between different groups of people?
13. Do young people and older people have the same attitudes towards the Internet?
14. Do old people use the internet very much in your country?
15. Do you think it is useful to teach old people how to use the Internet?

The future of the Internet

16. How do you think the internet might develop in the future?
17. How do you think the internet will change society in the future?
18. How do you think computers will change (or will affect) society in the future?

Control of the Internet

19. How do you think the government should and should not control of the Internet?
20. Do you think people can freely express their opinions on the Internet?
21. Do you think people should be able to express their opinions freely on the Internet?

The Internet as an alternative to reality

22. Do you think the Internet can be a substitute for reality?
23. In what ways could the Internet be a substitute for reality?
24. Do you think friendships formed on the Internet can be close friendships?

The Internet and business

25. Is the Internet used very much in business in your country?
26. How do you feel about buying things on the Internet?
27. Which kinds of things do people buy on the Internet?
28. Do you think shopping on the Internet will become more popular in the future?
29. Which things do you think are most suitable for buying on the internet and which are the least suitable?
30. Do you think there are any dangers of online shopping?
31. Do people in your country trust in the security of online shopping?

The Internet and education

32. In your country, is the internet used much in schools and universities?
33. What are the benefits of using the Internet in schools?
34. Do you think the Internet will play a greater part in education in the future?
35. Do you prefer using the Internet or a library?

The Internet and the global community

36. Do you think people nowadays have more knowledge about other countries and other cultures than they used to have thanks to the Internet?
37. Has the Internet had any other effects on bringing people from different

countries closer together?
38. What are the advantages and disadvantages of people from different countries chatting on the Internet?
39. Do you think the Internet might change the cultural values of some countries?

The Media

How do most people in your country get the news?

Talk about the one or two most common ways of getting the news in Your country, and why they are popular. Do people use different sources to get different kinds of news (e.g. political news, sports news, entertainment news)?

Compare newspapers and TV as news sources.

Consider speed, convenience, reliability, impact (e.g. of pictures), and discussion of issues.

Do you think that the different media (newspapers, TV, radio, the Internet) are reliable sources of news?

Discuss the reliability of each compared to the others. How could the media be made more reliable? How do we know which news is reliable and which is not?

What are the qualities of a good journalist or reporter?

Most students focus on ‘honesty’, which is coincidentally the same quality they name as being the most important in a friend! Journalists may also need to be brave, entertaining, good writers or speakers, informed, intelligent, discreet, objective, or even humorous. Say which qualities you think are most important and why, giving specific examples where possible.

How do you think most people will get the news in the future?

Give your opinion and say why. Don’t forget to use words such as ‘could’, ‘may’, and ‘might’, rather than only using ‘will’.

Do you believe that rich and influential people often control what the media tells

people?

Give your opinion.

Do people in your country focus more on domestic news stories or on international news stories?

Say which and why. The answer may depend on people's backgrounds, e.g. social status, job, or age.

Radio

1. What different kinds of radio stations and radio channels are there where you live?
2. Do you think it is better to get information from the radio or from newspapers?
3. Do you think that radio will continue to be popular in the future?

Radio and TV

4. Compare listening to the radio and watching TV.
5. Which kinds of programmes do you think work better on radio than on TV?
6. Why is watching TV said to be more harmful than listening to the radio?

The media

7. Which form of media do you think is best for getting news and information?
8. Do you think TV provides better news than newspapers?
9. Which form of media do people in your country tend to trust the most?
10. Why do many people not trust the media?
11. Is any control of the media desirable?

Newspapers

12. What different types of newspapers are available in your country?
13. Why do people buy newspapers?
14. Is it more important for newspapers to report national or international events?

Technology and the media

15. Compare the importance of radio and television in people’s lives.
16. How has technology changed or influenced the media in recent years?
17. How might technology affect the media in the future?

Issues

18. What kind of issues are often reported in the media where you live?
19. Are issues reported differently on television and in newspapers?
20. How does news reporting affect our understanding of issues?

Reliability of the news

21. Do you think we can always believe what we hear or read in the news media?
22. Why do you think there is so much false news on the Internet?
23. Do you think it's possible for news to be 'created' rather than discovered by news reporters?

‘Infotainment’

24. Some people say that news reports, especially on TV, are changing more and more into a form of entertainment. Do you agree?
25. Do you think it's a good thing to make news more entertaining?
26. How do you think news programs on TV could be made more interesting?
27. In the future, do you think the news programs on TV will become more entertaining?

The Past

1. What kinds of objects do families pass on to the next generation?

Common family heirlooms include photographs, jewellery, books, furniture.

2. How important is it to pass on traditions to new generation?

Also consider the relevance of these traditions in a modern society.

3. Are there any negative effects of trying to keep the past alive?

Some people are accused of “living in the past” – being unwilling to modernise. is this a fair thing to say to someone?

4. Compare the value of seeing photographs of objects and experiencing real examples in a museum.

It may be a good idea to think of an example from your own experience.

5. What role do museums play in a culture?

Do they help to preserve it? Do they show people how things have changed? Do they help to point out the things that have remained the same over time?

6. What might museums be like in the future?

Do you think they will be more interactive, using modern technology? What will the displays be like?

7. Do you think it is better to live in an old traditional building or a modern one?

Give your opinion and develop your answer with reasons.

8. What are the problems that old residential areas can cause in a modern city?

People living in Beijing should be able to provide some ideas here, given that the old hutong areas have been demolished in recent years. Such areas can cause problems for new infrastructure, e.g. roads and, some say, make the city look untidy and old.

9. Why should older buildings be maintained?

As reminders of the past? As part of cultural heritage? As architectural inspiration?

Things from the past

1. What kinds of objects do families pass on to the next generation?
2. How important is it to pass on traditions to new generation?
3. Are there any negative effects of trying to keep the past alive?
4. Compare the value of seeing photographs of objects and experiencing real examples in a museum.
5. What role do museums play in a culture?
6. What might museums be like in the future?
7. Do you think it is better to live in an old traditional building or a modern one?
8. What are the problems that old residential areas can cause in a modern city?
9. Why should older buildings be maintained?

Memories

10. Is it possible to forget important things from the past?
11. Do you think it is possible to choose what to remember and what to forget?
12. What kinds of events do people have the strongest memory of?
13. What times in a person's life are most worth remembering?
14. Do you think your time at university is worth remembering?
15. Do you think people mostly remember sad events or happy events?
16. How can people benefit from recalling sad events?
17. What can a person do if he or she wants to forget something but cannot forget it?

Happy and sad memories

18. Is what most people remember about past events accurate?
19. Have you ever imagined that something happened when, in fact, it did not happen?
20. Compare the memories that older people have with the memories that young people have about childhood experiences.
21. Why do older people often say the happiest time in their life was when they were young?

Recording events

22. Why do some people keep diaries?

23. What kinds of people like to keep a diary of their life experiences?
24. Should older people pass on their experiences by using a diary?
25. Is it important for old people to pass on their memories to young people?

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Time

Punctuality

1. Are people usually on time in your country?
2. What do people in your country think of people who are late?
3. What are some of the different reasons why people are late?
4. What are some of the excuses that people make when they are late?
5. Do you think people who are often late can change this habit?
6. In which situations is being on time particularly important?
7. In which situations is being punctual not very important?
8. What can happen to people who are late?
9. Do young people and older people have different attitudes to being on time?
10. Do you think it will be more important for people to be on time in the future?

Time management

11. Do you think it's necessary for people to manage their time well?
12. Should parents (teachers) teach children how to manage their time well?
13. What do you (people) do to use your (their) time effectively?
14. Compare the way you organise your time with other people you know.
15. How could people make better use of their time?
16. Why are some people better at managing time than others?
17. What impact might technology have on the way people manage their time?
18. How important is it to treasure the time we have?
19. Do you think that we now live a faster-paced life than previously?

Daily routines

20. What are the benefits of having a daily routine?

21. Are there any disadvantages of having a daily routine?
22. What problems can occur if a person follows a routine too closely?
23. Why do many people regard habit and routine as important?
24. Why don't some people like changes to their daily routine?
25. Which external factors can organise your day?

Time for work and family

26. How much time do people generally spend with family and friends and how much time do they spend working/studying?
27. How has this balance changed in your lifetime?
28. What effect have these changes had on society as a whole?

Time for relaxation

23. What are the benefits of having quiet time to relax?
24. How useful is physical activity as a way to relax?
25. How has the amount of leisure time people have changed in recent years?

Time in general

26. Do you think it's important to treasure the time we have?
27. How do you think people could make better use of our time?
28. Do you think modern technology gives us more time, or less?
29. Do you think modern life puts more pressure on people than before?
30. Do you think the current working hours of most people are reasonable?
31. Is it reasonable for an employer to ask people to work overtime?
32. When people get old, does time seems to pass more quickly or more slowly?

Working quickly and efficiently

33. What are some examples of work (housework) that needs to be done quickly?
34. What machines or equipment help people work faster?
35. Do you think computers help people to work faster?
36. Do you like working to a deadline?

37. Do you think modern people are becoming stressed by modern life?
38. Why are some people more efficient than other people when they do a task?
39. What can a person do to become more efficient?

Toys

1. What kinds of toys are popular with young children in your country?

Remember that the question asks you about young children, so make sure that the toys you mention are appropriate. It also uses the word ‘popular’, so don’t mention toys that only rich kids have!

2. Compare modern toys with toys in the past.

Consider the materials they are/were made from and how ‘advanced’ they are/were.

3. Would you say that parents spend too much money on toys today?

Think about how much they spend and compare this to the average salary and how much they spend on other things.

4. What are the skills that children can develop through playing with toys?

Consider hand-eye co-ordination, motor skills, construction skills and the ability to co-operate with others.

5. How can toys help to develop a child’s imagination?

Consider toys that require a child to construct something or perhaps develop artistic skills. Toys that can be changed in any way might aid development of the imagination.

6. Would you agree that the best toys are those that children make for themselves?

Toys that children make themselves encourage imagination and construction skills. However, many toys designed by professionals have been carefully thought about.

7. How do our attitudes to toys change as we grow older?

We often think that the toys we once played with are only “for babies”.

8. What kinds of things replace toys for adults?

Cars, computers, mobile phones, boy-/girlfriends, motorbikes, gambling.

9. Why is it that toys are found in all human cultures?

Perhaps it is a universally recognised children’s need – to keep them quiet!

Toys in general

1. What toys are popular with children in your country today?
2. Compare the toys children have today with the toys children had 20 (50) years ago.
3. In general, do children today have many toys?
4. Do you think that toys are good for children?
5. Do you think children today have too many toys?
6. Do children in the countryside play with the same toys as children in the cities?
7. What do you think of giving expensive toys to children?
8. Do you think what children see on television affects their choice of toys?
9. Do you think playing with electronic toys has a good influence on kids?
10. How do you think toys in your country compare with toys in other countries?
11. Would you agree that the best toys are those that children make for themselves?
12. How do our attitudes to toys change as we grow older?
13. What kinds of things replace toys for adults?
14. Why is it that toys are found in all human cultures?

Boys’ and girls’ toys

15. Do boys and girls play with the same kinds of toys?
16. Why do you think boys and girls play with different toys?
17. Do you think there are some toys that are only suitable for girls and some that are only suitable for boys?
18. Do you think toys should be labelled as boys’ toys and girls’ toys?

Sharing toys

19. Do you think it is better for children to play with toys alone or with other kids?
20. Do you think parents should make their children share their toys with other kids?
21. Why do you think some kids dislike sharing their toys?

Benefits of toys

22. Why do (you think) children like playing with toys?
23. Do you think children really need to have toys?
24. How do you think playing with toys helps the development of children?
25. Which do you think is better for children – simple toys or complex toys?
26. Do you think modern toys have more educational qualities than toys had before?
27. Do you think parents should try to choose educational toys for their children?
28. What are the skills that children can develop through playing with toys?
29. How can toys help to develop a child's imagination?
30. In your opinion, are there any toys that can have negative effects on children?

Games

31. What are some of the effects on children of playing games?
32. Do you think the games children play today are less creative and imaginative than games before?
33. What's the most popular game in Your country?
34. How have games changed in the past few decades?
35. How do you think games will develop in the future?
36. How are children's games different to adults' games?
37. Which games are popular with adults in your country?
38. Why do many adults today not play games?
39. What benefits do people get from playing games?
40. What social benefits can adults get from playing games with other people?
41. How does playing games help in the mental development of children?

Traffic Jams

Traffic conditions

1. Do you feel that traffic conditions in your town/city are getting better?
2. At what time of the day do the worst traffic jams usually happen?
3. Which locations are most likely to have traffic jams?

Social effects of traffic jams

4. What effects do you think traffic jams have on society?
5. What effects do you think traffic jams have on individual people?
6. How do people feel when they are in a traffic jam?
7. What effects do traffic jams have on the environment?

Managing traffic jams

8. Does only the government have the ability to manage the problem of traffic jams?
9. How can government decisions affect how many traffic jams there are?
10. What has the government done to help solve the problem of traffic jams?
11. What would you suggest as possible solutions to the problem of traffic jams?
12. Do you think having more public transport is the answer to traffic jams?
13. How could more people be encouraged to use public transport?
14. Do you think building more roads will solve the problem?
15. Some governments have increased the sales tax on cars to discourage people from buying cars. Do you think that's a good idea?
16. Do you think big and small cars should be taxed the same amount?
17. How important are road rules when thinking about how to manage traffic?

Transport

Compare trains and buses as forms of transport in your country.

Think about speed, the network, comfort, safety, cleanliness, and service. Conclude by saying which you think is better. Remember to use the comparative

forms of adjectives (faster than, more comfortable than) or use phrases like ‘(not) as fast as’. You could also mention any recent changes or improvements in these forms of transport. “Buses have become safer.” “The network is much denser than a decade ago.”

Which types of transport do you think are better for short journeys and which are better for long ones?

Short journeys could include travelling around your city, whereas long ones could include travelling to other parts of Your country. Give one or two examples for each and then give reasons why you think they are better.

Is flying a common form of transport in your country?

Say why or why not. Is it becoming more popular? Will it be more popular in the future? Again, why?

How do people in your country usually travel when they go on holiday?

This probably depends on where they go on holiday to and how much money they have. Give a few examples of people in different situations.

Do you think that the use of cars should be limited by law?

Yes: most people agree there are too many cars, but think other people should stop using them; can also reduce damage, death, and injury due to car accidents; cars pollute cities, in particular; if there are fewer cars in cities, public transport will move faster; we rely too much on oil; much oil is wasted in traffic jams.
No: personal freedom; if roads are jammed, people will choose other methods of transport; other methods such as payment to enter city centres might be better; the public transport network is not too good.

In what ways do modern transportation methods make our lives easier?

Think about speed (get from A to B faster), the network (get to many places easily), and comfort (travelling is a much better experience than 50 years ago).

Cars

1. Which kinds of people own cars in your country?
2. Why do so many people want to own cars?
3. What are the social costs and benefits of car use?
4. What is the standard of driving like in your town/city?
5. How could safer driving be encouraged?
6. What kinds of problems might cities face if the number of cars increases?
7. What do you think the future holds for the car?

Means of transport

8. How easy is it to get around your area on foot?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a bicycle?
10. Which type of transport do you think is most dangerous in cities?

Public transport

11. What different forms of public transport are there in your area?
12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these forms of public transport?
13. How might technological advances change transport in the future?
14. What are people's attitudes to public transport where you live?
15. How could governments persuade people to use public transport rather than cars?

Transport policy

16. What are the economic (social) benefits of a good national transport system?
17. Who do you think should pay to keep roads in good condition?
18. Do town planners pay enough attention to transport when developing new areas?
19. Tell me about an important transport development in your country.
20. Which transport-related problems are most serious, in your opinion, and why?
21. What measures could the government take to deal with these problems?

Buying a car

22. Do men and women like to buy the same kinds of cars?
23. How do different cars show the social status of the people who use them?
24. Do people in your country think owning your own car means you are rich?
25. Why do some people consider the brand name of the car to be important?
26. What do you think of people who drive big cars?
27. What do you think are some of the advantages of driving a small car?
28. When choosing what kind of car to buy, what do people in your country think are the most important factors?
29. How do people or companies advertise cars in your country?

Travel

1. How is travelling for work reasons different to travelling for pleasure?

There's the level of enjoyment, the people you travel with and the need to stick to a schedule to consider.

2. Why do some people enjoy travelling?

They might like seeing other places, seeing how other people do things, meeting new people, or simply the thrill of moving fast.

3. What can make travelling difficult?

Delays (e.g. late flights or traffic jams), technical problems, the demands of other people, a lack of money or time.

4. How is travelling today different to travelling 50 or 100 years ago?

Consider speed, comfort, the regularity of services, the different choices.

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of air travel?

The key advantages are speed, safety and comfort, whereas the main disadvantage is expense.

6. How might people travel in different ways in the future?

Think about what new forms of transport might be developed (be realistic and not too far into the field of sci-fi!) and consider whether we will continue to use any of our current forms of transport.

7. What impact has the car had on the urban environment?

Consider pollution, the construction of roads and parking spaces, the location of homes, shops, businesses and industries.

8. Should people be encouraged to travel by public transport?

Consider how people could be made to use cars less and use public transport more.

9. What could the government do to improve travelling in your country?

Consider infrastructure developments and improving competition.

Travel in general

1. How is travelling for work reasons different to travelling for pleasure?
2. Why do some people enjoy travelling?
3. What can make travelling difficult?
4. How is travelling today different to travelling 50 or 100 years ago?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of air travel?
6. How might people travel in different ways in the future?
7. What impact has the car had on the urban environment?
8. Should people be encouraged to travel by public transport?
9. What could the government do to improve travelling in your country?
10. How much does the media influence where people travel?
11. How do people prepare for trips?
12. How do people with different personalities prepare for trips?
13. Do you think it is necessary to prepare in detail for trips?
14. What essential things do people need to take when they go on a trip?
15. What kinds of clothes do you think it's best to wear when travelling?
16. What suggestions do you have for people preparing to visit your country?
17. What kinds of people do you like to travel with?
18. Do you think that the Internet (or TV) has influenced people's ideas of travel?

19. Do you prefer to travel with your parents or with friends?
20. What are the differences between travelling alone and travelling in a group?
21. What are the qualities of a good travel companion?
22. What are some possible problems that a person might have while travelling?
23. Do older people and young people like travelling in the same way?

Commuting

24. How do people in your city travel to work?
25. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in the centre of a city (or on the outskirts of a city)?
26. What are the travel conditions like for people when they travel to work?
27. Why do so many people travel to work each day?
28. Why do some people travel long distances to work?
29. Do you think more people travel further to work than 20 (50) years ago?
30. How do you think travelling to work might change in the future?

Travel destinations

31. What are the benefits of travelling to new places?
32. What are some of the most popular travel destinations in your country?
33. Which places (countries) are people from your country most interested in visiting?
34. Do you think the government should encourage people to make trips overseas?
35. Compare the types of travel destinations that people of your age choose and those that people of your parents' age choose.

Long distance travel

36. In your country, how do people travel over long distances?
37. Do you think this will change in the future?
38. Compare long-distance travel with travelling short distances.
39. Why are more and more people going on long distance trips nowadays?
40. What countries are most popular as travelling destinations for young people from your country?
41. Have the reasons why people travel long distances changed in the last 20

years?
42. When travelling on a long journey, what should people to pay attention to?
43. What difficulties do people sometimes have when they travel long distances?
44. Which form of transport do you think is the most comfortable for long journeys?
45. How can people make themselves more comfortable when making a long trip?
46. What are some thing people do on long journeys?

Exploring and development

47. Why do people often like to explore new places?
48. If some people decide to explore a remote area, who should pay for it?
49. What personal qualities does a person need to be an explorer?
50. If somebody got lost while exploring or travelling in a remote part of the world, or if they needed some other type of help, who should pay for this help?
51. What are some reasons why people want to develop a new, undeveloped place?
52. Do you think that new development in a place can harm the natural environment?

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Visiting

Visiting people and receiving visitors

1. What gifts do people in your country give when they visit someone's home?
2. How do people make guests in their home feel welcome?
3. Compare visits from relatives and visits from friends.
4. Why do people enjoy visiting others?
5. Do children and adults enjoy visits to other people in the same way?
6. Have changes in lifestyle have made it easier or more difficult to visit people?
7. Are there any problems people may experience in receiving visitors to their homes?
8. How important is giving hospitality to friends/strangers in your culture?
9. Do you think it's important to visit other people in their homes?
10. With guests, do you think it is better to eat at home or to go to a restaurant?

11. How important is the living room in a person's house when guests visit?
12. Why do people offer food and drink to visitors?
13. In your country, what food and drink do people offer guests to their home?
14. Is today's generation less formal than previous generations about guests?
15. Do you think there are any people who don't like visitors coming to their home?
16. What could these people do instead of having visitors come to their home?
17. Is there much difference between having visitors who you know well and visitors who you don't know well?
18. Do people behave differently when they have visitors they don't know well, compared to when they have visitors they know well?

International visits

19. What are some typical ways of entertaining foreign visitors in your country?
20. How important is it to make foreign visitors feel welcome?
21. How important is it to understand cultural differences when receiving foreign visitors?
22. What are the benefits to young people of studying in other countries?
23. How useful are international sporting events?
24. How could greater co-operation between countries be encouraged?
25. Do you think people should change their behaviour when they visit a place that has a different culture?
26. How do you think a foreigner can get used to life in your country?
27. What kinds of things do foreigners need to pay attention to when they travel in your country?

Social connections

28. Why do some people feel it is important to keep in touch but others do not?
29. What skills are important for maintaining relationships in the work context?
30. Is it wrong to use social connections to create opportunities in the workplace?

Water

1. What kinds of leisure activities are based around water?

Swimming, water skiing, sailing, boating, rowing, diving, fishing.

2. Why do many people enjoy water sports?

Many people enjoy the feel of water. Of course, water sports can be very healthy too – swimming and rowing, for example.

3. Should governments spend money on providing public facilities for water sports?

Should the government pay for this or should individuals who use the facilities pay?

4. How important is travelling by water now compared to the past?

Say which kinds of people use(d) water transport and also its importance to the economy or the country and certain regions.

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of travelling by water?

Travelling by water is slow, but often not expensive, especially for certain 'bulk' goods like stone, coal and concrete.

6. Do you think travelling by water will be popular in the future?

Perhaps cruises will become more popular with tourists.

7. How valuable is water in your country?

Some countries generally have a lot of water, but it is in the wrong places! In other words, it is far from the places where it is needed most. Many parts of the world don't have enough whilst other parts have plenty.

8. Compare the importance of water and oil in your country.

Most countries need huge quantities of both for their development needs.

9. How might technology help to solve problems of water supply?

Desalination plants can turn seawater into fresh water, for example.

Water and leisure

1. What kinds of leisure activities are based around water?
2. Why do many people enjoy water sports?
3. Should governments spend money on providing public facilities for water sports?
4. Why do some people like places with a lot of water?
5. Why do children in particular often like places with water?
6. What are the advantages of learning to swim at an early age?
7. Should children be taught to swim by their parents?

Travelling by water

8. How important is travelling by water now compared to the past?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of travelling by water?
10. Do you think travelling by water will be popular in the future?

Water resources

11. How valuable is water in your country?
12. Compare the importance of water and oil in your country.
13. How might technology help to solve problems of water supply?
14. Why do so many people live and work close to water?
15. What do people use water for in the home?
16. Do people use water in the home differently to how people used it in the past?
17. Why are there sometimes water shortages?
18. What can be done to solve water shortages?
19. How could climate change affect water supplies?
20. Why do people use so much more water than in the past?
21. In what ways do people waste water?
22. Should there be limits on the amount of water people can use?
23. Should the problem of water shortages be dealt with nationally or internationally?
24. Compare the ways in which water is used in cities and in rural areas.

25. How can people be made aware of the need to save water?

Work

What kinds of jobs do you think will be the most popular in the future?

Name them and say why they will (might, could) be popular. Reasons could include salary, holidays, people's interests, parents' wishes, working hours, stress level, location, stability, and fringe benefits.
Industries in many countries which will need people most in the near future are, according to experts, doctors and nurses, teachers, construction workers, engineers, IT workers, shipbuilding workers, textile workers, oil and mining workers.

Do you think that salary is related to the importance of the job?

Yes: company executives must make decisions which affect thousands of workers.
No: nurses are often paid very badly, even though they help save lives.

What other factors can influence the salary a person earns?

Consider the following factors: value of fringe benefits, holidays, danger, stress, working hours, location, stability, qualifications, experience, foreign language ability.
Which do you think has (have) the greatest influence? The level of influence may depend on the job, so give two or three examples.

What factors influence young people when they are deciding on their future jobs and careers?

Look at the factors listed under questions one and three. Give reasons why certain factors influence them more than others.

If you had your own business, what would it be and what kind of people would you employ?

Many people aim to have their own business, so this question (at least the first part) should be something that most students have already considered. Name the qualities you would expect in people who worked for your company and say why

those qualities would be important.
According to experts, large businesses most value skills and abilities such as project management, leadership, the ability to train people, sales and marketing.

In the future, do you think that people in your country (or occupation) will work fewer hours or more?

Give reasons and examples in your answer.

Job types

1. What are the main sorts of work people do in your town/city?
2. Are some jobs more popular with men and some more popular with women?
3. What kinds of jobs will be important in the future?
4. How does the job a person do affect what other people think of him/her?

Pay and working conditions

5. Which jobs are the best paid in your society?
6. Why are some jobs better paid than others?
7. How does this affect society?
8. Which jobs do you think should be better paid than they are now?
9. Is it more important to have job satisfaction or a high salary?
10. Apart from pay, what is important to people in a job?
11. What are the advantages of having good colleagues to work with?
12. Have there been any recent changes in working conditions in your country?
13. How can individuals achieve a balance between work and leisure?
14. How can the environment of the place where a person works be important?
15. In general, what essential facilities should a workplace have?
16. What factors make a workplace an enjoyable place to work?
17. Do you think it's important for a workplace to be attractive?
18. What factors influence the friendliness of a workplace?
19. How can the kind of people someone works with have an effect on their job?
20. Do you think people should be able to wear whatever clothes they like at work?

Choosing a career

21. How do people decide which kind of work to do?
22. How important is money when people are choosing what work to do?
23. How important is character when people are choosing what work to do?
24. What suggestions do you have for young people who are trying to choose a career?

Rewarding employees

25. What are some different ways that companies use to reward employees for doing a good job?
26. Apart from offering such rewards, how could employers encourage their employees to improve their work performance?
27. Do you think that to just give employees a financial reward is enough of a reward for doing a good job?

Work and society

28. How might people's working hours and conditions affect society?
29. What might be the social effects of people working very long hours?
30. How could employers help working parents?
31. Do you agree that a job should never become more important than family life?
32. How might changes in work practices affect society in the future?
33. How might attitudes to jobs and working conditions change in the future?

Careers

34. How effectively schools prepare people for jobs?
35. Compare job opportunities for people with and without a university degree.
36. How might the relationship between education and work change in the future?
37. What kind of advice should schools and colleges provide about future careers?
38. What are the benefits for the individual of having a long-term career plan?
39. At what age do you think young people should start paid work?
40. Do you agree that it is good to change career several times during your life?
41. What kind of people often change job?

42. What kind of people rarely change job?
43. What factors should be considered when fixing the age of retirement?

Age in the workplace

44. Do certain age groups tend to be concentrated in certain types of work in Your country?
45. Do you think older employees are more important to a company than younger employees?
46. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of hiring young people and of hiring older people for work?
47. (Similar to above) What are the advantages of having young people in the workplace and what are the advantages of having older people in the workplace? How do young people and older people relate to each other in the same workplace?
48. What jobs are more suited to older people and what jobs are more suited to younger people? FQx2
49. Do you think older employees are more suitable for working at the lower levels or the upper levels of a company?
50. Do you think older employees should receive higher salaries and more benefits than younger employees?
51. What are the benefits of having older employees doing some jobs?
52. Can you think of any jobs that older people don't like doing?

Work and technology

53. What modern technology is used most often by working people nowadays?
54. Are there any jobs where people use little or no modern technology?
55. What are the advantages of using modern technology when doing a project or other work?
56. Do you think people are more stressed due to the fast pace of modern technology?

Work experience

57. Do you think students need some work experience before they start working

full-time?
58. Should work experience be included in secondary school and university courses?
59. How do you think schools could help students gain some practical work experience?
60. Do you think it would be suitable for university students in Your country to study part-time and also do part-time work, at the same time?

Unemployment

61. Is there much unemployment in your country?
62. What do you think are the causes of this?
63. Which kinds of people find it hardest to get jobs?
64. What do you suggest could be done to reduce unemployment?

Looking for employment

65. How do people usually find a job in your country?
66. What suggestions would you give to young people who are looking for a job?
67. What problems do people sometimes face when they are looking for a job?
68. When people write a resume (CV), what things do you think they should highlight?
69. Some companies ask candidates for jobs to take personality tests. Do you think these are a good idea?
70. What happens at job interviews in your country?
71. How should interviewees behave at job interviews?

Liking and disliking a job

72. Some people seem to be quite successful but they are still not satisfied with their lives. Can you suggest why they feel that way?
73. Some people work at a job that they don't really like very much. Why do you think they do that?
74. In general, do you think people in your country like their jobs?
75. Do you think someone who doesn't really like his or her job is still able to become successful in that job?

76. If your friend didn't like his or her job, what would you suggest they do?

The internationalisation of work

77. In what ways has globalisation affected people's work?
78. Do many people from your country want to work abroad?
79. What kinds of jobs do they want to do?
80. How easy is it for them to find jobs abroad?
81. Where can people find help or information if they want to work abroad?
82. What advice do you have for foreigners who want to work in your country?

Writing

1. Why do people sometimes write letters rather than make phone calls?

Perhaps they want to explain things carefully, in detail or don't want to forget anything.

2. Compare the importance of writing letters for older and younger generations.

Younger people are probably more used to using modern technology, whereas the older generation may be "set in its ways".

3. Why do many people feel differently about receiving a personal letter rather than an email?

Holding letter might feel better than looking at a computer screen.

4. How important is the sending of cards in maintaining relationships?

People may send cards at festivals and on special occasions, particularly if they cannot see the person face-to-face. This helps maintain the relationship.

5. Compare the effect of receiving a card and receiving a present.

Sending a present requires more effort and will probably be more appreciated!

6. Do cards and postcards have a future in the age of the Internet and text

messaging?

Again, holding a card or postcard may feel nicer.

7. Why are writing skills so important in education and learning?

A great part of education is developing the ability to express oneself clearly, explain how things happen(ed) and why.

8. How important are literacy skills for the general population of a country?

If people cannot communicate clearly this could cause problems for safety or make doing business more difficult.

9. How could governments encourage the development of literary skills for different age groups?

Make one or two suggestions.

Sending cards

1. How important is the sending of cards in maintaining relationships?
2. Compare the effect of receiving a card and receiving a present.
3. Do cards and postcards have a future in the age of the Internet and text messaging?

Letter writing

4. Why do people sometimes write letters rather than make phone calls?
5. Compare the importance of writing letters for older and younger generations.
6. Why do many people feel differently about receiving a personal letter rather than an email?
7. Do people today write letters by hand as much as they used to?
8. How do people feel when they receive a handwritten letter as compared to an email or a typewritten letter?
9. When do people usually write letters by hand?
10. Do young people and old people have the same ideas about letter writing?

11. Do young people write letters as often as older people do?
12. Compare letter writing with more modern ways of communicating with people.

Letters to newspapers

13. Do you think writing letters to newspapers is important?
14. Is it common for people to write letters to newspapers in your country?
15. What kinds of things do they write about?
16. What is the value of writing letters to newspapers?

The postal system

17. In your opinion, what is the postal system in your country like?
18. How do you think your country's postal system could be improved?
19. Do you think the postal system would be better run by a private company?

Letters and history

20. What can we learn from looking at handwritten letters that are very old?
21. How are old letters important in the study of history?
22. What is the value of reading letters that famous people in history have written?

Business letters

23. Are letters important when doing business?
24. What skills are needed to write good business letters?
25. Compare the advantages and disadvantages of writing letters with making phone calls when doing business.
26. What are the differences between business letters and personal letters?

Literacy

27. Do you think writing skills are important?

28. Is there much difference between in writing in your country and writing in other countries?
29. Why are writing skills so important in education and learning?
30. How important are literacy skills for the general population of a country?
31. How could governments encourage the development of literary skills for different age groups?

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About the author

Mark Griffiths began teaching English in 1990 and has worked mainly in the Czech Republic and China. He first qualified as an IELTS examiner in 2001 and has had several IELTS books published in China.

Several books, such as this one, are about the IELTS speaking and writing modules. Others are part of the English 101 Series – a range of books published in the first half of 2013. Some of these books are specific to IELTS whereas others are of use to all people studying English as a foreign language.

Mark can be found presenting the pub quiz at 'The Goose and Duck' (a.k.a. 'Frank's) near his home in Beijing on Wednesday evenings.

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