

1. 'Art is only worth what people will pay for it.' Do you agree?

Terms and Scope

- Implied assumption made that the value of an artwork is *solely* encapsulated in its price tag or monetary value. Candidates should attempt to refute or question this absolute perspective.
- **'Art'**: Includes suitable genres of the arts, such as paintings, photography, music/dance performance, theatre, literature and more (art that *can* be bought). For the purposes of this discussion, it is important to choose art genres wisely: choosing to discuss genres like pop music or movies as representation of 'art' shows a shallow understanding of the topic, and conveniently misses out the idea of people being 'willing to pay for such art'. Less clear-cut examples of art such as multimedia installations and cultural performances can be accepted as long as the artistic qualities/elements of these examples are surfaced and properly discussed
- **'only'**: Some engagement with the absolute term is required as the question is making an extreme claim about art, price and value.
- **'worth'**: Refers to the larger value/significance of art, both tangibly (practical contributions to the society in the form of enhanced well-being and social cohesion) or intangibly (historical/cultural/artistic).
- **'what people are willing to pay for it'**: Specifically, the price of a piece of art or its market value. The price of a piece of art though, may not always be the same as its *economic* value, because of its potential to influence trends and fuel industry growth.

Band 4 & above

- Addresses 'only' through explaining why this view fails to recognise other forms of value that art has or why it does not acknowledge exceptions.
- Addresses the **relationship or contrast** between different forms of value art has and how much people are willing to pay for it, perhaps through analysing the inability of the latter to fully express the worth of art.

Band 3

- Lists the general benefits/value of art or lack thereof without relating them to art's price tag.
- Valid perspectives but may be restricted/inconsistent in scope (for instance, definition of worth is limited to ways where art is personally valuable to individuals without a broader consideration of larger functions)

Low Band 3

- There could be poor awareness or unrealistic and even flawed ideas of what constitutes art or worth.
- Response may be limited to anecdotal examples.

Yes, the worth of art is derived from its price tag:

1. Art, being a **highly subjective entity**, has **no intrinsic worth on its own** and thus, **its value is necessarily assigned by its viewer/audience and how much they are willing to pay for it**. Art auctions operate with that concept in mind, and often these auctions set new standards and benchmarks for what constitutes 'worthy' or fine art of that time; without the price tag to serve as an indicator of what an artwork is worth, **measuring its value would be practically impossible, given how disparate assessments of artistic and/or cultural merit from different sources would likely be**.
 - Abstract painter Mark Rothko's "Orange, red, yellow", which is a rather simple painting consisting of blocks of red and yellow painted on an orange background, fetched an astounding figure of \$86.9 million in a 2012 auction. British artist Tracey Emin's My Bed, an installation artwork consisting of her unmade bed, sold for 2.2 million pounds

- in 2014. And in 2024, Crypto investor Justin Sun paid \$6.2 million for a banana duct-taped to a wall, an absurdist installation artwork by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan.
- In each case, the art concerned appears to possess little intrinsic or artistic worth, apart from the high amount each buyer was willing to pay. The highly subjective nature of art meant that some struggle to recognise the worth of these artworks whereas those who chose to purchase them at those prices evidently do.
2. Given the capitalistic structure of our society, the price tag of an artwork sometimes informs us of its **social or artistic significance or worth**. Artworks that fetch a high price are quite often known or accepted amongst aficionados for **their rarity, exceptional skill or concept, or historical and cultural significance**.
- “Salvator Mundi” was sold in 2017 for \$450.3 million, making it the most expensive painting to be ever sold in history. The astonishing price tag attached to this art piece is somewhat understandable given the historical significance of this painting and its intricate and complex artistry by renowned artist Leonardo da Vinci.

No, art has tremendous worth/value that is not simply derived from its price tag:

1. Art has **immense historical/cultural value in its capacity to depict, conserve, and pass on the core beliefs of societies**. This value has little to do with how much people are willing to pay for a piece of art, since it is **difficult to quantify cultural value in financial terms**. In fact, it can be argued that putting a price tag on art cheapens and unnecessarily commodifies its priceless contributions to culture and history.
- For instance, indigenous paintings and performances are widely celebrated and embraced in countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada for being essential in passing down valuable cultural knowledge and practices from their Aboriginal communities, even if such art may not always fetch high prices.
 - Works by indigenous artists Muriel Miguel and SJ Norman are revered by many for their artworks that honour the continued existence of the indigenous populations in gentrified urban areas.
2. Art also possesses tremendous social worth as **a medium to prompt personal and societal reflection about social issues, facilitate social conversations/dialogue about the status quo, and even spark positive social change**. The **social value of art, which increases along with greater accessibility and relatability, is in fact inversely proportional to the price people are willing to pay to own it**.
- For instance, there are numerous examples of art with socially beneficial messages, whose social impact is magnified by greater accessibility. Chinese artist Ai Weiwei’s public refugee life jacket installation on the pillars of the Konzerthaus Berlin was striking and notable to say the least, as the massive display sought to highlight the severity of the ongoing refugee crisis. The sculpture titled “Non-violence” created by Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd after the murder of John Lennon has also risen to become a symbol of the ongoing struggle for non-violence and the fight for gun control worldwide. It was purchased by the Luxembourg government and donated to the United Nations.

2. Examine the view that competition is necessary in today's world.

Terms and Scope	
• 'competition': The act of pursuing excellence for the purpose of gaining an advantage over other who are striving for similar goals. This could take place between individuals, or broader communities, such as organisations and even countries. This could include individuals seeking to get ahead of their peers in the educational arms race or professionally in the workplace; businesses attempting to capture a larger share of the market; and nations competing for highly talented or skilled workers or for scarce natural resources. Examples may also include sportspeople and athletes competing for national pride. • 'necessary': Acknowledges that some degree of competition is – beyond being beneficial – essential and inescapable, based on today's context. • 'today's world': May identify relevant conditions or characteristics of today's world that may heighten the need for competition, ranging from the interconnected nature of the global economy, the sheer speed of technological change as well as other disruptions, and in the case of individuals, the rise of 'hustle' culture	
Band 4 & Above	Band 3
• Addresses the key term 'necessary', that it is not merely desirable, but fundamental to what society requires today. • Addresses how significance of the benefits (or negative impact) of competition intersects with conditions or characteristics of today's world	• Listing the pros and cons of competition without explaining why it is fundamental/necessary, given today's context Low Band 3 • Limiting the response to a specific type of competition. For instance, the scope could be narrowly focused on sports competition i.e. why athletes need to outdo their rivals for personal glory/national pride

Why competition is necessary:

1. **Limited and dwindling natural resources in today's world** necessitate competition between various groups to stake their claims to **sustain life** and economic development
 - Drought and flood exacerbated by climate change contributing to conflict over water sources between farmers and herders who are forced to move to find water; both trying to safeguard their living.
 - Dwindling global fish stocks leading to phenomenon of 'ghost ships' – Chinese ships illegally fishing in North & South Korean waters, South Korean ships illegally fishing in Argentine waters.
2. The global economy is increasingly like **a single interconnected economic arena whereby nations and companies are constantly attempting to outdo or surpass each other to grab a share of the global economic pie**. With the global push for open and free trade, coupled with the predominance of multinational corporations and presence of digital platforms rendering national boundaries more and more porous, **individual nations and businesses are not just competing regionally or locally, but with rivals from increasingly far-flung places**.
 - National economies have to constantly offer a more pro-business environment and better opportunities than their competitors to attract foreign direct investment, companies and even skilled workers and global talent. For example, Singapore has to constantly build on its strengths – consisting of strong infrastructure, efficient governance, and a skilled workforce – in a bid to improve its Ease of Doing Business ranking and position itself as a business and worker-friendly nation.

- In the automotive industry, carmakers are not just concerned with rivals in their domestic markets, but must constantly upgrade their products to make their cars safer, more functional, and more cost-effective, as well as strategise how to improve the appeal of their cars relative to their competitors from other markets. EV maker Tesla has to contend with fellow EV giant BYD in the Chinese market, whereas European brands like BMW and Volkswagen may soon have to worry about their market share if the EU ban on Chinese cars is relaxed. Being competitive in such a cutthroat, global market is integral to the survival and success of carmakers.
3. In **today's fast-paced and achievement-oriented world, competition between individuals is arguably key for them to secure opportunities, and achieve personal, professional and educational growth.** The rapid rate at which educational curriculum and assessment, and demands of the work are changing, with an ever greater emphasis on achievement having intensified 'hustle' culture. With the perception that one's peers at work and school are working as hard as they can becoming more pronounced, individuals feel compelled to respond in kind, and competition levels spiral upwards. Workers and students who can adapt quickly and achieve significant growth stand to gain an invaluable upper hand.
- Software engineers, for instance, are under unrelenting pressure to remain relevant and adaptable amidst the fast rate at which advancements are made in technology and coding languages. As the significance of cloud computing, machine learning, and AI rises, those working in the tech industry must also develop their competencies through skills upgrading or learn new skills on the job. They have to be prepared to adapt to new pressures, complete training and courses, and work longer hours, or they may find themselves without a job, especially given how fragile job security is in the tech sector.
 - South Korea has a rapidly evolving job market where the latest cutting-edge skills specialising in STEM, AI, and digital technologies are increasingly prized. This incentivises students in the education system to perform exceptionally, since pathways to develop these capabilities are highly sought after and in finite supply. This fast pace of change in terms of what makes graduates suitable for the job market is exacerbated by the extreme emphasis South Koreans place on academic achievement. This excessive glorification of educational attainment is deeply rooted in South Korea's cultural norms, where attendance of private cram schools from a very young age is a common social phenomenon. The combination of factors necessitates that students attain their educational goals with requisite nimbleness and resilience, or they would lose out to their more competitive peers.

Why competition may not be necessary:

1. Given the **increasing complexity of the challenges faced by nations and humanity as a whole, an emphasis on competition represents an overly one-dimensional and arguably parochial view of the relationship between competition and achieving one's desired outcomes.** In fact, alternative models of achieving desired outcomes may be superior to competition in the specific area of complex problem-solving – alternatives with a collaborative rather than competitive focus, such as teamwork, cooperation, and empowerment of others. Confronted with 'wicked' problems with no easy solution in sight, collaboration and cooperation builds trust, leverages different strengths, and creates enduring solidarity, whereas competition intensifies self-interest and creates division and silos, preventing the pooling of resources and knowledge. Thus, **competition is not necessary, since a superior alternative in the form of collaboration and cooperation exists in allowing humanity to overcome the severe challenges it currently faces.**

- The defining challenge facing humans this century is climate change. The complexity, intractability, and sheer overwhelming scale of the endeavour of addressing anthropogenic climate change is immense indeed. Yet, nations are struggling to come together as a global community, due to a competitive mindset characterised by national, political and commercial self-interest. The tendency to see and depict other nations and the private sector as rivals and adversaries widens division and makes it nearly impossible for cohesive and unified action to be taken. Yet, the complex, interconnected nature of anthropogenic factors contributing to climate change means that adopting a largely collaborative approach is likely to yield far more significant and enduring results. Both the causes of climate change – in terms of carbon emissions that worsen the greenhouse effect – and its effects – in terms of rising sea levels, extreme weather, and biodiversity loss – show no respect for national borders. A collaborative approach is superior in this case because it can help build the trust and rapport needed for all nations to come together as a global community to secure the future of the planet. Collaboration is also superior to competition because it facilitates the sharing of climate-friendly technologies, know-how, and financial resources, and that is the best way to coordinate global efforts and allow different nations, regardless of their development status or wealth, to all play their part.
2. In fact, far from being necessary, the **current cultural fixation with competition already present in the world may worsen an already unhealthy sociopolitical ‘sickness’ that brings about more problems**. In many societies, there is already an obsession with one-upmanship due to how narrowly success is defined and how the rewards associated with success – test scores and grades, salaries and wealth, job titles and social status – are perceived to be in short supply. Geopolitically at times, political or state actors seem to embroil themselves in competition more for ideological reasons rather than tangible benefits in terms of wealth or resources.
- Continuing down this path is likely to expose societies to the corrosive impact of hyper-competitiveness: pressure to perform in ‘competitions’ that invariably pit candidates against another, including stressful kindergarten admissions interviews in places like Hong Kong and high stakes examinations (Singapore and Korea) contributing to high rate of anxiety among the young and the well-documented mental health crises in numerous Asian societies
 - The competition for parts of the South China Sea by various claimants such as China, Vietnam and the Philippines have excessively ratcheted up geopolitical tensions and created many diplomatic conundrums among other countries in the region as well.

3. Should stricter regulations be placed on films today?

Terms & Scope

- The issue: given the films today, are our regulations on film sufficient?
- **‘stricter regulations’**: more regulations, more severe punishments, clearer/more detailed/newer guidelines; on a scale: from very blunt measures (e.g. censorship) to “light(er) touch” ones (e.g. advisories; ratings; **rules on financing**). The purpose of tightening regulations could be to provide protection for local films, such as in the case of Australia requiring Netflix to include some local films
- **‘films’**: movies and documentary films (e.g. *An Inconvenient Truth*), movies meant for TV (longer feature) for mass consumption, either in public (e.g. theatres) or in private (streaming services). The choice of Youtube videos as ‘films’ is questionable; very short video clips such as Tiktok stories are also clearly not part of the genre. Response could also consider the process of film-making, though not as the main focus of the whole essay, since the question implies that the concern about stricter regulations is directed primarily at films rather than the filmmaking process (e.g. stricter regulations on hiring of diverse cast and crew, etc.);
- **‘today’**: Could identify and discuss relevant developments and trends in today’s media and technological landscape that necessitates a closer examination of whether existing/conventional regulations are adequate, such as the rise of streaming platforms, rapid technological advancements increasing the ease and realism of generated content, and a greater demand for representation and equity

Band 4 & above

- Engages consistently with the comparative ‘stricter’, showing awareness that there may be greater need for this, in terms of content and possible negative effects, as well as the (lack of) effectiveness of existing regulations
- Be able to discuss the **significance** of costs/benefits of making regulation stricter.
- Could also consider why imposing stricter regulation is irrelevant or not feasible given the context

Band 3 & below

- Merely discusses the problems/benefits of watching film (implying that more regulation is not needed/needed). Without this implication, it should go into Lower Band 3.

Why stricter regulation on film is needed

1. The impact of films can be significant on the young, perhaps **even more so now with enhanced visuals and sound** that can evoke stronger emotions and responses, not least due to how the young may be more impressionable. And because **access to films is easier** today via online streaming sources such as Disney+ and Netflix, **gatekeeping by parents is difficult, if not impossible**. This necessitates greater attention by media authorities in censoring scenes that may be deemed age inappropriate as well as having more stringent monitoring and blocking of online sources, not to mention instituting harsher punishment of those who violate such regulation.
 - For instance, *A Minecraft Movie* (2025) includes live-action filming and computer-generated imagery of characters engaging in combat, and encounters with hostile creatures. While these are presented in a fantastical context, these enhanced visuals may still be unsettling for younger viewers.
2. The **worrying increase in film violence** calls for tougher regulation on how films can or should be shown – especially to the young – in terms of onscreen depictions of assault with

deadly weapons, severe injury, torture, suicide, death, and violence against specific groups such as women, children, and racial minorities.

- This is not a new concern: a 2013 report in the US journal *Pediatrics* that PG-13 movies of that time (e.g. *The Hunger Games* and *The Avengers*) contained more violence than R-rated films of the 1980s, with gun violence having tripled since 1985.
3. The **social impact of films can be significant**, not least when content may address issues of significance to society (e.g. race, religion, politics, gender). In today's world of greater tensions along various social fault lines, films may stir up or exacerbate inter-group tensions. It would thus be **sensible, even necessary, for media authorities in more conservative societies to be more stringent**, both in terms of regulation of content from abroad as well as of local film makers who flagrantly violate regulatory stipulations.
- An example is the local film *#LookAtMe* (2022), directed by Ken Kwek, which was disallowed from public screening in Singapore due to concerns that it could undermine the social fabric. The film's plot involves a protagonist planning a revenge attack on a homophobic pastor, with allusions that appeared to reference a real pastor in Singapore.

Why regulation need not be stricter

1. **Rather than needing to be stricter**, tighter regulations, in the worse cases, are **being used as a pretext by oppressive ruling regimes to control information, ideas and opinions to their advantage and tighten their grip on power**. Often, such action is taken to suppress the views of other cultures that are deemed “unsuitable” by the regime – a unilateral, authoritarian move that not only violates citizens’ freedoms but may also deepen divides between nations, arguably at a time when bridges need to be built rather than burnt.
- Prominent examples include China’s blocking or censorship of US films under the Marvel umbrella such as 2021’s *Shang-Chi and the Legend of Ten Rings* (unhappiness over the depiction of Chinese characters) and the following year’s *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (for a reference to Falun Gong, a religious movement deemed an “illegal organisation” by the Chinese government).
 - Similarly, the Vietnamese government banned the release of the highly anticipated *Barbie* movie in 2023, allegedly due to a scene featuring the nine-dash line—a controversial depiction of China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea, which is perceived to be a challenge to Vietnam’s sovereignty over the South China Sea. Even in democratic societies like the US, the recent 2025 100% tariffs on foreign films could be seen as a move to favour domestic film production, and at the same time, curb foreign influence, especially that of China which has a thriving film industry that is shaping global narratives.
2. Stricter regulations risk silencing diverse voices and stifling critical dialogue at a time **when societies need open conversations the most**. In a world increasingly shaped by global challenges—climate change, inequality, identity politics, and misinformation—films and documentaries serve as powerful tools for education, empathy, and social awareness. By imposing stricter controls, authorities may prevent creators from tackling controversial or sensitive topics, even when such content is presented with nuance and artistic integrity.
- For example, Russia recently toughened its anti-LGBT laws, allowing the authorities to fine any individual or organisation found to have promoted homosexuality in public, online, or in films, and going as far as to deem LGBT movement as extremist. To this end, it has censored films such as the award-winning *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), stifling discourse on identity and gender orientation. Furthermore, with modern audiences becoming more media literate, there is growing capacity for viewers to

engage with complex issues responsibly. Rather than blanket restrictions, **content warnings, age ratings, and viewer discretion** are more effective and democratic approaches that protect vulnerable groups without compromising artistic freedom or public discourse.

4. Discuss the claim that modern technology has made it more difficult for political leaders to govern today.

Terms & Scope	
• ‘modern technology’: contemporary products, services, and infrastructure that are designed and built using scientific knowledge and engineering. There is likely to be an emphasis on new or social media, which is acceptable, given the scale and nature of the impact the former has exerted on politics and political processes. However, an attempt should be made to establish new or social media as a specific form of ‘modern technology’. • ‘more difficult...to govern today’: How such modern technology has increased the challenges and complexities that politicians face in leading and running a country. The scope should be broad, covering areas such as ensuring safety and security, making informed decisions, enforcing laws, connecting to and being accountable to the electorate, etc. • ‘political leaders’: Individuals (not an entity like the government) who hold positions of power and influence within a political system, <i>rather than unelected politicians</i>, since the latter are not in a position to ‘govern’	
Band 4 & Above	Band 3
• Engages with ‘more difficult’ by discussing how the nature of political work has expanded/become more complex • Establishes clear links that explain how modern technology adds to/causes the difficulty of political work (or not).	• Lists the advantages and disadvantages of modern technology and how it is used by political leaders and/or citizens

Modern technology has made it more difficult to govern:

1. The **abundance of misinformation and disinformation available through digital platforms** can serve to **undermine trust** in government messages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, modern technology—particularly social media—made it significantly more difficult for political leaders to govern effectively.
 - For example, in the United States, viral misinformation on platforms like Facebook and Twitter falsely claimed that COVID-19 was a hoax or that vaccines change people’s DNA. These claims spread much faster than official public health messages and reached millions of people within hours. As a result, political leaders and health officials faced widespread public resistance to mask mandates, lockdowns, and vaccination campaigns. This **undermined trust in government institutions and made it harder to implement consistent, science-based policies**, illustrating how the speed and scale of misinformation in the digital age can severely disrupt governance and public cooperation.
2. Disparities in access to technology **have created new governance challenges by exacerbating existing inequalities**. As governments increasingly shift public services online, those without stable internet access or sufficient digital skills risk being left behind.
 - A clear example is the U.K.’s attempt to move many public services—such as benefit applications and tax services—online through platforms like GOV.UK. While efficient for many, this transition has alienated people lacking digital literacy, particularly the elderly and low-income citizens without personal devices or internet access. In the U.S., efforts to modernize unemployment benefit systems during economic downturns were hampered by outdated websites and poor access in underserved communities, leading to delays and widespread frustration.

- Similarly, during the 2022 Kenyan general election, the use of electronic voting and results transmission was intended to improve transparency, but technical failures and limited digital infrastructure in rural areas raised doubts about fairness and access. These examples show how even well-intentioned digital initiatives can create new barriers, **forcing governments to grapple with issues of inclusion, trust, and effectiveness in an increasingly digital world.**

Modern technology can ease the work of political leaders:

1. Advanced data analytics can **help political leaders make evidence-based policy decisions** by analysing large datasets and identifying trends, patterns, and potential outcomes.
 - In the UK, the government's use of data analytics during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled policymakers to track infection rates, predict healthcare resource needs, and formulate targeted containment strategies. Such technology can also **help political leaders analyse complex policy issues, predict outcomes, and evaluate the potential impact** of different policy interventions.
 - In New Zealand, the government has employed AI algorithms to analyse public feedback and sentiment on social media platforms regarding various policy proposals, enabling policymakers to **better understand public sentiment and incorporate citizen input** into policy decisions.
2. Modern technology has significantly **enhanced governments' ability to govern effectively by improving citizen engagement and streamlining public service delivery.** Online platforms and social media allow political leaders to communicate directly with the public, gather feedback in real time, and foster greater participation in policymaking.
 - Estonia is a global leader in digital governance through its e-Residency program, which not only enables individuals around the world to establish a digital identity and access Estonian services, but also empowers citizens to vote, engage in policy discussions, and interact with government agencies entirely online. This level of digital integration promotes transparency, inclusivity, and trust in public institutions.
 - Similarly, Singapore's Smart Nation initiative exemplifies how technology can transform service delivery. Through platforms like MyInfo, which consolidates citizens' data from various government agencies, individuals can seamlessly access services related to healthcare, education, and social welfare. By reducing bureaucratic barriers and enhancing efficiency, such initiatives demonstrate how digital tools can make governance more responsive, transparent, and citizen-centered.

5. To what extent do you agree that the widespread use of artificial intelligence will improve our lives?

Terms & Scope • ‘artificial intelligence’: Systems or machines that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, including learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and most currently, the harnessing of large language models for a range of tasks. It should not be confused with automated processes, which follow fixed, pre-programmed rules and are not able to adapt or learn. • ‘widespread’: Response should assume the extensive use of AI in our everyday life or as a common tool in many industries, and discuss the link between the extent or scale of AI’s application and its impact in terms of improving or not improving our lives. • ‘improve our lives’: Concerning the different ways societies, groups, and individuals may benefit in terms of various aspects of their daily routines, lifestyles, living conditions, well-being, and quality of life.	
Band 4 & above • Shows good awareness of the defining characteristics of AI • Establishes clear links between said characteristics and how AI directly or indirectly enhances people’s lives • Engages with ‘widespread’ by taking into consideration the relationship between a proliferation of AI tools/application and said benefits	Band 3 • Listing of benefits and problems without explaining/justifying why/how AI can improve our lives. <u>Low Band 3/Band 2</u> • Shows little awareness of what distinguishes AI from other technologies. Band 2 if misconception is consistently shown. E.g. Response equates automation with AI

Why it is likely to improve our lives

1. **The precision and speed that AI possesses play an important role in improving our safety as a result of significant reduction of human errors.** The ability of AI to function accurately and continuously makes it an excellent self-operating and self-learning systems; it will react better to a wider range of variables.
 - This is the principle behind self-driving vehicles and is already in place for vehicles such as trains. It is theorised that the widespread use of autonomous vehicles will make roads safer as human error, inconsistencies, and reaction time are replaced with AI. Autonomous vehicles could significantly reduce traffic accidents and save more lives by 2045, according to a study by Intel. It improves our lives as it eliminates the need for police resources to enforce safety laws and more officers could concentrate on reducing the most serious criminal activity. Robotaxis using AI software have been rolled out in more than 10 cities in China, including Chongqing and Wuhan, with the project having completed 1million rides and planning to expand the services to a dozen more cities by 2030. Such autonomous driving cars are said to reduce congestion and are friendlier to the environment, as they run on electricity, rather than fuel.
2. **The ability of AI to work with unparalleled efficiency will improve workplace operations significantly.** When Artificial Intelligence takes over repetitive or dangerous tasks, it frees up humans, allowing them to perform tasks that involve creativity, and leaves enough room and time for the interpersonal aspects of their lives.
 - Examples would include travel navigation, smart home devices, smartphones, web searching, etc. Today, even the financial institutions such as banks apply AI technology to point out security risks and protect customers’ data. With AI handling most of the

- mundane and repetitive tasks at the workplace, workers are free to channel their efforts to more important tasks, thus increasing productivity as well as the workers' self-esteem.
- Many companies in the service industry have also used AI to virtually assist their customers, a move that is particularly important when many face a labour crunch in the industry. Chatbots are created to help customers in their queries because of their ability to handle many customers at the same time, beyond the limit of the human customer service representatives, reducing the wait time for customers as a result.
3. **AI's distinctive quality to process a huge amount of data beyond human capacity enables it to identify more accurate patterns that lead to better decision making.** AI is useful in parsing immense amounts of information which can be applied in a variety of areas, such as in investment, criminal activity, fraud detection, streamlining processes, and even traffic management amongst many other examples. Through machine learning, AI systems learn and adapt to new data without human intervention and can spot trends or extrapolate reasonable conclusions from millions of datapoints.
- For example, by improving the operations of healthcare facilities and medical organisations, AI can reduce operating costs and save money. One estimate from McKinsey predicts big data could save medicine and pharma up to \$100B annually.

Why it is likely to worsen our lives

1. **However, the pace at which AI advances and the rate at which it is being adopted by companies to scale up and expand operations into more sectors and industries would end up threatening the livelihood of employees in certain industries and economies.**
- The very precision, efficiency, and self-learning functions of AI can threaten the jobs of those employed in repetitive and low-skilled labour such as certain aspect of manufacturing, and many societies have no clear policy or plan to help them adjust, adapt and transition to the new technology.
 - As AI improves, not only are blue collar jobs such as drivers are at risk of being replaced, but white collar professionals like accountants might soon be taken over by AI systems. Many large organisations, including Microsoft, IBM, fintech Klarna have conducted layoff exercises to downsize their workforce as a result of their large scale adoption of AI to improve efficiency. Jobs related to software development are being take over by AI, so are copywriting, graphic design and video editing. According to a report by the McKinsey Global Institute, around 800 million jobs could be lost worldwide due to automation by 2030. The lack of variable costs in terms of salaries and operational expenses provides an attractive proposition to many employers concerned about the risk to their operations as a result of frequent strikes by powerful unions in Europe, for example. This also explains why many airports and airlines have invested in developing automated and biometric check-in infrastructure for passengers without the need for any airport or airline staff to be present at these counters, also because of the increasing competition among airports to be more efficient than others.
2. **Similarly, as AI applications become more ubiquitous and commonplace, so too would infringements of privacy.** AI's ability to mine data, connect the various datapoints and recognise patterns can lead to huge invasion of our privacy as we continue to rely on AI for our everyday needs such as Digital Assistants, web searches.
- Latest technologies like facial recognition can identify any individual in a crowd, as long as security cameras are equipped with it. The data gathering ability of AI also means that a timeline of our daily activities can be created by accessing a person's data from various social networking sites. China's Social Credit System, powered by AI, gives all

Chinese citizens a score based on how they behave. Facial recognition technology is already deployed as a tool of authoritarian control in Xinjiang Province.

6. Is conflict inevitable in today's volatile world?

Terms & Scope	
• 'conflict': War/armed and unarmed conflict/clashes <i>between</i> and <i>within</i> countries and communities because of resources, ideology, ethnicity, religion, geopolitics, etc. Given the context of today's world, responses should make an effort to touch on large-scale conflicts. Must involve some form of tussle for power, rather than just presence of inequality, injustice, or unfairness. E.g. Gender inequality is irrelevant unless the response teases out how the inequality manifests or escalates into a struggle to change the status quo. Focusing on interpersonal conflict demonstrates little awareness of the context of a 'volatile world'. • 'inevitable': Absolute keyword that means that conflict is certain to happen and unable to be avoided or prevented. To engage meaningfully with it, candidates need to show the degree to which conflict is inevitable and not blindly agree with the claim. • 'today's volatile world': Changing rapidly and unpredictably, due to drastic and sometimes unanticipated shifts in geopolitical realities and tensions, the global economy and supply chains, and disruptive technologies. Some symptoms of volatility (for Band 4) include the nuclear arms race in Asia and the Middle East; ethnic strife in countries like Somalia and Myanmar; territorial disputes in the South China Sea and between China and Taiwan; the struggle for hegemony between the USA and China; the Russia-Ukraine war; the various flare-ups that are creeping up because of resources shortages.	
Band 4 & above	Band 3
• Addresses 'inevitable', perhaps through explaining why the causes/origins of conflict may be deeply entrenched in underlying factors, or intractable due to their multifaceted and complex nature. • Conversely, responses could discuss the significance/effectiveness of preventive measures to minimise the occurrence of conflicts or mitigation measures that shorten or aid in resolving conflicts once the latter have begun	• List factors that are related to or contribute to conflict without addressing why they make conflict unavoidable <u>Low Band 3</u> • May focus exclusively on conflict between individuals, which shows limited awareness of the context of 'today's volatile world'.

Why conflict is inevitable given today's volatile world:

1. **Rapid or sudden shifts in geopolitical realities erode the already limited trust** between global superpowers who want to assert their dominance and strengthen their positions, and this is a recipe for disaster that can only end in conflict.
 - Russia's invasion of Ukraine happened because of Putin's belief that there is a need to keep the USA from its sphere of influence. According to analysis from experts like John Mearsheimer, it is the USA's and the EU's supposed meddling in trying to democratise Ukraine that has kickstarted a conflict that shows no signs of ending even as it enters its fourth year.
 - The simmering conflict between America and China has shown no signs of abating. Previously, under the previous US Administration, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022 seemed to signal the USA's opposition to the 'One China policy'. Fast forward to 2025, and President Trump's sudden and arguably inexplicable initiation of a 'tariff war' on effectively the whole world have thrown the global economy, supply chains, and geopolitics into a state of disarray. More to the point, Trump's singling out of China by imposing a rate of 30% on most Chinese imports have ratcheted up US-China tensions.

2. The **current uncertainties of the world have contributed to the resurgence of nationalistic and jingoistic leaders**. As anxieties rise, the appeal of assertive personalities and 'strongman' leaders also increases. Coupled with the opportunistic **tendencies for such politicians to weaponise such fears and gain favour by scapegoating foreign nations**, this leads to the heightening of enmity between nations, which can make tensions/conflict hard to avert.
 - Putin's mobilisation of the Russian Army near Scandinavian countries has pushed Sweden and Norway away from a policy of neutrality into a more aggressive one. This has high potential in seeing armed conflicts.
 - Xi Jinping's aggressive stance in the South China Sea and the overreach of the China Blue Navy and the Chinese Army on the Himalayas is creating a very dangerous situation in Asia. PM Lee's 2022 National Day Rally speech indirectly alluded to such developments and warning a less peaceful couple of decades ahead for Asia.
3. The **intensifying threat of climate change has put much more pressure on countries to adopt more selfish policies** to preserve or obtain dwindling resources, making it more and more likely that countries are headed for conflict
 - Ethiopia is about to complete the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), a \$4.5bn mega-project on the Blue Nile river that runs from Lake Tana in Ethiopia to meet the White Nile in Khartoum. The dam project will affect water levels downstream, and many believe the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will seed the germs of instability, and it will cause a water war between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt.

Why despite today's volatile world, conflict can be avoided:

1. Given the erratic behaviour of some countries, **many leaders have actually redoubled their commitment to and efforts to focus on diplomatic channels to diffuse and avoid armed conflict at all costs**. This has put a halt on what seems to have been inevitable global conflict many times.
 - Despite heavy criticism, NATO members have been unwilling to have boots on the ground in Ukraine and risk escalating the conflict with Russia, which could lead to nuclear war.
 - Singapore and Malaysia have been able to resolve their dispute over Pedra Branca by resorting to diplomacy and accepting the rule of law established after the ruling by UNCLOS.
 - Despite President Trump and Vice-President Vance's aggressively "America First" foreign policy stance and tactics, various world leaders have tried to repair or maintain diplomatic and bilateral ties with America, including Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, Indian PM Modi, and British PM Starmer.
2. Even in a world where supply chains are all but fragmented and globalisation is seen with scepticism, **conflict remains the last resort that countries have, because the cost of armed or prolonged conflict is a strong deterrent**.
 - Despite all the political chest-thumping following Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, China has refrained from starting an all-out invasion. Instead, it has opted for more maritime patrols, war games on the border, provocative incursions, and raised import bans on some Taiwanese products.
 - Even when tensions flared between Saudi Arabia and Iran's back Houthi Rebels in March 2022, both countries refrained from engaging in warfare because it would be too costly for both parties to start a war in the wake of the economic devastation caused by Covid-19.

7. 'The key to good governance is in staying accountable to the people.' How far do you agree?

Terms & Scope:

'key': A *crucial* feature of a government, though *not necessarily the most important*; it is difficult to achieve good governance without this feature. Various understandings of 'key' can be accepted. For instance, if 'key' is understood as 'most important', this would invite comparison to other criteria when it comes to good governance. This could be because it forms the *foundation* of other aspects of good governance (e.g. maintaining social order, national security/sovereignty, economic management etc.)

'staying accountable to the people': There is an implication here of sustained behaviour (over a long period of time) in terms of the willingness to *justify* one's actions which in the case of governance usually means that those actions oblige the social contract. 'to the people' also implies an attempt by the government to make their actions/policies transparent rather than hidden from its people. Beyond transparency, we should allow for a range of interpretations. 'staying accountable' can also mean serving the interest of the people/ensuring that the people benefit and/or are not harmed.

'good governance': The ability to manage citizens within a state well/effectively, including (but not limited to) supervising and resolving their conflicts, protecting their political and social rights, and providing for their needs.

Band 4 & Above	Band 3
- Addresses 'key' by explaining why accountability is necessary precursor or prerequisite for good governance, or why in its absence, good governance might be highly unlikely. - Addresses a range of aspects or facets relating to the act of governing	- Largely a listing/discussion of the benefits and harms of a government being accountable to its people. - May focus exclusively on showing how well different needs of society are met (e.g. stability/law and order, a good healthcare system, a strong economy etc.) instead of addressing 'good governance'

Why staying accountable is key to good governance:

- A nation's leaders need the trust of their people to govern effectively, and accountability is important in building that trust.** By being transparent and upfront with its people, a government can gain political capital and goodwill to allow it to pursue important long-term goals, even if these goals lead to short-term inconveniences, as people will trust that the government has their interests at heart.
 - Sweden, consistently ranked as one of the most transparent governments in the world, annually publishes the official online publication *Taxeringskalendern*, which contains the tax returns of every citizen in Sweden, including those of its highest-ranking government officials. The principle of public access to information is also a fundamental principle in Sweden's form of government. One of the fundamental laws, the Freedom of the Press Act, contains provisions on the right of the public, and crucially, the press, to access official documents. The law also protects the identities of sources who provide journalists or news agencies with information, and journalists can never be forced to reveal their sources. This heightened transparency has resulted in a high degree of vigilance: elected representatives and civil servants are fully aware that they operate under constant public scrutiny.

2. **Accountability helps build political engagement among citizens, which is vital in maintaining good governance into the long term.** By making sure that all information is available to its people, constant and clear feedback between government representatives and the people they represent can be maintained. A more politically engaged youth population will also create better leaders who are more familiar with the country's needs to ensure good governance into the future.
 - Swedish law also protects all public servants by giving them the right to remain anonymous when they disclose information to the media. Revealing the identity of a whistle-blower is a crime in Sweden, and legislation is designed to make reporting any act of corruption simple, inexpensive, and low risk. In addition, the presence of an *ombudsman* – an individual elected by the Swedish parliament to ensure that civil servants comply with laws and statutes and fulfil their obligations – allows a complaint to be made by anybody who feels that an individual has been treated unjustly by a public authority or a civil service official. These ethical watchdogs promote a culture of transparency while putting pressure on public players.
3. **Accountability ensures a clear direction and thought-out policies, which is important for ensuring a cohesive and consistent regime.** For governments to be accountable to their people, they must first be clear on the rationales for each policy they plan to implement.
 - Open parliament sessions – which members of the public can sit in – in Singapore, for example, require MPs to think through and debate every issue thoroughly, lest a member of public raises concern. In being accountable, governments are made to consider all options, leading to only the more effective solutions being tabled.

Why staying accountable is not necessarily key to good governance:

1. **In an increasingly polarised and populist world, staying accountable to “the people” might mean being judged by a capricious public that may not accept what is best for them.** People today are not interested in long-term and slow progress, but instead chase short-term and highly visible goals.
 - The American Journal of Political Science found voters tend to only acknowledge economic growth during an election year and not throughout the election. People also tend to focus on more sensational elements, with the parliamentary discussions in Singapore largely going unnoticed except for some very public, but less policy-relevant gaffes by well-known MPs. As such, a fully accountable and competent government pursuing long-term policies may risk losing an election due to the short-term, even irrational mindsets of a politically illiterate public.
2. **In the most extreme scenarios, there may be issues of national security which require governments to exercise their own discretion and act unilaterally to protect the social stability and security of the country.** While it is crucial for people to have access to information, not all information is useful – or necessary – in ensuring the sovereignty of a nation. Secret services of the world have discretionary powers and are not held accountable to the public. This is necessary to protect their people from particularly insidious threats that may cause panic.
 - In Singapore, the fate of extremists detained by the Internal Security Division is not made known to the public, which prevents them from being treated as martyrs or receiving any airtime. Even Sweden's famous Freedom of Press Act is subject to provisions on secrecy that restrict the right to access official documents. The need to protect the safety of citizens outweighs any possible argument for unfettered transparency – one only needs to consider the destabilising force of Wikileaks on

governments worldwide, with some parliaments thrown into gridlock and others having the Herculean task of rebuilding trust from scratch.

8. 'Young people in your society should fear the future rather than embrace it.' To what extent is this an accurate view?

Terms & Scope:

- **'young people'**: Youths aged 15-35 years old; youths who have not entered the workforce or those who are in the initial stages of their careers.
- **'in your society'**: Refers to the Singapore context.
- **'should fear the future'**: Dreading or feeling anxious about the future as the uncertainty and challenges are persistent and severe (i.e. very difficult to overcome). Also implies a certain helpless acceptance of said challenges. It is acceptable for responses to argue that young people should fear the future as this is likely to compel/spur them to take action to address problems that incite fear E.g. climate change.
- **'[should] embrace it'**: Adopting a positive and welcoming attitude towards what is to come because of concrete opportunities, positive trends, and young people being prepared. Could also encompass a proactive attitude whereby young people adopt a proactive instead of a passive stance towards the future.

Band 4 and above

- Addresses the terms 'embrace' and/or 'fear': Addresses **significant** reasons for **why** young people should adopt this attitude and not merely discuss positive/negative attitudes.
- Credit will be given to responses that engage with '**rather than**' through comparison of attitudes towards challenges and opportunities of the future for young Singaporeans

Band 3

- Discusses benefits/problems of having a positive/negative outlook, addressing the significance of such

Low Band 3

- Lists future prospects/highlights that young people can embrace, or conversely, future threats/risks/challenges young people may fear

Band 2

- Lists general challenges and opportunities of the future (without links to the concerns of young people)
- Points do not reflect Singaporean issues (e.g. famine/world hunger as something to fear)

Should fear rather than embrace:

- Despite the exciting, even global, opportunities present in a constantly diversifying job market, which seems to promise endless career prospects, economic slowdowns and technological disruptions in recent years signal **economic volatility** and **increased job market pressures** for young Singaporeans in the future.
 - The rise of automation and artificial intelligence is transforming traditional industries, leading to mass job displacement. Even recent graduates in sectors like finance and technology face **uncertainty about job security**, as businesses transition to automation or move their operations out of Singapore due to rising costs. This also includes the growing cost of living, where housing prices seem increasingly out of reach for young people and car ownership is a luxury. Such emerging challenges could leave young people **feeling apprehensive** as they face the uncertain future.

2. Even though a high-quality education system and access to all the latest technology appear to have given young Singaporeans a high sense of capability and empowerment, there are **complex global forces that remain outside their sphere of control**.
 - As a small island nation, Singapore is **particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change**, including rising sea levels and increased temperatures, which can pose long-term environmental and health challenges. The **palpable effects** such as increased heatwaves and their impact on daily life make young people worried about environmental sustainability and their quality of life, yet they feel helpless in the face of such intractable challenges.
 - Others would include international conflicts (such as US-China tensions and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war) that lead to trade disruptions and economic uncertainty that highlights **Singapore's vulnerability to external shocks**. Furthermore, the **lack of effective responses** from international organisations and the **reluctance of key nations to address such problems** decisively heightens this **sense of pessimism and inability** of young Singaporeans to make much of an impact.
3. Singapore's **highly structured and competitive education system**, while renowned for its academic excellence, may not fully prepare young people for the unpredictable dynamics of the global economy, potentially leading to challenges in adaptability. The focus on rote learning and high-stakes examinations in schools **might not encourage the development of critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability skills** needed in rapidly changing industries.
 - For instance, in fast-evolving sectors like technology and creative industries, employers increasingly value innovation and problem-solving skills, which may not be the focal point of traditional education models. This situation can leave young Singaporeans **feeling inadequately prepared** to pivot or innovate in their careers as demands change.

Should embrace rather than fear:

1. While ambiguity and uncertainty characterise today's world, **a responsive and holistic education ensures that young Singaporeans are more than ready to adapt to such fluidity**.
 - Singapore's education system is consistently ranked among the top globally, providing young people with a solid academic foundation and access to world-class universities and research facilities. This strong educational background **equips them well for future challenges and opportunities**. In addition, there has been a **concerted effort made to focus on cultivating 21st century competencies** in schools, and young people are **increasingly equipped with the skills needed to confidently address the challenges and opportunities of the future**. This is bolstered by young people's increasing awareness of today's challenges through their exposure to global trends and events via the plethora of online resources.
2. With Singapore's stable political environment and government foresight, the Singapore government actively **invests in youth and education programmes, ensuring that young people are supported through scholarships, grants, and continuous learning initiatives**. With the volatile demands of an ever-changing job market that requires keeping pace with all the latest developments, young people may feel overwhelmed by the expectations placed on them.
 - Fortunately, Initiatives like the SkillsFuture program aim to support lifelong learning and help young citizens stay relevant in the workforce by subsidising skills training and education at different stages of their careers. **This reassures young Singaporeans**

that they will be well supported even as they face the challenges of the future. Young Singaporeans are also in a good position to take advantage of new opportunities and career pathways due to the city-state fostering a robust start-up ecosystem, supported by **government policies that encourage innovation and entrepreneurship**. Singapore is ranked highly as one of the best places in the world for start-ups, particularly in technology-driven sectors. Governmental support, such as funding and incentives for start-ups, creates a conducive environment for young entrepreneurs.