



St Paul's School  
FOUNDED 1509

## English 13+ Entrance Exam- Guidance and Example Questions

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The English entrance exam presents applicants with a choice between two discursive essay questions on a broadly ethical-philosophical idea or issue. Below are two past paper questions, with rubric, that illustrate this style, followed by some general guidance on exam requirements and recommended preparation prior to the exam itself.

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*From the list below please choose **one** of the two tasks.*

*Think carefully about your chosen task and consider a range of ideas to explore and discuss. You can choose to draw on your own personal experience, the lives of others, or both.*

*There are marks available for accuracy of punctuation, spelling and grammar, as well as the quality of your written expression. Remember to check your work carefully in the final five minutes of the exam.*

- 1. If everyone were paid exactly the same, regardless of what job they do, the world would be a happier and fairer place. Discuss.**
- 2. We should judge historical figures by the moral standards of their time, not ours. Discuss.**

\* \* \*

These questions are not designed to test any specific subject area. Instead, candidates are expected to draw on their own disparate knowledge and personal experience to develop a relevant and engaging response.

**Candidates are given 45 minutes to complete this task. They will be given 10 minutes to plan, 30 minutes to write and 5 minutes to check and correct their work.**

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St Paul's School  
Lonsdale Road London SW13 9JT  
020 8748 9162  
reception@stpaulsschool.org.uk

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**stpaulsschool.org.uk**



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## Assessment Criteria

Marks are awarded according to two equally weighted criteria:

1. **Quality of writing:** *this includes sophistication of expression, breadth of vocabulary and individuality of style and voice, as well as accuracy of spelling and grammar.*
2. **Quality of argument and structure:** *this assesses how well shaped and sequenced the overall response is, as well as how logically and persuasively the writing moves through to a justified and clear conclusion.*

## General Advice

We encourage candidates to do the following:

- **Use the full planning time provided to prepare both the content and structure of their response.**  
*There is a direct correlation between the care and effort that has gone into planning, and the quality of the finished response. Quality and fluency of expression are essential; a thorough and clear plan will allow candidates to focus fully on their writing once they begin their response.*
- **Argue for whichever side of the implied debate they genuinely support.**  
*Candidates will not be judged on their point of view, and the questions are specifically designed so that either side of the implied debate could be reasonably defended or rejected. They should not assume that there is a 'right' or 'better' answer from the examiner's perspective. A balanced response that does not conclude definitively for either side is also perfectly acceptable.*
- **Consider both sides of the debate.**  
*Even if they decide to write towards an entirely one-sided conclusion, candidates should consider and explore the other side of the debate. An effective argument anticipates and negates obvious counter-arguments in addition to developing the strength of its own position.*



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Things to avoid:

- **Candidates should not fabricate factual details like statistics, imagined surveys or made-up quotations. We are looking for cogent and clear argument, not a pastiche of journalistic writing.**
- **Candidates should take care not to deviate from the focus of the question**  
*The questions are designed to require some degree of abstract/conceptual thought. Real-life examples, relevant personal experiences and engagement with specific related topics and subjects can help to ground ideas and make response more persuasive and engaging. However, candidates should take care not to deviate from the question. Consider sample question 2 above. Providing specific historical examples would be perfectly appropriate here. However, a response that segues into a detailed historical account of a particular individual risks deviating into irrelevance and failing to address the actual debate that is at the heart of the question.*
- **Overly casual and informal writing.**  
*There is intentionally no specified form. If they find it helpful, candidates may choose to frame their response as a speech or article, but this is not required. Regardless, particular care should be taken to avoid an overly conversational tone and/or vernacular diction. Rhetorical devices that are engaging and persuasive can be very effective, but they are no substitute for cogent argument, clear structure and intellectual substance.*
- **Cliché, platitudes and generalisation.**  
*The age and experience of candidates is obviously taken into account when assessing their work. What will immediately strike an adult as unoriginal, tired and cliché may not be obvious to an eleven-year-old. Nonetheless, an awareness and avoidance of language and phrasing that is vague, formulaic or vacuous is an important indicator of linguistic ability.*



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## Preparation

Given the style of question for this exam, it is impossible to anticipate the ideas, experiences and knowledge candidates will need to draw on to develop their response. Therefore, we recommend focusing on the following with candidates who wish to prepare specifically for these tasks:

- **Accuracy and fluency of writing.**

*There is no expectation that a candidate's writing under timed conditions will be flawless. However, an approach that prioritises quality over quantity is certainly recommended. Major grammatical errors and awkward or unclear syntax that affect the clarity of ideas and argument can have a significant impact on writing marks.*

- **Breadth and precision of vocabulary, and sophistication of expression.**

*The range of vocabulary available to a candidate is not something that they can improve significantly in the immediate run-up to an exam and will instead reflect more broadly on their academic progress and potential. Naturally, engagement with suitably ambitious independent reading and continued writing practice are essential prerequisites.*

*In terms of more immediate preparation, a self-reflective and critical approach to the way they articulate ideas is important. Indeed, the appropriateness and precision of their use of vocabulary and expression is more significant than its complexity. They are ultimately aiming to show off in this response, but that does not mean the more esoteric their language the better. Poorly handled complexity and arcane but misused expression will compromise the quality of their overall response.*

- **Planning and structuring arguments**

*As mentioned above, effective planning is essential. It is recommended that candidates have a clear sense of the conclusion they are aiming for before they start writing and plan out a simple three or four paragraph structure that leads to this logically and persuasively. Practising how to do this efficiently and thoroughly under time pressure will help them to approach the exam with confidence.*