



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Anthropology

ANTH1

(Specification 1111)

Unit 1: Being Human: Unity and Diversity

Report on the Examination

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ANTH1

General

There continues to be improvement in the quality of answers from one examination session to the next and this is very encouraging. Students are using a wide range of ethnographies and showing more in-depth knowledge of these ethnographies. There continues to be, however, a variation between centres in the quality of material presented. There was some increased use of relevant concepts and theoretical frameworks to analyse and evaluate the material.

Positive features:

- Use of detailed ethnographic studies that shows knowledge of where, why and in what context the research was done and by whom.
- Most students are spending the right amount of time on each question and producing answers of sufficient length.
- Students are showing familiarity with key anthropological thinkers and the concepts associated with these thinkers.
- Students are not just presenting the ethnographic material but analysing, interpreting and evaluating it as well.
- Students are now comparing material more fully rather than simply juxtaposing information and leaving the comparison implicit.

Key Issues:

- Some students appear to lack awareness of the key theme of the unit: universality and diversity, including the biological anthropology component.
- For some students interpreting questions appeared to cause difficulties, even where the wording of the question was taken directly from the specification.
- There appears to be issues with understanding the trigger word 'way'. It does not just mean give an example.
- Some students had problems in interpreting the Items and using them effectively; there was a tendency simply to recycle the content of the Items rather than using them to help answer the question.
- There is still a problem with some students presenting a 'world cultures' approach to the answers. Some students relied too heavily on Bruce Parry without adequate critical evaluation of the material. Material for answers should be specifically related to anthropological studies, which will include not just description but analysis, interpretation and evaluation. Students should, where possible, identify exactly who did a given study and where it was done.
- Overall there was not enough actual comparison and too many students continue simply to juxtapose material on different cultures.
- Students should keep in mind that anthropology is not just about the study of 'tribes', as contrasted with 'western' culture. Examples can be selected from a range of societies and social groups; the key is that the method of gathering information must be anthropological/ethnographic.
- Although it is possible to use the same ethnographic study for more than one question, some students overdid this, relying on a very few, sometimes non-anthropological, studies to answer most of the questions. If the ethnographic material is to be reused, then either it needs to be in a very different context or different material from the same ethnography should be selected. For example, some students used lip plates amongst the Suri as an example of using the body as a symbol and also as objects in social relations.

- There needs to be continued development and improvement of AO2 skills in student work.
- In some cases, students mentioned theoretical perspectives without applying these to the ethnographic material.

Question 01

Most students were able to give a sound definition of culture and some form of appropriate example. Where marks were lost, this was usually because of the narrowness of the definition or the superficiality of the example. For instance, some students focused solely on behaviour or practices in their response and/or omitted the shared and learned element of culture. In some cases, it was not made clear what exactly it was about the example that was cultural. The two marks for exemplification were earned more consistently by students who could point out the cultural part of their example, or who demonstrated that they were giving a cultural example through comparison.

Question 02

There were a range of relevant factors identified and all were awarded marks. Many students had a good understanding of biocentric and anthropocentric approaches to engaging with the environment. However, rather than seeing these as alternative positions held in relation to a single factor, they were often given as an example of a factor each in themselves. Credit could still be earned here when the two different approaches were linked to other factors, such as for example religious beliefs (biocentrism) or economic activities (anthropocentrism). This issue is linked to a general problem of how to interpret the question where students did not focus on 'factors' but instead described different 'ways'.

Sound ethnographic examples were given, often contrasted with a 'western' perspective. In many answers, there was scope for greater precision by stating the particular western contexts that students were referring to.

Question 03

This question was answered very well by the majority of students. They understood the concept of 'symbol' and were able to offer a variety of ethnographic examples, of which many were very specific and detailed. However, it was sometimes difficult to identify the 'ways' in which the body was used as a symbol, with many students leaving this part of their answer implicit. Students tended to give an example rather than a clear 'way', that requires a more general point which is then illustrated with an example. However, students were still rewarded when the forms of body modification were explored in terms of the reasons for their practice.

Some of the best answers demonstrated AO2 skills by distinguishing between 'emic' and 'etic' approaches to interpreting symbols.

Question 04

A good range of examples were used in response to this question. There was clarity about the role that objects could play in social interactions and gift exchange and this was a common area addressed by the majority of students. Stronger student answers were able to draw on theoretical explanations of the role of objects in social interactions, often citing the work of Mauss and Sahlins. Students tended to read 'ways' correctly in this particular context.

However, many answers drew from material in Unit 2. This is not a problem in itself (and with the new version of the specification material culture will be in Unit 2), but in this examination, it led in some cases to more of a focus on identity than on social relations. Some students reused the same ethnographic examples from Question 03, such as lip plates. This indicated a lack of full coverage of the specification.

Very few students were able to use Item A effectively to help them answer the question. However, those who did often produced very sophisticated interpretations of the Item and incorporated this analysis into the answer. For example, some were able to make the connection between objects that were high and low in the house to inequality in social relations.

Gift exchange was often used well to answer the question, but there was some tendency to spend too long describing all the different types of reciprocity rather than using the concept of the gift to answer the question.

There was a tendency to describe different examples of how objects are used rather than earning AO2 marks by doing more than this, for example by comparing and contrasting the use of material objects in different cultures, social groups or contexts.

Question 05

This question was on the whole not answered well. Most students failed to realise that the question invited them to focus on what is common in humanity as a result of our common biological evolution. There was scope for critiquing this position and to argue that there is very little that is universal. However, those students who argued that nothing is universal generally demonstrated a lack of awareness of the biological anthropological side of the Unit. The best answers were able to show that though there is considerable diversity, there are still some underlying features that are found universally among humans. Stronger answers were able to identify universal characteristics clearly, such as incest taboos in relation to marriage and courtship; that there are rules about whom one can and cannot marry (endogamy/exogamy); that many cultures have specific courtship practices, rites or rituals; and that different societies take particular positions with regard to sexual relations and define with whom these can legitimately take place. Students were able to identify that societies have rules about the distribution of property and economic resources and give ethnographic examples of these. Some answers on relations between different age groups focused on age sets, the role of different generations in different societies, and issues of status. These then went on to show how, despite these underlying universals, there is considerable diversity in how the common points are manifested.

A common issue among weaker responses was the attempt to engage with more than one optional area of the question, or indeed to describe any universal features of human societies whether or not it related to the particular area under consideration. Students would benefit from ensuring that they clearly indicate the area selected at the beginning of their responses.

Question 06

A number of responses for this question were also disappointing. Many students failed to interpret the question in relation to 'ways of thinking', one of the main headings of the specification. Instead, they presented all sorts of different examples of how humans view the world differently, without focusing specifically on 'ways of thinking'. Many students did not pick up on the material in the Item that referred to classification and logic. Nevertheless, some of the general responses were well argued and were rewarded accordingly.

One particular issue was that students tended to present rather one-sided answers. As in Question 05, students did not show awareness of the 'universal' side of the unit and just presented multiple examples of diverse ways of looking at the world. The better answers were able to use the debate between Lévi-Strauss and Sapir and Whorf, or discussed whether the belief in witchcraft was fundamentally also a logical way of thinking.

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