

**Implementation of progressive assessment practices**

Short essay questions are a new question type in the HKDSE Geography Examination. A geography teacher develops an assessment plan for her senior secondary Geography students of above-average ability to help them master the basic skills of answering short essay questions in a progressive manner. Scaffolding is used in the design of the assessment items. It involves providing students with a template on the essay structure and guidelines on the types of information to be included in each part of the essay, followed by the gradual withdrawal of this support when the students become competent in answering short essay questions on their own. The teacher introduces essay writing in the school assessment at the start of Secondary 4, as most of her students are bright and already have some experience and skills in essay writing by the junior secondary level. Assessment items designed by the teacher for the issue “Global warming – Is it fact or fiction?” are shown as follows to illustrate her assessment plan.

**Stage 1: First test in early Secondary 4 after the learning and teaching of the issue**

A simple “command word” is used here. Students are only required to recall what they have learned and to write the information in the format of an

Each short essay question for HKDSE Geography normally includes two sub-questions/parts, but only ONE simple and straightforward question is developed here for beginners.

**Describe the impacts of global warming with examples. (6 marks)**

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**Answer Section (about 1 page):**

**Introduction** (clear and concise; may give definitions of some key words; provide a brief outline of your essay):

**Body of the short essay** (may include several paragraphs, each focusing on one key idea; provide examples to support your ideas):

Negative impact:

An “Answer Section” has been designed for students to fill in their answers. In this section, the essay structure is shown with suggestions for each part. The length of the essay is also suggested.

Positive impact:

**Conclusion** (clear and concise; a short summary of main points in the essay; may include your comments/prediction/deduction/judgment):

**Stage 2: Short essay question in the first term examination of Secondary 4**

Simple “command words” are still used but students are required to give descriptions as well as explanations here.

Two simple sub-questions are included in the short essay question this time.

**What is “the greenhouse effect”? With reference to examples, explain how human activities enhance this process.** (12 marks)

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Answer Section (about 2-3 pages):

**Introduction:**

**Body of the short essay:**

**Conclusion:**

An “Answer Section” is still here with a more demanding requirement on essay length. No suggestions are made concerning the different parts of an essay.

### Stage 3: Short essay question for the second term examination of Secondary 4

As shown by the underlined command words, this essay question is more demanding than the previous two. Students are required to compare and contrast the situations of two types of countries. They must also analyse the role of international cooperation in alleviating global warming.

**Compare and contrast the impacts of global warming on low latitude countries and high latitude countries. Discuss how international cooperation may help alleviate the problems. (12 marks)**

No essay structure/answer plan is given to students this time.

### Stage 4: Short essay question for the second term examination of Secondary 5

Command words are no longer underlined.

A quotation is included here to guide students' writing. This type of question requires students to write an essay in response to the quotation, so it is a more demanding task than the previous three.

***"Biofuels are a panacea to global warming problems"***  
**Explain how the burning of fossil fuels contributes to global warming. To what extent do you think the use of biofuels is a panacea to global warming problems? (12 marks)**

"To what extent" is a higher-order command phrase that requires students to assess and weigh the information/data relevant to the question. Students must also make judgement on the relative importance of all of the arguments and counter-arguments in their answers.

### **Further suggestions on developing junior secondary students' essay writing skills**

- Teachers could develop a 6-year assessment plan to help students develop their question answering skills progressively, starting at the junior secondary level.
- Teachers should give extra support to junior secondary students to develop their essay writing skills. The following are some examples.
  - The teacher could cut a model essay text into several sections and ask students to fill in missing information, reconstruct the separate parts into a coherent essay and explain their arrangement.
  - The teacher could also ask students to use graphic organisers to assist them in formulating answers to essay questions during tests.
  - The teacher could provide a heading for each key point in the essay to guide students in their writing. Alternatively, the teacher could provide the first sentence of each paragraph and ask students to complete the rest by themselves. Such scaffolding can be found in the following short-essay question for assessing junior secondary students on the issue of “Changing Climate, Changing Environments”.

#### **Essay Question:**

Describe the positive and negative impacts of climate change. (6 marks)

#### **Guidelines on writing your answer:**

1. Look at the first sentence of the “Introduction” below and see what can be added to this part.
2. Write 3-5 complete sentences on each impact listed in the essay body below. Each paragraph usually begins with a topic sentence that includes a general statement about the paragraph. The sentences that follow add details and supporting evidence, including examples.
3. Write a short conclusion to your essay.

**Introduction** (clear and concise; may give definitions of some key words; give a brief outline of your essay):

With the changing climate in the past few decades, some countries will suffer, while others will gain...

**Essay body** (may include several paragraphs, each focusing on one key idea; provide examples to support your ideas):

Impact 1: Impact on sea level

Impact 2: Climatic unpredictability and extreme weather events

Impact 3: Impact on flood frequency

Impact 4: Health risks

Impact 5: New farming opportunities

...

**Conclusion** (clear and concise; a short summary of the main points in the essay; may include your comments/predictions/deductions/judgements):

### **Concluding remarks**

Although the assessment items presented in this example are designed by a geography teacher, it should be noted that the rationale of the design is applicable to all PSHE subjects because essay writing is a common skill required by PSHE subjects and essay-type questions are a common question type in public examinations. To obtain better results, PSHE subject teachers could work with language teachers to develop a more comprehensive plan for developing students' essay-writing skills in key learning areas of both PSHE and language education. For more details on implementing the aforementioned "Language across the Curriculum" strategy, please refer to Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 of the *PSHE KLA Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-Secondary 6)* (2017).

If you are interested in assessment, read also Examples 36-41.