

H2 Economics (9570)

Essay Answering Techniques — 10m & 15m Guide

A-Level 2027 Syllabus

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Exam Structure Overview

Paper 2: Essays (60%) — The Only Paper You Need to Know

Feature	Details
Duration	2 hours 30 minutes
Total marks	75 marks (3 essays × 25 marks each)
Structure	6 questions: 3 micro (Section A), 3 macro (Section B)
Requirement	At least 1 from Section A, at least 1 from Section B, 1 from either
Each question	Part (a) = 10 marks, Part (b) = 15 marks
AO1+AO3	≈40% of marks
AO1+AO2+AO3+AO4	≈60% of marks

Warning

You **must** answer at least one micro question and at least one macro question. Your third can be from either section. This means you cannot specialise in only micro or only macro – you need strength in both.

Assessment Objectives (What Examiners Test)

AO	Name	What It Means
AO1	Knowledge & Understanding	Recalling economic concepts, theories, definitions, and principles.
AO2	Interpretation & Evaluation of Information	Reading data from extracts, tables, graphs. Making valid inferences. Recognising limitations of data.
AO3	Application & Analysis	Applying economic concepts to real-world contexts. Constructing coherent causal chains and arguments. Drawing diagrams correctly.
AO4	Evaluation	Critically weighing arguments, recognising assumptions, synthesising to reach well-reasoned conclusions.

Key Point

Paper 2 is 60% higher-order (AO4). Evaluation is not optional – it is the dominant skill being tested. Every essay requires you to evaluate, synthesise, and reach well-reasoned conclusions.

Command Words – What They Require

Understanding command words is the single most important exam skill. Misreading the command word is the most common cause of losing marks you earned.

Command Word Table

Command Word	Typical Marks	What It Requires
Analyse	10 (part a)	Break down economic relationships into component parts and show how they interrelate. Requires detailed causal chains with economic theory and application. Show the mechanism step-by-step. Diagrams are expected.
Discuss	15 (part b)	Present both sides of an issue. Must include: theoretical arguments for AND against, plus a reasoned conclusion. Balanced treatment is expected. Do not just argue one side.
Evaluate / Assess	15 (part b)	Make a judgment and support it with criteria. Requires theoretical analysis plus evaluative commentary (limitations, assumptions, trade-offs). Must reach a substantiated conclusion.
Examine	15 (part b)	Similar to evaluate but emphasises close inspection of the issue from multiple angles. Requires thorough critical analysis.
To what extent / How far	15 (part b)	Highest-order. Requires weighing multiple perspectives, considering conditions and limitations, and reaching a nuanced, well-reasoned judgment that specifies the conditions under which your judgment holds.

Warning Command Word Trap

“Explain” is **not** the same as “Describe.” Describing tells the examiner *what* happened. Explaining tells the examiner *why* it happened. If the question asks you to “explain,” you must include causal language: *because, leading to, this results in, consequently.*

Depth Guide by Mark Weight

Marks	Expected Depth
8 marks	Two-sided analysis: arguments for + against + evaluation + conclusion.
10 marks	Full structured answer: definition, diagram, detailed explanation, application, evaluative judgment.
15 marks	Complete essay: introduction, balanced body (FOR/AGAINST), strong evaluation woven through, well-reasoned conclusion.

Exam Tip The 1-Minute Rule

As a rough guide, allocate **1 minute per mark**. A 10-mark part (a) should take about 10–12 minutes. A 15-mark part (b) should take about 18–20 minutes. This ensures you finish the paper.

The DIEE Framework

The **DIEE** framework (Define, Illustrate, Explain, Evaluate) is the standard answering structure used in Singapore JC Economics. It ensures your answers are comprehensive and hit all assessment objectives.

The Four Components

D Define – Start by defining the key economic term(s) in the question.

- Shows examiner you understand concepts precisely (AO1)
- E.g., “Price elasticity of demand (PED) measures the responsiveness of quantity demanded to a change in price of the good itself.”
- Keep definitions tight – 1–2 sentences maximum

I Illustrate – Use a diagram, real-world example, or data reference.

- In essays: draw a properly labelled diagram or cite a real-world example
- Every diagram needs: title, labelled axes, labelled curves, initial + new equilibrium
- Shows examiner you can apply theory (AO2/AO3)

E Explain – Provide the theoretical reasoning.

- Build the causal chain step-by-step
- Use economic logic: *because* → *leading to* → *which results in*
- Reference your diagram or data as you go
- Shows examiner you can analyse (AO3)
- Target 3–5 sentences of reasoning for a 4–6 mark question

E Evaluate – Add critical commentary.

- Limitations, assumptions, counter-arguments
- Short-run vs long-run considerations
- Perspectives of different stakeholders
- Intended vs unintended consequences
- Shows examiner you can think critically (AO4)
- Essential for all questions 6 marks and above

When to Use DIEE

Question Type	DIEE Application
10 mark essay part (a)	D + I + E, brief E (light evaluation)
15 mark essay part (b)	Full DIEE with heavy emphasis on final E

Example DICE in Action: 10-mark part (a) “Explain how a subsidy affects market outcomes”

- D** A subsidy is a government grant to producers, paid per unit of output, intended to lower production costs and increase supply.
- I** [Diagram showing supply curve shifting right from S to S_{subsidy} , with lower equilibrium price P_1 and higher quantity Q_1 . Consumer surplus and producer surplus areas shaded, with subsidy cost shown.]
- E** The subsidy reduces firms’ marginal cost of production, shifting the supply curve rightward from S to S_{subsidy} . At the new equilibrium, price falls from P_0 to P_1 and quantity rises from Q_0 to Q_1 . Consumers benefit from lower prices (increased consumer surplus), while producers receive a higher effective price inclusive of the subsidy (increased producer surplus).
- E** However, the effectiveness of the subsidy depends on PED and PES. If demand is price inelastic, the price decrease is small despite the subsidy. Additionally, the subsidy represents a cost to taxpayers and creates an opportunity cost for government spending. In the long run, it may encourage inefficient firms to remain in the market, leading to allocative inefficiency.

Essay Answering Techniques

Part (a) vs Part (b) Structure

Each essay question has two parts:

- **Part (a) – 10 marks:** Usually tests knowledge, understanding, and analysis (AO1 + AO3). Requires definition, diagram(s), and clear explanation. Light evaluation may be needed but is often implicit.
- **Part (b) – 15 marks:** Tests application, analysis, and heavy evaluation (AO1 + AO2 + AO3 + AO4). Requires balanced argument, critical evaluation, and a well-reasoned conclusion.

Essay Introduction Formula

Your introduction should be 3–4 sentences following this structure:

1. **Hook/Context:** Situate the issue in real-world context. Use a **Singapore** example if relevant.
2. **Define key terms:** Define the most important economic concept(s) in the question.
3. **Thesis/Stand:** State your overall position clearly.
4. **Roadmap:** Briefly outline the structure of your essay.

Example Strong Introduction

Question: “To what extent is government intervention necessary to correct market failure in the provision of healthcare?”

“Healthcare markets in many countries, including **Singapore**, exhibit significant market failure due to positive externalities, information asymmetry, and the public good characteristics of certain services. **Market failure** occurs when the free market allocates resources inefficiently, resulting in a deadweight loss to society. This essay argues that while government intervention is necessary to address these failures, the *extent* of intervention depends on the specific type of healthcare service, the nature of the market failure, and the potential for government failure. The analysis will first examine why healthcare markets fail, then evaluate various policy interventions, and conclude with a judgement on the optimal degree of intervention.”

Warning Introduction Pitfalls

- ✗ Do **not** write a generic introduction that could apply to any question
- ✗ Do **not** start with “Economics is the study of...”
- ✗ Do **not** write more than 4 sentences – 3 is often enough
- ✓ Do use the question’s own language to show you’re directly addressing it

Body Paragraph Structure – PEEL

Use the **PEEL** structure for each body paragraph:

P – Point State your point clearly in one sentence.

E – Explanation Elaborate with economic theory, causal chain, and diagram reference.

E – Example/Evidence Cite a real-world example or data. Singapore-specific examples score highly.

L – Link Link back to the question. Add an evaluative comment.

Organising Body Paragraphs

For “Discuss/Evaluate/To what extent” questions (15-mark parts):

Section	Content
Paragraph 1	Argument FOR the proposition with theory + diagram + example
Paragraph 2	Another argument FOR (different angle or perspective)
Paragraph 3	Argument AGAINST / limitations / counter-arguments
Paragraph 4	Evaluation: conditions, trade-offs, Singapore-specific considerations
Conclusion	Final judgment with clear justification + conditions

Key Point

Evaluation should be woven into each paragraph, not just tacked on at the end. Each paragraph’s “Link” step should naturally include evaluative thinking. The strongest essays evaluate *as they go*, not just in a separate section.

Conclusion Expectations

Your conclusion is **not a summary** – it is the most important part of your evaluation.

1. **State your final judgment clearly** – do not sit on the fence
2. **Justify why** – what criteria did you use to reach this judgment?
3. **Specify conditions** – under what circumstances would your judgment change?
4. **Prioritise** – which factor matters most? Why?

Example Strong Conclusion

“In conclusion, government intervention in healthcare is *necessary but not sufficient* to achieve efficient outcomes. Information asymmetry in the form of adverse selection and moral hazard fundamentally undermines the private insurance market, justifying mandatory health insurance schemes such as **Singapore**’s MediShield Life. However, the extent of intervention must be calibrated: while direct provision may be warranted for public health goods (e.g., vaccination programmes), market-based mechanisms with targeted subsidies may be more efficient for elective procedures. Ultimately, the case for intervention is strongest where externalities are largest and information asymmetries are most severe, but governments must guard against government failure – particularly regulatory capture and bureaucratic inefficiency.”

Evaluation Strategies (The “Big Nine”)

These are the **nine evaluation strategies** you should use to earn AO4 marks. Memorise them and apply them deliberately.

1. Short-run vs Long-run

- SR: fixed factors, partial adjustment, existing firms only
- LR: entry/exit, full adjustment, changing elasticities
- E.g., PED is more elastic in the LR as consumers find substitutes

2. Different Stakeholder Perspectives

- Consumers vs producers vs government vs workers vs society
- The “right answer” depends on whose welfare matters most
- Examiners reward awareness of conflicting interests

3. Theoretical vs Practical

- Ceteris paribus assumptions rarely hold in reality
- Models are simplifications; real economies have frictions
- E.g., perfect competition assumes perfect information – but real consumers have bounded rationality

4. Intended vs Unintended Consequences

- Policy X aims to achieve Y but may cause Z
- E.g., minimum wage raises incomes for the low-paid (intended) but may cause unemployment (unintended)

5. Assumptions and Limitations of Models

- Question the assumptions of the model you just used
- E.g., the multiplier model assumes spare capacity – does this hold?

6. Magnitude and Significance

- How large is the effect? Is it economically significant?
- Use data from extracts or known statistics to support magnitude claims
- “While the tax will reduce consumption, the effect is likely to be small given the PED of -0.2”

7. Prioritisation

- Which factor/effect is most important? Under what conditions?
- “Although both demand-pull and cost-push factors contributed to inflation, cost-push factors were more significant in this case because...”

8. Trade-offs

- Efficiency vs equity
- Economic growth vs environmental sustainability
- Price stability vs full employment (Philips curve trade-off)
- Short-run growth vs long-run sustainability

9. Singapore-Specific Context

- Small, open economy – highly vulnerable to external shocks
- No natural resources – reliance on human capital
- Ageing population – implications for healthcare spending, CPF
- Government intervention is extensive – different from laissez-faire assumptions
- Exchange rate-centred monetary policy (MAS) – unique among economies

Exam Tip Evaluation Checklist

After writing each paragraph, ask yourself:

- ✓ Have I considered SR vs LR?
- ✓ Have I considered different perspectives?
- ✓ Have I questioned my own assumptions?
- ✓ Have I referenced Singapore context?
- ✓ Have I weighed the magnitude/importance?

Essay Timing Guide

Part	Marks	Time	Activity
Planning –		5 min	Read all 6 questions, choose 3, plan each
Part (a) 10		20 min	Define + diagram + explain
Part (b) 15		25 min	Balanced analysis + evaluation + conclusion
Total/essay	25	50 min	×3 = 150 min

Warning Question Selection

In the first **5 minutes** of Paper 2, read *all six* questions. Select the three you can answer best. Do not start writing until you've chosen and planned all three. Many students pick a question immediately, then discover later that another question would have suited them better.

Diagrams – Best Practices

Diagrams are essential for analysis (AO3) marks. Poor diagrams lose marks even if your written analysis is correct.

Diagram Requirements

Every diagram must have:

1. **Title** – What does the diagram show?
2. **Labelled axes** – Price/Quantity, Price Level/Output, etc.
3. **Labelled curves** – D , S , AD , AS , MSC , MSB , etc.
4. **Initial equilibrium** – Clearly marked E_1 or similar
5. **New equilibrium** – Clearly marked E_2 or similar
6. **Arrows or shifts** – Show direction of movement
7. **Reference in text** – “As shown in Diagram 1, ...”

Common Diagram Types

Diagram Type	When to Use
Supply-Demand (S-D)	Price mechanism, taxes, subsidies, price controls, elasticities
Externality diagram (MSC/MSB)	Market failure, externalities, Pigouvian taxes
AD-AS Macroeconomic equilibrium, policies, growth, inflation	
PPC Scarcity, opportunity cost, economic growth	
Circular flow National income, injections, leakages	
Cost-revenue (firm) Profit maximisation, shut-down, price discrimination	
Lorenz curve Income inequality, Gini coefficient	

Exam Tip Diagram Tips

- Draw diagrams with a **sharp pencil and ruler** – freehand curves lose marks for neatness
- Label every curve clearly – D , D_1 , S , S_1 , etc.
- Use arrowheads on shift lines
- Mark equilibrium points clearly (E_1 , E_2)
- Shade relevant areas (deadweight loss, subsidy cost, consumer surplus) where relevant
- Always refer to the diagram in your written answer – “As Diagram 1 shows...”
- Draw diagrams *large enough* to read – at least a quarter of a page

Common Mistakes (from Examiner Reports)

These are the most common reasons students lose marks, compiled from SEAB examiner report findings.

Content-Related Mistakes

1. Not answering the question directly

- Answering a different question from the one asked
- Writing prepared content that doesn't fit
- **Fix:** Use the question's own words and phrases in your answer. Check at the end: "Did I actually answer what they asked?"

2. Failing to apply real-world context

- Generic answers without connecting to the essay context or real-world examples
- Not using **Singapore** examples when appropriate
- **Fix:** Always apply economic theory to a specific context and explain *why* it matters for your argument

3. Superficial evaluation

- Adding "However" without developing the counter-argument
- Evaluation that is not substantiated with reasoning
- **Fix:** Use the "Big Nine" evaluation strategies deliberately. Each evaluation point needs its own causal chain, not just a one-liner.

4. Lack of real-world examples

- Essays without any concrete examples or real-world data
- Not using **Singapore** examples when appropriate
- **Fix:** Prepare and memorise a bank of **Singapore** examples (see Singapore Examples Bank)

Technical Mistakes

5. Confusing "Explain" with "Describe"

- In part (a) questions, describing *what* happens instead of explaining *why*
- **Fix:** Use causal language: "because → leads to → which results in"

6. Inadequate diagrams

- Diagrams without labels or equilibrium points
- Diagrams not integrated into the explanation
- **Fix:** Every diagram must have: title, labelled axes, labelled curves, initial + new equilibrium

Structural Mistakes

8. Over-reliance on memorisation

- Rote-learnt essays that don't adapt to the specific question
- **Fix:** Understand concepts deeply. Each question is unique – adapt, don't regurgitate.

9. Vague conclusions

- Conclusions that sit on the fence without taking a clear stand
- Repeating what was said earlier without synthesis
- **Fix:** Your conclusion must state your final position, justify it, and specify conditions.

10. **Poor time management**

- Spending too long on low-mark questions
- Running out of time for high-mark evaluation questions
- **Fix:** Strictly enforce the 1-minute-per-mark rule.

Answer Writing Framework – Quick Reference

Formula for Any Question

Key Point The Universal Formula

DIEE + PEEL + Eval

- D**: Define the key term
- I**: Illustrate with diagram / data / example
- E**: Explain with causal chain + theory
- E**: Evaluate with 2+ strategies + conclude

Quick-Reference Cards

For “Analyse” / Part (a) (10m)

- Define key term(s)
- Draw diagram + explain
- Build causal chain (4+ steps)
- Apply to context
- Light evaluation at end

For “Discuss” Questions (15m part b)

- Brief intro with thesis
- Arguments FOR (2 paragraphs)
- Arguments AGAINST (1–2 paragraphs)
- Evaluation woven throughout
- Conclusion with clear judgment

For “Evaluate/Assess” (15m part b)

- Establish criteria for judgment
- Present both sides of argument
- Use 3+ evaluation strategies
- Weight and prioritise factors
- Clear substantiated conclusion

For “To what extent” (15m part b)

- Strong intro with clear stand
- Balanced body (FOR & AGAINST)
- Evaluation woven throughout
- Nuanced conclusion with conditions
- “To a large/small extent because...”

For Part (a) Essay (10m)

- Define key economic terms
- Diagram + explain causal chain
- Apply to real-world context
- Light evaluation at end
- Concise (not essay-length – save for part b)

For Part (b) Essay (15m)

- Brief intro with thesis/stand
- 3–4 body paragraphs (PEEL)
- Evaluation in every paragraph
- Use 3+ evaluation strategies
- Strong conclusion with judgment
- Singapore-specific examples

Singapore-Specific Examples Bank

These examples can be used in both essays and CSQs to demonstrate real-world application. Examiners reward contextually relevant examples.

Microeconomics Examples

- **Taxes:** Singapore GST (9% from 2024), carbon tax (\$25/tCO₂ from 2024, \$50–\$80 by 2030)
- **Subsidies:** Healthcare subsidies (means-tested), CPF housing grants, Edusave
- **Price controls:** COE system (quota + market price), no minimum wage (debated)
- **Public goods:** SAF (national defence), street lighting, public parks
- **Externalities:** Smoking ban, mandatory recycling, electric vehicle incentives
- **Market dominance:** Singtel (telecoms), SIA (aviation), FairPrice (retail)
- **Price discrimination:** MRT fares (adult/student/senior), Changi airport landing fees
- **Information failure:** Asymmetric information in used car market, medical insurance (adverse selection)

Macroeconomics Examples

- **Fiscal policy:** GST Voucher scheme, SG Bono, SkillsFuture credits
- **Monetary policy:** MAS exchange rate-centred policy (SS\$NEER band), unique among economies
- **Supply-side:** SkillsFuture, Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs), foreign worker policy
- **Growth:** Trade-dependent growth (GDP: ~\$500bn), 2–3% trend growth
- **Inflation:** MAS core inflation target, imported inflation from global supply chains
- **Unemployment:** Low structural unemployment (2–3%), but mismatch issues
- **Inequality:** Gini coefficient ~0.37 (after transfers), CPF as wealth equaliser
- **Trade:** Open economy (trade/GDP ~300%), FTAs, regional supply chains
- **Exchange rate:** MAS manages SS\$NEER against a basket of currencies, not pegged to USD

Final Exam Day Checklist

Before the Exam

- ✓ Know your command words cold
- ✓ Have DICE memorised
- ✓ Know the “Big Nine” evaluation strategies
- ✓ Have a mental bank of **Singapore** examples
- ✓ Practise drawing all key diagrams (S-D, externality, AD-AS, PPC)
- ✓ Review your weakest topic – the compulsory nature means you can’t avoid it

During Paper 2 (Essays)

1. 5 min: Read all 6 questions. Choose 3 (at least 1 micro, at least 1 macro)
2. 2–3 min per essay: Plan structure and key points
3. 47 min per essay: Write (20 min part (a) + 25 min part (b) + 2 min checking)
4. Check: Did I answer the question? Is evaluation present? Is there a conclusion?

Last-Resort Strategies

- **Stuck on a question?** Define the key terms and draw a relevant diagram. This usually unlocks your thinking and earns AO1/AO3 marks.
- **Running out of time?** Write in point form with clear economic reasoning. Partial marks are better than blank space.
- **No idea what topic?** Scarcity and choice are always relevant. The Central Economic Problem underpins everything.

Key Point Final Word

Economics is a **decision-making discipline**. Every essay question ultimately asks you to analyse how economic agents make decisions under scarcity. Frame your answers around:

1. What decision is being made?
2. Who is making it? (consumer, producer, government?)
3. What are the trade-offs?
4. What are the intended and unintended consequences?

If you can answer these four questions, you can answer any essay.