

A-level

ANTHROPOLOGY

ANTH 2 Becoming a Person: Processes, Practices and Consequences
Report on the Examination

2110
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ANTH2

General

Overall, students performed well, with some schools and colleges and students performing particularly well. Students were able to manage the time effectively and complete all questions. Answers were largely of sufficient length, although some students still wrote a disproportionately large amount for Questions 03, causing them to have less time for question 05 or 06. Question 04 was based on a new area of the updated specification and appeared to challenge some students in a few schools and colleges, though not in others. The responses to this paper showed that schools and colleges and students had clearly responded to the feedback from the previous series.

Positive features

- Almost all students attempted the five questions required.
- Use of detailed, well contextualised ethnographic studies. Many students drew on studies encountered in Unit 1 and applied them successfully to Unit 2.
- Greater awareness of a broader range of both contemporary and classic ethnographic studies.
- There was definitely greater awareness of the need to address theoretical interpretations of the debates within responses.
- An increased awareness of the need to use concepts, unpack them and interpret and apply them to the specific demands of the question.
- Knowledge of the work of specific named anthropologists (both ethnographic and theoretical).
- A wide range of material was present, both between and within schools and colleges, and students were confident enough to draw on different areas of the specification and use the same ethnographic studies differently, which required considerable depth of understanding of the material.

Key Issues

- Many students did not apply their knowledge to the specific demands of the questions.
- Some students were unable to define western personhood, although they were able to provide some good examples, grounded in ethnographic research.
- There was a disappointing lack of use of anthropological theories in some students' work, especially in questions 05 and 06.
- There was an over reliance on non-anthropological cross-cultural examples.
- There was a lack of analysis and evaluation in some work, with some answers being overly descriptive and quasi-commonsense, especially relating to question 04.
- Especially in weaker answers, there were too many references only to 'western society' and/or Britain, with the odd reference to an unidentified 'tribe'.
- There were a lot of errors in locating societies geographically.
- There was a tendency for students to over-generalise rather than to point out the complexities in cultural differences and similarities. A greater sensitivity in discussing other cultures through ethnographic detail is required to achieve the very best marks.
- There was not enough explicit comparison – in many cases, answers were simply a juxtaposition of descriptions of two or more cultures.

Question 01

Many students were successful in providing an example of 'the western concept of personhood' and in providing an example. Often, however, students failed to explain the term, or merely talked about the development of western concepts of personhood.

Some students failed to develop the explanation or the example; for instance, simply stating a one-word example such as 'egocentric' without developing this into a full sentence to show their understanding. Therefore a significant number of students failed to gain the full four marks available.

Students who gained full marks tended to use examples drawn from named sources, such as Descartes or Mauss. Students should be encouraged, where possible, to use named examples because their meaning will be clearer in relation to anthropological concepts and issues. Most students wrote the right amount for this question and the better answers generally received full marks in about 5-6 lines.

Question 02

This question continues to challenge students in terms of layout. Students are far more likely to gain the full 6 marks if they set out their responses clearly, ie if their identifier is distinct from the explanation. Many students referred to problems of interpretation but were not able to give examples of this problem. In some cases students suggested one identifier but then gave two examples of the same identifier, which meant they were not able to gain full marks. Some students suggested general problems for anthropologists in the field without these problems being specifically related to rites of passage. However, many students were able to suggest two separate problems that anthropologists may face when trying to understand rites of passage, including cultural relativism and ethical issues.

Students need to be aware of the structure of the marks: one for identifying and a further two for unpacking and offering examples. Again, ethnographic studies, where used to support a difference, often produced highly successful responses.

Question 03

This question prompted some strong responses, although there was a range in the quality within and between schools and colleges. Students were generally able to discuss two or three examples of ways in which gender roles are culturally constructed in two or more societies. However some responses were overly focused on general or sociological discussions of gendered socialisation in the west. Although it may be useful to consider the cultural construction of gender in western societies, it was almost always unsupported by ethnographic work and often relied on quasi common-sense. There was a tendency to be descriptive rather than analytical, listing examples of different forms of gender roles rather than comparing them or drawing out similarities or differences.

Stronger responses referred to gender roles specifically using ethnographic detail to illustrate the points made. In some of these stronger answers, the universality or otherwise of patriarchy was discussed. In many stronger responses, rites of passage were applied to the question to show how gender roles are shaped and maintained. This question elicited some impressive analytical and well organised responses.

Question 04

It was clear that some students were not adequately prepared for this question, which relates to a new area of the specification. There were some successful attempts to explore some of the ways in which material objects are used to express and negotiate identity in different societies, but often general or literal examples such as religious symbols in western society were referred to, without ethnographic knowledge. Some students recycled the views put forward in the Item but did not go far beyond them, which was disappointing. Weaker answers simply listed material objects such as cars and pointed out how in the west, these indicate greater social status. Students frequently listed examples of significant material objects in the creation of identity without thinking about the negotiation of identity nor attempting to compare these.

Students frequently understood the question but did not have the ethnographic examples to support an informed discussion. However, in some schools and colleges students were clearly well prepared and referred to the work of Hoskins or Miller (on saris, for example), and used key material objects discussed within various ethnographic films and applied them to the question with success.

Question 05

Just over half of the total number of students chose this question and there was a very wide range in the quality of responses, although many answered well and a few students reached full marks. Weaker answers considered a (list-like) range of rituals, but their answers lacked ethnographic detail and their responses often left the functions of the rituals implicit. Alternatively, weaker students tended to limit their discussion to one or two functions of rites of passage without providing accurate and contextualised rites of passage. Some students spent a long time explaining the stages of rituals without focusing on their function. This meant that the responses were not sufficiently analytical or evaluative to meet the AO2 demands of an 'assess' question satisfactorily.

Stronger responses discussed a number of different functions of rituals, such as: to stabilise or destabilise society, to reaffirm gender roles, to signify and negotiate change, to mark the changing status of particular groups using referenced evidence and ethnographic detail, drawing out the differences and similarities between these functions from different theoretical perspectives. For example, students discussed the functions of territorial, puberty, death, marriage and birth rites backed up with specific anthropological research.

Question 06

This question elicited varied responses, with some students able to explore a range of ethnographic studies in relation to boundaries. Students focused on both small and large scale boundaries between human groups. However, these responses tended to lack a theoretical dimension, – such as Barth discussing the relativity and dynamic nature of boundaries. Disappointingly, there were few successful attempts to define boundaries and few attempts to discuss explicitly the different causes of or reasons for these boundaries. In many cases, students simply described wars or conflict without any reference to named anthropological research. Alternately some students named anthropologists without discussing the findings of the research. There was an absence of relevant concepts such as genocide, power asymmetry and social memories.

Stronger responses focused on ethnographic studies of ethnic conflict and/or of boundaries between social groups. Some students effectively discussed a range of causes such as power asymmetry, lack of resources, political instability, territorial conflict, colonial legacies or historical reasons. When used, ethnographic studies were often very well linked to the question. Concepts were more numerous and integrated, and explained and appropriately applied to the question. For example some students were able to explore a number of different large and small causes of boundaries between social groups, considering how interlinked these causes are. Examples of conflict cited and used well in this respect included the Rwandan conflict where social memories, a shared history of conflict, competition over resources and political instability were interlinked, resulting in the ethnic conflict there, using for example the ethnographic research by Maalki. The best responses discussed the relative importance of contributing factors to the conflict with both ethnographic detail and the application of theoretical ideas.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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