



# Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level  
in Geography (WEG03) Paper 01  
Contested Planet

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The entry for WGE03 in January 2025 was similar to previous January examination series. As discussed below there was variability between responses but the overall standard of answers was good. There are perhaps fewer very weak responses in January compared to June.

Some general observations include:

- Physical geography questions can have weaker responses than human geography questions. In this series Q1b, about mid-latitude weather hazards, was the weakest of all.
- There were very few 'blank' or no-attempt responses, but noticeably more for Q1b.
- Many answers to 15 and 20-mark questions began by defining key terms in the question. This is good practice and especially helpful in terms of focus when candidates are writing in a second language.
- 10-mark 'explain' or 'suggest reasons' questions do not need conclusions, as only Assessment Objective 1 is being tested.
- The evidence (examples, data, facts, parts of case studies, concepts) used to support arguments in answers is very variable. Some candidates write whole essays with very limited reference to actual evidence (or named places) to back-up their arguments and assertions.
- The Figure questions in Section A still suffer from answers that describe the Figure, the command word 'describe' has never been used on this exam paper. Marks are awarded for explanation (AO1) not description.

In terms of the optional questions in Sections B and C:

- Approximately 40% of answers were to Q4 Energy Security and 60% to Q5 Water Conflicts (the reverse of Summer 2024)
- Approximately 80% of answer were to Q6 Superpowers and 20% to Q7 Development Gap (more skewed than in Summer 2024)

The comments on specific questions below should be read in conjunction with the published mark scheme and are written with the aim of identifying strengths and weaknesses and passing this information on to candidates to help improve future performance.

### **Country classification**

Centres should note that the country classifications used in the Specification (see page 75 of the Specification) are:

- **Developed**
- **Emerging**
- **Developing**

This classification is based on the **Human Development Index**. Many candidates use the terms MEDC and LEDC, or HIC and LIC. These are acceptable terms to use in answers, but centres need to be aware that they will not be used in examination questions, or mark schemes.

Terms such as 'Global South' or 'Majority World' are completely acceptable in terms of describing developing/low-income country groups. Candidates should avoid use of the term '**Third World**' which still appears in some answers. This is a Cold War era term, largely referring to former colonies, and is anachronistic at best.

The term 'slum' does currently appear in the specification. However 'informal housing' or 'self-built housing' can be used as more appropriate terms.

### **Question 1 - Atmosphere and Weather Systems**

#### **Question 1a**

Most answers to this question were reasonably successful and Figure 1 was generally interpreted successfully. However, in some answers Figure 1 was barely referred to or ignored. A small number of answers were generic and referred to 'hazards' but not drought specifically. There remains confusion over drought (a period of abnormally low precipitation) and aridity (permanently low precipitation).

Equally, some answers focussed on heatwaves which are not the same hazard as drought. Better answers used Figure 1 as a stimulus to suggest specific actions that could reduce risk at the three stages shown, such as drought resistant crops, improved water supply or medical intervention to protect the very young and very old. Good answers used specific place-based, real-world examples to support their explanations.

It is worth noting that 'evacuation' is rarely a solution to drought. This is because it often intensifies over time, is long duration and affects large areas. Drought is a very different hazard compared to a tropical cyclones. Equally reducing greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate climate change is not a management solution for a drought occurring today.

#### **Question 1b**

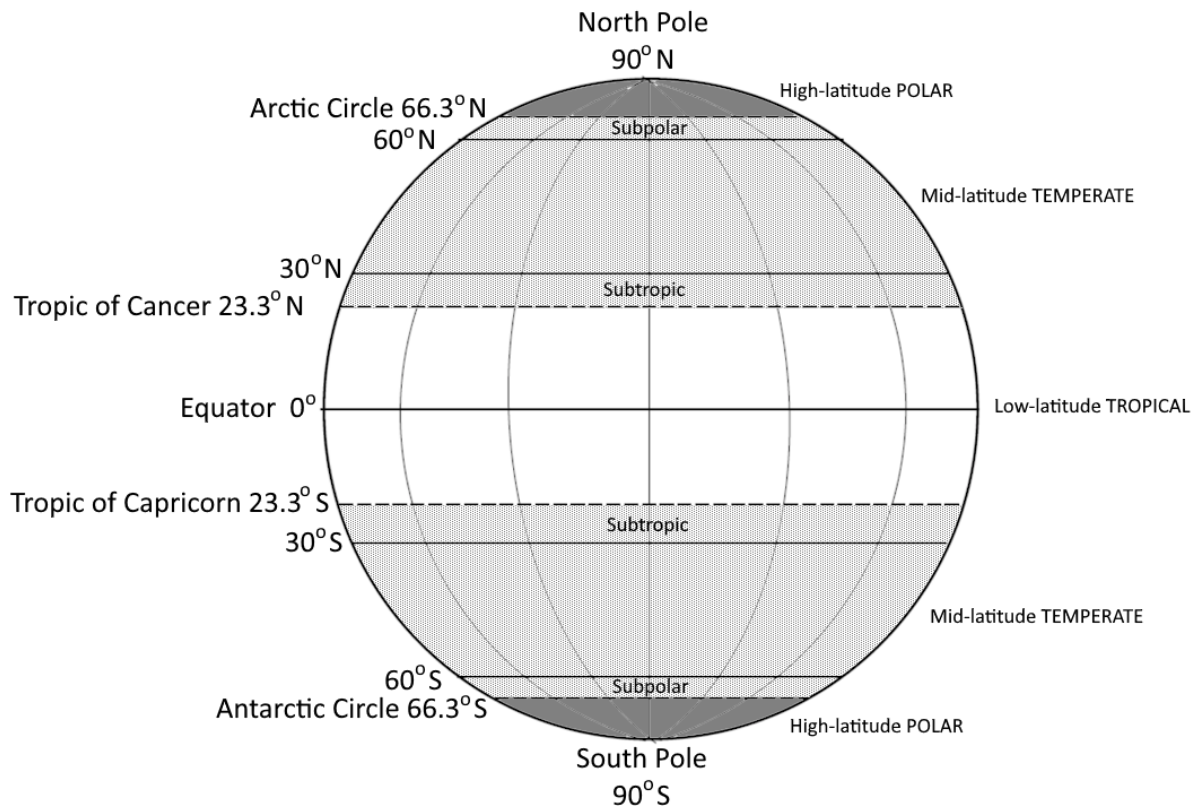
This question was the least successful of this series with many Level 1 and Level 2 answers. It was the only question which yielded a noticeable number of 'blank' responses i.e. it was not attempted at all. The issue is a lack of clarity on the meaning of the term **mid-latitude**. The specification includes this content:

*Mid-latitude weather hazards are associated with high- and low-pressure systems:*

- *The formation of depressions and their impact on weather conditions due to their passage and fronts, including wind damage and flooding (Northern Europe).*

- *The formation of anticyclones and blocking anticyclones and their impact on the weather including heat waves, drought and elevated pollution levels.*

The mid-latitudes are locations 30° to 60° north and south of the equator:



These regions experience mid-latitude depressions (storms), frontal rainfall (flooding), droughts and heatwaves. They do not experience tropical cyclones other than the final stages of some (such as Hurricane Sandy).

Many answers focussed on weather hazards at, or close to, the equator such as tropical cyclones and drought in the Sahel, however this is not the focus of the question. Many mentioned atmospheric cells (Hadley Cells and the ITCZ) in a tropical context – which was often not relevant and/or confused in terms of processes. High and low air pressure are often confused i.e. it is stated incorrectly that low pressure leads to drought and high-pressure rainfall.

In the past, a few answers explained the impacts of tectonic hazards (see also Question 3). Some answers had a mixture of mid-latitude and tropical hazards, but the overall lack of focus depressed the mark awarded. Often there were very detailed section on named disasters such as Typhoons Haiyan and Nargis, or the 2011 East Africa drought (all of these are less than 20° N of the equator).

There were a small number of very good answers that used named examples of heatwaves (2003 and 2022 in Europe), and depressions/European wind storms to exemplify the

impacts of weather hazards. Many of these answers also argued that the high-pressure hazards of drought, heatwave and wildfire were potentially more widespread and serious.

### **Question 2 - Biodiversity Under Threat**

This question was usually answered well. Candidates usually made good use of the data in Figure 1 and quoted it in their answers. There was a pleasing level of understanding of how level of development might contribute to the data shown.

Many answers linked species overexploitation to issues such as over/illegal hunting and the bushmeat trade in Africa, but were also able to explain Europe's higher threat from landuse and pollution in terms of ongoing industrialisation, consumption and urbanisation/suburbanisation. Most answers had a clear focus on explaining the reasons for differences and successfully limited the amount of description they used (a very small number simply described the data).

There were one or two issues, global warming might be a greater threat in Latin America and the Caribbean because of low-lying coasts/islands or island endemism (this was often suggested). The global warming threat is not directly related to the emissions of the three regions because GHG emissions do not have a local impact. Care must be taken not to fall into stereotypes. For instance there are numerous examples of successful conservation in Africa.

### **Question 3 - Synoptic**

The synoptic question has generally increased in answer quality over time and this synoptic question was answered quite successfully by many. There was perhaps less Assessment Objective 2 (AO2) assessment and evaluation compared to previous series.

One issue is that a number of answers were very generalised i.e. answers that failed to name specific cities and/or specific weather hazards. A small number of answers considered earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunami to be weather hazards, but they are not. Many answers did recognise that the contention in the question was complex i.e. rapidly growing cities often have youthful vulnerable people, informal housing and high population density but may well be relatively well resourced and prepared to manage risk compared to other places.

The best answers often compared specific cities and referred to name disaster events. Some argued that in fact rural areas are more at risk (poverty, isolation) and/or argued that some cities were more at risk than others. It is not the case that the emissions from cities increase risk for those cities specifically.

### **Question 4 - Energy Security**

#### **Question 4a**

Answers to this question were typically successful. Most used the data provided in Figure 3, and only a small number attempted to answer the question without using the Figure. In terms of reasons most explained that relying on imports, large domestic reserves and having a broad energy could be related to some of the countries shown.

#### **Question 4b**

This question was often answered well. The most significant issue with some answers was that they did not understand the term 'unconventional fossil fuels' and instead wrote about conventional gas, coal, oil, nuclear and biofuels. This did not affect many answers, as most wrote about tar sands, shale oil/gas (fracking was sometimes called 'cracking' incorrectly) and deep-water oil. Often the level of detail provided on impacts of examples and case studies (e.g. Athabasca tar sands), was very good such that there was hard evidence to support the arguments being made. The best answers often argued that the environmental/social consequences of exploitation, especially long-term, do not really justify the short-term economic benefits of exploitation.

#### **Question 5 - Water Conflicts**

##### **Question 5a**

This option was more popular this series and was answered reasonably well, although a small number of answers did not reference Figure 4. Some answer became a little side-tracked by the development level of the countries in Figure 4 (they were chosen so that within each category the countries were not very similar) rather than focussing on explanations such as physical water availability, water quality and water storage.

##### **Question 5b**

Transboundary water sources is generally a well understood concept such that most answers to this question were good and exemplified. A small number had clearly not encountered the concept of 'transboundary' as part of their studies.

It is important to understand that the word 'conflict' (as used in the specification and question) is not a synonym for 'war.' Rather it refers to a spectrum of disagreements from local and easily solved right to a 'water war'. The latter are of course very, very rare. Many answers referred to the Helsinki and Berlin rules as well as the specifics of agreements concerning the Nile, Mekong, Danube and others. There was often some inaccuracy over the Geography of transboundary basins such as stating that Turkey and Egypt are in dispute over the Nile or that water is transferred from Africa to Asia.

Some answers tended to be an extended description of several transboundary case studies, rather than a genuine AO2 assessment of the likelihood of conflict. The best answers recognised that conflict is quite rare and that when it does occur, water is but one issue, many countries that disagree have a history of political disagreement and other tensions.

Others pointed out that conflict is much more likely in situations where water insecurity is high, or where power is asymmetric.

### **Question 6 - Superpower Geographies**

Broadly this question was answered well. The question itself provided some scaffolding in terms of 'economic, military and geopolitical power' and many answers used this to good effect i.e. having a section in their essay on each. In most cases the concept of 'multipolar' was understood although some answers wasted a lot of effort describing uni/bi/multipolar situations from the past rather than focussing on the present and future.

Weaker answers tended to focus either on hard/soft power or else not consider economic, military and geopolitical power separately; these answers were often poorly structured and meandered towards a weak final summation. Many answers included details of the USA, China other BRICS and the EU and this was often backed by factual data on economic and military power. Some argued that a bi-polar world is more likely (China and USA) in the future, and a multi-polar one quite unlikely. These answers were often quite well supported with good language/terminology.

Weaker answers tended to conclude with a brief summary rather than the confident judgement/conclusion seen in the best. It should be clear from the published mark scheme that there is no 'expected' answer/opinion/view to these longer essay questions and candidates are encouraged to confidently assert and support their own argument.

### **Question 7 - Bridging the Development Gap**

This question was answered by a very small number of candidates. Overall, many answers perhaps failed to grasp the aim of the question. Many could explain what the development gap is and could explain in detail the progress made by NICs/emerging countries with reference to China, India, South Korea and others.

Fewer could make the connection between the success (economically) of these countries and the impact on the 'gap' worldwide, i.e. that 100s millions have moved across the gap but that 100s of millions remain on the wrong side. The idea of 'become less significant' was rarely addressed despite there often being quite good country specific evidence provided.

### **Summary and examination format reminder**

Going forward please try to focus on the following points as you prepare candidates for future examinations:

1. There are no marks for describing Figures, reasons and explanations for what is shown on a Figure are required to gain marks.

2. When using case studies in 15 and 20-mark answers be selective, the examiner does not want to know everything there is to know about the Three Gorges Dam and everything will not be relevant to a good answer.
3. Try to avoid over-writing on the 5-mark questions: the marks can be achieved using the 10 lines provided. However, answers must refer to the data in the Figure.
4. Keep focusing on the question as you write your answer and check you are still answering directly.
5. Defining key terms is a good way to start an essay as it helps you focus on the content/concepts you must discuss.
6. Evidence in the form of examples, extracts of case studies, data and facts are important, especially in the 15 and 20-mark questions.

### **Examination format reminder:**

It is important to understand that the examination question types and mark tariffs for WGE03 **do not** vary from one examination series to the next.

However, within Sections A, B and C the questions **will vary** from one series to another. This variation is random and does not conform to a pattern.

Some important points to note are:

- In Section A, Question 3 is a synoptic question and it will always be a 15-mark essay question.
- In Section A, there will always be a 10-mark data stimulus question on both A1 Atmosphere and A2 Biodiversity. The 15-mark essay question could be on either A1 or A2.
- In any exam series, Section B will either consist of a 5-mark stimulus question plus a 15-mark essay question, or a 20-mark essay question.
- Section C will be the opposite structure to Section B in any given examination series.

*Please see the WGE03 Contested Planet Assessment Guide for further details:*

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/International%20Advanced%20Level/Geography/2016/Teaching%20and%20learning%20materials/Contested-Planet-Unit-3-WGE03-Assessment-Guide.pdf>

