

EXAM ESSAY PREPARATION: PART 1

Dear all

This is the first of possible essay questions you might get in the exam. Let us have a look!

This particular question focuses on the **PRECOLONIAL PERIOD** (in other words, history BEFORE the arrival of Europeans! **So do not mention Europeans at all!**)



Ok, the question is: ***Explain how environmental conditions influenced the economy, social organisation and political structure of the precolonial San of southern Africa. (50)***

It can also be asked in this way: ***Explain how environmental conditions influenced the lifestyle of the precolonial San of southern Africa. (50)***

The above two questions are EXACTLY the same. LIFESTYLE is a word that ALWAYS includes economy, social organisation and political structure.

1) QUESTION ANALYSIS

Before we attempt to answer the above question, we must first analyse it: ***Explain how environmental conditions influenced the economy, social organisation and political structure of the precolonial San of southern Africa.***

- ***Explain how:*** this is the INSTRUCTION phrase. The instruction phrase tells you what kind of analysis/approach you need to use in your essay.

In this case: *“Your main focus should be on the ‘why’ of a particular issue, or on the ‘how’ with the aim of clarifying reasons, causes and effects. You are being tested on your capacity to think critically, to exercise perception and discernment.”* (<https://unilearning.uow.edu.au/essay/2c.html>)

- ***Environmental conditions influenced:*** This is part of what you must identify and explain. What ENVIRONMENTAL conditions? Things such as rainfall, fauna, flora, access to water.

- **Economy:** This is the first of the lifestyle aspects influenced by the environment you need to explain. In other words, how did certain environmental conditions influence the economy?

But WHAT do they mean by economy? Well, according to one definition, an economy is “*careful management of available resources*”. In other words, economy in this case refers to a group’s ability to use certain resources, such as animals and plants, to their advantage. In this case, to use these resources to ensure that they survive, since these resources were their food and source of tools.

- **Social organisation:** the second lifestyle aspect which was influenced by the environment. In other words, how did certain environmental aspects influence social organisation?

But what is social organisation? According to one definition: “*the system of relationships between persons and among groups with regard to the division of activity and the functional arrangement of mutual obligations within society*” (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20organization)

In this case, social organisation refers to relationship and power structures between men and women. How labour was divided. The size of a group of people. How permanent their settlements were. Did the groups stay the same size, or was there a lot of flexibility in group size? Were there certain people who had a higher status/more wealth than others? Etc.

- **Political structure:** The last lifestyle factor influenced by the environment.

So what does political structure mean? Well, this is an easy one. It simply refers to how a group of people were governed, or governed themselves. In other words, what type of leadership system did they have, if any? How did they make important decisions in this group?

- **Precolonial San of southern Africa:** This part of the question limits the essay to a specific group of people, a specific time period, and a specific location.

So in this case, you must only focus on the PRECOLONIAL period (10 000 years ago to roughly the year 1488) Do not go beyond this time period! **Do not mention the Europeans!**

You only focus on the SAN people. Do not discuss the Khoekhoe, or the Xhosa, or ANYONE else. You only focus on the people known as the SAN (remember,

the San were people in South Africa who lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle).

And lastly, you must limit yourself to SOUTHERN AFRICA. No need to discuss other parts of the world.

2) STRUCTURING YOUR ESSAY (OR HOW TO PLAN YOUR ESSAY)

NB: YOU DO NOT HAVE TO INCLUDE AN ESSAY PLAN IN THE EXAM! (You won't get marks in the exam for an essay plan)

However, it is always a good idea to spend about 5-10 minutes on working out a rough plan for yourself on how you will structure your essay. It really helps! It helps you to focus, and helps you plan your paragraphs.

So, how to plan this particular essay? Well, the easiest way is to structure your essay in such a way that it answers the question in a logical manner. Your analysis of the question, which we did in the previous section, will help a lot here! So let us give it a go!

The following plan is one way to do this. There are of course other ways you can do this, but this should give you an idea of how you should approach the planning of your essay:

- a) First, our introduction. ALL ESSAYS BEGIN WITH AN INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH! In our introduction, we explain to the reader what our essay will be about, and what themes we will be discussing.

In this case, we will mention that we will be discussing how specific environmental conditions, such as rainfall, fauna and flora, had an important influence on several lifestyle aspects of the precolonial San people, specifically on their economy, social organisation and their political structure.

Environmental conditions: It is a good idea to include a brief paragraph about the main environmental features of southern Africa. Things to mention here include the fact that the western parts of SA receive less rainfall (explain why); most of the rivers are only periodical (so they are dry some times of the year); the amount of rainfall influences the amount of animals (fauna). More rain = more animals; same with plants (flora). More rain = more plants.

- b) Influence on economy: In this paragraph, you explain how environmental conditions influenced the San economy.

First of all, what was the San economy? Well, if you don't know this already, they were HUNTERS and GATHERERS! So they hunted for fauna and gathered flora. So how did certain environmental conditions, such as low rainfall, affect these activities?



NB: THEY DID NO GROW CROPS SUCH AS FARMERS TODAY DO, NOR DID THEY KEEP LIVESTOCK SUCH AS CATTLE OR SHEEP!

- c) Influence on social organisation: In this paragraph, you will explain how the environment had an influence on social organisation.

So you know that the San were hunters and gatherers, and thus relied heavily on wild animals and plants. So who did what? What did the men do? What did the women do? In other words, what was the gender division of labour?

Also, how large were the San groups? Was it small groups? Big groups? Why? (It was directly linked to the environment!) Don't forget that San group sizes fluctuated (changed) – also explain that – also linked to environment!

Were there rich San people? Why? Why not? (Remember to link your explanation to the environment!)

Did the San live in permanent villages? Or did they move around a lot? Why? (Again, link to the environment!)

- d) Influence on political structure: In this paragraph, you will look at how the environment influenced the San political structure.

Did the San have a leader? Why? Why not? (Again, bring in the environment here!)

How did the San make important decisions? (Again, link to environment!)

- e) The conclusion: so your last paragraph, where you summarise the main themes you discussed in your essay, and tie them back to the question.

“The function of the essay's **Conclusion** is to restate the main argument. It reminds the reader of the strengths of the argument: that is, it reiterates the most important evidence supporting the argument. Make sure, however, that your conclusion is not simply a repetitive summary as this reduces the impact of the argument you have developed in your essay. The conclusion provides a forum for you to persuasively and succinctly restate your thesis given the reader has now been presented with all the information about the topic.” (<https://unilearning.uow.edu.au/essay/4biv.html>)

3) WHERE TO FIND THE CONTENT FOR THE ESSAY QUESTION

When you prepare for this essay question, please focus on the following pages in Tutorial Letter 501:

- South Africa's environmental conditions: pp. 11-14
- San economy: pp. 16-17
- San social organisation: pp. 17-19
- San political structure: p. 20

4) HOW TO FOCUS ON THIS QUESTION

Remember, you always have to make sure you focus on the question. This is especially NB for the essay in the exam.

So, in this question, you **MUST** constantly link the San people's economy, social organisation, and political structure **WITH** environmental conditions. Remember, you must **EXPLAIN** how the environment **INFLUENCED** these lifestyle aspects. Do not forget this even for a second.

So how do you do this? Well, make sure, in each paragraph, that you **CLEARLY** explain to the reader how the environment influenced these aspects. Easy, right?

What should you **NOT do**? What you should not do is to simply **DESCRIBE** the economy, social organisation and the political structure of the San. If you do that, you are **NOT** answering the **QUESTION!**

NB: DO NOT JUST DESCRIBE THE ECONOMY, SOCIAL ORGANISATION, AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE. You have to go further than that. FOCUS ON THE QUESTION!