

Topic

Read the two texts below. Write an essay summarising and evaluating the key points from both texts. Use your own words throughout as far as possible, and include your own ideas in your answers.

(Topic taken from CPE Writing - Grivas Publications)

Examinations are not fair.

Making judgments about the ability of students based on examinations that take place just once or perhaps twice a year is simply not fair. So many students fail to show their true ability due to anxiety, stress and a number of other factors. Many students who do well in exams do so simply by cramming facts into their heads the week before the exam, to be forgotten by the following weekend. Surely assessment of the work done in class and at home throughout the school year would be a fairer system?

Classroom assessment is idealistic.

It's all very well to talk about teachers judging their students work in the classroom, and students working alone at home on their projects, but everyone knows that continuous assessment doesn't work like that. Teachers are only human, and tend to be softer on their students than an examiner would be (or, in a worse scenario, harder on a student they don't like). Parents or older siblings help students with the projects they have to do at home, even if it's just coming up with ideas for them. Exams may not be fun, but at least we get to see what each individual student is capable of.

Model answer

The two texts express contrasting views on the hotly debated issue of school exams.

The first author considers the annual assessment of students' performance as inadequate. Knowing that your only chance to prove your competence relies on a couple of questions that need to be answered within a suffocating time limit cannot but fill you with anxiety. To make matters worse, even when the students manage to cope with the stress it is doubtful whether they gain any academic benefit. All they do is switch off their critical thinking and employ their parrot fashion learning. When the exams are over they 'delete' all this array of incongruent information. Therefore, they end up with lots of pains and no gains!

Conversely, the second text sees the exams as the only reliable means of school assessment. If the students were continually evaluated throughout the year they would be at the mercy of the bias of their teachers. If the professors are positively predisposed they will inflate the marks and if they have any sort of conflict with their pupils they could use the marks as a form of punishment. Moreover, the project work that has often been hailed as the creative alternative of barren exams may prove to be a hoax. More often than not it is other family members that do the work and the students undeservingly reap the rewards.

While I agree that the exams entail counterproductive stress that may spoil the true meaning of education, I cannot overlook the fact that they are an objective and trustworthy method of evaluation. If the written tests accounted for a proportion of the pupils' overall mark and the rest was completed with projects and class participation we could successfully combine the profits of these too seemingly contrasting methods.

All in all, the examinations can contribute to an objective assessment of school performance as long as they are combined with elements of continuous assessment.

(315 words)