

**ANSWER KEY & MARKING SCHEME · CBSE CLASS 11****Writing and City Life (Mesopotamia)**

History · Chapter 1 · Use this with the Board Paper · Companion to Quick Drill

**HOW TO USE**

Attempt the Board Paper first (closed-book, full time). Then come here. For 2-mark+ questions, compare your answer to the model. For 3-4 mark questions, also consult the **Topper Templates** below — these show the exact step-by-step structure that scores full marks per CBSE marking-scheme conventions.

**MODEL ANSWERS · BOARD PAPER****Section A — Very Short Answer (1 mark each, 5 Qs)****Q1. What does the word 'Mesopotamia' mean, and between which two rivers did it lie? [1 mark]**

**Ans:** It means 'the land between the rivers' (Greek mesos + potamos), lying between the Euphrates and the Tigris.

**Q2. What was a ziggurat? [1 mark]**

**Ans:** A massive stepped mud-brick temple-tower with a shrine to the city god at the top (not a tomb, unlike the Egyptian pyramid).

**Q3. What is the script of Mesopotamia called, and why is it so named? [1 mark]**

**Ans:** Cuneiform — from the Latin cuneus, 'wedge', because the signs were wedge-shaped, pressed into clay.

**Q4. On what material was Mesopotamian writing done? [1 mark]**

**Ans:** On clay tablets, into which signs were pressed with a reed stylus and which were then dried or baked.

**Q5. Name the institution that organised the economy of the earliest Mesopotamian cities. [1 mark]**

**Ans:** The temple (of the city god), which collected and redistributed grain and goods.

**Section B — Short Answer (3 marks each, 4 Qs)****Q6. What is meant by 'city life'? Why is a city more than a large village? [3 marks]**

**Ans:** City life means a settlement organised around economic SPECIALISATION and the DIVISION OF LABOUR: not everyone produces food, and some people become full-time craftsmen, traders, priests, scribes or officials who depend on others for grain. This interdependence requires an organised flow of goods, secure food supplies and a central institution (in early Mesopotamia, the temple) to redistribute the surplus. A city is therefore defined by this specialisation and interdependence, NOT simply by having a large population — a big farming village where everyone farms is not a city in this sense.

**Q7. Why was long-distance trade so important to southern Mesopotamia? [3 marks]**

**Ans:** Southern Mesopotamia had very fertile silt soil and produced a large surplus of grain and textiles, but it lacked metal ore, building stone and good timber of its own. To obtain these essential materials — copper and tin for bronze, stone for fine building, and wood — it had to TRADE over long distances. Mesopotamians exported their surplus grain and woven textiles and imported metal, stone, timber and precious stones from regions such as Turkey, Iran and the Gulf. Thus it was the SCARCITY of natural resources, not their abundance, that made trade central to Mesopotamian life.

**Q8. Describe the legacy of Mesopotamia to the modern world. [3 marks]**

**Ans:** Mesopotamia's greatest legacy is WRITING itself, the foundation of all record-keeping, administration, law and learning. From its sexagesimal (base-60) counting we still get the 60-minute hour, the 60-second minute and the 360-degree circle. Its scholars made careful astronomical observations and a calendar, and developed mathematics, laying foundations later passed on to the Greeks. It also produced the world's earliest great poem, the Epic of Gilgamesh. These gifts — writing, the division of time, astronomy and literature — show why Mesopotamia is called a cradle of civilisation.

**Q9. Explain the role of the temple in the earliest Mesopotamian cities. [3 marks]**

**Ans:** In the earliest cities the TEMPLE, not the king, was the main organising institution of the economy. The temple was the residence of the city god, but it was far more than a place of worship: it owned large tracts of land, herds of animals and workshops, and it employed many people. It received offerings and a share of the harvest from farmers and then REDISTRIBUTED grain, wool and goods to the craftsmen, scribes and labourers who worked for it. In this way the temple acted as the central storehouse and employer of the early urban economy, holding the city of specialists together; kingship grew up alongside it somewhat later.

**Section C — Source-Based + Long Answer (5 + 8 = 13 marks)**

**Q10. Read the source and answer the sub-questions: 'As the temple-city of Uruk grew, so did the volume of goods that passed through it — oxen, sheep, fish, grain and bread came in as offerings and taxes, and had to be given out again to those who worked for the temple. Memory could not keep track of so many dealings among so many people. From about 3200 BCE, scribes began to press signs into tablets of wet clay, at first small pictures of the things they counted, recording who had given what and how much.' (a) Which city is named in the passage? (b) From about which year did writing begin here? (c) Why did the people of Uruk need to keep written records? (d) What was the FIRST form of these written signs? (e) What does this source tell us about why writing was invented? [5 marks]**

**Ans:** (a) Uruk. (b) From about 3200 BCE. (c) Because the growing temple-city handled a huge volume of goods — oxen, sheep, fish, grain and bread coming in as offerings and taxes and going out to temple workers — and human memory could not track so many dealings among so many people. (d) The first signs were PICTOGRAPHS — small pictures of the objects being counted (which later developed into wedge-shaped cuneiform signs). (e) The source shows that writing was invented for a PRACTICAL, ECONOMIC purpose — to keep accurate records of goods and transactions in a complex urban economy — and NOT, at first, to write literature or stories. It reveals that record-keeping was the engine that gave birth to writing, which is why writing and city life developed together.

**Q11. Why did writing develop in Mesopotamia, and what was its importance? Explain. [8 marks]**

**Ans:** Writing developed in Mesopotamia for a practical, economic reason and then transformed society. (1) THE NEED: as the temple-city of Uruk grew from about 3200 BCE, a huge volume of goods — oxen, fish, grain, bread, taxes — passed through it, and the many transactions among many people could not be held in memory; society needed a way to keep RECORDS. (2) THE FIRST FORM: the earliest writing appears on clay tablets as PICTOGRAPHS — small pictures of the objects being counted — together with number signs; these are administrative lists, not literature. (3) THE SCRIPT: signs were pressed into wet clay with a wedge-tipped reed STYLUS, giving the wedge-shaped script called CUNEIFORM (Latin cuneus, 'wedge'); the tablets were dried or baked, and because hardened clay survives, vast numbers have come down to us. (4) DEVELOPMENT: over time the pictures became stylised wedge-signs, and signs came to stand for SOUNDS and SYLLABLES as well as objects, so cuneiform could record the spoken language — and thus letters, contracts, laws, prayers and poems, not just lists. (5) SCRIBES AND SOCIETY: with several hundred signs, cuneiform was hard to learn, so writing became the skilled work of professional SCRIBES trained for years in schools; a literate scribe was valued and could serve the temple, the palace or trade. Writing therefore both required and deepened the SPECIALISATION that defined city life. (6) THE IMPORTANCE/LEGACY: writing let a complex urban society manage trade and taxes, record laws so that justice did not rest on memory, send messages across distance, and preserve mathematics, astronomy and literature such as the Epic of Gilgamesh for later generations. Writing is Mesopotamia's greatest gift to the world and the thread that held the city together — every later record-keeping civilisation stands upon this invention.

**★ TOPPER TEMPLATE — 8-mark question: 'Why did writing develop in Mesopotamia, and what was its importance?' OR 'Explain the development and significance of writing in Mesopotamian society.'**

Almost every term paper — the single most common long answer

<b>Step 1</b> [2 marks]	<b>Why writing began — the economic need</b>	Open with the PURPOSE: writing developed not for literature but to keep records as the temple-city economy of Uruk grew. Around 3200 BCE society needed to track goods brought into the temple — oxen, fish, grain, taxes — and transactions between many people. State firmly that the FIRST writing was administrative book-keeping, not poetry.
<b>Step 2</b> [2 marks]	<b>How writing developed — pictograph to cuneiform</b>	Describe the form: the earliest tablets used PICTOGRAPHS — small pictures of the objects counted. These were pressed into wet clay tablets with a wedge-tipped reed STYLUS, giving the wedge-shaped script we call CUNEIFORM (from Latin cuneus, 'wedge'). Over time signs came to stand for sounds and syllables, so cuneiform could record the spoken language, not just lists. Mention that the clay tablets were sun-dried or baked and so survived for thousands of years.
<b>Step 3</b> [2 marks]	<b>Writing and society — scribes and learning</b>	Explain its social effect: cuneiform had hundreds of signs and was hard to learn, so writing became the skilled work of professional SCRIBES who trained for years in schools. A literate scribe was respected and could find administrative employment. Thus writing both required and reinforced the specialisation and division of labour that defined city life.
<b>Step 4</b> [2 marks]	<b>The importance / legacy of writing</b>	Conclude with significance: writing let an urban society manage trade, taxes, laws and large building projects across distance and time, holding the complex city together. Later it carried law-codes, mathematics, astronomy and literature such as the Epic of Gilgamesh. Writing is Mesopotamia's greatest legacy to the world — the foundation on which record-keeping, administration and learning still rest. End by linking writing directly to the survival of the city as an organised community.

**COMMON LOSS OF MARKS:**

- Saying writing began 'for stories/poetry' instead of for ECONOMIC record-keeping — the most common conceptual error.
- Not naming cuneiform, the clay tablet and the reed stylus specifically — vague phrasing loses precision marks.
- Forgetting the SOCIAL point (scribes, hard to learn, specialisation) so the answer never links writing to city life.
- No concluding line on the wider legacy (law, mathematics, astronomy, Gilgamesh).

**★ TOPPER TEMPLATE — 4-mark question: 'Why was the city important in Mesopotamia?' OR 'What is meant by urban life / city life?'**

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<b>Step 1</b> [1 mark]	<b>Define city life by specialisation</b>	State the concept: city life means a settlement where people do DIFFERENT specialised work and depend on one another — not everyone grows food. Some are craftsmen, traders, priests, scribes or officials. This DIVISION OF LABOUR is the heart of urban life. Do not define a city merely by its large size.
<b>Step 2</b> [1 mark]	<b>Interdependence and organisation</b>	Explain the consequence: because specialists do not grow their own food, the city needs an organised system to collect grain and goods and REDISTRIBUTE them — in early Mesopotamia this was done through the TEMPLE. The city thus needs continuous, secure supplies and a central institution to manage them.
<b>Step 3</b> [1 mark]	<b>Trade, transport and writing</b>	Add the supports of city life: because the southern plain lacked metal, stone and timber, the city depended on TRADE to import what it could not produce; and because so many transactions had to be tracked, the city needed WRITING. Efficient transport along the rivers and canals carried bulk goods cheaply.
<b>Step 4</b> [1 mark]	<b>Why it mattered</b>	Conclude with significance: the city concentrated people, skills, surplus and power in one place, allowing achievements impossible in a village — monumental temples, long-distance trade, record-keeping, law and learning. Mesopotamian urbanism shows that the city, not the village, became the engine of civilisation.

**COMMON LOSS OF MARKS:**

- Defining a city only by population size, missing the key idea of specialisation and division of labour.
- Not linking the city to the temple (the redistributing institution), to trade and to writing.
- Listing features with no concluding line on WHY the city mattered for civilisation.

**★ TOPPER TEMPLATE — 5-mark source/extract-based question: a short passage on the temple economy, on writing, or on Mesopotamian city life, followed by 3 sub-questions.**

Annual in the source-based section

<b>Step 1</b> [1 mark]	<b>Read twice; underline named terms and the key claim</b>	On first read, underline every proper noun and key term in the passage (e.g. 'Uruk', 'temple', 'cuneiform', 'clay tablet', 'c.3200 BCE'). The sub-questions are almost always answered from these underlined anchors plus one line of your own chapter knowledge. Do not start writing yet.
<b>Step 2</b> [2 marks]	<b>Answer 'identify / state' sub-questions tightly, then 'explain'</b>	For an 'identify/name' sub-question, answer in one line straight from the text. For an 'explain' sub-question, add ONE line of chapter knowledge to the passage's fact — e.g. the passage says writing recorded temple goods; you add that this is why writing began for book-keeping, not literature. Match the length of each answer to its marks.
<b>Step 3</b> [2 marks]	<b>The evaluate / 'in your view' sub-question</b>	The last sub-question usually asks for reasoning ('Why was this important?' / 'What does this tell us about city life?'). Give a judgement supported by a chapter fact — e.g. 'This shows that writing and the temple were the two institutions that held the complex urban economy together, because a city of specialists could not function without records and a central store.'

**COMMON LOSS OF MARKS:**

- Copying the whole passage instead of answering the specific sub-question asked.
- Ignoring the marks in brackets — writing a paragraph for a 1-mark 'identify' and one line for a 2-mark 'explain'.
- Skipping the evaluate sub-question or answering it with opinion alone, unsupported by a chapter fact.

**MARKING SCHEME — GENERAL NOTES**

- In History the correct name or term (Uruk, cuneiform, temple, c.3200 BCE) is itself worth marks; vague phrasing ('an old city', 'a kind of writing') is not rewarded.
- The 8-mark writing answer must cover WHY writing began (record-keeping), HOW it developed (pictograph → cuneiform on clay), the role of SCRIBES, and the LEGACY; missing the 'why' or treating writing as literature from the start caps the score.
- For source-based sub-questions, award marks for answers drawn from BOTH the passage and chapter knowledge; pure copying of the passage without the asked-for point gets half marks.
- A common conceptual error to penalise: defining a 'city' only by size rather than by specialisation and the division of labour.
- Distinguishing the ziggurat (temple-tower) from the Egyptian pyramid (tomb), and the temple (early economic organiser) from the king (whose power grew later), is required for full marks where relevant.