

Use the question / 防跑题

- Command: explain=define+how; Evaluate=pros/cons+judgement; Discuss=both sides; To what extent=degree/conditions.
- Check object: one model? two frameworks? external environment? internal capability? customer/market? CSR/stakeholder?
- Universal answer: Define -> Apply -> Insight -> Strengths -> Limitations -> Judgement. 每段都回到题目。
- Q1 External model (40%) / 外部模型**
- Need: choose ONE strategic model/framework; explain clearly; apply to real organisation/industry; show insight; strengths + limitations.
- Model choice: macro change/regulation -> PESTEL; competition/profitability -> Five Forces; growth -> Ansoff; price-value positioning -> Bowman; overall options -> SWOT/TOWS.
- Priority 1: Short universal writing formula / 最优先加入的小抄句型**
- Opening formula: This answer argues that [insert point]. The discussion uses [model/framework] to show how [company/industry] can respond to [external/internal/customer/sustainability issue].**
- Paragraph formula: This matters because [reason]. For managers, it suggests that [action/decision]. However, this is limited because [limitation].**
- Evaluation formula: The model is useful as a starting point, but it should not be used mechanically. Its value depends on whether managers connect the analysis to evidence, capability and implementation.**
- Final judgement formula: Overall, [company] should [recommendation], but this will only create advantage if it is supported by resources, coordination and clear execution.**

中文: 这四句可以放在小抄最上方, 任何题都能套。

PESTEL: 宏观环境

- Definition: macro-environment: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal.
- Application: link each factor to a major decision: market entry, pricing, sustainability investment, supply chain redesign, product development.
- Unlever example: P/L=EU due diligence/packaging; E=inflation/weak consumer confidence; S=health, ethics, sustainability but price-sensitive; T=AI/digital commerce; Env=climate/plastic risk.
- Insight: shows threats/opportunities before committing resources; managers can adapt, invest, reduce risk or change direction.
- Strengths: broad overview; good under uncertainty; links external trends to strategy. Limits: can be descriptive; no ranking; ignores internal capability; changes fast.
- Judgement: useful starting point, but combine with RBV/Value Chain because external opportunity does not mean the firm can respond.

Q1 paragraph plan / 第一题段落

- Intro: This essay uses [model] to analyse how [company/industry] can make [decision] in a challenging environment.
- Body 1: explain model + why suitable for external uncertainty/competition/change.
- Body 2: apply key factors/forces to organisation with evidence/example. 不要只列点, 要说影响决策。
- Body 3: insight for managers: invest/adapt/reduce risk/choose market/positioning.
- Evaluation: strengths + limitations; final judgement = useful but not sufficient alone.

Five Forces - competition backup 竞争备用

- Definition: in industry attractiveness: rivalry, buyer power, supplier power, substitutes, new entrants.
- Use when question says competition/rivals/profitability. Example: FMCG/supermarkets have high rivalry and buyer power; private labels are substitutes.
- Strengths: clear competition focus; shows margin pressure; useful for entry/position decisions. Limits: static; ignores resources; digital boundaries blur.

Other Q1 options 快速备用

- Ansoff = growth choices: penetration/development/product/diversification. Limit: oversimplifies risk.
- Bowman Strategy Clock = price-value positioning. Limit: less macro detail.
- SWOT/TOWS = S/W/O/T -> SO/ST/WO/WT actions. Limit: shallow without evidence.

Q1 general opening / 第一题通用开头

Strategic management is a process of choice of uncertainty by simplifying complex external conditions into clearer decision areas. In this answer, [model] is used to examine how [company/industry] could make a major strategic decision about [decision] in a challenging external environment.

中文: 战略模型帮助管理者把复杂外部环境变成更清楚的决策因素。本答案用某模型分析某企业如何做重大决策。

If using PESTEL / 如果用 PESTEL

PESTEL is suitable because the question is concerned with external uncertainty and change. It allows managers to consider political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal pressures before committing resources to a major decision.

For example, for Unilever, political and legal pressure may come from sustainability regulation and packaging rules, while economic pressure may come from inflation and weak consumer confidence. Social and legal pressures such as health, ethics and sustainability can create opportunities, but they may also conflict with affordability. This means managers must balance differentiation with cost control and practical execution.

The main insight from PESTEL is that strategy should not be based only on internal ambition. It must fit the external environment. If regulation, customer behaviour and technology are changing, the firm may need to redesign products, change supply chains, adjust pricing or invest in sustainability.

Its strength is that it gives a broad view of external forces and helps managers avoid narrow thinking. Its limitation is that it can become descriptive and does not show which factor is most important or whether the firm has the capability to respond.

Therefore, PESTEL is useful for identifying threats and opportunities, but it should be combined with internal analysis such as RBV or Value Chain before making the final decision.

If using Five Forces / 如果用 5F 模型

Porter's Five Forces is suitable when the strategic decision depends on competition and industry attractiveness. It examines rivalry, buyer power, supplier power, substitutes and new entrants to show where pressure on profitability comes from.

For example, in FMCG or supermarkets, rivalry is high because many firms compete on price, promotion and brand visibility. Buyer power is also strong when large retailers or price-sensitive customers can switch easily. Substitutes such as private labels can weaken national brands and force firms to defend value through innovation, pricing and communication. The main insight is that managers should not enter or expand in a market only because demand exists. They must also consider whether competitive forces will allow sustainable profit. The strength of Five Forces is that it clearly explains competitive pressure and margin risk. However, it is more limited in fast-changing digital markets and does not explain why one firm can outperform another within the same industry.

Overall, Five Forces helps managers judge industry attractiveness, but it should be supported by internal capability analysis to show how the firm can defend its position.

If using Ansoff / 如果用 Ansoff

Ansoff's Matrix is useful when the strategic decision concerns growth. It helps managers compare market penetration, market development, product development and diversification, each with different levels of risk.

For example, a firm may choose market penetration if it wants to grow existing products in existing markets, while product development may be better if customer needs are changing and innovation is required. Diversification is usually riskier because it involves unfamiliar products and markets.

The main insight is that growth is not one single choice. Managers must match growth ambition with risk, resources and market knowledge.

The strength of Ansoff is that it provides a simple growth map. Its limitation is that it can oversimplify risk and does not explain how to implement the strategy.

If using Bowman Strategy Clock / 如果用 Bowman 策略时钟

Bowman's Strategy Clock is useful when the decision is about competitive positioning. It compares price and perceived value, helping managers decide whether to compete through low price, differentiation, hybrid value or premium positioning.

The main insight is that customers do not judge strategy by price alone. They compare what they pay with the value they believe they receive. A firm must therefore align pricing, quality, brand and communication.

Its strength is that it links customer value with competitive positioning. Its limitation is that it says less about wider external pressures such as regulation, technology or supply-chain risk.

If using SWOT/TOWS / 如果用 SWOT/TOWS

SWOT is useful for summarising strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, while TOWS improves the model by turning those findings into possible strategic actions.

For example, a firm can use strengths to exploit opportunities, use strengths to reduce threats, address weaknesses by using opportunities, or reduce weaknesses to avoid major risks. The strength of SWOT/TOWS is that it connects internal and external factors in a simple way. The limitation is that it can become shallow if it is not supported by evidence or clear prioritisation.

Q2 Internal capabilities (20%) / 内部能力

- Need: Two internal frameworks/concepts + examples. Best pair: RBV/VRIO + Value Chain.

Q2 full opening / 第二题通用开头

Long-term competitive advantage depends not only on reading the external environment, but also on understanding what the firm can actually do better than competitors.

This answer uses RBV/VRIO and Value Chain analysis to show how a business can assess internal strengths and turn them into competitive advantage.

RBV/VRIO = what the firm has 看企业有什么

- Definition: advantage comes from valuable internal resources/capabilities. VRIO tests Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, Organised.
- Examples: Apple brand/ecosystem/design; Unilever brands, distribution, R&D, sustainability governance; Tesco Clubcard/data/supply chain.
- Use: identifies which resources deserve investment/protection and can support sustained advantage.
- Strengths: long-term internal focus; explains sustained advantage; helps prioritise capabilities. Limits: rarity/imitation hard to measure; may ignore external change; resource alone is not enough.

Value Chain = where value is created 看价值在哪产生

- Definition: analyses activities: inbound logistics, operations, marketing/sales, service and support activities.
- Use: finds bottlenecks, cost savings, quality improvement, differentiation and service improvements.
- Examples: Unilever sourcing -> operations -> brand marketing -> retailer/customer relationships; Starbucks service/experience; Tesco logistics + stores + data.
- Strengths: practical/activity-based; shows where to improve. Limits: oversimplifies digital ecosystems; value may be co-created with partners/customers; less dynamic.
- Judgement: VRIO identifies important capabilities; Value Chain shows where they become customer value. Together they improve internal environment and competitive advantage.

Q2 paragraph plan / 第二题段落

- Intro: Long-term advantage depends on using internal capabilities, not only analysing external conditions.
- Para 1: RBV/VRIO definition + example resource + why it creates advantage.
- Para 2: Value Chain definition + example activity + where to improve operations/service/marketing.
- Compare: VRIO = what is valuable; Value Chain = where/how value is created.
- Conclusion: both together help assess strengths and turn them into advantage.

Q2 full opening / 第二题完整开头

Long-term competitive advantage depends not only on reading the external environment, but also on understanding what the firm can actually do better than competitors.

This answer uses RBV/VRIO and Value Chain analysis to show how a business can assess internal strengths and turn them into competitive advantage.

RBV/VRIO paragraph starter

RBV argues that firms gain advantage from resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and supported by the organisation. For example, [company] may have strengths such as brand reputation, customer data, innovation capability, supply-chain knowledge or employee skills. These resources matter because they allow the firm to deliver value in a way competitors may find difficult to copy.

However, a resource does not create advantage automatically. It must be organised and used effectively. For instance, strong data or brand reputation has limited value if the firm cannot turn it into better products, customer experience or operational performance.

Value Chain paragraph starter

Value Chain analysis adds a more practical view because it shows where value is created inside the business. It examines activities such as procurement, operations, marketing, sales and service. This helps managers identify where the firm is efficient, where it differentiates, and where bottlenecks reduce performance.

For example, [company] may create value through reliable sourcing, efficient operations, strong brand communication, digital channels or customer service. If one activity is weak, the whole strategy may suffer, even if the firm has strong resources.

Q2 comparison + conclusion

The two frameworks are useful together because VRIO explains what resources matter, while Value Chain explains where and how those resources are converted into customer value. Therefore, they help managers move from identifying strengths to improving the internal environment and building competitive advantage.

Q3 customer/pricing/innovation/communication (20%)

Q3 full opening / 第三题完整开头

A strong market position is built when a business understands what customers value and then aligns its pricing, innovation and communication with those needs. This answer argues that customer understanding should come first, because pricing, innovation and communication are only effective when they reflect real customer behaviour and perceived value.

- Question is open. Choose 2-3 linked areas, not random list. 先讲顾客, 再讲价格/创新/沟通。
- Main argument: customer understanding is the foundation; pricing, innovation and communication work only when aligned with what target customers value.
- Customer understanding: needs, pain points, segmentation, behaviour, perceived value. Sentence: firms must understand what customers value before setting price or innovating.
- Pricing: value-based, premium, penetration, affordability. Price signals value/quality/status, not just "cheap". Link to target segment.
- Innovation: customer-led product/service improvement; solves real problems; differentiates. Not technology for its own sake.
- Communication: positioning, IMC, social media, storytelling, trust. Helps customers understand why the offer is valuable/different.
- Examples: Apple=premium+ecosystem+innovation; Tesco=Clubcard+value pricing; Starbucks=experience+personalisation; Unilever=affordable mass + premium beauty + sustainability messages.
- Judgement: market position strengthens when insight, price, innovation and communication reinforce each other; inconsistency confuses customers and weakens trust.

Q3 paragraph plan / 第三题段落

- Intro: market position improves when a firm understands customers and aligns its offer with perceived value.
- Para 1: customer insight/segmentation; Para 2: pricing strategy; Para 3: innovation or communication; Para 4: link together + example.

Customer understanding paragraph

Customer understanding means identifying customers' needs, motivations, pain points, behaviour and willingness to pay. It helps a firm avoid guessing what the market wants. For example, customer insight can show whether consumers value low price, convenience, premium quality, ethical sourcing, personalisation or brand status.

Pricing paragraph

Pricing strengthens market position when it matches the target customer and the brand promise. A low price may attract price-sensitive customers, while premium pricing can signal quality, status or specialist value. However, pricing must be credible: if the price is high but customers cannot see the value, the firm may lose trust and volume.

Innovation paragraph

Innovation can strengthen market position when it solves real customer problems or improves the customer experience. It should not be innovation for its own sake. The strongest innovation links customer insight with product design, service improvement or sustainability needs.

Communication paragraph

Communication helps customers understand why the offer is different and valuable. Through positioning, social media, storytelling and integrated marketing communication, a firm can build trust and make its value proposition clearer.

Q3 conclusion

Overall, customer understanding, pricing, innovation and communication should reinforce each other. If they are aligned, the firm can build a clearer market position; if they are inconsistent, customers may become confused and the brand may lose credibility.

Q4 CSR, sustainability, stakeholder value (20%)

- Need: "To what extent" = balanced degree judgement. Do NOT write only moral points. 不要只写企业应该做好事。

Q4 full opening / 第四题完整开头

Businesses should not focus only on financial return, but they also cannot ignore profit. A balanced view is needed because long-term success increasingly depends on stakeholder trust, responsible governance, sustainability and financial discipline. This answer argues that firms should give strong attention to CSR and stakeholder value, but these should be integrated with strategy rather than treated as separate moral claims.

Stakeholder view 利益相关者

- Firms need profit to survive, invest, employ people and reward investors. Financial discipline matters.
- Limit: short-term profit focus can damage trust, environment, employees and long-term resilience.

Stakeholder view 利益相关者

- Long-term success depends on customers, employees, suppliers, communities, regulators and environment. Trust/legitimacy reduce risk.
- Limit: stakeholder goals conflict and are hard to balance.

CSR / Sustainability / Culture

- CSR = responsibility beyond legal compliance. Strong CSR is real, measurable and linked to strategy; weak CSR is symbolic/greenwashing.
- Sustainability is strategic because climate risk, regulation, resources and consumer expectations affect competitiveness.
- Culture decides whether CSR is real: leadership, incentives and daily decisions turn values into behaviour.
- Examples: Unilever climate/plastics/living wage; Patagonia environmental purpose; Tesco food waste/supply chain and affordability.
- Balanced conclusion: businesses should not ignore financial return, but long-term financial success increasingly depends on stakeholder trust, responsible governance and sustainability.
- Best final idea: responsible profit, not profit vs responsibility.

Q4 paragraph plan / 第四题段落

- Intro: answer "to what extent"; firms should prioritise responsibility strongly, but not completely replace financial return.
- Para 1: shareholder argument; Para 2: stakeholder/CSR argument; Para 3: sustainability/culture; Para 4: limitations/trade-offs; Conclusion: balanced judgement.

If panic / 如果读题紧张

- Underline topic words. Write 3 mini-points before essay. If unsure, use: definition -> company example -> strength -> limitation -> judgement.
- Do not copy full crib sheet. Use it as prompts and adapt to wording. 不要机械照抄, 要贴题。

Exam sentence bank / 可直接套用

This model is used because..., however its limitation is...

- For decision-makers, this suggests that...
- This creates both opportunities and risks.
- The key issue is not only strategy design, but implementation.
- Competitive advantage depends on both external fit and internal capability.
- A balanced view is needed because...
- Overall, the organisation should...

Try example bank / 公司例子

- Unilever: FMCG, strong brands, sustainability pressure, plastics/climate, affordable vs premium strategy.
- Apple: premium pricing, ecosystem, innovation, brand loyalty, differentiation.
- Tesco: Clubcard data, value pricing, supply chain, private-label competition.
- Starbucks: customer experience, service culture, personalisation, brand community.

Stakeholder paragraph

From a shareholder perspective, businesses need profit to survive, invest, employ people and reward investors. Financial return is important because without profitability a firm cannot fund innovation, pay workers or remain competitive. This view keeps managers disciplined and focused on efficiency.

However, a narrow focus on short-term profit can create long-term risks. If a firm ignores employees, customers, suppliers, communities or the environment, it may damage trust, reputation and resilience.

Stakeholder / CSR paragraph

The stakeholder perspective argues that firms depend on many groups, not only shareholders. Customers, employees, suppliers, regulators and communities all influence whether a business can succeed. CSR is therefore important because it shows that a firm accepts responsibility beyond minimum legal compliance.

However, CSR must be real and measurable. If it is only used for marketing or image management, it can become symbolic and may be criticised as greenwashing.

Sustainability / culture paragraph

Sustainability has become strategic because climate risk, regulation, resources and consumer expectations now affect competitiveness. Organisational culture is also important because values, leadership and incentives decide whether responsibility becomes daily behaviour or remains only a statement.

Q4 conclusion

Therefore, the best position is not profit versus responsibility, but responsible profit. Businesses should create financial value in a way that protects stakeholders and supports long-term social and environmental sustainability.

Emergency mini answers / 考场紧张时的迷你答案

If I do not know how to start Q1: This question is about how a model can support strategic decision-making in uncertainty. I will use [model] because it helps managers understand [external change/competition/growth/positioning].

If I do not know how to start Q2: This question is about internal capability. I will use RBV/VRIO to identify valuable resources and Value Chain to show where those resources become customer value.

If I do not know how to start Q3: This question is about market position. My argument is that customer understanding is the foundation, while pricing, innovation and communication must be aligned with customer value.

If I do not know how to start Q4: This question asks for a balanced view. I agree that financial return matters, but long-term success also depends on stakeholders, CSR, sustainability and culture.

Very short company examples / 极简公司例子扩展

Unilever: useful for sustainability, FMCG competition, packaging, supply chain, affordability versus premiumisation, stakeholder value.

Apple: useful for premium pricing, innovation, ecosystem, brand loyalty, customer value and differentiation.

Tesco: useful for value pricing, Clubcard data, customer understanding, supply chain and private-label competition.

Starbucks: useful for service experience, brand community, communication, personalisation and culture.

Note: These are copy-paste additions, not a full exam script. In the exam, adapt the company, model and decision to the actual question wording. / 注意: 这些是可复制补充句, 不是完整背诵稿。考试时一定要根据题目替换公司、模型和决策。

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