

1.1 Environmental systems, feedback and perspectives

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ Total: 10 marks

KEY WORDS stock • flow

Objective

Environmental systems, feedback and perspectives. Supported HL concept preparation; original classroom practice, not an official IB paper or assessed learner work.

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ What would explain this observation?

- A lake can respond to the same nutrient input differently depending on its current state. Environmental outcomes depend on **stocks**, **flows** and feedback.
- Start with a prediction. State the quantities or features you would compare, then decide what evidence could distinguish two explanations.

■ Build the model

- A system model has a boundary, stores and flows. Negative feedback counteracts change; positive feedback amplifies it. An environmental perspective shapes what people value and which management outcomes they prioritize.
- stock: An amount held within a system; flow: Transfer of an amount per unit time.



■ Choose evidence that can test it

- Separate physical evidence from value judgements. A stock is an amount at a time; a flow is an amount per time. Sustainability decisions require ecological, social and economic evidence and a stated scale.
- Draw the system boundary before calculating a budget. Identify inflows, outflows and possible unmeasured terms. Compare stakeholder claims using the same evidence, then explain where values lead to different choices.

■ Work from known quantities

- State the known values and their units. Choose the relation because its assumptions fit this case, then rearrange before substitution.
- Known: a reservoir begins with 800 units, receives 120 and loses 90 during a week. Change in storage = inflow-outflow = $120 - 90 = 30$. Final storage = $800 + 30 = 830$ units. The model assumes no omitted flow.

Example:

A stock starts at 600, receives 80 and loses 110. Find final stock. Use the same sequence: known quantities → model → relation → substitution → unit and interpretation.

■ Check the conclusion and its limits

- A balance that closes mathematically can still omit a real process if terms were estimated to fit. Positive feedback does not mean a socially desirable result.
- Return to the original observation. Explain what the result supports, which conditions it assumes, and one way to test a competing explanation.

Warn:

Positive feedback always produces a socially beneficial outcome. This claim is false: A balance that closes mathematically can still omit a real process if terms were estimated to fit. Positive feedback does not mean a socially desirable result.

Key:

Environmental systems, feedback and perspectives: Separate physical evidence from value judgements. A stock is an amount at a time; a flow is an amount per time. Sustainability decisions require ecological, social and economic evidence and a stated scale.

2 Practice

2.1 What makes a reservoir budget incomplete? Choose one answer.

- **A** An unmeasured outflow
- **B** Consistent units
- **C** An explicit boundary

2.2 A stock starts at 600, receives 80 and loses 110. Find final stock. Show the relation, substitution and units. [2]

2.3 Decide whether this claim is true and justify: Positive feedback always produces a socially beneficial outcome. [2]

2.4 An amount held within a system: write the technical term. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A fictional reservoir starts at 500, receives 90 and ends at 550. Evaporation is 20. Infer other outflow and give an alternative explanation if measurements are uncertain.[4]
