

GCE



Revised GCE **History**

Student Guidance

A2 Unit 1: Planning for Success
Examination Advice for Students

For first teaching from September 2016
For first award of AS Level in Summer 2017
For first award of A Level in Summer 2018

Updated: 7 July 2020



Planning for Success - Examination Advice for GCE History Candidates

Students make the same mistakes each year in GCE History. The advice below will help you to avoid making these common errors giving you the best chance of success in CCEA History examination papers.

Reading the question

- Read the question carefully;
- Every question has a key instruction, for example, ‘To what extent...?’, ‘How far...?’, ‘Analyse’, ‘Assess’. Make sure that you follow this instruction in your answer;
- Underline the key issues and key words that appear in the question - this will help you to concentrate on them;
- Pay close attention to any dates specified in the question. Your answer must cover the full range of dates given in the question - it is a common mistake to cover only part of the specified dates or to start later or stop earlier than the date given; and
- If you misinterpret the question, your answer will be irrelevant and lack focus.

Answering the question

- Write a brief plan. Plans are not marked but they will help you to organise and structure your answer;
- Do not write out the question. This is unnecessary and wastes valuable time;
- Make sure that you clearly write down the correct number of the question you are answering;
- Stay focused on the question. A good way of doing this is to try and use the key words in the question throughout your answer;
- Keep asking yourself if you are answering the question. This will help to ensure that your answer is sharp and relevant and that you do not wander off the topic;
- Answer the question asked, not the one you want to answer or one that you have rehearsed; and
- Be selective with your evidence. Avoid the temptation to put everything you know down on paper.

Communicating your ideas

- Practise writing accurately before the examination;
- Pay attention to the structure and coherence of your essay;
- Write legibly;
- Use good grammar;
- Watch your spelling and punctuation;
- Do not use text language; and
- Avoid abbreviations such as ‘Liz’ for Elizabeth I, ‘parl’ for parliament, ‘DOC’ for Daniel O’Connell, ‘govt’ for government. Common abbreviations that appear in textbooks, such as IPP or GAA, are acceptable but they should be written out in full the first time you use them.

Managing your time

- If you are half way through planning an answer and you realise that you have picked the 'wrong' question, it is not too late to change;
- Don't waste time writing details and facts that do not help to answer the question; and
- Leave a little time at the end of the examination to check your answers.

Examinations can be stressful as you will not have seen the questions before. However, you will have covered the entire course and have had many opportunities to practise similar past paper questions as part of your preparation, so have confidence in your own ability.

Planning for Success – Examination Advice for A2 Level Candidates

A2 Unit 1

Total time 1 hour 15 minutes

Overview

Synoptic essay question

A choice of **2** questions - you answer **1** of these.

Total marks available: 40.

Spend up to 15 minutes planning your answer.

Spend approximately 60 minutes writing your answer.

Quality of written communication is assessed in this question.

A typical question will read like this:

“The quality of their leadership was the most important factor in determining whether unionists and constitutional nationalists succeeded in achieving their aims in nineteenth century Ireland”. How far would you agree with this statement?

- The questions will all be based on a 100-year time period. It is vital that your answer covers the whole time period;
- Some events/issues within the 100-year period of study will be particularly relevant to the question and will best illustrate your arguments, so concentrate on these. Do not dwell on events that have little relevance or add little to your arguments just to demonstrate that you are covering the 100 years. If you do this, you are likely to run out of time and this will reduce the quality of your response. Only write about what is relevant to the question;
- The questions will often begin with a statement and then you will be asked to discuss the extent to which you agree with it. Think of events/issues which will help you to answer the question asked. Alternatively, you could be asked whether a particular date marked a turning point in the fortunes of, for example, a political movement. In such questions, it is important to present evidence supporting and contradicting the proposition from both before and after the date identified as the turning point;
- Try to think of ways of linking the events/issues or personalities over 100 years. For example, in a question on the extent to which the death of Stalin marked the most important turning point in relations between the Soviet Union and Western governments in the period 1917-1991, it is important to discuss examples which support and contradict the proposition;
- Keep to the question asked. Try to use the wording of the question in each paragraph of your essay. This will ensure that you keep to the point and do not wander off the topic;
- The questions will require you to demonstrate your ability to debate and reach a judgement. Make sure that you substantiate your arguments with relevant evidence and

draw conclusions based on the evidence you have presented, otherwise, you will not meet the requirements for these questions; and

- Remember **style** – it is vital that you include an introduction and a conclusion in your essay.

Your **introduction** should set the scene for the essay. It introduces the issues you are going to discuss in the main body of your answer. Try to refer to the exact wording of the question in your introduction to make sure that you are answering the right question. Show the examiner that you know that other factors are important, not just the one given in the title of the question. In the main part of the essay, you may want to devote a paragraph to each of these factors.

Your **conclusion** should ‘round off’ your essay and emphasize the main arguments put forward in the body of your essay and reach a clear, logical judgement. New ideas/arguments should not be brought into the conclusion. Keep your conclusion short and succinct.

- Remember the importance of accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation. Historians are expected to be able to communicate in accurate and clear English. Examiners understand that you are writing your answers under pressure. However, frequent grammatical errors and simple spelling mistakes are seen by examiners as a sign of carelessness. You must get into the habit of writing accurately.

