

GCE



Revised GCE
History

Student Guidance

A2 Unit 2: Planning for Success
Examination Advice for Students

For first teaching from September 2019
For first award of AS Level in Summer 2020
For first award of A Level in Summer 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...?’, ‘Assess’. Make sure 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 your 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

- Look at the marks awarded for each question – this is usually a good guide as to how much time you should spend on your answer;
- If you are half way through planning an answer and 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 2

Total time 2 hours 30 minutes

Question 1(a)

Source work

Total marks available: 15.

Approximately 5 minutes to read Source 1.

Approximately 15 minutes to write your answer.

Quality of written communication is not assessed in this question.

A typical question will read like this:

Use Source 1 and your knowledge of this period. How valuable is source 1 to an historian as evidence in a study of the strength of the Volunteers? (15 marks)

- Start by reading the source very carefully – underline key aspects of the content, as well as dates and the author. Think about the strengths and weaknesses of the source and jot them down or underline them as you read the source;
- Read the source more than once to make sure you understand what it is saying. This will help you to place in context the information and/or the opinions the source provides and from there assess its value;
- It is important to study carefully the caption which introduces the source because it has been written to help you to answer the question;
- You will have 1 source to study, which is a **primary** source;
- You will be expected to discuss those **key** features of the source which will help you to assess its value. The content of the source will always be very important. In addition, you should also discuss other features of the source such as the author, date, mode and motive;
- Remember to look at what is valuable about the source but also assess its **weaknesses** and **limitations**. Always include in your evaluation any **limitations** in the source which affect its value in relation to the question. For example, a source might be valuable because it gives one opinion on a particular event. However, in giving only one perspective, it is limited in its value to the historian. To gain a full picture of the different opinions about the event, the historian would need to consult other sources;

- You must include relevant own knowledge in your answer;
- Remember that, in this question, you are being asked to decide how **valuable** the source is in telling you about the event/issue. Don't discuss the value of the source in general terms; you must be specific; and
- You are being asked to make a judgement in this question. You must identify how valuable the source is and provide evidence to support your judgement. Top level responses will provide a clear and explicit judgement at the end of the answer, supported by evidence from the source and the candidate's own contextual knowledge.

Question 1(b)

Source work

Total marks available: 20.

Approximately 5 minutes to read the sources and plan your answer.

Approximately 30 minutes to write your answer.

Quality of written communication is not assessed in this question.

A typical question will read like this:

Use Source 1 and Source 2 and other evidence you have studied. How far do the sources support the idea that the Volunteers were more of a hindrance than a help to the British Government? (20 marks)

- Plan your response. Write out key points you want to make. Then weave in the sources to support your argument;
- Consider **each** of the sources in turn and assess how far they support the proposition in the question. Do they strongly, partially or only slightly support the proposition? Or do either of the sources disagree with the proposition?;
- Use short extracts from the sources to support or reinforce what you are saying. Do not write out the sources at length;
- Do not assess the value of the sources in this question;
- You must ensure that you also bring in your **own knowledge** to support or refute the proposition; this can be factual detail you know about the topic which is not included in the sources. You should also elaborate on the information given in the sources by setting it in the context of the time; and
- This question requires you to assess or evaluate a statement. Make sure that you stick closely to the question and argue with clarity and relevance. If the question asks you to assess the importance of a factor in, for example, causing an event, don't forget to discuss it in relation to other factors.

Question 2

Evaluation of two different historical interpretations

Total marks available: 25.

Approximately 10 minutes to read the sources.

Approximately 40 minutes to write your answer.

Quality of written communication is not assessed in this question.

This question will ask you to evaluate which of two different interpretations of a particular historical event or development you find more convincing.

A typical question will read like this:

Study Interpretation A and Interpretation B. Historians have different views about particular issues. Using both interpretations, and your understanding of the historical context, which of these different interpretations of the reasons for the outcome of the 1918 general election in Ireland do you find more convincing? (25 marks)

- Read Interpretation A and Interpretation B with particular care to make sure that you understand what they are saying. This will help you to place in context the opinions which the authors are expressing. Underline important aspects of the extracts;
- When you have understood what the interpretations are saying, think about **other evidence** you can bring in to your answer which is not included in the extracts but is directly related to the arguments they contain;
- In your answer you should analyse and evaluate the **two** interpretations contained in the extracts;
- Use short extracts from the interpretations to support or reinforce what you are saying. Do not write out the extracts at length;
- You are expected to include relevant contextual knowledge in your answer. ‘Contextual knowledge’ is evidence you bring in to your answer which is not included in the interpretations but is directly related to the arguments they contain. For example, if one interpretation states that the weaknesses of the Irish Parliamentary Party contributed to the success of Sinn Féin in the general election in Ireland in 1918, you could support this argument by providing some examples of the mistakes made by the party leadership;
- You will not gain any marks for knowledge you include in your answer which is **not** directly related to the arguments contained in the interpretations. If, for example, neither of the sources make any reference to the impact of British government policy on the outcome of the general election in Ireland in 1918, you will not gain any extra marks if you discuss it in your response because it is not linked to the arguments in either of the interpretations;

- You do not need to mention the names or views of any other historians in your response. Simply focus on the interpretations of the two authors.
- You must identify which of the two different interpretations you find more convincing and provide evidence to support your choice. Top level responses will provide a clear and explicit judgement at the end of the answer, supported by evidence from the interpretations and your own contextual knowledge;
- Examiners will always reward a candidate whose answer is relevant, clearly structured and coherent. The examiner should not have to search through your answer for the relevant information; and
- Whilst quality of written communication is not assessed in this question, historians are expected to be able to communicate their ideas clearly and accurately.

Question 3

Essay question

There is a choice of **2** questions. You answer **1** of these.

Total marks available: 20

Approximately 5 minutes to plan your answer.

Approximately 40 minutes to write your answer.

Quality of written communication is assessed in this question.

A typical question will read like this:

How successfully did the Government of Sir James Craig respond to the problems facing Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1925? (20 marks)

- This a traditional essay question and plan it as such – even writing key words to help you plan your essay will help;
- Make sure that you address the full range of dates mentioned in the question;
- Make sure that you stick closely to the question and argue with clarity and relevance. Try to refer to the wording of the question in each paragraph of the essay. This will ensure that you keep to the point and do not wander off the topic. Be selective with your evidence; avoid the temptation to put everything you know down on paper;

- In the essay you will be expected to present an argument. The question will require you to assess or evaluate a statement or a quotation, covering both sides of the argument. For example, a question may ask ‘How far...?’ or ‘To what extent...?’ a particular factor was responsible for bringing about a key historical event. Your answer should focus on the proposition (in other words, the factor mentioned in the question) first and then discuss the other relevant factors in explaining the event. For example, if a question asks: ‘How successfully did the Government of Sir James Craig respond to the problems facing Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1925?’, you will be expected to discuss both the successful and unsuccessful aspects of Government policy. Do not take the statement or question at face value. The essay questions in A2 2 require you to demonstrate your ability to debate and reach a judgement. Make sure that you support your argument with relevant evidence and draw logical conclusions based on the evidence you have presented; otherwise you will not meet the requirements of these questions;
- The examiner will always reward a candidate whose answer is clearly structured and coherent. Planning your essay and ordering your paragraphs before you begin writing will help you to structure your essay and organise the material clearly. The examiner should not have to search through your answer for the relevant information;
- It is vital that you include an introduction and a conclusion in your essay;
- The **introduction** should be short and to the point. It should set the scene for the essay. It introduces the issues you are going to discuss in the main body of your answer. Refer to the exact wording of the question in your introduction to make sure that you are answering the right question. Do not write a lot of background information or give lengthy descriptions. Avoid writing in the first person or making general statements which tell the examiner nothing. For example, do **not** write: ‘In my essay I will look firstly at religious factors that were responsible for the outbreak of war. I will then discuss other factors which also contributed to the war and then I will reach my conclusion’;
- A good **conclusion** will emphasise the main arguments put forward in the body of your essay and reach a clear, logical judgement. Use the conclusion to state your argument very clearly (although it should be very obvious by this stage) and relate it back to the essay title. New ideas or arguments should not be brought into the conclusion. Keep your conclusion short and succinct; and
- Remember the importance of good grammar, spelling and punctuation. Historians are expected to be able to communicate in clear and accurate 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.