

**GCSE**



Revised GCSE  
Student Guidance  
**History**

**Guidance for answering the  
Big Questions on Paper 2**

For first teaching from September 2017





## GCSE History

# Guidance for answering the Big Questions on Paper 2

### 1. How to answer a 'How convincing' question

In this question, you will be given an interpretation of the past by someone who is reflecting on an event/issue/development in the past and you must decide how convincing the view is.

- It is important that you focus on the content of the source, first and foremost.
- In this question you do not assess the usefulness or the reliability of the source.
- It is worth looking at the author and even the date as they might help you to place the view in context and could help to strengthen your argument. However, you do not need to go in to detail on either the author or the date.
- You have to bring in your contextual knowledge to help you to support your judgement.

In this question the approach should be to look at the view presented in the source and then ask yourself are you convinced by the message or in other words –do you believe what the source is saying? You should look at what is being said and show the ways you believe it is convincing and also explain any doubts or challenges you have about what is being said.

You can be totally convinced, partially convinced or not convinced at all. It is up to you to explain the reasons why you believe or do not believe the view in the source using your contextual knowledge. There is no right or wrong answer and no right or wrong approach. However, you must make a judgement and make it clear why you have reached this conclusion.

You will see in the samples below that there are some sections in bold font which show that the focus is very much on the content of the view. It is also vital that in this response you explain the judgements you have reached by repeatedly linking your judgements back to the question.

There are **8 marks** available for this question and you should spend **approximately 10 minutes** on it.

### Example 1- The Cuban Missile Crisis

Study **Source D** below and answer the question which follows:

**Source D: The view of an American journalist writing about the Cuban Missile Crisis on the 50th Anniversary in 2012.**

Kennedy's handling of the Cuban Missile crisis was his finest hour and a great victory for the American President. Kennedy had been tough, skilful and he stood firm when the USSR challenged the USA. He had tested the USSR to the limit, avoided war, forced the Soviet ships to turn away from the blockade and forced the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev to back down. Kennedy had maintained the NATO alliance, defended U.S security, and showed that victory could be won without giving in to Communist demands. It was a story of American skill, of U.S. strength and power, and of wise presidential leadership in the middle of a crisis.

How convincing is the view in **Source D** that the Cuban Missile Crisis was a victory for President Kennedy?

Explain your answer using **Source D** and **your contextual knowledge**.

### Example 1 answer:

**I am convinced by the view in some ways** as the Cuban Missile Crisis was seen by many as Kennedy's 'finest hour'. Kennedy had helped to avoid a nuclear war and had forced Soviet ships to turn back at the blockade. Kennedy and ExComm held their nerve and ignored the shooting down of an American U2 plane, had agreed publicly to the first letter sent by Khrushchev, and secretly to the second. Kennedy claimed victory and the blockade was lifted. However, the journalist puts a very positive spin on the President's handling of the crisis and this **makes me less convinced** by this view because it says that 'victory could be won without giving in to Communist demands' but Kennedy had given in as he had agreed to take US missiles out of Turkey and Cuba remained communist and on good terms with the USSR. The journalist fails to mention that Khrushchev also claimed that he had won the Cuban missile crisis and he had achieved both his aims that America would not invade Cuba and that the US missile sites in Turkey would be dismantled. The deal was kept secret and as a result the world did not know that Kennedy, despite being seen as tough, had actually "softened" to make a deal. **I am also not convinced** by the view in the source because the author is very sympathetic and very positive towards the USA and fails to see how the USSR saw it as their victory.

### Example 2 –The Origins of the Cold War

Study **Source D** below and answer the question which follows:

**Source D: The view of a Soviet historian writing about the origins of the Cold War.**

For the first time since the collapse of the USSR, I have been able to study the Soviet Union's secret files. They clearly show that Soviet leaders during the Cold War were genuinely trying to avoid conflict with the USA. All western writers before the 1970s, and many since, blamed the Cold War on the Soviet Union and its "attempt to force communism on the rest of the world". I do not agree with this line of argument. In my view the USA was to blame and I believe that America was engaged in a war to keep countries open to capitalism and American trade. Some Modern historians stress the Cold War was a clash between capitalism and communism, but I disagree. Instead the Cold War was very much about the USA's determination to have control all over the world and to smash the USSR.

How convincing is the view in **Source D** that the USA was to blame for starting the Cold War?

Explain your answer using **Source D** and **your contextual knowledge**.

### Example 2 answer:

**I am convinced in some ways** by the view in Source D. The author states that the USA was trying to stop the USSR from forcing communism on the rest of the world and I would accept that this was true. The US policy of containment was designed to stop the spread of communism. The USA was frightened by communism and saw it as a threat to democracy. The author also says that the USA hated the USSR and I am **partially convinced** by this as they hated what the USSR stood for. However, **I do not believe** the view that the USSR was trying to avoid conflict. After WW2 the Red Army expanded into Eastern Europe and imposed its will on the people there. Churchill described it as 'an Iron Curtain' and this helps to explain the reasons why the USA was worried about communism. **I am also not convinced** that the blame lies solely with the USA. The relationship between the two nations was a tense one. Americans had long been concerned about Stalin and after WW2 ended, old tensions emerged to create a sense of mutual distrust. The USSR did not like the fact that the USA was helping Germany recover from the war through the Marshall Plan and saw this as 'dollar diplomacy'. In such a hostile atmosphere, no single country was entirely to blame for the Cold War. **I am not convinced by the view** because the author is not giving us all the facts. The Soviet historian is biased and is clearly saying that the USA started the Cold War and tries to take the blame away from the USSR.

## 2. How to answer a 'How far do you agree with the view' question

In this question, you will be given **3** interpretations of the past and your task is to decide if they **agree or disagree** with a particular view in **one** of the sources.

- It is important that you focus on the content of the source.
- In this question you **do not** assess the usefulness or the reliability of the views.
- You need to look at the **author and explain** why they hold their view as this can impact on what they are saying.
- You need to bring in your **own knowledge** to help you to explain the view and to help with your decisions.
- You have to make a supported **judgement, i.e. you need to show why you have reached your conclusion.**

In this question one approach which can be used to help you to structure your answer is the acronym – **ICEVOK**

**I = Interpretation**

**C = Content**

**EV = Explain the reason why the author has this viewpoint**

**OK = Own knowledge**

### Theme: The Origins of the Cold War

#### Source B- The view of an American blogger on a Student website

By the time World War II ended, the USA had no choice but to stamp out the Reds on their march to rule the world. Let's face it we all agreed that the best defence against the Soviet threat was to hit them with force. The Soviet Union differed so widely from our way of life. How could we ever work with them? America's only choice was contain them using whatever means we had available to us.

#### Source C –The view of a British historian writing about the Cold War in 1991 following the collapse of communism

The Cold War was a fight to the death between two ways of life, one which wanted free trade and democracy, and the other which believed in a government that controlled its people in every possible way. Of course both sides, including their governments and their people believed that their way of life was better. Both sides are to blame for the Cold War. Both mistrusted each other, both used language which threatened the other and both went out of their way to gather their friends to support them. It is wrong to place the blame on one side or the other as many historians and scholars try to do.

#### Source D: The view of a Soviet historian writing about the origins of the Cold War.

For the first time since the collapse of the USSR, I have been able to study the Soviet Union's secret files. They clearly show that Soviet leaders during the Cold War were genuinely trying to avoid conflict with the USA. All western writers before the 1970s, and many since, blamed the Cold War on the Soviet Union and its "attempt to force communism on the rest of the world". I do not agree with this line of argument.

In my view the USA was to blame and I believe that America was engaged in a war to keep countries open to capitalism and American trade. Some Modern historians stress the Cold War was a clash between capitalism and communism, but I disagree. Instead the Cold War was very much about the USA's determination to have control all over the world and to smash the USSR.

Study **Sources B, C and D again** and answer the question below:

How far do you agree with the view in **Source D** that the Cold War came about because of "America's determination to smash the USSR"? In your answer, you must use **Sources B, C and D** and use **information of your own**.

### Sample answer:

**I do not agree** that the Cold War came about as a result of the determination of the USA to smash the USSR. There are many reasons to explain the origins of the Cold War and there is an acceptance by most historians that both sides were to blame.

Source D, is the interpretation where this view is stated. It gives a number of reasons for the start of the Cold War including the view that the USA wanted to smash the USSR. **(I=Interpretation)** The source gives several other reasons for the start of the Cold War such as the USA desire for trade and their plan to spread capitalism around the world. The author also says that the Soviet Union had been trying to avoid conflict. **(C=Content)** The author is a Soviet historian and this may well explain his view as he shows the USSR in a good light and having no responsibility for the Cold War. The view here is very negative about the USA but this is not surprising given the author's USSR perspective. **(EV= Explain the View)** I know that the USA and the USSR were suspicious of each other's ideology and Stalin hated capitalism as much as the USA hated communism. This suspicion went back years and was put on hold to fight the common enemy –Germany. Relations quickly deteriorated at the end of WW2. **(OK=Own knowledge)**

Source B **disagrees** with the interpretation in D and does not accept that the USA started the Cold War. **(I=Interpretation)** The student explains that the USA had no choice but to stand up to the USSR as they went 'on their march to rule the world'. Source B also explains that the two countries were so different, one being a democracy the other a communist dictatorship, they could not work together. The student also explains that America took the decision to contain communism. **(C=Content)** The student is American and this explains why they are so anti-communist and why they see the blame resting with the USSR. The fact that the student is a blogger contributing to a student website allows them to be open with what they are saying. **(EV= Explain the View)** In some ways there is truth in what is being said by the student. The 'Reds' did march through Eastern Europe and they imposed their way of life there using terror. Churchill called it an 'iron curtain'. The USA went on to announce the policy of containment to try to stop the spread of communism. **(OK=Own knowledge)**

Source C is a more balanced view and also **disagrees** with the interpretation and makes it clear that each side has to be seen as having a part to play in starting the Cold War. **(I=Interpretation)** This view shows that the two sides were totally different in their beliefs and their way of life. Both saw their way as the best way. The historian explains that 'Both sides are to blame for the Cold War' as they both threatened each other. The historian also explains that the two sides tried to get support from their allies. **(C=Content)** This view is a much more balanced one and this is most likely because the historian has the benefit of research and hindsight and is trying to be objective in showing that there are two sides and it is wrong to put the blame on one or the other as some people do. **(EV= Explain the View)** I know that the USSR felt threatened and wanted to create a buffer to protect themselves. Stalin was suspicious of the West and was angry that the USA had not shared the secret of the atomic bomb with them and felt the USA would use it against them at some point. The Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan seemed to prove to Stalin that the USA was determined to destroy communism. However, from the West's point of view Stalin's actions in Eastern Europe showed that he could not be trusted as he had gone back on promises made at Yalta and Potsdam. **(OK=Own knowledge)**

**I do not accept the view** in source D and the other sources show that the Cold War did not come about because of the actions of one country. Both played their part in increasing fear and tension in the period after WW2.

In the sample answer you will see that in each paragraph there is reference to the **interpretation** at the start of the paragraph. The **content** of the source is used to help to explain how it agrees/ disagrees with the view. The **author's perspective** is explained and **own knowledge** is used to expand on the content of the source.

The answer above is one approach to this question. Whichever way you choose to answer the final source question, the key to success is to ensure you cover each of the areas in bold.

- If you focus on the views only and fail to cover the other areas you will not be able to access the higher mark bands.
- Likewise, if you use your own knowledge only and fail to use the interpretations your mark will be restricted to the lower mark bands.
- If you fail to explain the reasons why the author has their view, you will also be restricted to the lower mark bands.

