

Advice for students taking the BFI History/Geography written examination

The exam is 4 hours long. Try to divide your time equally between the two questions that you answer.

You will answer one History question and one Geography question.

Each question is worth 20 marks in total but the number of marks available for each question and part-question is **not** indicated on the exam paper.

However, the marks awarded for each question and part-question **is** defined by Cambridge and indicated below;

- For an **essay** question, the two parts of the question are not separated but the first part is worth 8 marks and the second part is worth 12 marks. Total = 20 marks.
- For a **Document Based Question (DBQ)**, the two parts of the question are labelled a) and b). Part a) is worth 8 marks and part b) is worth 12 marks. Total = 20 marks.

Structure of the exam paper:

After reading the question paper carefully, your first decision is to choose **either** *Sujet A* **or** *Sujet B*. From your chosen *Sujet* (A or B), you must answer a History **and** a Geography question. You **cannot** choose one question from *Sujet A* and one from *Sujet B*

Sujet A consists of:

- One History essay
- A Geography DBQ

Sujet B consists of:

- One Geography essay
- A History DBQ.

Continued

The three types of question explained:

1. **History and Geography essay questions** consist of two parts:

- The first part is always worth 8 marks and uses the command word **explain**. This means that your answer must be analytical. You may provide definitions and descriptions as part of your answer but to obtain high marks your answer must provide a number of well-argued reasons. Your answer should have a clear structure.
- The second part is worth 12 marks and uses command words such as; **assess** or **evaluate**. You may also be asked to decide '**to what extent**' or '**how far do you agree**'. In other words, this second part is a higher-order question where you are asked to evaluate, provide arguments for and against, assess the relative importance of different factors, make judgements, and arrive at a substantiated conclusion. The quality and strength of your arguments is important, so a well-structured answer, will gain a much higher mark than an answer where the structure is vague.

It is important that you treat each part of the essay as a separate question. If you don't it makes it much more difficult for the marker to give you a good mark. Leave a two-line gap between each part of your answer or, even better, call them part a) and part b) – even though they are not given these letters on the exam paper.

Examples of essays taken from the specimen paper. To help you, the first part of each essay (8 marks) is not underlined, while the second part (12 marks) is underlined.

History essay

Theme one: Challenges to democracy, totalitarianism and the road to World War Two (1930-1945)

Explain why, in the 1930s, the great democratic powers were reluctant to defend the liberal world order they had created at Versailles. How far do you agree that the rise of totalitarianism was the most important underlying cause of the slide towards war in 1939?

Geography essay

Theme 2: Territorial dynamics: unequal integration and unequal development in a globalised world

Explain the main causes of global inequality. Evaluate the success of different strategies to reduce this inequality.

Continued

2. **History and Geography Document Based Questions (DBQs)** are usually based on two documents (although sometimes, only one is used). In a Geography DBQ, one of the documents is almost always a map. These DBQs also consist of two parts:

- Part a) is always worth 8 marks and asks you to **assess the usefulness** of the documents in a specified context. You should attempt to interpret the meaning of the documents, and not just list the points that they make. Better answers will also consider the weaknesses of the documents (i.e. their 'uselessness') as well as their strengths. The best answers not only consider each document on their own but comment on the documents taken together, sometimes pointing out contradictions that they may contain.
- Part b) is always worth 12 marks and asks you to use the **documents and your own knowledge** to evaluate or assess some aspect of the topic. It is important that you make reference to the documents but you need to use your own knowledge to go beyond the points that are made in the documents. Once again, this second part is a high-order question where the quality and strength of your arguments is important, so your answer needs to be well planned and well structured.

Examples of DBQs taken from the specimen paper. The questions are given here, but not the documents themselves.

Geography DBQ:

Theme one: Maritime areas and geopolitics at the heart of a globalised world

Study Documents A and B.

- a. How useful are documents A and B for understanding the importance of maritime trade routes to the global economy?
- b. Using documents A and B and your own knowledge, discuss the extent to which maritime canals and straits are a potential source of international tension.

History DBQ:

Theme three: Politics, economics and ideology from the 1970s to the end of the Cold War.

Study documents A and B.

- a. How useful are documents A and B to an historian examining Britain's economic problems in the 1970s?
- b. Using documents A and B and your own knowledge, to what extent do you agree that Britain's economic problems in the 1970s were mainly brought about by the oil crisis of 1973?

Good exam technique:

It is important to learn and understand the content of the BFI course in History/Geography, but it is also important to develop good examination skills – techniques that can boost your overall mark.

1. Structuring your answer is important:

Quite clearly, planning an answer is important.

Introductions are important but should be brief and to the point, possibly laying the foundation for the arguments that will follow in the body of the essay.

The main part of the essay should consist of a series of paragraphs, outlining your arguments in a logical and coherent way.

The conclusion should not *just* repeat statements that have already been made. It is an ideal place to emphasise the evaluative part of the answer, making an overall judgement on the issue under discussion.

2. Responding correctly to the command words:

You must remember that the command for the first part of the essay is *Explain* (a lower level of demand) while the command for the second part of the essay is *Evaluate* (a much higher-level demand that requires you to make some form of judgement).

When explaining something you should find yourself using ‘because’ or similar words.

Evaluation can be achieved through such phrases as;

- ‘The most important aspect is...’
- ‘This can lead to X, which is one of the most important aspects of...’
- ‘X is a bigger problem than Y because X operates for longer/at a larger scale’

3. Using examples and developing points:

Relevant examples always gain extra credit and extend the breadth of an answer. It is best to use at least two examples in any answer.

Developing points adds to the depth of an answer. Points can be developed by phrases such as ‘This means that...’

4. Some general advice:

- The generic mark scheme is very helpful because it outlines the aspects of an answer that can gain high marks. Make sure that you are familiar with it.
- Highlighting the key words and commands in a question can often focus your mind on a suitable answer.
- The advice **R T P A** – ‘*read the question, think about the question, plan your answer, before you answer the question*’ is worth considering.

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