

A Level (including AS Level) History (9697)

In this syllabus, all papers can be taken either as A Level papers or as AS papers. What is the difference between them?

The difference between A Level and AS in History is purely a matter of difference in outcome. The syllabus content and the question papers for the two levels are identical (though A Level candidates must do two papers, and AS candidates only one), but each paper will be graded twice – once as an A Level, and once AS. Put another way, the grade boundary marks will be lower for AS, thus allowing for the different expected standards. The great advantages of structuring the syllabus in this way are simplicity and choice. Teachers can use any paper either as an A or AS Level. This maximises both the numbers of papers available at AS, and the possible combinations of papers in an A Level course. It even makes it possible to have A and AS Level candidates in the same class.

Are all the papers available both in June and November examinations?

No they are not. Papers 9697/1 (European History), 9697/3 (International History) and 9697/5 (History of the USA) are offered in both sessions. However, Paper 9697/6 (Caribbean History) is available only in June, and Papers 9697/2 (Southeast Asia) and 9697/4 (History of Tropical Africa) are available only in November.

Do I have to teach the whole of the content of the papers I choose? They look rather content-heavy.

The syllabus developers made a specific effort to reduce content, which can be seen from the number of possible topics, which have not been included. They have tried to make the content explicit. Nonetheless, it is not essential to teach the whole of the content. As is normal with A Level History syllabuses, question choice in the examination papers allows you to avoid teaching certain topics if you wish. However, as students must answer three essays from a choice of seven, there is only scope to leave out maybe a couple of topics on each paper whilst keeping some flexibility over which questions to answer.

Why is the number of questions in the examination limited? We are used to a much greater choice.

Each of the papers is constructed so that candidates are guaranteed a question on every syllabus topic. Every paper offers seven essay questions from which candidates only have to answer three.

The amount of question choice in some A Level History papers in the past has been demonstrably excessive, with candidates sometimes offered literally dozens of questions. In practice, this meant that teachers only taught a small amount of the syllabus, focusing on a specific period. Such a question paper was, in reality, many papers masquerading as one, with an almost infinite number of question combinations. Within such papers, the sheer number of combinations and options made it hard, in assessment terms, to guarantee that all students faced comparable challenges, with a consequent risk of unfairness. The large numbers of questions made it almost certain that examiners would have to resort to setting some questions on obscure corners of the syllabus. Paradoxically, the amount of question choice served to make the paper more difficult.

In reducing the question choice, we believe we make a better examination. However, we accept that the questions which remain must be mainstream and avoid obscurity. There are significant areas of content on which only a single question will be set. It would be unfair if this one question

did not give all candidates who had studied the topic an opportunity to show what they had learned.

What is the status of the booklists in the syllabus? Do we have to use them all in our teaching?

No teacher could possibly be expected to use all the books on the list. Where the booklists do not themselves comment on the status of the books included, you should assume that the list is simply a guide to the kind of appropriate material available. In A Level History, teachers must be free to use whatever books they think best for their students. However, there are a few exceptions to this. We have tried include in all the lists at least one inexpensive and readily available book of source material. Students will need access to such material. We have also sought to identify general works, which could serve as a students' textbook. We do not encourage the reliance on a single book, but schools on limited budgets should select from amongst these general works. Many of the rest of the books are rather more for teachers' use than for students, and a single copy in even the best-stocked school library would be perfectly sufficient.