

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y100/01/02 Summer 2023 series

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Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Online courses

We have created online courses to build your confidence in delivering, marking and administering internal assessment for our qualifications. Courses are available for Cambridge Nationals, GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016).

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All teachers delivering our redeveloped Cambridge Nationals suite from September 2022 are asked to complete the Essentials for the NEA course, which describes how to guide and support your students. You'll receive a certificate which you should retain.

Following this you can also complete a subject-specific Focus on Internal Assessment course for your individual Cambridge Nationals qualification, covering marking and delivery.

GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016)

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General overview

The Topic Based Essay is an opportunity for candidates to show skills which have been used and developed in other units. The Essay requires independent research about a historical issue about which there are different interpretations by historians. It also requires the selection of a range of primary sources. For higher level marks in AO1 there should be consistent focus on the question and sustained judgement about different interpretations or explanations supported by detailed knowledge. For AO2 there should be evidence of sustained evaluation of primary sources relevant to the question. As with the evaluation required in Paper 1, the evaluation should consider provenance and be supported by contextual knowledge. For AO3 named historians' interpretations should be explained and evaluated using contextual knowledge, as is required in the Unit 3 examination. Although there are new demands in terms of finding evidence and integrating evaluation into a longer essay, the skills required are not new. Students do need support in research and in deploying and extending skills and while this is not a taught unit in the sense of specific historical material being imparted and discussed it does nevertheless require teacher input, and a structured programme of skill development is permissible and beneficial. A sound understanding of the skills required and what constitutes effective analysis and evaluation in all three assessment objectives is essential.

It is also important that students work on questions and topics that are suitable for them. In themselves questions were usually suitable, although some had been changed or adapted from approved titles which made it difficult for students to show skills. However, in practice they gave rise to problems in understanding the issues and material or in finding appropriate sources. If this turns out to be the case, then the sensible course is to inform OCR and get approval for another more suitable title.

In general, the assessment objective which gave rise to difficulties was often the evaluation of primary evidence. There were examples of very strong discussion of different views which showed a great deal of understanding but did not engage sufficiently with primary evidence. There were also many examples of evaluation which had little support. Moderators commented on the disparity in many essays between more developed critical analysis in AO1 and AO3 compared with that offered in AO2. There is quite extensive support available from OCR and a general recommendation is that this element might be given more consideration in the preparation of candidates for this unit.

More positively, the more extended writing opportunities in the unit did result in work which showed depth of knowledge and thought. Some students took the opportunity to research topics which noticeably engaged their interest and were obviously not part of previous A Level study. A great deal of work was done on finding secondary material and considering different views. The benefits of undertaking some sustained independent research remain considerable.

OCR support



OCR webinars on preparing for the NEA are available to book on [Teach Cambridge](#).

There is also an [independent study guide](#) on the skills and techniques that can be used to plan and write coursework.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remained focused on the terms of their own question • offered analysis rather than description • showed an understanding of what the question required • chose relevant and appropriate sources • evaluated primary sources by considering provenance and contextual knowledge • explained how sources, both primary and secondary, related to the issue • evaluated secondary sources by using contextual knowledge • offered overall judgements which were supported and followed from the analysis of evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saw the question more in terms of a general topic rather than a specific issue to be discussed • offered more explanation or description than the higher level skill of evaluating arguments and viewpoints • demonstrated a view rather than assessing different perspectives or viewpoints • used a limited range of sources which illustrated arguments but offered little evaluation • relied on generic evaluative comments on primary sources • explained historians' views without offering any judgement on their validity • evaluated secondary sources by comments on the historians' background or reputation rather than by using knowledge • offered overall judgements inconsistent with previous critical comments.

Misconception



Comments on historians

Cross referencing historians by simply saying 'X agrees with Y' does little to establish a supported evaluation unless there is an analysis of why they agree and on what basis. Similarly, simply saying that 'X and Y are writing a text book and so will be accurate' or even 'X and Y's view is only in a text book so will not have used detailed research' is not more than limited comment.

"Historian A says that William 'was a strong leader'. However, William was not the main reason for the victory at Hastings as historian X says Harold's forces were 'exhausted from their march South' so showing that Harold was the main reason." Is a common type of argument but identifying different reasons given by historians is not the same as establishing why historians interpret the causes of an event differently.

Most common causes of centres not passing

Candidates attempting a question which they did not fully understand.

Candidates offering limited supporting material, often descriptive.

Candidates offering assertion not supported judgements.

Candidates offering very little evaluation of evidence or very simple comments about sources.

Common misconceptions

That what is required is a general project or extended writing about a topic, not an answer closely related to the exact terms of the question.

That using primary sources to illustrate an argument or explain a viewpoint is 'evaluation' rather than assessing the evidence by using provenance and contextual knowledge.

That taking short extracts from historians which show facts or explain one particular element is identifying a historical interpretation or viewpoint.

That comparing or contrasting the views of historians is, in itself, evaluating their interpretations.

That looking at the background of historians or the type of book they are writing is sufficient to assess the validity of their view.

That very long essays will result in better work than essays which remain closer to the recommended word limit.

OCR support



The OCR booklet on assessing primary sources is helpful. Simple comments such as 'This source is from Himmler who was a leading Nazi and should know' or 'This primary source is from the time and is reliable' is not more than limited evaluation. For examples of more developed and supported evaluation, please see guidance. Excellent evaluation would require the use of provenance and contextual knowledge.

Avoiding potential malpractice

Although not compulsory, the keeping of a research log in which books read and sources acquired and analysed is probably the best way to make sure that the work is the candidate's own.

The teaching of research ethics and good practice and insisting on referencing.

Clear guidance on AI using latest guidelines.

Spot checks on references to make sure that work is the result of independent research.

Helpful resources

- OCR A Level Coursework Workbook, Nicholas Fellows and Mike Wells Hodder Education 2018
- <https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/referencing/footnotes>
- www.theclassroom.com/write-research-report-log-7782419.html
- https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/academic-development/assessment...
- Y100 Training course available on OCR Train (see page 3 link)
- [OCR coursework guide](#)
- [Exemplar essays available from OCR](#)
- [OCR A Level History A - Y100 Assessing AO2](#)
- A Guide to Marking Y100 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NFcEUepT0Y>
- OCR Scheme of Work for Y100 (published Autumn 2023)
- OCR video on choosing coursework titles (published Autumn 2023)

Additional comments

Students should understand that they are using skills from previous units and not starting a completely new project.

There is a need for ongoing support in reinforcing the use of skills while maintaining the unit as an independent study.

It would be helpful if students had undertaken some independent research involving finding and evaluating sources as part of the course before they embark on coursework.

Choosing a question suitable to the interests and abilities of students which opens up opportunities for discussion and assessment of different view and evidence is vital.

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