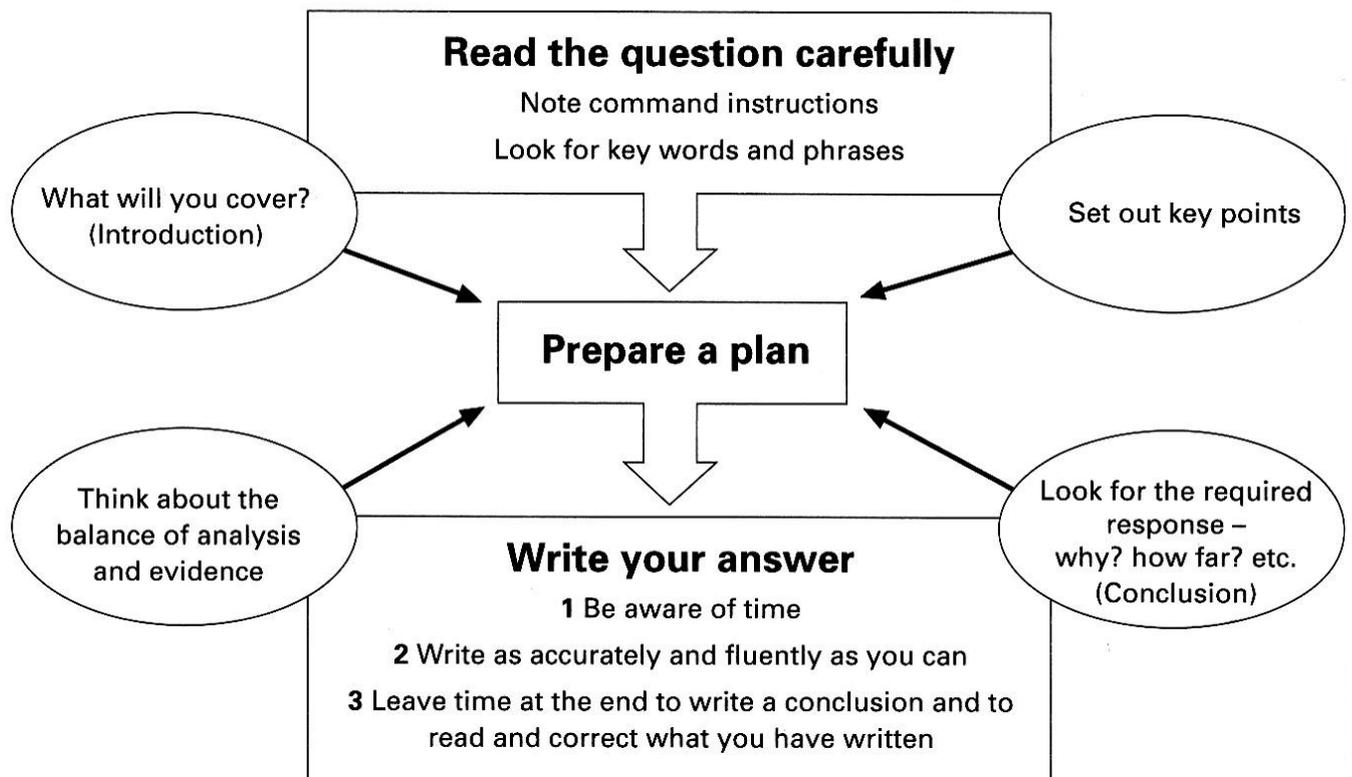
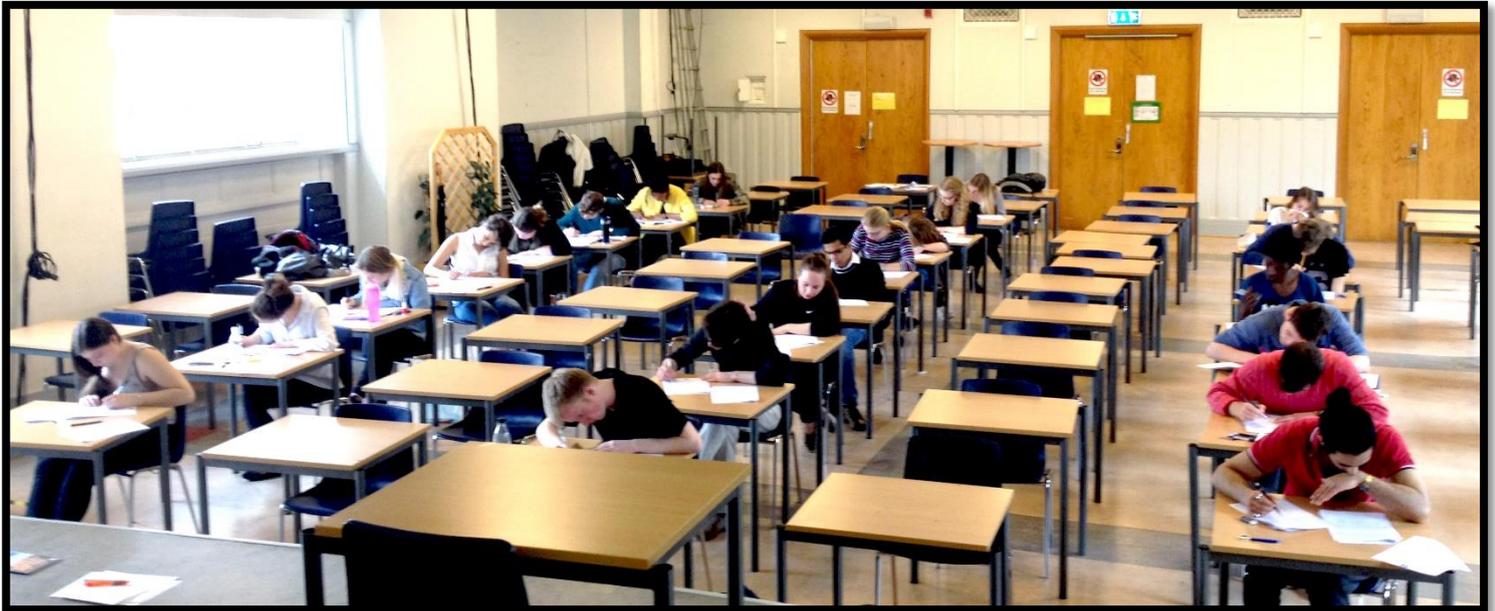


# THE HISTORY ESSAY



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# ESSAY WRITING – MORE IN-DEPTH

## PLAN – PLAN – PLAN – PLAN – PLAN - PLAN

### WHY IS A PLAN SO IMPORTANT?

1. The argument of your essay takes its unique shape in the plan.
2. Your argument is tested in the plan to see if it is convincing.
3. All your resources – thinking and information, are brought together in the plan.
4. You see if you have enough information to answer the essay in the plan. Your resources confront the essay title.
5. Your plan gives an outline shape to the essay in paragraphs or chunks of connected information and ideas.
6. The plan prevents mistakes, inaccuracy, and repetition.
7. The plan makes writing the essay quicker.
  1. It allows you to concentrate on expressing your ideas,
  2. helps you keep your place in an essay, because you can see what you have written and what comes next.
8. If you are used to planning, you will produce a more relevant and direct answer in examinations.

### IF YOU WRITE AN ESSAY AT HOME

1. Use plenty of space (*it will be easier to read and follow when writing*).
2. Plan in pencil with an eraser (*it will allow you to rearrange and correct information*).
3. Leave a margin (*more notes may than be added as you write*).
4. Analyze the question parts (*this leads to a line of argument*).
5. State the line of argument (*this gives overall direction to the essay and helps the introduction*).
6. Separate out main ideas or areas of knowledge and make them your subheadings (*each may then take a paragraph in your final essay*).
7. Fill in the facts, quotations, comments, thoughts which fit these subheadings (*these will form the main body of your essay*).
8. Keep your notes near at hand (*you will need to search your notes for the details and materials you need*).
9. Use reference and textbooks (*To check your notes and to search out extra information*).

### IF YOU WRITE AN IN-CLASS-ESSAY OR AN EXAM ESSAY

Clarity of thought is the most important virtue. This clarity comes from taking a few minutes to think out the way in which an essay should develop. It is astonishing, but true, that each year some candidates write whole essays in pencil, make minor corrections, then rewrite them in ink. This is fortunately rare, but other examples of poor use of plans are frequently seen. Here is an example:

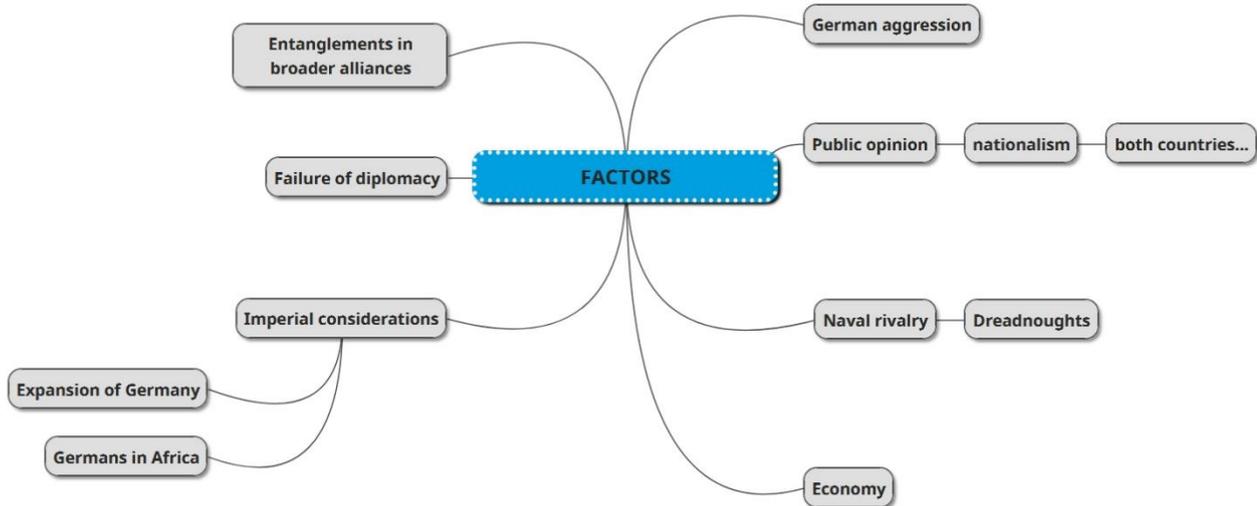
#### Consider the factors that influenced the Anglo-German relations, 1904-1914

<b>Plan</b>	Morocco 1905 Dreadnought 1906 Agadir 1911 Sarajevo/Schlieffen
-------------	--

This is, in fact, not so much a plan as a brief reminder of what the candidate considers to be key points. The fact that this student knows them makes their appearance here irrelevant-unless, of course, he fears that they are likely to be forgotten in the next few minutes. Worse than being a waste of time, they might dictate the course of the essay, which would bring disaster. This plan does nothing constructive and could impose a narrative structure and a lack of direction.

Here is a different plan for the same question:

### Consider the factors that influenced the Anglo-German relations, 1904-1914



### ADVANTAGES OF THIS TYPE OF A VISUAL PLAN

1. **It provides a structure for the essay.** By the time the plan is complete, the student can visualize the appearance of the whole essay. Key points represent paragraphs. Details can be added where helpful but are not allowed to overwhelm the structure. If, while writing the essay, other important points come to mind, they can quickly be added to the plan and used in the appropriate place. Having identified the key points, they can also be numbered to show the order in which they will be considered.
2. **It is a memory aid.** During the construction of a plan the student is likely to think of a number of main points and details in swift succession. The plan can enable the student who is worried about “*drying up*” to get these ideas on paper quickly.
3. **The plan is not cramped at the top of a page.** It should be written on loose paper (scrap paper – last page on the IB Exam paper). This will allow ample space, and the plan can be consulted at any time without shuffling back to the beginning of the essay.
4. Of course, pattern notes do not work for everyone. A linear plan can do just as well, but leave space to develop ideas further, and having established key points, use numbering so that the plan still has flexibility.
5. By the time that you have thought out a plan, you will be better prepared to write your introduction as a keynote to what is to follow...

**PLAN, PLAN, PLAN! 5-7 minutes making an outline on a scrap paper is always worthwhile. It aids structure, fluency and content to the essay.**

# OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Here is an overview of the different parts of an essay:

STRUCTURE (FOCUS)	CONTENT	ANALYSIS
<b>Basic (General) Essay Structure</b>	<b>General Content</b>	Narrative
Introduction	Overview	
Background	Context	Comments
Main Text	Concepts	
Discussion		Critical Comments
Conclusion		
	<b>In-Depth</b>	
	Facts - details	Analysis
	Examples	
	Links	Conclusion
	Comparisons	
		<b>Perspectives / Views</b>
		N/A
		Perspectives
		Historians
		Integrated into the answer
<b>Structure - different parts</b>		
Introduction - Question		
Introduction - Outline		
Background (When/Where/What)		
Main text - Arguments		
Main text - Statements		
Main text - Evidence		
Main text - Comments...		
Discussion - Compare		
Discussion - Contrast		
Conclusion - Summary		
<b>Focus on the question!</b>		

As you can see – the essay structure above follows the IB Mark Band

This first session of how to write an IB essay starts with a short presentation of the basic essay structure and then focus on the very first part – the "INTRODUCTION". So, let's start. An essay contains three main parts:

1. **Introduction**
2. **Main body**
3. **Conclusion**

It's important to visibly clearly separate these three parts from each other. This is done by leaving a few empty rows between the parts (it's also done in the text but that we will talk about later). The main body is usually also divided into three parts:

1. **Background**
2. **Arguments**
3. **Discussion**

These parts should also be held apart visibly by an empty row or two. We will cover these parts later but as stated above – let's start with the way you present yourself to the "heartless", "cold minded", critical IB Examiner...

# INTRODUCTION

The introduction should prepare the reader (examiner) and set the general tone of your answer. Although it's short, the introduction is important because first impressions can influence a reader's (examiner's) subsequent assessment of the answer.

In *"The Modern History Manual"* the authors answer the question *"What is the job of the introduction?"* in the following way: *"Very simply, it introduces the essay or the argument. It prepares the way for the main body of the essay"*. They continue *"The introduction should be a statement of intent. It is important for the writer because it lays out a line of attack along which the essay will proceed. You may like to think of the essay as a journey; in the introduction you give the directions and the likely route that will be taken. You may even wish to say what things of interest may be seen along that route."* (but you **NEVER** answer the research question in the introduction)

As mentioned before – the introduction has a profound effect on the reader (examiner). Everyone forms some sort of impression of a person the first time that they meet. So it is with an essay. The first thing that a reader (examiner) meets is the introduction.

What should the introduction then give to the reader (examiner)?

1. **The question**
2. **An outline of the essay**
3. **Transition**

- **The question (or an assessment of the topic):** A sentence or two shows that the writer (a) has understood the general area or topic for discussion and (b) has a good grasp of the relevant information.
- **An outline of the essay (line of argument, important theme or idea):** These sentences (two-three) should outline how the writer intend to proceed because (a) this is the main function of the introduction and (b) it proves that the specific question has been understood.
- **Transition:** This sentence is a smooth movement to the background – the first paragraph in the main body.

Your most startling, persuasive or important points should not go in the introduction; do not let the introduction steal your **"thunder"**. If you can satisfy the three requirements above the reader (examiner) should gain a good first impression of both the essay and the writer. In this way you should hold the reader's (examiner's) attention. What is more, if the introduction is clear, precise, forthright, logic and interesting the reader (examiner) will remember that initial impression and perhaps forgive any minor slips or passages that follows in the main text. It is well known that we remember best what comes first and what comes last in any period of study or reading. This is known as *"primacy"* and *"recency"* of memory. This should make us take extra care with introductions and conclusions. They will be the parts of the essay most likely to be remembered in any general impression.

## INTRODUCTION – EXAMPLE 1

**This is an introduction to an essay that received the highest mark in the British A-level course...**

**Question:** *Discuss the assertion that Hitler bore sole responsibility for the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939*

Between the years of 1919 and 1939 the situation in Europe changed dramatically from the peace treaty at the end of the First World War to the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939. The change escalated with the rise of the Nazi party in Germany and its leader Adolf Hitler. This essay will examine whether Hitler was solely to blame for the outbreak of war in Europe. The essay will examine each situation that arose between Hitler's rise to power and the outbreak of war, analyzing it and giving evidence for the argument that Hitler bore sole responsibility and the evidence against that view.

**Identification of the different parts in this introduction:**

Between the years of 1919 and 1939 the situation in Europe changed dramatically from the peace treaty at the end of the First World War to the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939. The change escalated with the rise of the Nazi party in Germany and its leader Adolf Hitler (*Historical context – where, when, what*). This essay will examine whether Hitler was solely to blame for the outbreak of war in Europe (*Question/Task presented*). The essay will examine each situation that arose between Hitler's rise to power and the outbreak of war, analyzing it and giving evidence for the argument that Hitler bore sole responsibility and the evidence against that view ("*Outline*").

## INTRODUCTION – EXAMPLE 2

**This is one of my many student introductions:**

**Question:** *Analyze the long-term and the short-term causes of World War II.*

World War II broke out in September 1939 after the German attack on Poland. In the answer to the task of analyzing the long-term and the short-term causes of WWII the significance of the settlements after the First VK; the economic problems caused by the stock market crash in New York, the German rearmament, Hitler's aggressive foreign policy, and the failure of the League of Nations will first be addressed. After this, a focus on the more immediate causes, especially the last phase of Hitler's foreign policy, the appeasement policy of Great Britain and the unexpected Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939 will be applied.

**Identification of the different parts in this introduction:**

World War II broke out in September 1939 after the German attack on Poland. (*Historical context – where, when, what*) In the answer to the task of analyzing the long-term and the short-term causes of WWII (*Question/Task presented*) the significance of the settlements after the First VK; the economic problems caused by the stock market crash in New York, the German rearmament, Hitler's aggressive foreign policy, and the failure of the League of Nations will first be addressed. After this, a focus on the more immediate causes, especially the last phase of Hitler's foreign policy, the appeasement policy of Great Britain and the unexpected Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939 will be applied ("*Outline*").

## INTRODUCTION – EXAMPLE 3

### **Another student introduction:**

**Question:** *To what extent can Germany be held responsible for the outbreak of World War II?*

This essay will try to answer the question to what extent we can hold Germany responsible for the outbreak of WWII. The first part will concentrate on why many historians hold Germany guilty, like the German military rearmament and its aggressive foreign policy under Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP. These elements will be compared with the English/French appeasement policy, the failure of the League of Nations and the role of the Soviet Union.

### ***Identification of the different parts in this introduction:***

This essay will try to answer the question to what extent we can hold Germany responsible for the outbreak of WWII (***Question/Task presented***). The first part will concentrate on why many historians hold Germany guilty, like the German military rearmament and its aggressive foreign policy under Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP. These elements will be compared with the English/French appeasement policy, the failure of the League of Nations and the role of the Soviet Union (“***Outline***”).

**NOTE:** The historical context – where, when and what was presented in the first part of the essay – the background – thereby it worked as a “***transition***” to the main text.

# CONCLUSION

The conclusion should remind the reader (examiner) what you have accomplished during the essay. Some of the best conclusions are short and very much to the point. Use a maximum of 8-10 rows or 6-7 sentences (this is just an advice, but it is helpful because it contains and defines the conclusion). You will remember that we referred to the essay as a journey. By the time you write the conclusion you will have reached your "destination". The conclusion is not supposed to be a bland endorsement of the essay question or a simple restatement of what has gone before. It is important to:

1. **State clearly your main idea, argument or explanation, i.e. what seems most important to you in your answer.**
2. **Show how and why the argument or answer you have offered differs from, or qualifies, the essay title.**

You can refer to the wording of the title to make clear the importance of your answer to the question set. Say how and why your answer relates to:

1. **The question.**
2. **Your intentions as set out in the introduction.**

Try to avoid being overcome by the sense of relief at finishing which produces a vague summary or a conclusion of the "*thus it can be seen...*" variety. The conclusion to your essay will be determined by what has preceded it. As one examiner put it "*The conclusion must confront the title with your main point or argument to show that you have satisfied the question*"

In Hugh Robertson's book "The Research Essay" he states "*The final section is comprised of your conclusions which, after the investigation and weighing of the evidence, form the most logical answer to the research question. In other words, you are weaving together the various threads of the thesis and summing up the major supporting points. It is not a dull, dry, restating of the major sections but a subtle linking together of the main arguments. Sometimes it can be effective to start the concluding summary with the research question since this reminds the reader of the purpose of the essay. Avoid adding new information in the concluding summary as this will confuse the reader*". He ends by stating "*The concluding summary is brief, but it is important because it is the last opportunity to impress the reader with the validity of your arguments: remember that last impressions are usually lasting impressions*".

# MAIN TEXT / MAIN BODY

This is where the thesis is developed and substantiated. Your outline (in your introduction) provides the pillars around which you will structure your answer. You have to flesh out the skeleton by selecting the relevant factual details from your research notes to support your arguments. A good essay is clear and focused (Hugh Robertson in *"The Research Essay"* claims that "A successful essay has the focus and clarity of a laser beam"). Therefore, ensure that all supporting material is explicitly linked to the central theme and securely anchored in the argument. Avoid the tendency to pack the essay with irrelevant and inert information, because extraneous facts will only serve to fragment the focus of the essay. Instructors and examiners look for incisive analysis and argument in an essay, not for chronological narrative, rambling description, or a wholesale dumping of unrelated facts. Your responsibility is to construct and advance a systematic, logical and convincing thesis – carefully structured, cogently argued, substantiated with evidence, and clearly expressed.

As mentioned in lesson one, the main body is usually divided into three parts:

1. **Background**
2. **Arguments (and Evidence)**
3. **Discussion/Analysis**

## 1. BACKGROUND

This is the first part of the main body. You will show the historical context (what is usually referred to as "when", "where", "who" and "what"):

**When** is the event you focus on taking place (year, time-period, etc...)?

**Where** is it taking place (specific event, specific country, etc...)?

**Who** is involved (war, country/countries, political leader, etc...)?

**What** is going on (short overview)?

It's a short start, two-three sentences, of your main text. It should provide the reader the necessary knowledge to be able to follow the coming text – the arguments, evidence and in the end discussion/analysis. Some students use a sentence (or two) in the introduction for a brief explanation of the historical context. This is perfectly OK, but my experience is that the IB Exam Essay benefit from having this part at the beginning of the main body. It gives the main text a great start, the structure becomes clearer and it strengthens the general fluency of the essay. You could compare it to the beginning of a "children's story" that starts with the fixed formula "Once upon a time..."

## 2. ARGUMENTS (AND EVIDENCE)

After the short historical context, you come to the "main part" of the main text – the arguments and evidence. Here you present arguments with supporting narrative facts in an organized manner. It will be a series of reasoned, relevant points made in much the same way as a lawyer presents a case in a court of law, though your case will not be as one-sided as a lawyer's and your judge will be the reader/examiner! You must overcome the difficulty of abundant information by concentrating on your basic response to the question or the main line of argument. You will be using the idea of a main argument or basic response to help direct your thoughts and contain the argument. "The Modern History Manual" use this metaphor "The main argument method is like a set of blinkers for a horse in a race, forcing a straight line and avoiding distractions". Set yourself the task of suggesting a simple argument or answer and then you try to make out a case for it. The main argument or basic responses you have been searching for are short statements which represent a stance or attitude to the question. It may be that you have chosen a difficult argument to support or defend. You will find that out as you arrange the information or evidence to back it up. Try to limit yourself to the six (more or less if necessary) most important reasons or pieces of evidence which support your suggested answer. To be able to create good arguments you need to **select** the information or facts **relevant** to the question and present it in a **logical argument**.

**SELECTION:** When writing a history essay, most people have more *facts* or knowledge available than they can conveniently use. If you have twenty pages of notes, it is obvious that not all of those twenty pages can go into your essay! The simple answer is that you must select information from your notes to suit the question. This may appear obvious, but it is surprising how many essays are spoiled because students include too much information, particularly information which is not relevant or does not suit their argument. Sometimes students repeat facts or information in a slightly different way. Piling up information for the sake of it can reveal a lack of understanding. In short, what you leave out of an essay can be as important as what you put in! In *"The Modern History Manual"* the authors (Cloake, Crinnion & Harrison) writes *"It is better to kill the reader with kindness by selecting information for him than to batter him to death in a flurry of factual blows!"*. They continue *"To think of it another way, if you were asked to mend a broken chair you would not use every tool you had just for the sake of showing that you had them"*. So it is with information in an essay. You only need to use the information that is suitable or relevant to that particular essay. Some pieces of information must go unused despite the fact that you have them available. Do not be lazy or shy about information; exploit your notes. Their value is determined by your particular purpose or essay. Be ruthless with your notes. Vigorously re-organize and select the information for the best effect to suit your planned answer.

**RELEVANCE:** Having agreed that some form of selection must take place, how do we go about selecting? The inclusion or exclusion of information is decided by our historical experience which is gained by reading, discussion and thought. The more you practice the better you will become at selecting historical information to suit firstly your essay and secondly your argument. The vital thing to do is to make sure that the reader understands *why* you are including a particular piece of information. Here we are dealing with the difference between *implicit* and *explicit* relevance. The relevance is implicit when it is left to the reader to appreciate the importance of a point within that particular answer. Explicit relevance is where the writer plainly states the importance of a point in relation to the question being dealt with. When students fail to make explicit the relevance of a piece of information, they are usually seen as not understanding or merely relying on memory. Explain clearly why you have included pieces of information. Make their relevance to your essay title or line of argument obvious. Reconsider, at various points in the essay, both the implications of the title and the actual wording of it. This should prevent wandering and waffle in your answer. Never assume the reader will know what you are referring to. The reader needs to be guided through the information you have selected. It is interesting to see a professional historian reminding the reader *explicitly* of the relevance of his facts, analysis and discussion.

Example of *explicit* relevance from **Henry Pelling's** book *"Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain"* (2nd edition London 1979) the author examines some of the problems of using the concept of a *"Labour aristocracy"*. Pelling's central idea is that the value of this concept is variable, and its use needs care. In Pelling's contribution to the Labour aristocracy debate the reader is reminded explicitly of the author's position by comments like:

1. *"Only in the 1840's and later did the situation begin to improve markedly; and the class which now emerged into comparative prosperity was not an elite of labour aristocrats but a more homogenous class of factory workers..."* (page 47)
2. *"Employment on the railways as in other sections of the transport industry cannot be said to have been of such a character as to fit in with the theory of labour aristocracy."* (page 51)
3. *"There was no real labour aristocracy in the staple export trades – coal and the main branches of textile manufacture".* (page 52)
4. *"The concept of the Labour aristocracy has had its value in drawing attention to differences within the working class but if it implies the existence... of a labour elite distinctly separated from lower strata and marked by political behaviour of an acquiescent type then it is a concept that does more harm than good to historical truth".* ( page 61 )

**LOGIC ARGUMENTS:** As well as selecting the relevant information you must arrange it in a logical way. The most important thing to remember is that every idea, comment or observation must be supported by facts or reasons. It is easy to have an opinion about a moral issue like capital punishment, but if you were to discuss it in an essay you would usually have to give your reasons. So it is with history essays, you can have an opinion but you must

back it up with fact or reasons. In historical writing you may need a great deal of factual information (narrative) to support your argument or opinion. Writing an essay is not a mechanical process. You may adopt the principle of statement and reasons, facts or evidence to your style and purpose. It is possible in a sense to work in "reverse", giving particular details and drawing a conclusion.

### **3. DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

In historical writing if you are to achieve a sense of movement through time, it is always necessary to counterbalance description and analysis on the one side with sufficient narrative on the other side. But in *all* types of writing, including history, if you are to achieve sufficient intellectual rigor, you must counterbalance any narrative and description (the easier aspects) with sufficient analysis. The two first parts of the main text, the background and the arguments + evidence, are pre-dominantly narrative. You might have ended each paragraph with some reflection of the evidence presented which is a beginning of an analysis, but it's the discussion at the end of the main body that brings together the different parts for a developed reflection/analysis. In some essays the information or opinions conflict. These opposing views should be brought together in the discussion. Do not suppose that all issues are equally balanced. In most cases, historical opinion favors one side or the other. It is the historian's job to do justice to both (or more) cases, however strong or weak, and justify this.

# QUESTION ANALYSIS

Factors that affect your ability to analyze questions:

- Extent and depth of reading**
- Quality of notes**
- Experience of Question analysis**
- Historical understanding**

Question analysis is a fundamental skill for an advanced level student of History. The question analysis involves:

- a. examining the parts of a question*
- b. understanding the significance of a question*
- c. developing a line of argument in response to the question*

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF QUESTIONS ON AN ADVANCED LEVEL?

Understanding what questions are designed to do will help us answer them. The examination is a collection of questions and individually a question goes some way to satisfying the requirements of the examination.

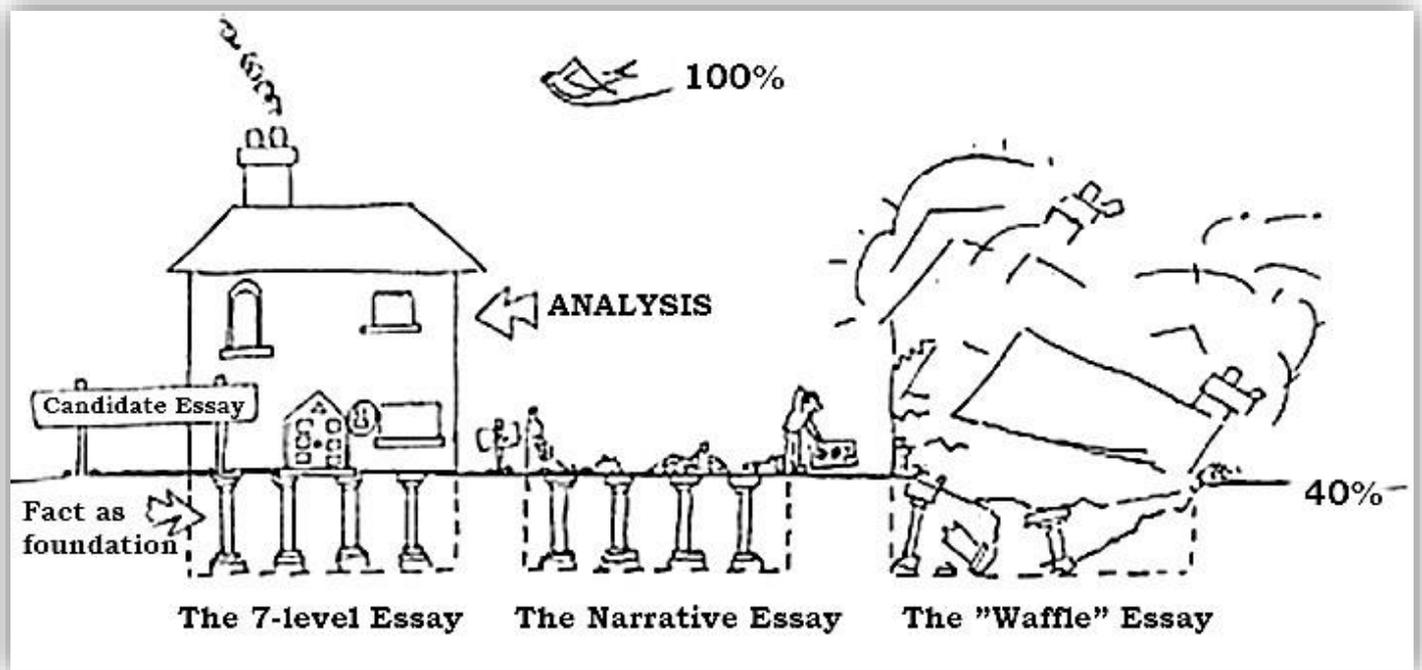
### SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES

- a. the knowledge and understanding of factual material (**narrative – facts**)
- b. the ability to draw conclusions from historical evidence (**identification and understanding**)
- c. the ability to evaluate opinions (**historiography – “different perspectives”**)
- d. the ability to select and organize relevant knowledge – to analyze and answer specific historical questions (**analysis**)

Notice that:

1. the order of the objectives reveals something of the process of historical writing. The historian starts with some knowledge or facts (a), adds opinion, interpretations, judgements, (b) and (c) and presents them in a logical and relevant essay (d). The last of these objectives is most important, since understanding it will make the difference between good and bad essays or grades.
2. marks are awarded in line with these objectives. Firstly, some credit will be given for knowledge. Every essay must have a solid foundation of factual knowledge. You cannot avoid reading and making notes to provide a fund of knowledge on which to draw. Secondly, knowledge is not the only thing that is important in a good essay, “*wholly narrative answers (factual or story telling) will be restricted to a maximum of 6/7 marks out of the 15 available for an individual question*” (Markband comment for 6/7 marks out of 15: “*for a narrative with implicit explanation*”). Allowing for your knowledge being detailed and accurate that gives a maximum of 40% – a bare pass.

Most of the marks will be awarded for demonstrating more sophisticated skills, like analysis, judgement, interpretation and assessment of knowledge. Mastery of the information must be proved by marshalling it, that is in the way you select and organize information relevant to the question. For this reason, you are not asked questions which would require only knowledge, as this would be solely a test of memory. Advanced level questions, therefore, do not begin “*What happened in...*” or “*Describe the events of...*”



## QUESTIONING THE QUESTION

Despite any impression you may have gained, History is not just concerned with finding the answers. One of the fundamental skills of the historian is the ability to ask questions. Here we concentrate on generating questions. You must have a critical frame of mind for all historical work. Being critical means that you must question any information, material or statement you come across to test and establish its meaning and truth. The idea of questioning is central to the chapters on reading, note making and documentary evidence.

Questioning does not take place only with essays or their titles. When faced with a document, gobblet, quotation, exercise, or problem, do not accept it passively, but interrogate it thoroughly. Historical work is a two-way process—a dialogue between the historian and his evidence. You will find that being actively involved in this dialogue is interesting and enjoyable. You will also find that to generate the right question is usually more difficult than to find the right answer. The questions which are tackled at advanced level reflect the many aspects and problems of History as a subject.

## THE LOGIC OF QUESTIONS: PROBLEMS AND TYPES

The problems of the historian mark his subject out from other disciplines. When combined and presented in an advanced level question it is difficult to see the underlying historical problems. You must reach behind the form or wording of the question, dismantle it and carefully examine each part.

### SOME TYPICAL HISTORY ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Consider the extent to which colonial rivalry was a cause of the First World War.
2. With what success did Alexander II deal with problems Russia faced during his reign?
3. Account for the dominance of Prussia in Germany by 1867.
4. Examine the impact of the Second World War on the civilian populations of Europe.

The first approach that may be used in breaking down questions is to look for the question types. There are two basic question types:

1. Explanation type (giving reasons for something)
2. Assessment/Evaluation type (weighing up something and saying how fair, sensible, reasonable or true it is)

**NOTE:** Many questions will be a combination of these two types. (Ex: “What were the problems which faced Stalin on his accession to power and how successfully did he resolve them?”)

You decide the question type by concentrating on what we shall call the “*instruction part*” of the question. In this part the instructions are given before the question or the problem is set. The wording of the instruction will usually be the clue to the type of question:

1. **Why** was Britain so slow to develop a national system of education before 1914? (**Explanation**)
2. The period 1880-1914 witnessed a revolution in English education! **How true is this statement?** (**Assessment/Evaluation**)
3. **What were** the problems which faced Stalin on his accession to power and **how successfully** did he resolve them? (**Explanation/Assessment**)

## EXPLANATION (WHY) QUESTIONS

Why... Account

for...

What do you understand by...

Outline the...

Why did...

Why didn't... / weren't... / wasn't...

What problems faced...

Explain the course of...

What were the aims of...

What factors... / considerations... In

what ways...

Discuss the nature of... / the part played by...

Examine the role of...

Comment on the...

## EVALUATION OR ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

To what extent...

Estimate the value of... / the importance of...

Assess the influence of...

In what respect was... / what ways did... How successful/satisfactorily...

How far do you accept the view / judgement...

Compare the contribution / value of...

What significance... / justification... / contribution... / part...

Consider the validity of...

With what justification... / success... What was the importance...

Evaluate the...

How true... / effective... / successful...

Describe and assess the...

Discuss the verdict... / the view that... / observation that... / this statement... / the comment... / the importance of...

Examine the claim that...

Comment on the...

The division into explanation and assessment is not rigid. Because:

1. many questions are a combination of the two types. Study this example:

“What problems faced (the Bolsheviks in 1917) (**explanation**) and how satisfactorily were they resolved by 1924?” (**assessment**)

2. the rest of the question may shift the emphasis from explanation to assessment. You could perhaps, be asked to assess the value and strength of an explanation. Look at this example:

“How far can the origin of February Revolution 1917 be explained by the Russian participation in World War One?” (**assessment**)

## THE WORDING OF QUESTIONS AND PARAPHRASING

It's a good idea to dismantle a question into different parts like:

- The instruction part (example – underlined)
- The main topic (example – box)
- The key factor, phrase or words (example – **bold text**)

**EXAMPLE:** Consider the importance for Russia of Stalin's policies in the period 1927 to 1939.

### PARAPHRASE

It's a good idea to paraphrase the question after you analyzed the different parts – just make sure you understand all parts of the question, so you don't change the question.

**EXAMPLE:** This essay will assess the significance or importance for Russia of Stalin's policies between 1927 and 1939.

**In what way can paraphrasing the question help you?**

1. The key factor, phrase or word is more important than the main topic.
2. Paraphrasing brings the key factor, phrase or word of the question to the surface and forces you to answer it, not write just about the main topic.
3. You will be inclined to more relevance in the examination. It will discourage the all too common, careless “triggering” of a response (usually chronological and narrative) to a few familiar words.
4. Paraphrasing should tell you whether you can answer the question. Too often students look for any excuse – a familiar form of words as the main topic – to relieve themselves a mass of factual information.

## UNDERSTANDING THE QUESTION

In order to proceed with your analysis and understand the question fully, you will need to look for what is “hidden” in and by the question. You need to be able to understand what the question is telling you about itself. Questions will imply certain things about the way you should answer them. By imply we mean that something is being suggested indirectly. There are two ways in which the question implies something about itself:

1. in what it selects from or assumes about an historical problem.
2. in requiring the measurement or weighing up of an historical problem.

**EXAMPLE:** We will use the process of question analysis already shown to dismantle this question:  
*How far was the decline of the Liberal party 1906-24 due to the rise of the Labour Party?*

**Question type:**

- the question part asks for assessment “*How far were...*”
- but the words “*due to*” change the emphasis to explanation
- we are dealing with assessing the validity of an explanation

**Question parts:**

Instruction part: *How far was the decline of the Liberal party 1906-24 due to the rise of the Labour Party?*

Main topic: *How far was the decline of* the Liberal party *1906-24 due to the rise of the Labour Party?*

Key factor: *How far was* ***the decline of the Liberal party 1906-24 due to the rise of the Labour Party?***

**Paraphrase:**

*This essay will focus on the rise of the Labour party 1906-24 as a reason for the decline of the Liberal party.*

The question assumes that there is a connection between the key phrase and the main topic, and our knowledge should tell us if this is a reasonable assumption. The implication can be seen by thinking of the instruction part and the key phrase or word. *There may be other ways of explaining the decline of the Liberal party in this period.* Liberalism may have declined because of:

- the impact of the First World War**
- its failure to properly undertake social reform**
- lack of success in dealing with the Irish question**
- long-term structural changes in the British economy**
- dissonance between “old” and “new” Liberalism etc.**

You could substitute any of these alternative explanations as the key factor or phrase in the question e.g. How far was the decline of the Liberal party, 1906-24, due to **the impact of the First World War?**

or **the split in its leadership?**

or **the failure of social reform?**

or **lack of success in dealing with the Irish question?**

So, you could go on reviewing and reworking the problem. Just as the key factor or phrase may be changed so the rest of the wording of the question could alter, but the basic form of the problem remains the same.

**NOTE:** Think of this common form of question as a “*part and whole*” has been selected. The question is designed to see how well you understand the significance of that part in relation to the whole topic (explaining the decline of the Liberal party 1906-24). If you do not recognize that the question is implying that something has been selected, you will only answer a part and not the whole of it. The implication of our question is that we cannot explain the decline of the Liberal party unless we mention the other factors. We must do justice to all the factors involved.

**SOME LAST WORDS:** Assessment forms a large part of historical work. In every question needing assessment a standard or scale of reference is required by which you can measure relative success, failure or achievement. In each case the standard used should be realistic for the time or period which you are studying. Thus, it is all too easy to see in the Liberal social reforms before 1914, the beginning of the Welfare State. However, in the search for origins employing such a term as Welfare State may obscure a real understanding of what the individuals at the time intended or what they created.

**These tools of analysis are not always necessary or infallible. The questions may be simple enough not to require the application of the whole process. Whatever analysis you do will give important direction to the construction of an argument at the planning stage of essay writing.**

**EXERCISE:** Look up old Essay Questions. *Identify* what *type of question* it is (explanation/evaluation/assessment). *Dismantle* the questions *into different parts* (instruction part / main topic / key factor, phrase or words). *Paraphrase* the question and see if there are any “*hidden*” parts you should consider in the answer...