

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y100/01 Summer 2018 series

Moderated unit

Version 1

Contents

Introduction	3
General trends.....	4
Successful marking of AO1	6
Successful marking of AO2	8
Successful marking of AO3	10
Key things to remember	11

Introduction

The non examined assessment (NEA) is a compulsory unit of the A Level History qualification. It is worth 40 marks and counts as 20% of the total A Level. It is an independently researched essay with a recommended word count of 3000-4000 words, which is marked by centres and moderated by OCR.

The essay should include explanation and analysis of different perspectives on a clearly stated historical issue, reaching judgements and drawing on a range of primary and secondary source material. Therefore it brings together the skills developed in the three examined units. The choice of essay question must be the candidate's own, and may extend their knowledge of aspects of the past already studied or relate to topics not specifically required by the specification.

Guidance on preparation and marking of the NEA, including the marking criteria, is included in the specification, and further guidance is available in the Unit Y100 Guide on the OCR website. Marking should be positive, rewarding achievement rather than penalising failure or omissions. The awarding of marks must be directly related to the marking criteria. Teachers should use their professional judgement to select the best-fit level descriptor that describes the candidate's work, giving a separate mark for each assessment objective. Teachers should use the full range of marks available to them. Centres are responsible for internal standardisation of assessments, where appropriate.

General trends

This unit continued to offer centres opportunities for candidates to develop their knowledge of topics studied for other units or to branch out and to explore different topics, not previously studied. This produced work which was varied and which often showed a high level of commitment and interest. The essays were generally based on appropriate research. This varied in terms of the depth and range of sources used. Centre marking was generally aware of this and annotation often pointed out strengths and limitations of research. Though outcomes varied considerably in terms of meeting the requirements of the mark scheme, the value of a sustained piece of historical writing based on independent research was evident in the majority of the work seen.

The questions invited analysis rather than description and the essays did not often fall back on indiscriminating narrative. The majority attempted to respond directly to the questions, though not all sustained a focus on their precise terms or avoided some descriptive elements. In general, centre marking did show by marginal annotation where there was irrelevance and did recognise the difference between explaining and assessing different elements.

Most essays contained both primary and secondary evidence and made use of both. The tendency for evaluation of evidence (AO2 and AO3) to be less sustained, supported and successful than the essay skills of AO1 continued. There were many essays which tackled the questions directly and offered different general interpretations but lacked sustained supported evaluation of primary sources and named historians. In many cases, the centre marking recognised this. There were a substantial number of instances where a high mark for AO1 was seen as justification for equally high marks for AO2 and AO3 even when the amount and quality of evaluation was clearly not on the same level as the overall argument.

An important point to note is that this is a mark scheme which requires assessment of three distinct elements. It is perfectly possible for an essay to be focused, coherent and analytical but to contain limited assessment of primary evidence, for example. Many centres recognised this; it is essential that the marking is not a reflection of an overall quality and is firmly based on the separate requirements of the three Assessment Objectives considered in more detail below.

In overall terms, the level of communication was high. The style of writing was generally appropriate and with some exceptions, essays generally offered a clear and direct way of writing. Sometimes there was the misuse of words which affected the argument. Some were grammatical, for example 'affected' and 'effected' were sometimes confused. However, some were conceptual. For example, the financial crisis which France faced before the Revolution is different from the economic problems the country faced. For quite a few candidates, the terms are interchangeable and some arguments were weakened as a consequence. When questions refer to specific terms, for example 'mercantilism', then it is vital that the terms are used with understanding. Also, when words like 'great' or 'genius' are used in questions, the requirement is for more than a discussion of 'success'. Candidates are strongly advised to consider the implications of the words they choose for questions.

Topic-based essays are a chance for candidates to look at historians' views. However, historiographical surveys are not required, since candidates spend more time reading about historians than reading historians' works. It is a requirement that essays should contain assessment of named historians and not merely schools of history. Though long surveys of schools of history were less common this year, there were instances where there was no named historian included in the text of the essay. It is not a substitute for critical consideration of secondary sources to say 'some historians argue' or 'Marxists think that' or 'Intentionalists hold the view' unless there is specific reference to a historians, whose work should be analysed in terms of arguments and evidence, not ideology or supposed membership of a group or school.

It would be wrong to suggest that the unit was dominated by problems or inadequacies. Centres managed the process of encouraging independent research well. There was much detailed and careful marking and annotation. Considerable trouble was taken to standardise internally. There was also a great deal of very realistic assessment which recognised the variation in skills and understanding between stronger and weaker answers. Marks were often well spread and it was rare for the rank order of merit to be assessed incorrectly. The comments on the individual AOs should be seen in the broader general context of a successful and worthwhile unit.

Successful marking of AO1

The requirements of AO1 are very much those of Advanced Level essays in general. There is a requirement for work to be focused on the question, for arguments to be supported by good factual knowledge and for factors and views to be assessed as well as simply being explained. The marking in general recognised these demands and was realistic in assessing how well the essays had met them. In terms of outcome, some essays offered very analytical and well considered responses to questions which showed a highly developed historical understanding sometimes going beyond what might be expected at A Level. The most successful answers kept a firm focus on the question, not only in terms of the subject matter but also in terms of the command word; in the essay title 'Assess the reasons...', strong answers did just that. They did just not offer a list of reasons which were explained or they did not only describe; they offered an assessment of the relative importance of the reasons which was supported and not merely asserted. In titles which required a judgement 'How successful was...' then stronger answers went beyond identifying and explaining some successes and failures and offered a much more developed analysis of success, establishing criteria and assessing supposed successes or failures using knowledge well.

In general, marking was alive to the differences between developed analysis and sequential explanations. However, there were some instances where the failure of essays to respond to the question was not identified and this resulted in some generosity. A common problem for candidates was analysis of the reasons for Napoleon's downfall. There is no doubt that reverses in Spain and Russia contributed; but the focus should be on the outcomes and results, not the causes or the events themselves. Therefore long accounts of the grim events in Russia in 1812 are not explanations for the downfall of 1814. The knowledge has to be used. For some markers, there was a tendency to assume that explanations had been made rather than looking to see whether that was the case. Others more rigorously expected the outcomes of the Russian expedition to be linked to the final fall and assessed.

Another issue which arose was the limited understanding of the question itself. Questions in themselves were perfectly valid and could have given rise to sustained discussion. This did depend, though, on a clear understanding of the concepts they contained. Thus whether or not British mercantilist policies were responsible for the outbreak of the War of Independence could be discussed. As well as economic restrictions, there were a range of other issues and there is certainly a debate about how seriously colonial traders and merchants were injured by controls as opposed to benefiting. However, if the candidates saw 'mercantilist' as a general hold all term for British policy then the question itself was not suitable and the resulting response was not properly targeted or precise enough. It is necessary for centre marking to look closely at the precise demands of the question.

Another example which may help to make this point clear is when the focus of the question is not always the focus of the answer. 'Assess the reasons for the fall of the Soviet Union' or 'Assess the reasons for the outbreak of the French Revolution' are both good questions. They do require, however, a focus on precise events in 1991 and 1789 respectively and not just a list of problems of Soviet Russia or problems of the *Ancien Regime*. Successful marking by centres recognised this, but there was some tendency to over-reward answers which did not link analysis of problems to actual developments.

Annotations were often helpful but sometimes tended to focus on the other two Assessment Objectives. Where there is just description, it is helpful to identify this. Where there is explanation but no real assessment, this too, is something that needs to be identified. And on the positive side where there is sustained discussion and developed judgement, this too might sometimes be more closely noted, so that the decisions about AO1 are clearly explained to the moderator. It is of very limited use to write 'AO1' in the margin without some idea of the quality. Conversely annotations which point to the quality of argument and supporting material are of considerable value.

There was a considerable amount of very focused annotation which linked to the final mark given for the assessment objective. Where this was confirmed or amended as a result of internal moderation it is helpful for an explanation to be given.

Successful marking of AO2

The inclusion of a range of primary evidence is a requirement of the unit. These contemporary sources can be used to test historians' interpretations and this aspect was often very successful, but it is assessed appropriately as part of AO3. AO2 specifically demands evaluation of primary sources. Marks for AO2 should be given according to the quality of and support for the evaluation. The mark scheme refers specifically to 'excellent' 'very good' 'good' and 'some' evaluation for the higher bands. There is not an expectation that every source should be evaluated but that a range of evidence is assessed and that the evaluation should be supported by contextual knowledge as well as reference or provenance. This should be familiar to candidates as Paper 1 has specific requirements for evaluation of primary evidence. There is also the expectation that the sources should be analysed, which is linked to the issue of the question. It is not expected that this will be a stand-alone exercise but that as part of a wider historical investigation, there will be deployment, analysis and evaluation of primary sources.

The range of evidence in general was often impressive and stronger answers were able to show sustained evaluation and the use of excellent contextual knowledge to judge the evidence. Centre annotations which showed where and why the evaluation was 'excellent', 'very good' and so on were very useful for the purposes of moderation. However they also allowed marking to be firmly based on the evidence of the work itself. Put simply, where annotations could only show 'some' evaluation, then there was no justification for a very high mark, regardless of the overall quality of the argument assessed in AO1. Alternatively if evaluation were noted correctly as excellent with a strong use of knowledge and an awareness of the nature of the evidence, then this provided the justification for a high mark which could be accepted by moderation. Without this annotation or simply by reference to AO2 or 'eval' it is more difficult to see the basis of the marking and also more difficult for centre makers to reach the correct mark.

There were responses that were over credited, as summarised here:

First, some essays contained little or no primary evidence yet were credited with evaluating it. Though not very common, it was prevalent enough for many moderators to comment on and indicates that there was some uncertainty about what is meant by primary or contemporary evidence. Guidance can be found in the [OCR Guide to Unit Y100](#).

Second, some essays were adept at using primary evidence to assess historians' interpretations but did not test that evidence, taking it for granted that it could be relied on and could be used to confirm or challenge a historian. Though this was often useful for assessment, it could not really be seen in a meaningful way as meeting the requirements for evaluation of primary sources.

Thirdly, there was some analysis of the nature and origin of the primary sources used in the essay but no conclusions were drawn about the value of the source as a result. For example, 'The source is from the time of the French Revolution and it is in a cahier or list of grievances drawn up in 1789 prior to the calling of the Estates General.' is a useful starting point, but it does not explain why this might make the evidence valuable, reliable or questionable.

Fourthly, there were judgements based on unspecific comments about the evidence. Thus they would have applied to any source of a particular type, such as a letter, or a chronicle, or a diary. There was little which referred to the particular source.

Fifthly, there were evaluative comments which relied exclusively on consideration of the origin of the evidence and were more specific about the authorship, but made no use of the historical context.

Where there is no evaluation, or where the evaluation is limited, as explained above, it was helpful when annotations pointed this out. It was also helpful when stronger evaluation was noticed and developed marginal comments were made. Thus when there is specific and detailed contextual knowledge used to assess evidence it was very good marking practice to point this out. When this was combined by an analysis of the origin and nature of the source then this was a strong assessment of primary evidence.

An example may help:

Another area of historical debate is whether Edward the Confessor adequately provided for his succession, and this occurs primarily due to the difficulty in reconciling the Norman and the English sources. The D version of the Anglo Saxon Chronicle states that William visited England at the end of 1051. Douglas points out that this is not mentioned in any of the Norman texts and is the only source which mentions the visit. The author was seemingly in the court of Archbishop Ealdred of York and has no other particular focus on southern events. However, there is primary evidence that Ealdred was at the King's court in 1051 as the Chronicle says 'the king sent bishop Ealdred from London' and thus the visit seems feasible.

Successful marking of the AO identified where primary sources were used in a way which was relevant to the issue in the question. It drew a distinction between sources used in support of arguments, in support of a critique of historians and when the evidence was in addition being assessed in a supported way.

Successful marking of AO3

The essay requires the use, analysis and evaluation of a range of secondary sources. Historians' interpretations should be analysed and tested using contextual knowledge. There is less value in attempting to look at the origin of secondary sources and *ad hominem* responses are generally unconvincing. There was less reliance on personal and speculative comments on historians and more focus on using knowledge. Where there were no references to named historians, the demands of this AO were not really being met. There is the expectation that historians will actually be read during research and that engagement will be made with their views and evidence. What was striking was the wide range of historical views which were explained. Essays often went beyond textbooks and outdated if much discussed controversies and encompassed a range of historical writing.

The assessment of historical interpretations was more developed and extensive, generally, than the evaluation of primary evidence. This was especially true of more modern topics. The best annotation drew attention to the explanation of the views in relation to the issue in the question. This is a vital starting point. Annotation commonly drew attention to critical comments about historical views but there was less marginal comment on the quality of the judgement and the extent and quality of the historical knowledge which supported it. Again, comment on this aspect is very helpful for the centre markers and those standardising the original marking and also to the moderators. It was helpful when marking drew attention to the following areas:

Some responses seemed to be testing a historian but the knowledge that was used came from the book or article itself. Thus it was sometimes said that Historian X was reliable when he wrote that Napoleon was responsible for his own downfall because he used the knowledge that Napoleon had declined peace terms. However, that is merely to explain the view – 'Napoleon was responsible because he declined peace terms'. That view should be tested by researching the circumstances in which he declined the terms and whether the terms would have prevented his downfall – is the view tenable?

It was also helpful when centre marking pointed out simple cross-referencing: showing that historians agree does not necessarily make their views reliable. Thus 'Attempts corroboration but limited support' was a helpful comment when all the essay was attempting was to say that historians agreed without explaining how the evidence from one historian might bolster the view of the other. The same is true of judgement which is based on another historian offering a different view. This was often correctly identified as merely juxtaposing views, not using the evidence offered by an alternative view to challenge an interpretation.

Centres often correctly pointed out when primary material was used to confirm or challenge a historical interpretation. 'Uses PS to confirm view' is a useful comment, but it does depend how convincing the source is. Annotation which recognised when an appraised piece of primary evidence is used effectively to confirm or challenge is helpful. It is also important to make a distinction between convincing evaluation and merely an attempt to assess. Thus the use of cartoon to assess how successful a New Deal economic policy without further evidence and knowledge is not necessarily very convincing and it was helpful when annotation pointed this out.

There is some reluctance to encourage over-critical responses to professional historians by candidates and this is understandable. However, this does underline the importance of supporting critical comments by firm knowledge. Sometimes intensely researched work by experts was dismissed by candidates in extreme terms. The best work offered nuanced and supported comments which respected the historians' work while having the confidence to challenge it.

Key things to remember

There are three distinct Assessment Objectives and it is not uncommon for candidates to score more highly in one than the others. Marking should make a clear distinction between the different skills and not assume that say a good argument will mean good critical evaluation of primary evidence.

The skills being tested are not particular to the topic-based essay but have been developed in other units. For example AO2 is tested in Paper 1 by the requirement to assess primary sources and AO3 is tested in Paper 3 by the judgement made about two historians' views. The essay skills of AO1 are required for the essay answers in all three units. Understanding of key historical concepts such as causation are required throughout.

The marking criteria establish clear criteria for assessing the evaluation of sources, both primary and secondary, at different levels. Using the words of those descriptors in marginal annotation and ensuring that the overall comments reflect those comments are important in establishing the right mark.

Successful essays sustain a balance between argument and the use and evaluation of both primary and secondary material. Evaluation has a distinct meaning in all three elements and candidates should have confidence in making clear judgements about the issues in the question, about primary evidence and about secondary evidence. Centre assessment of the quality of that judgement is at the heart of successful marking.

The internal standardisation undertaken by centres is an indication of how seriously the marking is taken and the considerable efforts made to ensure fair and accurate assessment. In order that it achieves its object fully and is helpful to the moderators, when changes are made it is helpful if they are explained.

Moderators are grateful for the extensive comments from centres and would like to thank colleagues and encourage them to keep communicating their thoughts about the work in a full and frank way to ensure that moderation is supportive of the centre's marking as much as possible.

Supporting you

For further details of this qualification please visit the subject webpage.

Review of results

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our review of results services. For full information about the options available visit the [OCR website](#). If university places are at stake you may wish to consider priority service 2 reviews of marking which have an earlier deadline to ensure your reviews are processed in time for university applications.

active results

Active Results offers a unique perspective on results data and greater opportunities to understand students' performance.

It allows you to:

- Review reports on the **performance of individual candidates**, cohorts of students and whole centres
- **Analyse results** at question and/or topic level
- **Compare your centre** with OCR national averages or similar OCR centres.
- Identify areas of the curriculum where students excel or struggle and help **pinpoint strengths and weaknesses** of students and teaching departments.

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/administration/support-and-tools/active-results/>



Attend one of our popular CPD courses to hear exam feedback directly from a senior assessor or drop in to an online Q&A session.

<https://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk>



We'd like to know your view on the resources we produce. By clicking on the 'Like' or 'Dislike' button you can help us to ensure that our resources work for you. When the email template pops up please add additional comments if you wish and then just click 'Send'. Thank you.

Whether you already offer OCR qualifications, are new to OCR, or are considering switching from your current provider/awarding organisation, you can request more information by completing the Expression of Interest form which can be found here:

www.ocr.org.uk/expression-of-interest

OCR Resources: *the small print*

OCR's resources are provided to support the delivery of OCR qualifications, but in no way constitute an endorsed teaching method that is required by OCR. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the content, OCR cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions within these resources. We update our resources on a regular basis, so please check the OCR website to ensure you have the most up to date version.

This resource may be freely copied and distributed, as long as the OCR logo and this small print remain intact and OCR is acknowledged as the originator of this work.

Our documents are updated over time. Whilst every effort is made to check all documents, there may be contradictions between published support and the specification, therefore please use the information on the latest specification at all times. Where changes are made to specifications these will be indicated within the document, there will be a new version number indicated, and a summary of the changes. If you do notice a discrepancy between the specification and a resource please contact us at:

resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk.

OCR acknowledges the use of the following content:
Square down and Square up: alexwhite/Shutterstock.com

Please get in touch if you want to discuss the accessibility of resources we offer to support delivery of our qualifications:
resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk

Looking for a resource?

There is now a quick and easy search tool to help find **free** resources for your qualification:

www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/find-resources/

www.ocr.org.uk

OCR Customer Contact Centre

General qualifications

Telephone 01223 553998

Facsimile 01223 552627

Email general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

OCR is part of Cambridge Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge. *For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored.*

© **OCR 2018** Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England. Registered office The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA. Registered company number 3484466. OCR is an exempt charity.



**Cambridge
Assessment**

