

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y311/01 Summer 2018 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' 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. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper Y311/01 series overview

Y311 is one of twenty-one units for the revised A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of at least one hundred years through an Interpretation option on a named in-depth topic and two essays. The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A candidates are required to use contextual knowledge to test the views of two historians about one of the three named in-depth topics or an aspect of one. The question does not require them to comment on the style of writing or the provenance of the Interpretation. In Section B candidates are required to answer two essay questions from a choice of three.

To do well on Section A, candidates need to explain the view of each Interpretation in relation to the question and then evaluate the Interpretation by the application of contextual knowledge. Responses should show an understanding of the wider debate connected to the issue.

To do well on Section B, candidates need to make connections and links across the whole period, explaining similarities and differences between the events they are discussing in order to show an awareness of continuity and change across the whole period unless instructed otherwise. The comparisons made may be either between periods within the topic or between regions. The strongest answers will test a hypothesis and reach a supported judgement.

Overview of candidate performance

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:

- showed a clear understanding of the views of the two interpretations in relation to the question
- were able to use contextual knowledge to test the interpretations, linking that knowledge directly to the Interpretation through evaluative words
- were able to consider both the strengths and limitations of both Interpretations using contextual knowledge
- in answering the essay questions, covered the whole period in a balanced way
- adopted a thematic approach
- made links and comparisons between aspects of the topic
- explained the links and comparisons
- supported their arguments with precise and relevant examples
- reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question.

Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:

- showed a limited understanding of one or both of the Interpretations
- did not go beyond a basic explanation of part of the Interpretation
- did not link any contextual knowledge directly to the Interpretation and therefore did not evaluate the Interpretation
- in answering the essay, adopted a chronological rather than thematic approach
- did not make links or comparisons, even if events from different parts of the period were discussed in the same paragraph
- failed to cover the whole period
- did not focus on the precise wording of the question
- made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions.

There was a wide range of responses with some candidates choosing to answer the questions in a different order to the paper. There was some evidence of candidates failing to finish the third question, which for some was the thirty-mark Interpretation question, if they had prioritised the essay questions first, but no scripts contained only two responses or brief, bullet pointed plans submitted in place of essays.

Overall, for the essay responses most candidates submitted an introduction naming the key factors, such as shown below. Some stated the factors fairly simply, as shown in the extract below from a Question 4 response.

Exemplar 1

| | | |
|--|----|--|
| | | The empires of France and Britain in the period 1558 - 1783 the empires of Britain and France were at war significantly during the 18th century. |
| | KU | So in arguing that French rivalry with Britain hindered the development of the British Empire we must assess the stated factor within these colonial theatre: America, India and the Caribbean. To some extent the stated factor is most |
| | V | valid within America to a greater extent in comparison to India and the Caribbean. |

Here the response states the three geographical areas that experienced Anglo-French rivalry. Fewer candidates began with factual, 'background' introductions, which are of only marginal relevance. Frequently these introductions prohibit a clear structure to responses. Setting out the factors in an introduction can be beneficial to guiding candidates through their argument, offering a gateway for development. Most candidates dealt with one factor per paragraph, although some are still offering predominantly descriptive responses, lacking in synthesis and analysis. Links between factors were not always made, meaning that the progression of the argument was sometimes stilted.

Question 1

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages and explain which you think is more convincing about the actions of Robert Clive in India. [30]

Overall, this question was accessed by all candidates. Most were able to comment on both interpretations and even weaker responses could make accurate assertions on them. Most candidates took the interpretations in turn. Fewer candidates located the interpretations in the wider historical debate and those who did mainly used the famine in Bengal for their evidence. Those who did offer an evaluation of both interpretations and located them within the wider historical debate about the issue did so well and some Level 5 and above responses were seen. Those who took this approach benefitted from doing so by providing themselves sufficient argument to be able to offer a balanced judgement. The standard of spelling and grammar was sound, although there were a number of scripts which used rather too colloquial language, such as abbreviations. Candidates need to ensure that excessive use of these does not hinder the clarity of their responses.

Question 2*

- 2* 'Britain brought little benefit to its colonies in the period from 1558 to 1783.' How far do you agree? [25]

This was a popular question, with most candidates being able to accurately select areas of interest, namely the Caribbean, India and the Americas. Slavery was a key factor discussed by the majority of candidates, as was the famine in Bengal, with the economy and the exploitation of raw materials less so. Some responses merely described the factors without addressing the question of how far they benefitted the colonies. There was a tendency for some responses, more evident in the weaker ones, to list factors, sometimes 'first', 'second', 'third' or 'important..', 'another important ...', 'a factor..', 'another factor...'. Few responses reached a meaningful judgement on whether any of the factors benefitted Britain, although many gave a concluding statement giving their asserted opinion. There was, however, less evidence of 'new' factors appearing suddenly in the conclusions but few conclusions assessed or weighed up factors in relation to the question.

Question 3*

- 3* To what extent did the reasons for opposition to British colonial rule change in the period from 1558 to 1783? [25]

This question was selected by few candidates. Those who did choose to answer it tended to answer it last. Although candidates were able to describe the opposition to British colonial rule in a range of places, very few were able to pick up on the sense of change in the question. Most mentioned America as the main place where British rule was opposed, yet few cited why this might have been, with the next popular being the Caribbean, with many describing the small-scale slave unrest, though the majority of responses described the reasons for opposition, rather than address the matter of change or continuity within the stated time period. For this reason, there were very few highly evaluative and judgemental responses to this question.

Question 4*

- 4* To what extent was the development of the British Empire hindered by rivalry with France in the period from 1558 to 1783? [25]

This was the most popular question and many candidates chose to answer this first. Most candidates who answered this question approached it by region, writing a paragraph on each one. These geographically-based paragraphs tended to be in isolation rather than candidates linking the economic factors caused in one region to those experienced in another. Rivalry between the powers in India and the Caribbean were more common factors addressed than that in Canada. Weaker responses described the rivalry without discussing how it affected British development, making it difficult for them to reach an evaluative judgement. Those who did adopt an argument as to the extent of the British Empire's development being hindered by French rivalry were able to support it with well-selected knowledge. The factual information chosen by some was particularly strong and those who provided precise and relevant knowledge found it easier to make a judgement.

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