

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y315/01 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 Y315/01 series overview

Y315 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.

Section A

Question 1

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages and explain which you think is more convincing as an explanation of the reasons why the South (Confederacy) lost the American Civil War. [30]

While Interpretation A was relatively straightforward for most, Interpretation B was misinterpreted by a number of candidates. The interpretation was reporting on the view of other historians about the supposed lack of nationalism in the South in the first paragraph but the view being offered was that the South's loss of morale was caused by military defeat. However this did not stop many candidates reaching the higher levels and most concluded that Interpretation B was the more convincing one, although some successfully agreed with A that the South's lack of financial resources was fatal. Some weaker responses imparted knowledge rather than using it to evaluate the views in the interpretations and some resorted to a list of battles won and lost. However stronger answers were able to use an impressive depth of knowledge to test each interpretation and reach a substantiated judgement on which was the more convincing and why. There was impressive knowledge shown about the South's financial and indeed wider economic weaknesses used to evaluate passage A and some candidates were also able to address some of the leadership mistakes made by Jefferson Davis. The evaluation of passage B also benefitted from a wider understanding of how Sherman's 'March to the sea' affected southern morale. Some of the very strong answers were also able to argue effectively that both passages had convincing points to make about why the South lost and could be seen as complementary rather than antagonistic.

Section B

Question 2*

- 2* 'Technological developments have not changed the outcome of battles.' How far do you agree with this view of the period from 1792 to 1945? [25]

This was a familiar theme and many candidates successfully looked at themes such as weapons, transport and communications over the whole period. Some candidates read this as an 'how important' question, weighing technology against other factors which was a successful approach particularly when links were made between factors such as new weapons and the Generals who could use them effectively, such as Eisenhower's plans to use the new mulberry harbours to get reinforcements to France in the crucial weeks after D day. A contrast was sometimes made between the use of weapons over time such as the relative failure of the tank in its first appearance in World War One, compared to its successful use in the blitzkrieg tactics of World War Two. Others evaluated whether new technology had, or had not, changed the outcome of battles and many were sceptical of their effectiveness in actually changing the outcome of battles especially in the first half of the period. A few even dismissed the first half of the period as having no technological developments at all which led to unbalanced essays.

Question 3*

- 3* How important was planning and preparation to the outcome of successful military campaigns in the period from 1792 to 1945? [25]

Some of the weaker candidates described planning and preparation in general (the Schlieffen plan featured heavily) without evaluating its importance for the successful outcome of military campaigns. This meant that the finished essay became a list of plans and examples of preparation in action and lacked balance as well as being largely descriptive. Some less successful essays also approached the question in a generalised manner, commenting on whether a range of wars had involved planning or not. However the stronger answers were able to discuss when planning had been effective over the whole period and where it had failed or was less important than other factors, using a comparative approach to achieve synthesis. There was effective reference to Prussian planning in the wars of the 1860s, although many agreed with Von Moltke that no battle plan survives first contact with the enemy, and useful comparisons made between the failed plans for amphibious landings at Gallipoli in 1915 and the triumph of the Normandy landings in 1944.

Question 4*

- 4* 'The role of governments in the conduct of war changed significantly in the period after 1865.' How far do you agree with this view of the period from 1792 to 1945? **[25]**

Some excellent answers adopted a thematic approach using themes such as conscription and the control of public opinion and many concluded that there was an increase in the governments' role. There was impressive knowledge shown of both the extensive involvement of the French state in the early period and comparisons made to British conscription and DORA in the First World War. Stronger candidates ranged widely over the period and over conflicts with effective reference to the Japanese government's involvement in the Russo Japanese war in 1904 as well as the more usual suspects.

A number of candidates did not read the question carefully and discussed the role of governments in warfare over the whole period without assessing how far it had changed after 1865. A weak grasp of dates was also a problem for some who were unsure which wars fell on either side of 1865. Some candidates chose to pursue an unbalanced argument that argued that there was continuity in government involvement throughout the period and saw no escalation in the Total Wars of the twentieth century.

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