

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y100/01/02 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by our moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements; identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation and comments on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. This report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost to other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

General overview

There were a wide range of topics offered in the Topic Based Essays and while some centres encouraged topics which clearly arose from the OCR specification, others encouraged a wider range of topics including social and cultural topics. The essays were mostly source based and few did not refer to named evidence. Centres overwhelmingly used the OCR mark scheme and provided three separate marks, distinguishing AO1, AO2 and AO3. Few merely offered general comments and as one moderator reported, the mark scheme was used with growing confidence. A helpful technique adopted by some centres was using different colours for the three assessment objectives. For example the argument and the assessment of different interpretations was marked in red; the use, analysis and evaluation of primary sources was marked in green and the treatment of secondary sources, named historians, was in blue. This helped the markers to identify the quality of analysis and judgement in each assessment objective and to identify the range of sources used. Many centres showed that they had undertaken internal moderation, but it would be helpful to the OCR moderators if the reasons for changes made by the internal reviewer were explained. Administration was often praised in moderators' reports but it would be helpful if all the pages in the essay were numbered and the centre number and candidate number appeared on every sheet. It is also very important that the candidate's name and number are on the cover sheets. It is no longer a requirement for the form which certifies that it is the candidates' own work to be sent to the moderator, but this should be kept in the centre.

As was the case in previous years, assessment by centres of AO1 was the element which was more in conformity with nationally agreed standards than the other two assessment objectives. The marking did generally identify where the essays maintained a relevant argument and did consider the relative validity of different possible judgements. At the higher end of the mark range, essays were sharply focused on the question and a discussion was convincingly sustained which led to a supported and credible conclusion about the issue in the question. It was helpful when centre annotation pointed to irrelevance or drift from the question and where, by contrast, the focus of the answer was maintained. Many answers set out the possible debate in the first paragraph but did not follow through by an explanation of the different perspectives and a sustained evaluation. Annotations which noticed that were particularly helpful. It was also common for essays to outline different explanations and overall views but to be more limited in forming a supported judgement about their validity. Where this was done, marginal annotations indicated judgement were very useful. Their absence would be a helpful indicator that the essay was not in the top band for AO1. There were cases where essays were more about the general topic than the specific question, or where the question was not guiding the choice of content. In the main, centre marking did reflect this but there were some cases where credit was given for knowledge or even judgement as a skill in itself, not related to the actual question and this of course led to some over rewarding.

Appropriate annotation is the key to successful marking and this is especially true when the use of evidence is being assessed. AO2 is focused on the analysis and evaluation of primary sources. Some centre marking did not draw a distinction between primary and secondary sources, sometimes attributing credit for using historians' interpretations as AO2. To be clear, primary sources are evidence from the period of the topic chosen, rather than later historians' description or analysis of the period. A range of evidence can be used – physical objects like coins, portraits, buildings, films as well as a variety of written sources are valid. However, it is important that essays do use appropriate evidence. For example, while cartoons are often valuable for reflecting attitudes, they are unlikely to be very useful for serious analysis of the success of policies. A historian, for example, writing about the effectiveness of the New Deal economic measures would not make a cartoon his or her first port of call. To judge the impact of propaganda in Nazi Germany, it would not be enough to look at posters which could not provide evidence for the effectiveness of their use. Annotation which commented on the depth and support for evaluative comments on primary sources was often very useful. If a general comment such as 'eval' is

used to cover very basic comments on evidence which focus merely on the origin and nature of the sources, as well as much more developed comments which use contextual knowledge to make an assessment, then this may mislead markers. Even if there is quite a bit of simple evaluation, the overall achievement of the essay is simply to offer simple evaluation. Annotation might also comment on the range of sources used. As one moderator commented, an essay on Nazi Germany which relied only on evidence from Hitler and Goebbels was not looking at a range of evidence, so it is not merely a question of how many sources are considered. There were many strong answers which used primary evidence effectively but were aware that it could not be accepted at face value and tested it not only considering its nature, origin and purpose but also by looking at contextual information to assess its value and reliability. This is a clear requirement in Unit 1 and there should be an expectation that similar means of assessing evidence should be evident in the coursework.

In assessing AO3 most marking did look for named historians rather than general centres of history or unattributed overall views. Once again, simple comparison did not really amount to sustained evaluation and cross reference between historians as such should not be seen as a higher level skill. If evidence from another historian is used to assess a specific and attributed historical view, then that is an effective means of evaluation. Assessment of a historical interpretation needs the deployment of contextual knowledge. However the interpretation should be analysed and explained clearly or the nature of the evaluation will not be clear. Simply referring to what a historian is supposed to argue without appropriate explanation, quotation or clear reference is not effective. Also, it is not relevant simply to confirm a historian's reference to a given fact ('X is right to say that the war ended in 1945 because from my own knowledge that is when fighting ended'). Just as in Unit 3, the requirement is for evaluation of historians' interpretations. It does follow from this that chosen topics should yield differing interpretations and give clear opportunities to assess historians' views. There was some very impressive analysis of a good range of views which considered the evidence and arguments and were not reliant on looking at personal details of historians' careers, nationality, background or possible motivation. If for example the Marxist historians of the French Revolution are to be criticised it should be on the basis of the evidence behind their views or on the basis of contextual knowledge seeming to contradict or support their findings, not because of their political views as such.

The selection of an appropriate title, the process of finding appropriate evidence, the construction of an extended essay which maintains analysis and focus on the question and the assessment of different interpretations on the basis of critical consideration of a range of primary and secondary evidence are all challenging tasks. It is important that candidates should be supported by teaching which helps with skill development and encourages self-assessment based on a clear understanding of the assessment criteria. There are clear guidelines provided by JCQ and OCR but the essential element is that the essay should be the individual work of the candidate. Providing frameworks which result in all essays adopting a common structure, considering the same sources in the same order would not ensure that independence. Nor would detailed marking of individual work which was given to candidates to make changes in drafts. The following are appropriate means of supporting students in a demanding but rewarding process : holding classes and seminars in primary source evaluation or assessing historians' views; offering guidance on structuring arguments in general; advising on the use of internet material; helping to make sure that footnoting is appropriate; monitoring progress generally and offering support in research techniques such as note making, keeping records of where material has been accessed; classes in appropriate historical style; helping to make sure that research ethics are understood

Most common causes of candidates not passing

The most common cause of not passing lie in the failure of essays to maintain focus on the question set and failing to offer evaluation of both primary and secondary sources. Essays which do not achieve a pass often contain either no or very few primary and/or secondary sources. When sources are used, they must be actually relevant to the question and not the topic. Essays which do not pass often rely on long extracts which are not explained and sometimes have little direct relevance to the question as opposed to the general topic.

Common misconceptions

A common misconception is that long descriptions are necessary rather than the use of factual material to support analysis and discussion (AO1) but the main misconception lies in evaluation being equated to explanation - rather than specific judgement about primary and/or secondary evidence. Other misconceptions are that comparison of sources is the same as offering a judgement or that it is necessary to look at the personal background and possible beliefs of a historian to assess his or her interpretations. This often leads to guesswork and speculation rather than valid analysis.

Avoiding potential malpractice

It is important to thoroughly understand what is acceptable support and what is excessive guidance which takes ownership from the candidate and places it with the teacher. When whole classes do the same question, then the potential for excessive assistance increases and it is important that teachers make sure that where this is the case, the coursework unit does not become a taught unit, with similar teacher derived points appearing in all essays. Another pitfall is when help is sought outside the classroom or in commercially produced essays. Monitoring of progress through a candidate log is a way of ensuring that the coursework is developing as a result of independent study. This is not an OCR requirement but would be a way of demonstrating independent study.

Helpful resources

OCR provides examples of marked work at different levels which are available. The OCR History team is available for guidance, for example on the choice of questions or here to find information on assessment. There is a commercially produced guide for students on OCR coursework which includes exercises and is in the form of a log maintained by students. There are also guides produced by OCR about the process of research and the marking of coursework. OCR runs workshops in coursework marking. There are guides on using historical sources, for example A Anderson and A Pickering OCR History B: Historical Explanation and Using Historical Evidence (2008). And Black and MacRaid Studying History, 2016.

Additional comments

The great effort and thought which went into centre marking is an indication of how seriously this unit is taken by teachers and it is greatly appreciated by moderators. The integrity of teachers who while rewarding developed analysis and evaluation have a realistic view of work which is less successful is an essential element in the success and validity of the unit. The educational value of independent research is considerable but it would not be possible to give students the opportunity to develop their skills and understanding without the support of teachers and it is only right to recognise their commitment and hard work in this report.

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