

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y318/01 Autumn 2020 series

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.



Reports for the Autumn 2020 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate answers.

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.

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Paper Y318 series overview

Y318 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.

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 such as correctly/incorrectly/valid/invalid • were able to consider both the strengths and limitations of both Interpretations using contextual knowledge • covered elements of both paragraphs in each passage • 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 • demonstrated an understanding and familiarity with the different command verbs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • did not 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 overview

The interpretation question was, on the whole, answered well. Most candidates were able to access the higher levels by clearly linking their own knowledge to the views and opinions mentioned. At the top end, candidates used precise and accurate own knowledge, explaining that A reflected the view that opposition to Alexander II came about due to the peasantry and the zemstva. B argues that opposition arose from the universities and intelligentsia.

The most successful answers dealt with each interpretation in turn before coming to a measured conclusion. Answers which attempted a thematic approach often were confused and lacked evaluation, leading to an essay-like approach. Centres should be aware that credit is given in assessing the relative convincingness of the views that are present in each interpretation. Answers which went on to list impacts that were not present in each interpretation did not score highly, as they were not explicitly evaluating the view of each historian. This was often highlighted or prefixed by the phrase 'fails to mention'.

Candidates should not be evaluating what is not there, but instead focus on the actual views presented and testing them against historical knowledge.

Centres should also be aware that there is no requirement to mention other historians.

With regards to Interpretation A, most candidates were able explain opposition following the emancipation but also identified the weakness in the passage in that it does not portray the positive nature of the zemstva. Those at lower levels just described the interpretation. As for Interpretation B, most were able to identify its key message that opposition arose from the universities. In the lower levels, however, many mentioned the fact that only one factor was present. The interpretation was, the argument followed, was weak as it was limited.

Candidates should explore the strength of the argument presented, rather than critique the number of points made.

Section B overview

There were a greater number of candidates who answered Questions 2 and 3. Those candidates who did attempt Question 4 often answered this question well due to their thematic structure.

Question 2

This question was popular with candidates.

At the top end, candidates assessed three or four rulers and their policies towards living and working conditions within each paragraph, evaluating the level of continuity or change in each area. Successful responses utilised the word 'similarly' and then explained the level of success. Finally, answers in the top level contained interim assessments (or end of paragraph judgements) before writing a developed conclusion. The key to this question was selecting the right themes. This question is about living and working conditions; as such candidates who explored housing, conditions in agriculture and conditions in the factories, for example were able to achieve the higher levels.

At the lower end of the mark range, candidates did one of the following:

- wrote chronologically
- were unable to compare rulers within thematic paragraphs
- selected the wrong themes to explore (e.g. political conditions, education). This was particularly important as candidates who attempted a thematic answer but assessed these themes were unable to meet the demands of the question. Repression was also a popular theme, but it needed to be explicitly linked to the changes in living and/or working conditions to be credited.

Question 3

At the top end, candidates assessed three or four wars and assessed their impact economically within each paragraph, evaluating the level of help or hinderance in each area. Successful responses used the word 'similarly' and then explained the level of success, comparing wars effectively. Finally, answers in the top level contained interim assessments (or end of paragraph judgements) before writing a developed conclusion.

The key to this question was selecting the right themes and also only using wars as examples. This question is about economic development; as such candidates who explored agriculture, industry, working conditions (including famine) or foreign investment, for example, were able to achieve the higher levels.

- At the lower end of the mark range, candidates did one of the following:
- wrote chronologically
- were unable to compare wars within thematic paragraphs
- wrote about wars in the first paragraph but then picked other topics or factors that hindered economic development
- selected the wrong themes to explore (e.g. political and social development). This was particularly important as candidates who attempted a thematic answer but assessed these themes were unable to meet the demands of the question.

Question 4

This was the least popular question. Candidates were able to identify themes and evaluate the level of control. The most successful answers (of which there were few) addressed political, economic and social control and the extent to which it was more secure after 1945.

At the top end, candidates used the period after 1945 at the start of each paragraph before comparing it to two other time periods (in each paragraph). Successful answers were able to compare throughout the paragraph (this was more secure than... .. because..) and then assessed at the end. The best conclusions assessed the period in each theme to reach a sustained judgement.

At the lower end of the mark range, candidates wrote about chronological periods as factors or did not assess the whole period.

Centres should be aware that this style of question is not designed to assess whether two periods were similar or not; it is about assessing when there was the most secure control. Candidates should be encouraged, therefore, to come to a sustained judgement about the importance of the period in the question in relation to others; not whether it was similar to them.

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