

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

HISTORY A

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in History A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y219/01 Summer 2025 series

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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. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. 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 and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper Y219 series overview

Y219 is one of twenty-four units in Paper 2 for the A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of about 100 years through a short answer essay question and a traditional essay question. The paper contains two questions, each having two parts, a short answer essay and a traditional essay. Candidates must answer both parts of one question.

To do well on the short answer essay question, candidates need to consider the significance or importance of both issues, factors, individuals or events mentioned in relation to the question. Having analysed or explained both they must reach a supported judgement as to which is the most important or significant.

To do well on the traditional essay, candidates need to address the issue in the question, using detailed supporting knowledge. To reach the higher levels candidates need to assess the issues they discuss and reach a supported judgement, at least in the conclusion.

Both questions were equally popular among the candidates.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- gave equal consideration to the two issues in the short answer essay - reached a developed and supported judgement as to which issue was more significant or important - linked their knowledge of the issues to the focus of the question - discussed at least two relevant issues in depth in the traditional essay question - gave supporting detail that was both accurate and relevant to the question set, not just the topic - reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question - made a series of interim judgements about the issues discussed in relation to the question.	- considered only one of the two issues in the short answer essay or discussed one in a superficial way - produced a judgement that was not supported and was, therefore, assertion or a judgement that did not follow logically from the response - were unable to use their knowledge to address the issue in the question - showed a lack of understanding of the major issues relevant to the traditional essay question - were unable to support their response with relevant or accurate material - did not focus on the precise wording of the question - made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions.

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Question 1 (a) (i) and (ii)

1
(a) Which of the following had the greater impact on Russia during the period from 1894 to 1905?

(i) The influence of Pobedonostsev

(ii) The influence of Witte

Explain your answer with reference to both **(i)** and **(ii)**.

[10]

Responses needed to assess which of these two men had the greater impact on Russia between 1894 and 1905. There were a number of candidates who had difficulty with this question because there was an imbalance of knowledge and, therefore, in analysis between the two men. Most candidates had knowledge of Witte and the differentiating factor was the quality of their knowledge.

However, there were a significant number of candidates whose knowledge was less detailed concerning Pobedonostsev. As a result, some candidates provided generalised knowledge and analysis for this factor, and this meant that those responses were considered to be 'partial' answers. In which case, such answers could not attain above Level 4. Most candidates were aware that Pobedonostsev was Nicholas II's tutor. More accomplished answers showed candidates' detailed knowledge by referring to Pobedonostsev's role as Procurator General of the Holy Synod which gave him huge influence over religion and education. His anti-Semitism was reflected in the pogroms of the 1890s.

Misconception



Witte was not Prime Minister in the 1890s. He was Prime Minister for a short time between November 1905 and May 1906.

He was Minister of Transport for a short time from February to August 1892 and then Minister of Finance from 1892 to 1903.

Exemplar 1

1.	a.	The influence of Pobedonostev on Russia during the period from 1894 to 1905 was limited. This is because he was most effective prior to 1894, during the reign of Alexander III, Tsar Nicholas II's father. Pobedonostev was the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod from 1880. Taking on board this role, he influenced the church as well as educational and social policies with his strong beliefs in orthodoxy, which continued during Tsar Nicholas II's reign after 1894. Pobedonostev had also been Nicholas' tutor and influenced Nicholas' beliefs on autocracy, nationalism and orthodoxy, which he carried strongly in his beliefs and rule throughout 1894 to 1905. Pobedonostev was also anti-semitist, responsible for a lot of Jewish attacks which was also adopted by Nicholas, making Jews a perceived threat to Russia and his rule when they were of no direct threat. Nicholas was scapegoated onto Jews & throughout 1894 to 1905, accusing them of being revolutionaries. Pobedonostev was also writer and adviser of Russian Law in 1864, was publishing 'a
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		course of civil law' which was also adopted by Nicholas, as well as his judicial reforms.
		The influence of Witte lawyer on Russia during the period from 1894 to 1905 was of greater impact in comparison to Pobedonostev. In 1891, Witte was appointed Minister of Transport and in 1892, he was appointed Minister of Finance. These roles were crucial to his successes later on towards the period when he was appointed as President in 1905. During this time he shift focus from agriculture to industrialisation. He put the rouble on the gold standard' which produced the 'great spurt'. From this, coal production doubled and the production of steel and iron also increased. Witte also played a crucial role in the peace negotiations of the Russo-Japanese war, 1904-1905, where the treaty of Portsmouth, August 1905 was signed and Port Arthur was surrendered in December of that year. After the Russo-Japanese war, Witte also helped Tsar

		Nicholas write up the October Manifesto, 1905, in response to the defeat of the Russo-Japanese war. Witte also reintroduced reliance on foreign loans, raising taxes and foreign experts. Under Witte, the railway tracks of the Trans-Siberian railway increased, but was not completed and there was a lack of focus on textile industries as the priority was to focus on heavy industry.
		In conclusion, when discussing which of the following had the greater impact on Russia during the period from 1894 to 1905, it is clear that Witte had greater impact with his role of President. Under Witte's tenure, the Russian economy significantly improved with the new and successful approach of shifting from agriculture to industrialisation, reliance on foreign loans, foreign experts and raising taxes, which ultimately led to the 'great spurt' which industrial production doubling in most cases such as with coal. Pobedonostev did have an impact on Russia, however he had greater

		impact prior the period from 1894
		to 1905 as his successes during
		Alexander III's reign were carried on
		by Nicholas II, making his impact
		between 1894 to 1905 indirect
		rather than direct.

Exemplar 1 is a successful attempt to address Question 1 (a), particularly in the range of knowledge of Pobedonostsev. The response attained Level 5.

Question 1 (b)*

(b)* 'Lenin's leadership of Russia was **not** a success.'

How far do you agree?

[20]

The purpose of this question was for candidates to assess whether Lenin's leadership of Russia was a 'success'. Some candidates needed to think carefully about the words used in the question. Firstly, 'Lenin's leadership of Russia' provides clues concerning the time period involved in the question. Lenin was leader of Russia from the October Revolution 1917 to his death in 1924. Some candidates did not fully appreciate these dates and wrote their answers to include the time that Lenin was leader of the Bolshevik Party.

The statement in the question is that his leadership 'was not a success'. Some candidates did not fully understand that the question required them to provide knowledge and analysis covering both sides of the argument as to whether he was successful or not. Therefore, some candidates only provided one side of the argument which meant that their answers were 'partial' and could not attain more than Level 3.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should always read the question carefully. They should identify the key words and phrases, and it is advisable to use those words throughout a response. This should help to keep an answer focused on the specific demands of the question.

Question 2 (a) (i) and (ii)

2

(a) Which of the following was more important in increasing Stalin's control over the Russian people in the 1930s?

(i) Stalin's 'Cult of Personality'

(ii) The growth of the police state

Explain your answer with reference to both (i) and (ii).

[10]

The purpose of this question was for candidates to assess which of these two factors was more important in increasing Stalin's control over the Russian people. Most candidates were able to provide knowledge and some analysis for both factors. However, there was some imbalance in the quality of knowledge and analysis. Most candidates were able to address the issue of 'The growth of the police state' and many provided good knowledge showing the extent of activities of the police state that removed opposition throughout Russian society.

However, some candidates were less comfortable with the other factor: 'Cult of Personality'. There were some responses that used this factor to write a general description of the use of propaganda rather than fully analysing the concept of 'Cult of Personality' which focused on projecting the image of Stalin as the 'vozhd'.

The more accomplished responses were able to address the key issue as to whether these factors increased Stalin's control and, therefore, achieve the higher levels by providing a judgement as to which one was more important.

Exemplar 2

2	a	Stalin's cult of personality was very important in increasing Stalin's control over the Russian people in the 1930s because it allowed the population to idolise and worship him and thus be less likely to oppose him. For example, Stalin rewrote history textbooks around him to make him a hero and thus villainise others such as Trotsky. He also used photoshop to crop out Trotsky or create the idea that Stalin was the closest figure to Lenin and thus his next right successor, even though this was not representative of real life, as displayed through Lenin's testament since he distrusted Stalin over the Georgian question where Stalin called Lenin's wife a 'whore'. Furthermore, Stalin made sure public life and celebrations revolved around him. For example, on Stalin's 50th birthday in 1929 he ensured that his birthday became the most popular holiday of the year, supporting his idolisation. However, it can be argued that the cult of personality was only important in cities and towns where literacy rates were as high as 90%, and not in the countryside, which was cut off from society and frequently opposed Stalin. Nevertheless, it is still important to consider as it allowed Stalin to represent himself as a superior for people to worship, reducing opposition and thus allowed him to consolidate power easier. In contrast, the growth of the police state was more important as it affected the whole of society, not just the cities. The secret police, known as the NKVD or GPU, were behind a lot of the terror and resulted in over 1 million deaths. The method to do this was known as the purges, which involved executing any potential opponent by placing them on a show trial, where their guilt had already been predetermined. For example
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		in 1934 when a leading party member Kirov was shot in December, Zinoviev and Kamenev were placed on trial for being a political threat despite being innocent. The great purge 1936-9 executed over 3000 party members. Stalin also created labour camps by imprisoning opponents until their trial known as the Gulag. It is estimated that 1 in 8 of the population fell victim to the purges and not one family was safe. Therefore, the growth of the police state was more important as it reduced opposition across the whole USSR not just in cities.
		in conclusion, the growth of the police state was more important in increasing Stalin's control of the Russian people in the 1930s. Although the cult of personality was important, it rallied support only in towns and cities not in the countryside. In contrast, the purges created terror and fear across all of society, and no one was safe from oppression, thus forcing them to submit to Stalin, making it the more important factor.

Exemplar 2 is a successful attempt to address Question 2 (a), particularly the factor 'Cult of Personality'. The response attained Level 5.

Question 2 (b)*

(b)* 'The actions of Kerensky were the most important reason for Bolshevik success in Russia in 1917.'

How far do you agree?

[20]

The purpose of the question was to assess the reasons for Bolshevik success in 1917. The candidates were given the reason, 'the actions of Kerensky' and were expected to assess that reason against other factors to decide whether Kerensky's actions were the most important. The aspect that differentiated candidates was the quality of their knowledge and analysis.

In relation to the given factors, most candidates were able to explain one or two of Kerensky's actions, usually his handling of The Kornilov Affair and the failure of the June Offensive. More accomplished responses showed a wider range of knowledge and included Kerensky's reforms, when Justice Minister, that provided an amnesty to exiles that allowed Bolsheviks to return to Russia. Also, his decision to close the newspapers and, later, to seal off Petrograd that provided the pretext for the November Revolution.

In terms of other factors, most candidates argued that the roles of Lenin and Trotsky were important along with the failings of the Provisional Government.

Misconception



Kerensky was not Prime Minister for the whole period of the Provisional Government from March to November 1917. From March to May he was Minister of Justice. From May to September, he was Minister of War and Navy. **He was Prime Minister from July to November 1917.**

He was also Vice Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet from March to November.

Exemplar 3

		In his position, Kerensky was arguably a very detrimental figure in the stability of the provisional government and its eventual removal by the Bolsheviks in October 1917. For example, in June 1917, as Minister of War, Kerensky launched the failed June Offensive, which led to significant casualties for the Russian army, estimated around 3,000, and created unrest and dissatisfaction amongst the public who were beginning to view the provisional as weak and largely incapable of performing its role. Beyond this, in August of 1917, the provisional government faced the threat of the
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		Kornilov affair, in which Kornilov appeared to be threatening the implementation of a military dictatorship in his journey towards Petrograd. This event in itself weakened simply occurring weakened the provisional government, as it exposed its vulnerability to revolution which was later exploited by the Bolsheviks. Further, Kerensky allowed the Bolsheviks to gain an even greater level of power by turning them with defending Petrograd, creating an image of the Bolsheviks as the strong defenders of the security of Russia whilst only further diminishing the image of Kerensky and highlighting his incapabilities once again. Additionally, it appeared that as Prime Minister Kerensky largely ignored the needs of the Russian people, as demands for reforms such as an 8-hour work day went unmet, leaving the growing industrialised population - 2.9 million in 1913 - to suffer and grow continually discontent, turning the Bolsheviks as many within this social group began turning to them as an alternative. Therefore, it is clear that Kerensky's actions did have an impact of on Bolshevik success in 1917. However, he was not the only influence on this growing success, nor was of the greatest significance.
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Exemplar 3 is a successful attempt to address the issue of 'Kerensky's actions' showing a range of mistakes that he made. The response attained Level 5.

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