

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

HISTORY A

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in History A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y213/01 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.

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Paper Y213 series overview

Y213 is one of twenty-four units in Paper 2 for the A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests a coherent period of non-British history 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 have to 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.

There was approximately an even split in terms of choice of question.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• were clear about terminology and names • had a clear grasp of chronology and, therefore, relevance • could structure their ideas successfully • could marshal relevant evidence effectively.	• confused terminology and names • had a muddled sense of chronology and, therefore, relevance • did not give form to their ideas • were short of relevant evidence.

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

1

(a) Which of the following was a more important cause of the French Revolution?

(i) The structure of the Ancien Régime

(ii) The financial problems of France

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

[10]

Most candidates had an understanding of both factors and could deploy some relevant material. How well this material was assessed as a cause of the revolution was a key discriminator. Simply describing the peculiarities of the Ancien Régime or making a list of financial problems limited candidates' success. A common problem was that candidates did not distinguish between 'financial' and 'economic' problems, leading to passages of marginal relevance. Few candidates were really confident about the relationship between financial problems and the calling of the Estates-General.

Exemplar 1

1	a	The structure of the Ancien Regime was an important cause of the French Revolution, however it was not the most important. The Ancien Regime was made up of an estates system, where the king, nobility and clergy were at the top and the peasants were at the bottom. The peasants (the Third Estate) were compelled to pay high direct and indirect taxation to the Crown as well as tithes to the church, which the first and second estates were not. This bred intense inequality in France and angered the bourgeoisie and representatives from the third estate. This led to members of the Third Estate calling for members of the other estates to join them in creating a National Assembly to reform taxation at the Estates General, directly challenging Louis' authority to call assemblies and kickstarting the French Revolution at the Tennis Court Oath, which denied Louis' legal and moral authority. While Ancien inequality bred discontent among the Third Estate due to their unfair exploitation by the church and the crown, this was not the most important reason for the French Revolution, as most of the Third Estate lived in rural areas which still believed in the Divine Right of Kings, therefore did not seek to challenge Louis' authority and most peasants revered him, though they disliked the Ancien system. It was only a minority of Third Estate members in Paris who took the action of creating the National Assembly, and arguably, more discontent was bred breed bred in the nobility and clergy due to the financial crisis^{than in the Third Estate exploited}, therefore the structure
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of the Ancien Regime was not the most important reason.

The most important cause of the French Revolution was the financial problems of France. The crown was heavily in debt due to spending of the American Revolution and King Louis' extravagant spending habits, and over 50% of income was spent on interest repayments. There were many attempts to alleviate France's bankruptcy by Turgot, Necker and Calonne, however the nobility became ^{and impacted} mistrustful by the crown's lack of necessary action, and when Calonne tried to pass his tax reforms at the Assembly of the Nobility, they decreed it could only be solved by an Estates General. This is more of an ^{created or caused in the institutional clerical and nobility and clergy} important cause of the French Revolution as financial problems forced the crown to call an Estates General, after the Aristocratic Revolt, as the crown was bankrupt, and without the discussion which occurred at the Estates General, the National Assembly may never have been formed and the Third Estate would not have had a platform to challenge King Louis over the Ancien Regime's inequality. Arguably, the challenge of the King at the Estates General and the subsequent formation of the National Assembly kickstarted the revolution as it threatened Louis the most, and ~~as~~ without the financial problems of the crown, the Estates General would never have been called, therefore financial problems were the most important cause of the French Revolution.

		France's financial problems were the most important
		cause of the French Revolution, as while the Third
		estate were upset with the inequalities of the Ancien
		Régime, from socially and economically, it was only
		a minority of the Third estate who supported the removal
		of the National Assembly at the Estates General which
		would later propel the revolution. The Estates
		General would never have been called without
		action from the nobility and clergy due to the
		disagreement over financial problems, therefore those
		who benefited most from Ancien inequality had
		more of a role to play in starting the revolution, therefore
		financial problems were the most important cause

Exemplar 1 is a competent response which does relate both factors to the outbreak of the revolution. It is accurate but does not fully assess the consequences of Calonne's failed reforms in 1787. There is a substantiated judgement, so it was given 7 marks, Level 5.

Question 1 (b)*

(b)* How successful was Napoleon as a military leader in the period from 1799 to 1807?

[20]

This question produced a wide variety of responses, some with a sharp focus and control, others with a weaker sense of relevance. The central problem seen in a good number of responses was the chronological boundaries of the question, 1799-1807. This rendered all material up to the end of 1798 and after 1807 irrelevant. For instance, references to the 'Italian campaign' had to be to conflict in Italy after 1799 (i.e. the Marengo campaign) not to the Italian campaign of 1796-7. Further complications ensued if candidates confused the War of the Third Coalition (France against Austria, Russia and Great Britain) with the War of the Fourth Coalition (France against Prussia, Russia and Britain) and used Prussia and Russia interchangeably. Better responses appreciated Napoleon's success through to the Treaty of Tilsit, balancing this with naval setbacks and important contributions from his subordinates.

Exemplar 2

1	b	it can be said that Napoleon was very successful as a military leader from 1799-1807 and this can be supported by his crucial victories at the battles of Marengo, Ulm, and Austerlitz. However, this success was tainted by his failure at the Battle of Trafalgar at the hands of Britain. Firstly, the battle of Marengo Battle of Austerlitz was Napoleon's most resounding success in the period as it was a decisive victory and demonstrated Napoleon's masterful battle tactics. His effective use of the terrain as well as his 'false weakness' on the right flank of his army allowed him to out outsmart Austrian, Prussian and Russian forces to claim a decisive victory that ended the War of the Fourth Coalition. Furthermore, the decision to pursue ^{fleeing} Russian forces and drown them in an ice lake demonstrated his willingness and determination to secure total victory. Therefore, the Battle of Austerlitz was Napoleon's most resounding success as a military leader as it demonstrated his revolutionary tactics and their superiority over his enemies.
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Secondly, the ~~Battle~~^{was} of Marengo ~~and~~
~~Ulm~~^{was} were Napoleon's next largest

examples of his ~~military~~ success as a military leader from 1799-1807, however ~~they~~^{it} ~~were~~^{was} not as large as Austerlitz due to the size of enemy forces and so ~~are~~^{is} less important. The Battle of Marengo took place during Napoleon's Italian campaign and saw the defeat of joint Austrian and Piedmontese forces, resulting in the Treaty of Campo-Formio which ended the War of the First Coalition and cemented France's territorial gains in Europe. Therefore, this demonstrates Napoleon's success as he ended the war as well as securing dominance in Europe and millions worth ~~in~~^{of} war indemnities and plunder that could boost France's economy.

Thirdly, the Battle of Ulm was another example of Napoleon's success as a military leader, however, it was less important than Marengo and Austerlitz due to the fact that its consequences made less of an impact despite once again showing Napoleon's military prowess. Ulm demonstrated the strength of Napoleon's relationships with his generals as he trusted them

to follow his orders and split up to surround Austrian forces. This use of revolutionary tactics allowed the French to swiftly defeat the Austrians before Prussian support arrived, paving the way for them to continue their march towards Vienna. Therefore, the Battle of Ulm showed Napoleon's success as a military leader through his use of battle tactics, however, Ulm was more of a stepping-stone than a decisive battle that ended a war.

Despite being largely successful as a military leader from 1799-1807, Napoleon experienced a devastating failure at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1804. This was the first major defeat of the Napoleonic Wars and it came at the hands of France's largest enemy - Britain. British naval tactics, under the command of Admiral Nelson, were superior to those of the French which allowed them to break their line of ships and win the battle. Furthermore, Napoleon's chief general at sea didn't listen to his orders ~~no~~ during the battle which contributed to defeat. This

		lack of ^{effective} communication demonstrates that Napoleon was not always successful as a military leader, and that perhaps he was much more effective at on land than at sea. However, the fact that Britain's navy was superior to the French must also be acknowledged, as the British Royal Navy would continue to cause France problems after 1807. Therefore, the Battle of Trafalgar is the most important example of Napoleon's failure as a military leader from 1799 to 1807, but it can be said that it is outweighed by Napoleon's other successes.
		In conclusion, it can be said that, overall, Napoleon was very successful as a military leader from 1799 - 1807 due to his revolutionary tactics at the battles of Ulm and Austerlitz as well as his ability to defeat several coalition forces throughout the period. However, he wasn't always successful and he suffered a key loss at the Battle of Trafalgar which ended his hopes of an invasion of Britain and broke the illusion of French invincibility he had created.

Exemplar 2 illustrates some of the pitfalls candidates faced if their grasp of events was uncertain. Some understanding is evident and there is relevant basic support, despite some factual confusion and occasional irrelevance. As the response 'generally addresses the question' it was given 11 marks, Level 4.

Chronological boundaries

It was essential that candidates took account of the chronological boundaries of this question. There is a wealth of material from 1799 to 1807.

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

2

(a) Which of the following was of greater importance in the overthrow of the French monarchy in 1792?

- (i) The military crisis
- (ii) The sans-culottes

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

[10]

There were some very good responses to this question when candidates appreciated that the overthrow of the French monarchy occurred on 10th August 1792 when the sans-culottes invaded the Tuileries for the second time. Understanding the sans-culottes' mentality was important, as was the catalysing impact of the war, leading to the Brunswick manifesto. Less successful responses confused events, straying into September 1792 and beyond.

Question 2 (b)*

(b)* How important was Britain's role in the defeat of Napoleon?

[20]

This question produced a significant number of good answers. A simple structure of balancing Britain's role against, typically, two other factors suggested itself and worked well for many candidates. The best responses understood the different ways in which Britain contributed to Napoleon's defeat: navally, financially, diplomatically and in the Peninsular War.

Exemplar 3

2	b	The defeat of Napoleon is predominantly evident after his failures in the Russia campaign in 1812 and the 'attritional warfare' during the 'Spanish ulcer' (1808-1814). However, the most important reason for the defeat of Napoleon was Britain due to their sustained role in coalitions and campaigns against the French. Although, the Russian campaign and Spanish ulcer must be considered as other significant factors that catalyse the defeat of Napoleon. The most important reason for the defeat of Napoleon is due to the British's persistent involvement in coalitions against the French. There is evidence of the British's involvement towards the defeat of Napoleon during his rise to power such as when Napoleon had lost a naval battle during his Egyptian campaigns (1798) at the Battle of the Nile (1 August 1798) against Admiral Horatio Nelson leading the British fleet. Moreover, the British's naval supremacy over the French is demonstrated at the Battle of Trafalgar (1805, October) when the French and Spanish alliance fleet of 33 ships had again lost to Nelson who strategically outmanoeuvred the allied fleet with 27 ships. The battle during the 3rd coalition against France led to 16,000 casualties and 7,000 captured men - an embarrassing defeat for Napoleon in the midst of his continuous success in military victories such as
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the 'Ulm envelopment' (October 1805) and the battle of Austerlitz (December 1805). The British were a consistent threat for the French as they took part in all 7 of the coalitions that were formed against France. Additionally, the British cemented Napoleon's final defeat on 18th June 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo, where the Duke of Wellington forced the French army into a retreat of desperation as the British and additionally 50,000 Prussian soldiers chased the French off the battlefield. This victory for the British led to Napoleon's abdication and him being sent into exile to the island of St. Helena under the terms established between Napoleon and the British's Duke of Wellington. Therefore, Britain played the most important role due to the long-term threat navally and final victory at Waterloo that cemented Napoleon's defeat in 1815.

However, the second most important factor that is important in Napoleon's defeat in the 'Spanish ulcer', also known as the 'Iberian Peninsula war'. Perhaps Napoleon's defeat is owed to his hubris of ambition and imperial vision as his underestimation of Spanish resistance after he appointed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte - King of Spain (1808). This strategic manoeuvre by Napoleon led to Spanish uprisings triggered by the first rebellion against Spanish rule. French rule in France in Madrid

		(June 1808). The Spanish resistance persisted between 1808-1814 and led to over 300-350,000 deaths / losses for the French primarily due to guerrilla warfare and disease across Spain. Nevertheless, the Spanish Ulcer was a large-scale loss of the French and a sudden threat that Napoleon largely underestimated when invading Spain to establish the Continental Blockade. However, the extent to which the Spanish Ulcer had affected Napoleon's defeat was catalysed by British involvement, for instance, the Duke of Wellington provided the Spanish with 80,000 troops and £18 million to assist them in their fight against French authoritarianism under a Napoleonic empire. This suggests that the Spanish ulcer was pivotal in draining Napoleon's resources and army for his future campaigns / ambitions, but the British's role arguably catalysed his defeat due to their assistance to Spain during the Spanish Ulcer.
		The third most important factor that played a role in Napoleon's defeat was the Russian campaign (1812). After the Tsar Alexander refused to no longer comply with the terms of Treaty of Tilsitz (1807) such as the 'Continental Blockade' against Britain, Napoleon brought his Grand Armée of between 450,000 - 600,000 men to Russia. This decision by Napoleon arguably cemented his defeat as the losses of men, resources and his image to Europe had so led to his defeat at Leipzig.

(1813) in the 'Battle of the Nations' and Waterloo (1815). The French were successful when arriving to Moscow as they won a 'pyrric victory' at the Battle of Borodino against the Russian General Kutusov, yet their return from the 'burnt city' had been the primary cause of Napoleon's long-term defeat. Upon Napoleon's return from the Russian campaign, the French had lost approximately 500,000 men due to the cold conditions, guerrilla warfare tactics and disease. This large-scale loss of morale and men within the French army had led Napoleon's future battles to be fought with reluctance as the Russian campaign had established that Napoleon's indecision can cause significant consequences for France. Therefore, the Russian campaign played a pivotal role in the defeat of Napoleon but it is less significant than the British's role and the Spanish Ulcer due to the continuous attrition that these factors provoked overtime as Napoleon grew closer toward his final defeat at Waterloo (1815).

In conclusion, the main and most important reason that led to Napoleon's defeat was Britain's role. Their ability to consistently threaten Napoleon whether it is navally or economically as illustrated Napoleon's obsession with the Continental Blockade, Britain plays a persistent underlying threat to Napoleon which cemented his final defeat at

		waterloo (June 1815). Similarly, the Spanish Ulcer
		plays an important role in Napoleon's defeat but
		there is evidence of Britain's involvement that
		worsens the losses and consequences that Napoleon
		faces due to the Spanish resistance. Moreover,
		the Russian campaign is the third most significant
		factor in the defeat of Napoleon as it
		similarly brings large-scale losses that Napoleon is
		evidently unable to regain due to losses during
		the 6 th and 7 th coalition. However, Britain's continual
		role in threatening France is ultimately the
		primary cause of Napoleon's defeat.

Exemplar 3 shows good understanding, a workable 3-factor structure and generally good coverage of the material with at least some comment on the Waterloo campaign, so it was given 15 marks, Level 5.

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