

Moderators' report

A LEVEL

# HISTORY A

**OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in History A**

**H505**

For first teaching in 2015

**Y100/01/02 Summer 2025 series**

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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 the 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 comment on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. The 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 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.

### Online courses

We have created online courses to build your confidence in delivering, marking and administering internal assessment for our qualifications. Courses are available for Cambridge Nationals, GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016).

#### Cambridge Nationals

All teachers delivering our Cambridge Nationals suite are asked to complete the Essentials for the NEA course, which describes how to guide and support your students. You'll receive a certificate which you should retain.

Following this you can also complete a subject-specific Focus on Internal Assessment course for your individual Cambridge Nationals qualification, covering marking and delivery.

#### GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016)

We recommend all teachers complete the module on Online courses – NEA for their subject. These courses provide subject-specific information about course content; how to prepare for planning, marking and submitting; and support with understanding the marking criteria.

### Accessing our online courses

You can access all our online courses from our teacher support website [Teach Cambridge](#).

These free online courses currently cover the end-to-end NEA process for teachers. You'll find the link to the **Online courses** under the **Assessment** or **Training** tab – hover over **Assessment** or **Training** on the horizontal menu and select **Online courses** from the dropdown.

These self-paced online courses are intended for any teachers. During the course, you will engage with interactive content on subjects such as guidance on unit content, structure and administrative processes.

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## General overview

There was a wide range of topics and the majority of essays sampled were aware of different interpretations. Few just relied on description or narrative, and most used both primary and secondary sources. Most answers stayed within the suggested word guidance, but some work was considerably above that. In many cases, this resulted in unnecessary description or deviation from the main theme of the essay. This is an essay, not an extended dissertation and the key skills of analysis and evaluation can be delivered within the suggested word limit. A key skill is to master often complex material and present it clearly in such a way that different interpretations and evidence are explained and evaluated in a way that leads to a convincing judgement. It is intended that this should be possible within the suggested word limits.

Relatively few essays did not attempt any evaluation of evidence, but the quality of the judgements did vary quite considerably as the centres' assessments indicated. Advice has been given previously that evaluation should be undertaken in a similar way to the examined units. In those units the requirement is that both analysis of provenance and contextual knowledge should be used to test primary evidence. Secondary sources should be evaluated by using contextual knowledge as in Unit 3 Interpretations.

### Synoptic assessment

The NEA requires candidates to use skills which they have been taught in other units. Effective teaching will make sure that candidates understand this and apply the evaluative skills applied in Units 1, 2 and 3 to coursework. The OCR scheme of work is helpful in supporting this skills-based, synoptic approach.

A key requirement when assessing overall interpretations and the evidence which supports them is that the issue which the candidate has chosen to investigate remains the focus of the whole essay. Careful thought should be given to what the chosen questions require. The different interpretations and evidence must relate to the key issue. If, for example, the topic of Hitler's 'consolidation of power' is chosen, then the focus must be on consolidation, not acquisition. If an essay investigates the fall of Nicholas II in 1917 then that must be the focus of the answer, not merely a series of problems faced by the regime since the accession of the Tsar. If a question asks about whether Elizabeth's House of Commons agreed more than they disagreed with her throughout her reign, then the reign as a whole must be considered. If a question asks about the relative importance of foreign intervention on the outcome of the Spanish Civil War, then the causes of the war and the reasons why Britain and France did not offer more help should not be seen as useful unless they directly relate to the key issue. A major transferable skill that this paper helps to develop is the selection of relevant material and sustaining a focus on the key issues raised by the question.

The support which may be given to candidates is set out in the specification and also in the scheme of work. If a question is simply not working for a candidate, then it is possible and indeed advisable to change it by contacting OCR rather than persisting with a question which is proving difficult for various reasons. These may include the difficulties in establishing a debate; problems in accessing appropriate materials or realising that the scope of the question is either too great or too detailed. Obviously, an important part of this paper is choosing a question appropriate to the individual interests and abilities of each candidate, and advice is available on this. However, if a choice turns out to need modifying or replacing then this is entirely possible.

| Candidates who did well generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Candidates who did less well generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>kept a consistent focus on the issue in their question and understood its demands (AO1)</li> <li>explained and evaluated different factors thoroughly (AO1)</li> <li>organised their essays effectively and communicated their argument convincingly (AO1)</li> <li>selected primary sources which were directly related to the issue under discussion (AO2)</li> <li>explained how the sources related to the issue and also gave key information about the author and date of the source, appropriately referenced (AO2)</li> <li>offered sustained evidence of evaluation of primary evidence supported by consideration of provenance and the use of relevant knowledge (AO2)</li> <li>chose to use secondary sources which were directly relevant to the issue in the question and made it clear what interpretation of the issue was being given by each historian (AO3)</li> <li>evaluated, clearly explained and referenced interpretations by deploying well selected and detailed knowledge (AO3).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>included irrelevant material or did not engage with the issue in the question sufficiently</li> <li>did not support their explanations of different perspectives and described them rather than making clear and supported evaluation (AO1)</li> <li>did not deal clearly with the issue in the question and offered a series of different explanations which did not lead to a coherent and convincing overall argument (AO1)</li> <li>chose sources which related more to the topic than to the exact question (AO2)</li> <li>did not explain who produced the source and did not date and contextualise the evidence (AO2)</li> <li>offered limited supported evaluation and made assumptions about reliability based on basic comments on the origin of the evidence (AO2)</li> <li>did not identify the overall interpretation of the historians used but relied on taking relatively small elements of information and using it to support an overall argument (AO3)</li> <li>offered only assertions about the accuracy or otherwise of historians' views or simply juxtaposed different views without analysing whether these were or were not convincing (AO3).</li> </ul> |

### AO3 interpretations

AO3 concerns historical interpretations, not just factual content or explanation. Picking out, say, a passage by a historian which explains the anti-war protests against the Vietnam War and trying to evaluate by showing there were protests is not the same as identifying an interpretation which argues that the protests had limited effects on the actual decision to withdraw from Vietnam, then evaluating that view.

## Most common causes of centres not passing

Candidates who did not pass offered limited description, sometimes more on the topic than the actual question and did not support their work by evaluating a range of primary and secondary evidence. Sometimes it seemed as if candidates who did not pass had found the demands of the question too difficult. It is important that centres take advantage of the permitted support which they can legitimately give to candidates and also change and adapt any question which is proving too problematic for particular candidates to something that is within their grasp and the scope of their research but still opens up the chance to demonstrate the key skills required.

## Common misconceptions

One misconception is that this is a standalone unit more akin to a separate research project rather than an essay which brings together skills already being practised in other units. The requirements for source evaluation in the Unit 1 Enquiry question are the same as the source evaluation requirements in the NEA, and this is not always understood.

Another misconception is that sheer length means greater depth. In many cases it means that analysis and higher level skills are diluted by descriptive passages, and that extraneous and unnecessary material is included.

There is some misconception about the term 'evaluation' in the marking of the NEA. Evaluation requires a critical judgement not just an explanation of the meaning of the source or even how it was used. It is possible to use a variety of sources, for example portraits or posters or artefacts, but there should be critical judgements if higher level marks in AO2 are to be justified.

There was some misconception about how to deploy contrasting views. Simply to explain that one historian's view is challenged or confirmed by that of another historian is not to offer supported evaluation in itself.

### Misconception



There is support available to clarify what is meant by evaluation of sources as marginal annotations show that this is often seen as explanation and analysis of the content of evidence rather than making a distinct and supported judgement. Advice is available from [history@ocr.org.uk](mailto:history@ocr.org.uk). There is also an OCR guide to assessing AO2.

## Avoiding potential malpractice

Insisting on careful referencing to show where evidence and interpretations have been sourced is helpful in avoiding plagiarism. The OCR scheme of work is helpful in offering a monitoring programme. Although not a requirement, the keeping of a research log is helpful when checking both progress and how the essay is based on individual research. Teaching research ethics and the use of internet resources and AI and ensuring that the centre's policies on these matters are documented, understood and applied is of the utmost importance. Suspicious language and writing which is untypical of the candidate should be investigated and there should be awareness of JCQ guidelines and requirements.

## Helpful resources

The key resource is the OCR guide to Coursework available on the website. There is a two-hour course available on OCR Train. There is a YouTube guide to marking the NEA. A scheme of work is available on the OCR Website. OCR also provides exemplar materials and training sessions. Please contact [history@ocr.org.uk](mailto:history@ocr.org.uk) for details.

*OCR A Level History Coursework Workbook* by Nicholas Fellows and Mike Wells is a step-by-step guide to the skills needed. More general guides on historical research are available, such as Anthony Brundage's *Going to the Sources* (2017 ed. Wiley Blackwell).

## Additional comments

There is different practice by centres in the scope offered to candidates in choosing titles. Choosing an appropriate title is of the utmost importance and OCR advice is that the title must offer opportunities for the full exercise of the skills in the Assessment Objectives. It is important for titles to be submitted and approved but it is not possible for the OCR advisory team to know if the question is suitable for each individual student both in the approach it requires and in the nature of the debate and subject matter.

Many candidates did respond positively to the research and analysis required by their questions, but some were less certain of the requirements and implications and found the skills required challenging. It is always possible for approved questions to be changed if research is leading a candidate in a different question. For example, if the question is 'How far did Elizabeth disagree with her parliaments more than she agreed' seemed to be problematic and research was leading a candidate more into 'How effectively did Elizabeth control her parliaments?' then it is perfectly possible and indeed sensible for the question to be changed. Permission is not set in stone, and it is part of the permitted process for progress to be monitored and research to be discussed.

Annotations were often plentiful and helpful, but it is a better guide to accurate assessment of AO2 and AO3 if the quality of the evaluation of identified sources is noted.

### OCR support



There is supporting material available from OCR on the important issue of choosing questions and the OCR Subject Advisors can be approached if a centre is uncertain about a question that is not on the OCR list of questions.

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# Supporting you

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- learn about the key principles and processes of internal assessment and standardisation
- gain a deeper understanding of the marking criteria and how to apply them consistently and accurately
- see examples of student work with commentary and feedback from OCR moderators
- have the opportunity to practise marking and compare your judgements with those of OCR moderators
- receive instant feedback and guidance on your marking and standardisation skills
- be able to track your progress and achievements through the courses.

### How can you access our online courses?

Access courses from [Teach Cambridge](#). Teach Cambridge is our secure teacher website, where you'll find all teacher support for your subject.

If you already have a Teach Cambridge account, you'll find the link to the **Online courses** under the **Assessment** or **Training** tab – hover over **Assessment** or **Training** on the horizontal menu and select **Online courses** from the dropdown.

If you don't have a Teach Cambridge account yet, ask your exams officer to set you up – just send them this [link](#) and ask them to add you as a Teacher.

Access the courses **anytime, anywhere and at your own pace**. You can also revisit the courses as many times as you need.

### Which courses are available?

We recommend all teachers complete the module on Online courses – NEA for their subject. These courses provide subject-specific information about course content; how to prepare for planning, marking and submitting; and support with understanding the marking criteria.

The subject-specific courses are tailored for each qualification that has non-exam assessment (NEA) units, except for AS Level and Entry Level. They cover the following topics:

- the structure and content of the NEA units
- the assessment objectives and marking criteria for the NEA units
- examples of student work with commentary and feedback for the NEA units
- interactive marking practice and feedback for the NEA units.

We are also developing courses for some of the examined units, which will be available soon.

### How can you get support and feedback?

If you have any queries, please contact our Customer Support Centre on 01223 553998 or email [support@ocr.org.uk](mailto:support@ocr.org.uk).

We welcome your feedback and suggestions on how to improve the online courses and make them more useful and relevant for you. You can share your views by completing the evaluation form at the end of each course.

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