

Examiners' report

GCSE

HISTORY A (EXPLAINING THE MODERN WORLD)

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in History A
(Explaining the Modern World)**

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/07 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 7 series overview

This component saw a range of candidate responses to all questions: teachers and candidates are again to be congratulated for the thoroughness of their preparation for this comprehensive paper. Most candidates attempted to respond to all questions. The range and quality of most responses was impressive, and candidates showed a flexibility of application of their skills when analysing source material and interpretations. Again, this year candidates performed very well in the interpretations section. It was also notable how much knowledge and understanding students have of international relations to support this study, especially in responses to Questions 1 and 2.

Candidates are now handling historical sources far better than in the past and are clearly being exposed to a range of sources and questions in class to support their preparation and skill development.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• utilised a wide range of contextual knowledge examples across all questions • were able to explain contextual knowledge examples about the question being asked • were able to analyse the content and context of historical interpretations • were able to compare their own historical knowledge to the interpretations provided • were able to draw complex inferences from the sources provided • were able to draw judgements from the sources provided to assess their historical utility • were able to provide balanced arguments to essay questions • were able to provide summary and comparative conclusion arguments.	• used generalised rather than specific historical examples • left identified factors undeveloped or did not relate them directly to the question asked • took historical sources at face value rather than placing them in context • were descriptive rather than analytical of sources and interpretations • listed historical knowledge regarding interpretations rather than analysing them in context • spoke about historical issues outside of the time periods covered in the questions asked • did not provide explanations relating to the question asked or conclusive paragraphs to compare arguments.

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Section A overview

In order to perform well on this International Relations period study candidates need to show understanding of the unfolding narrative of developments and issues between 1918 and 1975. This includes the clash of ideologies between the East and West, and how commentators and historians have viewed this and the policy of appeasement differently. These skills focus on Assessment Objectives 1, 2 and 4, showing knowledge, understanding and the ability to explain, as well as analysis and evaluation of historical interpretations.

As in the past, teachers and candidates are to be congratulated for the thoroughness of their preparation for this part of the course. The overwhelming majority of candidates attempted to answer all of the questions, and many wrote with excellent or very good knowledge and understanding. The range and quality of responses was impressive on all questions.

Question 1

International Relations: the changing international order 1918–1975

- 1 Outline how the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were intended to ensure future peace. [5]

This question targets AO1, where candidates use their knowledge and understanding to outline the key characteristics of the period, in this case, how the Treaty of Versailles was intended to keep the peace. As in previous years, this was generally a well-answered question with a range of responses across the spectrum. This is commendable as this area of the specified content forms the backdrop to the interpretations and we understand that centres do not have the time to cover the content in depth.

Most candidates were able to identify some or many of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and then develop this by explaining how one of more would keep the peace, reducing the threat to France or the wider European continent. If this was done quite simply, Level 2 would be achieved. If there was more knowledge and understanding, candidates achieved Level 3. Many responses focused on the military limitations of the Treaty or its financial and territorial penalties which would weaken Germany to make war less possible. Some focused on the reparations and demilitarisation of the Rhineland which would placate France and make her less hostile. Others explained the peace keeping role of the League of Nations which provided a route to conflict resolution through arbitration and discussion.

Less developed responses awarded in Level 2 tended to identify a term of the Treaty very briefly and assert how it would keep the peace, rather than show good understanding of why that would work in the context of the war recently fought. Some candidates had very good knowledge of the terms of the Treaty, but their outline of how it would keep the peace was not convincing, so they typically remained at the top of Level 2.

Exemplar 1

1		Treaty of Versailles was intended to ensure future peace by limiting the German army. The German army was limited to 100,000 troops and 6 ships to prevent potential invasions of countries by Germany ensuring peace for countries near Germany. Treaty of Versailles also force Germany to pay £6600 million in reparations. This crippled the German economic which made it difficult for Germany to rearm and reduces their industrial production making it hard for them to have funds to fund wars against surrounding countries ensuring peace.
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This candidate achieved full marks for a very clear outline of some terms of the Treaty and how they were intended to keep the peace. The candidate identifies limitations to the German military and provides some support for Level 2: even if '6 ships' is simplistic, we understand they mean 6 battleships, and the figure for the army is correct. By the start of the fourth line this has been successfully developed to Level 3 with comments about these limitations prevent potential invasions by Germany so there is 'peace for countries near Germany'. This approach is then repeated for the reparation limitations to Germany so with Level 3 achieved twice, there is no question of this being anything other than full marks.

Question 2

2 Explain why Cuba became a focus of tension between the USSR and the USA in the 1960s. [10]

This question focuses on AO1 and AO2, where candidates use their knowledge and understanding to explain, in this case, Cuba's role as a flashpoint in the Cold War.

It was a well-answered question and showed that candidates have engaged with the content of the course on the development of the Cold War. The majority were able to identify key areas of tension between the USSR and USA and how they related to the situation in Cuba. Responses at Level 3 and above were plentiful, especially in relation to the Bay of Pigs incident and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Most had a good if not excellent understanding of the chronology of events which influenced the development of this tension. Many candidates were able to take their description of these events to an explanation of how these events and/or changes in Cuban leadership caused increased tensions between USA and USSR and reach levels 4 and 5. Candidates who reached these higher levels were able to draw connections with the increasing threat of nuclear missiles and the proximity of Cuba to key American cities, as well as develop the concept of brinkmanship in relation to the two superpowers. Some candidates took a longer-term view, and traced tensions back to Castro's overthrow of Batista that ignited US concerns, but many of these got 'lost' in the detail and did not make the connection to later USSR involvement which turned this into a key Cold War conflict between the superpowers.

Some candidates were unable to progress beyond Level 2 but were able to provide a more general description of the emerging communist ideology in Cuba or discuss the collapsing relationship between Cuba and USA, in a more general sense, during the 1960s.

There were few Level 1 responses, as most candidates were aware of the Cuban Missile Crisis or Bay of Pigs incident. In contrast the highest attaining candidates in this question were able to clearly contextualise the events occurring in Cuba with wider Cold War relationships, and the impact of these on growing tensions and political difficulties. Many had excellent knowledge and understanding, rather than focusing on the story of US hostility to Cuba.

Relate knowledge to the concept

This question asks candidates to focus on the concept of tension between the two armed camps. The candidates who were able to access higher levels were able to take their knowledge and relate it to this concept. In doing so, candidates should make it explicit that they are developing their previous, often descriptive points directly towards answering this element of the question. It is also essential that they are able to directly relate the content to the countries outlined, in this case the USA and USSR.

Exemplar 2

2.	Cuba became a focus of attention because of the new Communist leader Fidel Castro. He was a communist so he was backed by the USSR and this was a problem for the USA as they were extremely anti-communist and wanted no no threat of it taking over their politics. To try and stop this from happening The Soviets knew this and wanted an area near the USA where they could have influence so they began trade and businesses with Cuba. To try and stop this the USA set an operation called the "Bay of Pigs Invasion" where they would try and over-throw Castro using volunteers helped by the USA government and military through supplying equipment. This operation failed but gave Castro a reason to ask the Soviets for more help and defense, which now meant Cuba was in between the Americans and Soviets wanting control over it to lose gain territory and, for the Soviets, wanting an area of control near to the USA.
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		Another reason there was a lot of focus
		on Cuba was that after the failed attempt
		to overthrow Castro, the USSR supported
		Cuba with was going to supply Cuba with
		nuclear war heads. This caused the President
		Kennedy to send multiple letters to the Soviets
		who would be supplying the weapons and
		blockade the island to stop ships being able
		to deliver the weapons. This caused great
		tension between the two countries as with
		the USA holding the Soviets back there
		was a threat of a war between the two and
		that the USSR may launch a missile
		at USA, starting a nuclear conflict, this
		exchange lasted 13 days and caused
		great panic and stress for not only the
		US but the world. Eventually a deal
		was made to prevent the tension
		becoming a nuclear war but both the
		USA and USSR was prepared for what might
		have happened had the tension from
		Cuba spilled over...

In Exemplar 2, the candidate was able to identify two factors that lead to increased tension between USA and USSR during the 1960s and develop both of them to an explanation. In this case, the candidate develops the Bay of Pigs incident to develop an explanation over Soviet influence over land near USA and a second explanation relating to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the potential for nuclear conflict. The development of two explanations with detailed understanding allows the candidate to reach full marks: Level 5, 10 marks.

Question 3

3 Study Interpretation A.

Do you think this interpretation is a fair comment on Neville Chamberlain and his policies in the period 1937–1939?

Use other interpretations of the events of 1937–1939 and your knowledge to support your answer.

[25]

This question was answered well and candidates used their knowledge of events and other interpretations sensibly and effectively.

Most candidates began by offering a summary of the interpretation and its view, and then as their answer progressed, referred to specifics of the given interpretation to show a clear comparison with others they detailed. This is a good approach and makes it clear that they are evaluating the given interpretation with other views, rather than simply aligning the other historians and then telling us everything they know about them. Most candidates had no doubt that Trevor Roper was critical of Chamberlain's handling of Hitler as well as his personal deficiencies, for example limited intellect and blinkered approach to negotiation.

Most commonly candidates used the counter revisionist and popular political arguments in support of the fairness, or the popular majority and revisionist views to claim the view was unfair. By identifying correctly which other views would see Trevor Roper as fair or unfair they would achieve Level 3. To access the higher levels of Level 4 and Level 5, greater knowledge and explanation of the other views needed to be developed. Some responses showed very impressive knowledge of other interpretations and this led to very accomplished answers, comfortable achieving Level 5. Many had particularly strong knowledge of revisionist and Cato's arguments. Candidates are also showing more awareness of the need to be clear about which aspect of the given interpretation they see as fair or unfair, this strengthens their answer and makes clear the argument of their essay.

Fewer candidates based their answer on using their own knowledge of events to evaluate Interpretation A. Candidates have a good understanding that the best way to evaluate a historian's argument is using other historians' comments. It is this which opens the highest two levels in the mark scheme.

Some candidates struggled to achieve above Level 3 because they tried to use the orthodox view. This was because there was less scope to develop a detailed comparison with Trevor Roper's view. We strongly advise careful selection of which other interpretations to focus on, rather than trying to include them all in a more cursory way. Equally, although some did it very well, focusing on some of the less obvious aspects of Interpretation A, such as Chamberlain 'not wanting to strengthen the alliance', could also lead candidates into a muddled approach and argument. It is far safer to stick to more obvious lines of argument, in this case, Chamberlain's 'limited intelligence' 'arrogance' and desire for 'personal diplomacy', and use these to compare to other views.

There are still a few candidates who spend time explaining why every group of historians they use think what they do, which does not gain them credit for this question, unless it leads them, as in the case of the revisionists or counter revisionists, to explain more about what their view is. It is only evaluation of the context of the given interpretation which is creditable. This is a fundamental difference between the approach needed to answer this question compared to Question 4.

Finally, some candidates spend such a lot of time linking backwards and forwards between the given interpretation and each aspect of the other interpretations they offer, that not only is their answer confusing, but there is limited knowledge demonstrated of other views. Such complex linking is not necessary and indeed may depress the levels achieved.

Question 4

4 Study Interpretation B.

Explain why **not** all historians and commentators have agreed with this interpretation.

Use other interpretations and your knowledge to support your answer.

[20]

() Spelling, punctuation and grammar and the use of specialist terminology

[5]

This question was answered well. Candidates had a good understanding of the interpretations of the reasons for the Cold War, and many were able to outline key thinkers within each interpretation area. They could develop reasoning for why the interpretation developed, and the key historical context behind the thinkers in each area. As a result, most candidates were able to reach Level 3 or above: they could identify and explain the basis of at least one historical interpretation in direct comparison with the argument put forward in Interpretation B.

Interpretation B is a post-revisionist standpoint outlining the shared responsibility for the outbreak of the Cold War, which most of the candidates were able to identify. Most candidates went on to develop that Orthodox historians (such as Feis, Bailey and Kennan) and Revisionist historians (such as Kolko, Appleman Williams and Gardner) would disagree with the interpretation and were able to identify and describe the key features of these historical viewpoints in relation to the content of the source. Most of these answers were able to develop these viewpoints with some relation to the historical context in which they were written, enabling them to reach at least Level 3.

Most candidates achieved Level 3 and Level 4 by offering detail about alternative viewpoints to that offered by the interpretation. Fewer were able to explain how their context would have impacted historians and commentators. It remains the case that, in considering the orthodox view, many candidates could place it at the time of the Red Scare and strong anti-Soviet feeling in the USA. However, this needed to be securely linked to how that would impact those individuals in forming their view, in order to move up the levels. Simply saying the Red Scare made them biased was not enough to merit explanation. Stronger responses focused on the role of Feis and Kennan in the US government, meaning their views could be an attempt to justify their decision making. Alternatively, candidates could have focused on the self-censorship that was happening, to prevent accusations of pro-Soviet views at a time of heightened fear of communism. Likewise, for the post-revisionists, identifying détente and the Helsinki agreements was a basis for argument. However, an explanation then needed to be made that this new mood of willingness to understand led historians to view the origins of the Cold War in this light, as a series of overreactions and misunderstandings of basic differences in ideology. For some candidates, the context seemed more of an afterthought.

The highest attaining responses were able to reach Level 5 by correctly identifying the post-revisionist standpoint as the one relating to the source and utilising aspects of the source to develop this. With development of their answer using historical context from the causes of the Cold War or from those events impacting on the historians the student referred to, candidates were able to rise quickly through the levels. With two or more interpretations considered, candidates could access Level 5 and many were successfully able to do so.

Those in Level 2 tended to have been able to identify and describe the basis of the differing historical interpretations without being able to develop accurate historical context of the causes of the Cold War or the impacts of historical events surrounding the historians considered. A few candidates at Level 2 were able to give some chronological understanding of the differing viewpoints, but not relating this to Interpretation B.

Far fewer candidates are now confusing the various groups of historians or talking generally in terms of 'some historians think that...', rather than specifying a time period, nationality, or group. This is essential to achieve above Level 1. Level 1 was awarded when candidates made an unsubstantiated historical judgement that did not refer to the interpretations that are associated with the source, or in opposing viewpoints.

Section B overview

In order to perform well on the non-British Depth Study, candidates need to display an understanding of the relationship between the people and the state and how key political, social, and economic developments affected the people. Candidates' learning is examined through questions asking for knowledge and understanding and ability to explain and analyse, as well as use and evaluation of historical sources. These skills focus on Assessment Objectives 1, 2 and 3.

As in previous years, centres had prepared their candidates very well for the exam. Marks were given across the entire mark range for all five questions, although especially at Levels 3 and above. The final essay question was answered well, with candidates showing excellent knowledge and mastery of their material, and very effective focus on the question.

Question 5

5 Describe **one** difficulty faced by African Americans in the USA between 1945 and 1954. **[2]**

This was a well-answered question that was attempted by nearly all candidates. Nearly all candidates were able to accurately identify one difficulty faced by African Americans that was specific to the period, and many were able to describe this with specific detail to gain both marks. A common answer was an outline of segregation experienced by African Americans, with detail given by differing conditions in education, transport or public services. Similarly, candidates represented good knowledge relating to discriminatory voting practices, often citing literacy tests, preventing African Americans' access to voting rights. A smaller, but notable, number of candidates used the oppressive practices of the KKK as their route to both marks. A few candidates offered a more general understanding and were unable to expand on 'segregation', for example, to gain a second mark. Some candidates offered a very general understanding.

Misconception

Some candidates offered answers to this question that were very general, or outside the time period covered. It is important that all candidates make their answers specific to the time period covered in the question. It might help to refer to specific events of that time period in their answer to make sure that the examiner is aware of their specific understanding.

Question 6

- 6** Explain how the US government attempted to prevent the spread of communism within the USA between 1945 and 1954. **[10]**

This question focuses on AO1 and 2, where candidates use their knowledge and understanding to explain, in this case, how the US government attempted to prevent the spread of communism within the USA between 1945 and 1954. This question was generally answered well, and candidates were able to explain two ways that the government attempted to prevent the spread of communism within the USA. Candidates' focus often revolved around the actions of groups such as the FBI, HUAC or the various Congressional laws that were passed to limit communist political influence. The best responses were able to expand on their identified government action and explain the reasoning behind how this attempted to prevent the spread of communism within the USA.

Some candidates were limited to Level 3 by their focus on McCarthyism and their inability to then link this to government actions to prevent communism, often focusing on a more general social hysteria. Level 2 responses covered a more descriptive approach and often focused on propaganda aimed towards the developing Red Scare. Similarly, within Level 1, candidates often focused on a more general understanding of Cold War ideologies. A small, but notable, number of candidates referred to US foreign policy reducing the spread of communism, often in Europe, referencing the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine, and thus misunderstood the question's focus on 'within the USA'.

The highest attaining responses were those that were able to identify a specific government action and then evidence it with specific examples to explain how it attempted to prevent the spread of communism.

Question 7 (a)

7

(a) Study **Source A**.

Explain how this source is useful to a historian studying the USA between 1954 and 1964. [5]

This question focuses on AO3 analysis, evaluation, and use of historical sources.

This question was one that candidates found challenging and, although there were some who were able to reach Level 3, many were limited to Levels 1 and 2 by a misdirected understanding of the source content and context. Some responses reached Level 3 by arguing that the source was useful with some developed inference from the source, showing effective use of content, provenance or context to support. These largely focused on the President's intentions to increase public support for the Civil Rights movement or the impact of Little Rock, particularly on the US reputation abroad with their Soviet adversaries.

Most responses reached Level 2 by making a more general or unsupported inference based on reliability of the source. Candidates clearly had good source analysis skills and evidenced this by outlining their understanding of the importance of the President's involvement at Little Rock and the potential intention of a TV broadcast involving the US President. Nearly all candidates who attempted the question were able to achieve a Level 1 response and outlined elements of utility based on source content or general provenance.

Many candidates misinterpreted the source as being about the events at Little Rock themselves and discussed the plight of the students specifically in their answer. Often these responses were awarded Level 1 for valid information, related to the content.

Question 7 (b)

(b) Study **Source B**.

What is the message of the cartoonist? [5]

This question focuses on AO3 analysis, evaluation, and use of historical sources.

This question was answered well and showed that many candidates have been prepared to address the challenge of cartoon sources. Many responses achieved Level 3 by identifying the view of the cartoonist, namely that this was a criticism of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, suggesting the view that they were organising non-violent protests, when they were responsible for violence. These responses evidenced this with details from the cartoon and/or historical context and often referred to the marches in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 or Selma, to highlight the view of the cartoonist.

Level 2 responses identified the message of the cartoon and focused on the violence occurring but not recognising that the cartoonist was attributing the blame to King or the Civil Rights movement. There were few Level 1 responses. These focused on general source content or the provenance of the source. Most candidates answered this question and utilised source content effectively across all levels.

Exemplar 3

7	b	Source B is useful as it shows how people the people turn against African Americans is any way possible. In this cartoon vehicle Martin Luther King Jr shows a mess of cars flipped
		multiple things broken and a man dead on the ground. Martin Luther King was known for his peaceful riots, so this cartoon is mocking that Mr King conveying suggesting that his peaceful protests aren't peaceful. This cartoon disrespects everything Mr King stands for. The cartoonist shows the words 'I plan to lead another non-violent march tomorrow'. This mocks The message of the cartoonist is that Mr King is a liar and only causes violence and commotion, highlighted through the destruction behind him.

The response above reaches Level 3, 5 marks. The response outlines a description of what they can see in the cartoon and then develops this to outline the cartoonists intended message. It is a direct criticism of Martin Luther King, stating that the cartoon is 'mocking Mr King, suggesting that his peaceful protests aren't peaceful'. The fifth mark is given by utilising features of the source to support the cartoonist's message.

Question 8*

8* 'The women's movement in the USA was successful in achieving its aims between c.1964 and 1974.'

How far do you agree?

[18]

This question focuses on AO1 and AO2 and requires candidates to use their historical knowledge and understanding to write an extended answer (an essay) in response to a statement prompt. The essay should include at least three explained examples covering both sides of the argument.

This question was attempted by most candidates. Many responses presented a coherent and developed discussion around the success of the women's movement in the USA between 1964 and 1974. Most were familiar with the work of NOW and key figures such as Betty Friedan and Phyllis Schlafly on the opposing side of the argument. These examples, along with the Equal Pay Act (1963) and failed attempts to gain an Equality Act, were often seen in responses which achieved Level 3 and above, by explaining one or more factors impacting on the success of the women's movement. These responses linked these factors back to a measure of success, such as raising awareness of the movement or succeeding in passing specific legislation. A few responses achieved full marks by outlining a clinching conclusion to support their balanced argument.

Many responses achieved Level 2 by being able to accurately identify factors, such as those mentioned, and describing them, but without linking directly to a measure of success. A few were only able to make general reference to the women's movements of this period, or comment on women's rights in a more general sense. These responses were given Level 1. A few misinterpreted this question as asking about women's movements in the 1920s or during the Second World War.

There were some who left this question out or responded in a short and general way only. Some candidates chose to answer this question first, alongside Questions 3 and 4.

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