

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

J410/06 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 6 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 reparations 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.

Relate knowledge to concepts

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, rather than focusing on the story of US hostility to Cuba.

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 happen 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.
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and military through supplying equipment. This opportunity 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.

Another reason there was a lot of focus on Cuba was that after the failed attempt to overthrow Castro, the USSR ~~supplied~~ ~~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.

The candidate above 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

The USA 1919–1948: The People and the State

5 Describe **one** example of discrimination against women in the USA during the 1920s. **[2]**

This was generally a well-answered question and candidates were commonly able to gain both marks by identifying an example of discrimination against women that was specific to the USA during the 1920s. Key examples that were common were women earning lesser pay for doing the same job as their male counterparts or the conservative stereotypical roles that were expected of women, as opposed to more liberal freedoms. Another accurate example was the under-representation of women in positions of power and political office. A few candidates offered a more generic example of discrimination and were given a single mark. Many candidates mistakenly identified a lack of voting rights for women during this time period. Almost all candidates answered this question and were able to gain at least 1 mark.

Misconception



Many candidates offered a lack of voting rights for women as a form of discrimination in the USA during the 1920s. Women gained voting rights as part of the 19th Amendment which was passed in 1919 and ratified in 1920.

Question 6

6 Explain how the Second World War affected the USA's economy.

[10]

This question focuses on AO1 and 2, where candidates use their knowledge and understanding to explain, in this case, how the Second World War affected the USA's economy. This was answered well by many candidates but there were a number of misinterpretations or a more general understanding of the question. Many candidates answered well and were able to reach Levels 4 and 5 by explaining one or two ways that the Second World War affected the US economy. These candidates often focused on the supply of weapons to foreign powers which improved domestic metal and manufacturing industries, the purchase of war bonds and the impact on unemployment within the US. The highest attaining responses were able to make evidenced links to US companies such as Coca-Cola, Chrysler and Ford and their benefits from the wartime economy or show developed understanding of the impact on economic factors that were unable to be improved significantly by the New Deal.

Many candidates attained Level 2 by developing a general description of the wartime economy and fewer still were limited to Level 1, being able to outline a general understanding of US involvement in the war. Those candidates who misinterpreted the question focused on US involvement abroad and/or the impact of this on social factors such as race relations.

Some candidates wrote very little for this question or missed it out altogether.

Question 7 (a)

7

(a) Study **Source A**.

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. Responses were able to reach Level 3 by showing a developed understanding of the cartoonist's message, a criticism of FDR's reckless New Deal spending, with evidence from the source and/or contextual understanding. Good levels of source analysis skill were shown in most answers. Many responses identified that the 'out of control' steamroller was representative of the lack of control of FDR and his advisors and many responses explained this in the context of criticisms of the New Deal, such as those from the Republicans.

Most candidates achieved Level 2 in response to this question as they focused on a more general understanding of the cartoon message and did not attach the criticism intended by the cartoonist onto FDR and his advisors. Most of these responses showed evidence of this with features from the cartoon.

A few responses were limited to Level 1 because they offered a more descriptive understanding of what the source showed or the source's provenance. Very few candidates missed this question out and fewer still were not able to achieve a mark.

Exemplar 3

7	a	The cartoonist is intending to criticise the New Deal and FDR's economic policies. The depiction of New Deal Spending as a steamroller with no brakes rolling down a hill is in clear reference to FDR's first 100 days. In context we know that FDR employed several alphabet agencies, Social Security and that pleaded with Congress to provide him with the opportunity to sign executive orders, of which hundreds were signed. This was due to FDR's fear of getting the US out of a recession, which required many funds. The cartoon is potentially from a Republican perspective due to the date being that of the next election and the title being a common criticism of FDR's presidency, that he was doing too much too quickly.
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The response above shows a succinct identification of the message of the cartoonist, suggesting criticism of the New Deal and FDR's plans. The response develops this through a good understanding of context, referring to expensive alphabet agencies and the Republican's criticism. Additionally, it shows understanding of the imagery used in the source. This response was given 5 marks within Level 3.

Question 7 (b)

(b) Study **Source B**.

Explain how this source is useful to a historian studying the New Deal.

[5]

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

Level 3 responses suggested the source was showing the successes of the New Deal, particularly in response to the plight of African Americans and farmers. Many of these responses attached this to the successful work of the FSA and the AAA in effectively solving the problems of the dust bowl and overproduction in farming, during the 1930s. A few responses made developed inferences about the intention of the source in revealing what the government wanted people to think about the New Deal and the intended purpose of the source itself. In some cases, this meant that the more general nature of the answers limited candidates to the lower mark in Level 3.

Level 2 responses focused more on the purpose of the source, or a simple inference without any valid source support. A few responses were given Level 1 because they focused on the source content or simple provenance only. Most candidates were able to access this source and very few left the question out.

Question 8*

8* 'Prohibition failed because law enforcement officials were corrupt.'

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.

Most responses showed a good knowledge and understanding of Prohibition and achieved Level 2 and above by accurately identifying key features of Prohibition in the US and its impact on society. Those responses attaining Level 3 and above were able to accurately explain at least one of these identified factors. These responses often focused on specific examples of corrupt politicians, police officers and legislators for the supporting argument and the emergence of organised crime, speakeasies and moonshine production for the opposing argument.

A clear understanding of essay structure was present in many responses, where a two-sided argument was attempted, allowing candidates to access Level 5 of the mark scheme. Candidates who were able to provide a balanced answer were often able to evaluate the reasons behind the corruption of police officers and the lack of support for the policy across the 1920s from the general public. A few responses obtained full marks on this question by evaluating their balanced argument with a clinching conclusion comparing the validity of the two sides of the argument. These were often able to make a comparative judgement of whether the corruption of law enforcement was directly related to the public apathy towards the law itself. Furthermore, the highest attaining responses were able to draw direct links between the factors that had been explained and the eventual moves to legalise alcohol under FDR.

A few candidates misinterpreted the question as asking about reasons behind Prohibition and the impacts of alcohol. Some candidates chose to answer this question first, along with Questions 3 and 4, but many candidates left the question out or only wrote a short response.

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