

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

J410/02 Summer 2025 series

Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 1 series overview	4
Section A overview	5
Question 1	5
Question 2	7
Question 3	10
Question 4	11
Section B overview	13
Question 5	13
Question 6	14
Question 7 (a)	15
Question 7 (b)	16
Question 8*	18

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 1 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 some 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:
• deployed examples, issues and events relevant to the time periods examined by the questions • managed their time effectively, balancing their answers proportionally to the mark allocations for each of the questions, enabling sufficient time for Questions 7 and 8 • showed good knowledge and understanding of historical interpretations • established clear explanatory links back to the issues in the questions (Question 2, Question 3, Question 4, Question 6 and Question 8) • evaluated the historical sources' usefulness and purpose using contextual knowledge, content or provenance (Question 7) • had a clear grasp of the key concepts required from study of the specification.	• displayed less secure historical knowledge, for example about the Enabling Act and the chronology of events leading to the strengthening of Nazi power • described and identified issues without explaining them fully or without linking back to the issue in the question • left insufficient time to offer a fully developed response to Questions 7 and 8 • showed weak or confused knowledge and understanding of historical interpretations • used their own knowledge of events rather than historians' arguments to analyse the given interpretations • offered answers to Question 8 that were unbalanced, whether by looking at only one side of the argument or offering more generalised answers that lacked specifics on one side of the argument, especially about the Enabling Act itself • made simplistic comments about the historical sources in part B rather than evaluating them clearly in a valid way (Question 7).

OCR support



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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 schools 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 German 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 German 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

		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
		also 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 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...

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.

This 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 of Soviet influence over land near the 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

Germany 1925–1955: The People and the State

5 Describe **one** way the Nazis dealt with opposition during the Second World War. [2]

This question was answered reasonably well. Candidates needed to identify one way in which the Nazis dealt with opposition during the war and develop it with specific knowledge. To obtain both of the available marks the method of dealing with opposition needed to be contextualised in the period of the Second World War.

A variety of reactions were acceptable, including increased Gestapo monitoring to root out opposition, clergy like Niemöller being sent to concentration camps, the treatment of the White Rose group and the severe punishments for the 1944 bomb plotters.

A few candidates misunderstood the term 'opposition' for 'wartime enemies', and some talked about Reichstag Fire treatment of communists. Some also classified Jews as opposition, which was obviously not creditable. On the whole, most candidates secured at least 1 mark.

Misconception



Candidates should look carefully at the time frame given in the question within which to contextualise answers to score maximum marks.

Question 6

6 Explain how young people reacted to the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1939.

[10]

This question focuses on AO1 and 2, where candidates use their knowledge and understanding to explain, in this case, the reaction of young people to the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1939. The focus on reaction was key, and many candidates were able to explain at least one example of this to access the higher levels in the mark scheme.

To achieve Levels 4 and 5 candidates needed to identify a specific reaction and develop it with knowledge and explanation for why that would be the case. Most focused on the Hitler Youth and the opportunities it offered which might explain a positive reaction to the regime. Many candidates who started off with this identification were able to take their answer to explanation by focusing on what enjoyment the Hitler Youth offered young people, whether it be a sense of community, fun, superiority to others or activities they would not otherwise have been able to afford. Some drew the distinction between the early and later stages of the 1930s in terms of reactions to the Hitler Youth, and this was perfectly acceptable provided it was supported with valid and specific explanation of what changed.

Equally, many candidates focused on examples of negative reaction to the regime, evidenced by the Edelweiss Pirates or the Swing Movement. To achieve explanation, we were looking for more than a description of what they did to oppose the regime, but what it was that they were rebelling against, be it the high levels of control over their life, the censorship of jazz and external influences, or dislike of the Hitler Youth.

Some responses were too general to achieve the higher levels. They identified that young people enjoyed the Hitler Youth and described the activities they engaged in, but this was not enough to achieve above Level 3. Some responses did not identify a reaction at all, and simply told us everything they knew about young people during this period. Sometimes they 'ran into' a reaction as they described, but without that they would be limited to lower levels, usually Level 2.

Some responses included information about the White Rose which was outside the timeframe of the question and so could not be rewarded. Fortunately, most responses had other examples of opposition to draw on.

The answers showed good knowledge even if the focus on the time period selected was weaker at times.

Question 7 (a)

7

(a) Study **Source A**.

Explain why this photograph was published in 1937.

[5]

Question 7a focuses on AO3 analysis, evaluation and use of historical sources.

Candidates were presented with a photograph from an infant care course published by a Nazi organisation and asked to explain why this source was published in 1937.

Most candidates achieved at least Level 2 by identifying that the source was published as part of a programme to raise birth rates, put simply, to encourage women to have children. Candidates who could set this in a slightly wider context of seeing that it would encourage women to accept the role the Nazis wanted for them, to be at home caring for the family, achieved Level 3. Many successfully explained this and with some support from the source or contextual knowledge, these candidates achieved full marks. Candidates showed very good knowledge of this area.

Some responses were held back because they explained the message and not the purpose of the source. A response which explains that a source is to 'promote' or 'show' or 'illustrate' is not addressing the change, or intended impact, the source's publication was trying to provoke. Responses were then limited to Level 2 as a result.

Some responses did not address either the message or purpose of the historical source's production. These responses were written as if sources are illustrations in a textbook, simple prompts to make them recount what was going on at the time in relation to the topic focused on. It is very important that candidates see that sources, whether they are photographs, letters or reports, are written with some end in mind, and it is this we are focusing on when we ask them to evaluate.

Assessment for learning



Candidates need to be familiar with the different styles of prompt: reliability, usefulness, message or, as in this case, purpose. Practice will help candidates correctly interpret which approach to take when faced with the sources in the examination and help them use their knowledge and skills to the best advantage.

Question 7 (b)

(b) Study **Source B**.

Explain how this source is useful to a historian studying Nazi Germany.

[5]

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

Candidates were given a short extract from a report on the German economy, written by Nazi opponents in 1938. The source explains levels of dissatisfaction with the regime around wages, but a sense of resigned acceptance of the regime's benefits as the shadow of the early 1930s is still noted by workers.

Most candidates understood that the question of 'usefulness' requires them to look for inferences from the source which go beyond what is written on the page. There were lots of inferences possible, ranging from the more positive outlook on the economy by this time, the motivations people had for not resisting the regime (at least they had work) and the possibly surprising fact that even in a police state people were still prepared to grumble about aspects of their life.

Most candidates were able to write about one or more of these points (or the others listed on the mark scheme) from the source, therefore achieving Level 2. However, providing valid support from the source to support their inference was more difficult for some and this valid support from the source was key to achieving Level 3. This could be achieved with a direct quote or a paraphrase of the relevant part. One of the difficulties candidates had was an inclination to sum the source up, rather than 'read into it'.

Some candidates are still making the mistake of focusing on the wrong source, and using Source A when answering about Source B. This has vastly improved from earlier exams but will have a large impact, as no marks can be awarded if the source is mistaken.

Exemplar 3

7.	b	Source B is useful to a historian studying Nazi Germany as it highlights the general feeling of the working population of the period. The Source B says that workers "earn much less now than in 1929", indicating a failure of the Nazis, however they "don't really care" as "at least we have work". This could suggest that the Nazis have support due not necessarily due to resounding economic success, but because life under them is more bearable than before. Additionally, Source B also says "the poorer the workers are, the more opposition there is." suggesting not all people supported the Nazis, or that some didn't oppose them only because they were not poor. Interestingly, Source B ^{was} written by "political opponents of the Nazis", yet does not criticize the Nazis, suggesting either general support of the Nazis or fear of them.
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This candidate achieved full marks for a clear supported inference: Level 3, 5 marks. The inference is that 'the Nazis have support not due to resounding economic success but because life is more bearable' and the support precedes it, 'at least we have work'. The candidate goes on to develop another inference by commenting that lack of opposition was because the Nazis had resolved poverty which again is preceded by support from Source B.

Question 8*

8* 'The Enabling Act was the most important way in which the Nazis strengthened their power in Germany during the period 1933 to 1934.'

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.

The question was answered well. Many responses showed knowledge of the Enabling Act, and were able to explain what it was and how it strengthened Nazi power. Most identified other factors which assisted this process, ranging from the impact of the Reichstag Fire, the Night of Long Knives, and the death of Hindenburg.

Many responses achieved Level 3 and above by identifying these other factors and explaining how they strengthened Nazi power. There was much knowledge about the Night of Long Knives and its impact: the removal of internal opposition, and its importance in securing the support of the army. Others focused on the Reichstag Fire and its significance in helping the Nazis increase their share of the vote in the March elections by discrediting and removing their key political opposition, the communists. Some focused on the Army Oath or the death of Hindenburg, but often these points fell short of explanation, as their impact and its role in strengthening power was not explained, simply asserted.

Surprisingly, some candidates struggled to pin down the power the Enabling Act gave Hitler (to bypass the Reichstag when creating new laws), and how he went on to use it to consolidate power (for example generating new laws which removed trade unions and banning new political parties). Without this explanation of the given factor, answers remained unbalanced and peaked at Level 4. Students do not always find this area of the course easy to learn and revise, with its focus on politics and opportunity to confuse it with the machinations of the elites in Hitler's appointment as Chancellor leading up to it.

Responses which identified events but lacked detail or explanation of how they contributed to the consolidation of power remained at Level 2, and there were many of these. Knowledge of the Enabling Act was not always strong, and many confused it with the Emergency Decree after the Reichstag Fire. The chronology of events was also difficult for some: this was clear where the death of Hindenburg was linked directly in time with the Enabling Act, and where candidates saw the Night of Long Knives as a direct consequence of the Enabling Act.

Some responses introduced factors that did not explain the strengthening of power, for example writing at length about propaganda, and the sequence of events that got Hitler elected as Chancellor, for example the depression and Nazi appeal. Others talked more generally about Nazi methods of control, for example, using the police state. Unless it was clear that any given factor had a significant role within the two years of the question, this was not awarded at explanation. It is always important that candidates examine the timeframe of questions carefully and use this to focus their selection of material to cover in their responses.

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