

6 History analysis

A note to readers. It is suggested that you increase magnification to 125% or 150% to read the guide on screen. Click on the magnifying glass icon at bottom left of the screen and select your magnification.

Key points in Chapter 6

- **Analysis is a powerful intellectual skill.**
- **Analysis is the breakdown of a complicated whole and the identification of the influences and relationship of the parts.**
- **Students are not required to produce definitive History. Their development of the capacity for analysis, because it indicates thought, will be given credit.**

AS YOU PROGRESSED with your earlier study of History the approach to the subject changed, bit by bit, from mostly narrative History, the story of the past, to more and more analysis. In other words, there was a change from answering the questions What? Who? and When? to How? and Why? Your teachers probably comment that better students gain higher grades because they analyse their topics.

What is analysis?

Analysis refers to the breakdown of a complicated whole, such as a passage of History, into smaller parts and the identification of influences and the relationship of the parts to each other.

Consider the picture of the clock on the next page. If we liken the hour and minute hands to the movements of history, that is the changing events, then to understand those changing events we need to identify the reasons for the changes. In the case of the clock the reasons include the cogs and their positional relationship to each other as well as the spring, which provides the mechanical force. An alert, investigatory student of History is not satisfied with finding out only the position of the hands, the what? of history, but will penetrate below



Distinguishing the underlying reasons for events from the events

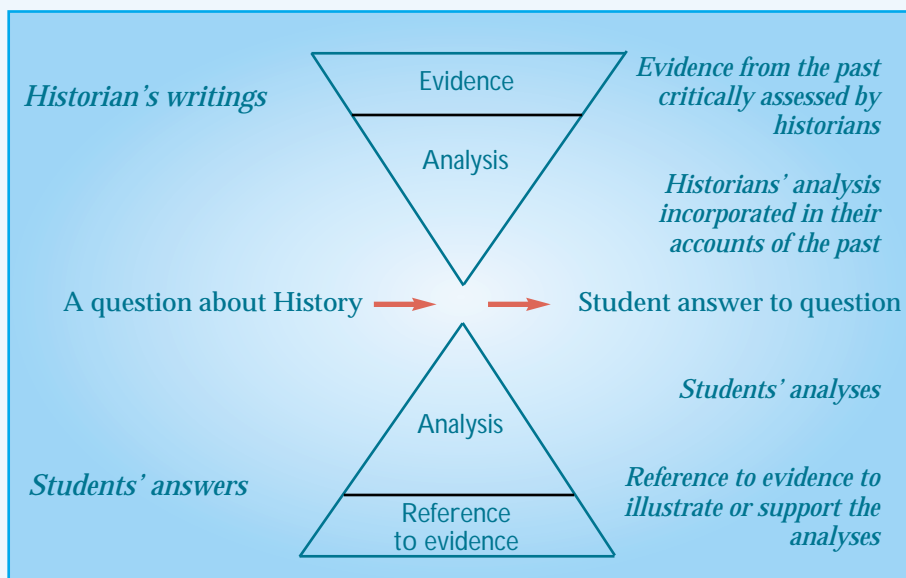
the surface of events to seek answers to the question why?

The reasons for events are often not explicit and evidential (that is, there is often little hard evidence of the reasons for events) but circumstantial; the reasons are inferred by the circumstances of the events. Consider an example from the world of physics: if you hold an apple in your hand at waist height and then release your grip, the apple falls to the ground. The fall of the apple is an event in history and you can answer a 'what' question: the apple fell to the ground. The 'why' question will be answered by giving the reasons; the influences and forces involved. You ended the force of your grip on the apple and the force of gravity was the influence for the apple to move to the ground. The reasons for the 'apple falling to the ground' event are the decision, made in the mind and probably not recorded (as a historical document) and the influence of gravity, which cannot be seen but induced by circumstances.

Analysis in books and analysis in essays

Writers of History books start with the evidence of events but a book which was only a summary of evidence would be little more than a

chronicle. Books provide an analysis but the narrative and analysis are mixed together. History books can be represented as an inverted triangle (see below).



Analysis in History books and student answers

When you answer a history question your answer should go in the opposite direction: you should produce an analysis of the subject in answer to the question and add the evidence to support your analysis. There is further discussion of essay preparation in the next chapter.

If history analysis is expected from you and is important, how can you go about this task? You will find historians' analyses in their books but it is even better to provide your own, although almost certainly you will use their analyses as a starting point.

Most of the suggestions in Chapter 3, Working on information, will help you towards your own analysis. My late colleague, Michael Barlen, devised a method to develop students' capacity for analysis which he called the 'factors and phases method' (and similar approaches have been called the 'grid method'). In this he took an identified passage of History. From the narrative of events the phases are decided. Phases for a topic are usually fairly clear but if you choose unusual phases the method is not invalidated. Next, the factors are decided, the contributory influences, aspects or components. Taking the phases as a horizontal axis and the factors as the vertical axis you have created a grid. Summary information (from your notes) entered in the grid boxes will indicate the dynamic, the pattern and the



FACTORS PHASES	Alignments / alliances important	Underlying tensions important	Weaknesses in political leadership	Diplomatic initiatives which failed	Military influence important
1912 and 1913 Balkans Wars		Yes		Great Powers, Treaty of Bucharest	
28 June Assassination of Franz Ferdinand		Yes (Serbia / Austria)			
23 July Ultimatum from Austria to Serbia	Germany / Austria (1879)	Yes	Germany did not restrain Austria		Yes
28 July Austria declared war on Serbia		Yes			Yes
29 July Russian mobilisation	Serbia looked to Russia for support	Russia thwarted in Balkans in 1908	Russian leadership: decisions made from weakness	William II (Germany), peace plan	
30 July Russian mobilisation rescinded				Grey (Britain) peace plan	
31 July Russian mobilisation			German leadership taken over by the military		Yes
1 August Germany declared war on Russia				Russia and Austria ready for talks <u>BUT</u> German decisions made	Yes
3 August Germany declared war on France	Franco-Russian alliance 1903	Alsace question unresolved			Yes
4 August Britain declared war on Germany	Triple Entente (France, Russia and Britain)	Anglo-German naval race after 1898			

Factors and phases applied to the Austro-Serbian War and the escalation of that conflict into a general European war (the First World War)



relationships between events. It is accepted that this method can distort and simplify the past (and reductionism lowers the quality of historical study) but work with factors and phases will engage your mind, bring out connections, help understanding and make answer writing far easier. There is a fuller discussion of Factors and Phases Method in *The Good History Students' Handbook*, Chapter 7, pp. 52-60.

There is no pretence that factors and phases or grid analysis provides a final and definitive analysis of a topic but it is a procedure to help you towards a fuller understanding and a help for you to think for yourself. You are not expected, as a student of History, to write the final truth of History. The primary purpose is to develop your intellectual capacity. As a student you are not expected to pretend you are a research historian but indications of your own thought, judgement and analysis in your answers as long as they are not wildly implausible, will be valued and rewarded.