

7 Writing answers

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 7

- Essay answers require defined skills which every student can master.
- Good answers are planned answers. They also reflect your reading and understanding.
- When you have practised answer preparation, you have the foundation for higher-level answer writing.
- Procedures developed for coursework answers, when applied in exam conditions, free you for high achievement.

ANSWER ESSAYS, whether for coursework or exams, are a part of advanced History study and require sharply defined skills which all students are able to develop and master. The following comments are divided into two: basic procedures and advanced answer writing.

The question

An essay is your response to a particular question and your teachers and examiners expect you to direct all you write to that particular question. Sometimes students' essays are admirable in every respect except for the failure to answer the question: they receive less reward, therefore, than they otherwise deserve. It is prudent, therefore, to consider the question with care.

To be clear what the question asks, try this procedure. Underline the key words and then re-write the question in your own words. You will notice that most questions at your level require analysis or judgement of the topic you have studied. If you have undertaken some of the suggestions in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 answer preparation will be easier.

Answer preparation

- First, with the question clear in your mind look over your notes and, also, what you produced during the 'working with information' and 'analysis' stages. Write on a rough piece of paper information and ideas that relate to the question.
- Second, when you have finished looking over your notes, consider all the information and ideas, which were relevant to the question, which you scribbled down. From these rough notes you will probably find an overall theme or argument. This will become the centre of your answer to the question. (If you don't find a theme or argument search your notes again.)
- Third, with your theme or argument decided, arrange your scribbled information and ideas into points which support your theme or argument. Each of these points will be stages in your answer, with a separate paragraph, each in support of your theme or argument.
- Fourth, now place in order these supporting arguments with the most important first and the least important last. This arrangement will enable you to present your most powerful case in support of your theme or argument.

When you are planning an answer, especially in an exam, it is useful to have a headings' check list so that, instead of waiting to stumble across information and ideas, you have reference points to what *could* be relevant. You can make your own check lists. Here is one, which can be adapted for Modern History, for Early-modern English History. It is designed to be memorised easily.

Government.	King. Council. Committees. Court.
Administration.	Chancery. Exchequer. Courts, London and Assize. Army and Navy.
Church.	Bishops. Convocation. Priests. Orders.
Policy.	Foreign. Fiscal. Religious. Economic. Social.
Functions.	King: Law. Defence. Order. Patronage. Oversee administration.
	Subjects: Loyalty. Help - advice and military aid and Money.

With your rough working finished you have thought through the question and your answer and you have prepared your answer plan. With this thinking completed, and your sketch plan made, you are free to concen-



Answer preparation

The question

- Read the question with care
- Underline the key words
- See the meaning of the question

In rough

- Write ideas and supporting evidence (events, dates, people ...) relevant to the question
- Review your jottings, group and order them
- Decide on an overall summary of your answer

Write

- Write your summary as the introduction
- Write no more than one theme/argument (with supporting evidence) in each paragraph
- Write your theme/argument as the first sentence of the paragraph
- Take care to express yourself with clarity

If you have time, read and correct your answer

Answer preparation memo sheet

trate on writing your answer as clearly and as persuasively as possible.

Answer structure

The emphasis of advanced essay work is on argument. High-grade answers have a very clear structure, which enables the reader to follow easily the argument. Summarise your argument or main theme in your introduction. Thereby you make it clear to the reader from the beginning what is the direction of your answer. Your introduction, which is, of course, the summary of your full essay, is best if it is short, just a few lines in length. Your argument will be more clear, if not mixed with other information. Your second, third, fourth ... paragraphs support your main theme or argument.

Aim to write the main point of each paragraph as the first sentence. The first sentence, therefore, defines the content of the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph should be a reference to events which illustrate, support or explain the main point of your paragraph.

The short essay answer example (partially in note form later in this chapter) illustrates clearly the procedure. You will note from this example that the answer has only three elements: 1) *The summary* of the answer which is written in the introduction; 2) *Three statements*, written at the beginning of the subsequent paragraphs, to support the summary; 3) The third element, in the paragraphs after the introduction, is *reference to events which support or illustrate the theme of the paragraph*. With the argument stated in the introduction and supported in the three following paragraphs, a conclusion is not needed but it could be added as an option.

Answer assessment

When your essay answers are assessed the reader will use six criteria. You can see why the short answer example will score well.

1. Does the answer have an argument or theme and is it directed to the question asked?
2. Is well-chosen evidence used to support or illustrate the theme or argument?
3. Is the answer structured to develop the argument?
4. Is the presentation of the argument persuasive and the English correct, clear and effective?
5. Does the answer indicate the writer has a sound understanding of the topic and its context?
6. Does the answer have indications of the writer's own thought and, where appropriate, does the answer show awareness of other views and debates on the subject?

You will note that students who follow the procedures outlined will score well with criteria 1, 2 and 3. Criterion 4 will be considered in Chapter 9 and criteria 5 and 6 will reflect, partly, your work with reading, noting and working with information. You may wish to assess the sample essay answer against the six criteria.

Higher-level answer writing

Essays reflect your work on a topic and your thought about it. Better answers from students, nearer the end of their course, are clinical in their clarity and elegant in their delivery. When you have practised these answer preparation procedures and you are confident working with them you will be ready to develop further your answer skills.

Higher-level answer writing is a creative act in which you encapsulate your mastery and expertise with a topic and demonstrate your skills in scripting an answer. It is a personal statement and the answer can demonstrate a creative refinement as a master potter or sculptor. Without loss of focus, structure and argument, the highly skilled answer writer will reflect penetrative insights and a depth of understanding of how things are, the nature of man and the possibilities of life in society, whether present or past, in an elegantly expressed but intellectually controlled piece of writing of limited length. Such an answer will show a sure grasp of the subject, judgement in choice of telling examples and reflect the writer's own ideas. An answer of this quality, the singular creation of a reflective thinker, is light years away from the cut and paste efforts of weaker students and it should be the aim of all top-grade students.



QUESTION: Can Germany be held more responsible for the outbreak of war in 1914 than any other country?

Introduction. Germany can be held more responsible for the outbreak of war in 1914. Germany was the first Great Power to declare war on another. Germany, also, was the greatest, but not sole, contributor to the international tensions that were the background to the war through a ham-fisted foreign policy after 1890. Further, although not the initiator of the Balkan crisis in 1914, Germany did too little, too late, to restrain Austria, Germany's primary ally.

Paragraph 2. Germany must bear much responsibility for the formation of two armed and mutually suspicious groups of countries by 1914 and heightened tensions between the Great Powers. When William II became Emperor in 1890 Germany began to follow a more self assertive policy, called *Weltpolitik* (world leadership). The cautious policy followed by Bismarck after 1871 was forgotten. It was Germany who was substantially responsible for causing the alignments and tension in 1914, the tension that was the background to the war.

- 1 It was Germany that allowed the Reinsurance Treaty, created by Bismarck in 1887, to lapse after 1890 and this helped to bring about the Dual Alliance between Russia and France in 1893.
- 1 Germany began the construction of a major navy in 1898, in rivalry with Britain and a threat to British security.
- 1 Germany spurned attempts by Britain to negotiate agreements in 1898, 1899 and 1901 and this encouraged the *Ententes* (agreements) with France in 1904 and Russia in 1907.
- 1 Germany created or used crises to weaken the 'entente powers' (Russia, France and Britain) in 1905 by the first Moroccan crisis, the 1908 Bosnian crisis when Germany went as far as to threaten war on Russia and the 1911 Agadir (second Moroccan crisis) when war seemed likely between Germany and Britain.

Paragraph 3. Germany had a less responsibility than Austria or Serbia for the outbreak of the Austro-Serbian War that began on 28 July and from which the outbreak of the major war between the Great Powers was an escalation but, even so, Germany was not

Essay answer example, partly in note form, page 1

Writing answers, page 6. Study guide, page 35

Provided by Sempringham on www.history-ontheweb.co.uk



without some responsibility. Serbia, with a pan-Serbian expansionist policy, wanted to unite with Bosnia and Herzegovina. These areas were ruled by Austria. Austria was prepared to thwart Serbia by war. Austria, a large but weak power, relied on German support and Germany agreed to Austria's war plan after 28 June readily with, apparently, limited care. Even though Serbia threatened Austria's lands and Austria was very ready to go to war, without German agreement Austria's declaration of war on Serbia on 28 July was unlikely. Germany, therefore, has some responsibility, but not the most responsibility, for the outbreak of the Austro-Serbian War that immediately preceded the First World War.

Paragraph 4. **Germany was most, but not solely, responsible for the escalation of the Austro-Serbian War into the First World War.**

The strongest evidence to support this statement is that Germany was the **FIRST** Great Power to declare war on another Great Power when she declared war on Russia, 1 August. It is accepted that Russia was provocative with the order for mobilisation on 31 July and this was the background to Germany's war declaration. Good leadership in Russia should have calculated the effects of mobilisation on Germany. Russia's mobilisation must be seen in the context of support of Serbia who had been invaded by Austria. The claim that Germany has primary, but not sole, responsibility for the escalation is further supported by the domination of the military in decision making from 31 July. It was this domination, and implementation of the Schlieffen Plan, that led to Germany's declaration of war on France, 3 August, followed by invasion and thereafter by Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 4 August.

Conclusion. It has been argued that although Russia was provocative by mobilisation and that Germany did not start the Balkan crisis, it was Germany's contribution to tensions before 1914 and acceptance of war but, in particular, the first declaration of one Great Power on another, that makes Germany more responsible than any other country for the outbreak of the First World War.

Essay answer example, partly in note form, page 2. Note that the question is answered at the beginning of the first paragraph (the introduction) and the answer argument is outlined. The theme of each paragraph, part of the overall argument, is summarised in each first sentence. Each statement in the argument is supported by reference to the events. Readers may wish to consult the analysis chart in Chapter 6.