

# Examination Supplement

The student-centred skills supplement for readers of new perspective

- revision and learning • questions and answer structure • modular assessment •

## Modular or linear assessment

More and more students take modular History AS/A-Level examinations. How does preparation for a modular exam differ from preparation for a traditional, linear, exam? If the exam specifications are divided into six modular parts, is modular exam preparation and good answer production easier?

## Modular exam preparation

Taking the second question first, the answer is yes and no. The only way that preparation is easier is the greatly reduced extent of content, per module approximately one-sixth of the whole course, that will be assessed. But there is a catch: the standard and expertise required is the same as for a final assessment after the completion of a two-year course. Students during the first year of study compete with students at the end of their two-year course for the higher grades. The only way to compete successfully is to master the module topic really thoroughly, in great detail, and to practice the skills and answer techniques required. One way to deal with the disadvantage of being in the middle of a modular course, when others are at the end, is to have read shorter general surveys of your period of History in order to gain an overview and surer understanding and judgement.

You will have guessed by now that preparation for a module exam is no different than preparation for a traditional end-or-course examination, except in the extent of content.

## Assessment: particular skills

Within about 10 weeks or so all History student readers will have exams. Exams provide particular challenges and opportunities.

Whatever your achievement and progress with your course work, and

whether or not you have enjoyed your course study, exams are a different ball game. The trick is to prepare for them with a clear understanding of the skills you need in order to gain full reward for your ability. Most important of all, a good programme of preparation, over the next 10 or so weeks, can enable you to raise your standard by two grades. There can be few students who would not be pleased to go from, say, a grade D to a grade B or from a grade C to a grade A.

## Revision and learning

However high your grades for your course work you now need to learn - so that you can answer exam questions quickly to make good use of the limited exam time. You will be aware that there is far more content for an advanced History course than in earlier courses you took, and because of this you didn't need to develop exam skills to a great extent before you began advanced History. By a few procedures, carefully undertaken, you can become an effective performer and achiever just as an athlete, by a programme of training, can prepare for high performance in a competition.

## We all have good memories!

There is no such thing as a person with a bad memory. Have you ever wondered why you can remember some occasion when you were very young, years and years ago, but cannot remember something from last week. If you understand how this can happen you will know how to be a skilled learner with a powerful memory. Your very early memories are of occasions which were very important or particularly interesting to you. If you achieve the same mind-set with your History learning, you will be an effective student. One good way to increase interest is to discuss your work with a friend. If she/he is a History student both the

speaker and the listener benefit. See *The Good History Students' Handbook*, Sempringham, 1993, pp. 66-7 for more details.

## The revision sheet

Write a summary of all your information for a topic on two sides of A4. Write, in summary form, both information (facts, events, dates) and ideas and explanations. Give prominence and emphasis to key points by the way you lay out your notes.

## Structured learning

If you try to remember notes on a topic by just reading them, you will find you gain little reward for the time you put in. The key is to be *active*. Pick out the six key points from one of your sides of A4 and memorise them. To do this use the 3Rs: Read the six points; Repeat them several times by speaking or writing them; Write them from memory to test they are remembered. When the six are securely remembered choose one or two points between the ones already remembered and repeat the process. You have now memorised about 18 points from your revision page. The remaining information and ideas you will remember by their *association* and relationship with the 18 or so core points in your memory.

## Phased learning

To be effective with learning follow a sequence for any topic. Learn on, say, Monday (day 1); repeat the same learning on Wednesday (day 3) - it will take less time - and again the following Thursday (day 11). You will now have a firm foundation of information and you will be able to use this to answer a question in exam conditions. If you forget details of the information you learned with your summary sheets, look up your notes: because you have

learned the core information the details will stick in your mind.

## How many topics to revise?

The number of topics to revise for your exam will depend on the number of questions you are required to answer. If you should answer four questions, revise six; if three questions, revise at least four but preferably five. If more topics are revised than questions to be answered you will have a genuine choice of questions.

## The revision programme

If you have exams in June you have 10 or so weeks left for revision. It is not too early to begin your consolidation and revision programme now. This will give you time for two cycles of revision. Your programme should be planned so that learning is completed before your first exam in any subject - because learning is arguably the hardest study task and will be out of the way before you give most effort to sitting your exams. Even if your aim to finish revision and learning before the first exam is not fulfilled you will have achieved more than if you drift towards June with weeks wasted and little achieved. Your self-directed programme should initially include at least one topic for each of your advanced subjects per week and time allowed for holidays, weekends off, etc. and continued work for your teachers. As you become more efficient you will be able to increase the amount you achieve per week. As advanced students it is for you to take control and responsibility, and even if you slip behind with your programme you will still have time during the examination period to make good gaps you left. The rest of the time will be free for relaxation and genuine revision - that is, looking at your summary sheets and skeleton answers again.

## After a topic is learned

Once a topic is learned find time to apply it to past questions. The questions you will have in your June papers will be very similar, but seldom identical, to past questions. Well prepared candidates are never surprised by their exam question papers. Questions from the past three, four or five years are the surest guide to the questions you will have on exam day (unless there has been substantial syllabus change). So find past papers and apply your considered and learned topic

to these past questions in the way outlined in the answer preparation section outlined later in these pages.

## Structured questions

The comments on essay questions that follow apply to structured questions. There are, in addition, particular points to bear in mind with structured questions. (a) Note the allocation of marks for each part of the question. Use the marks as a guide to the length of answer required and the time to spend on it. (b) Take great care to notice the exact wording of the question so that you refer to the correct sources and answer what is asked. (c) Read the sources with care: you will have enough time for this and unhurried reading will be repaid by a more accurate answer. (d) Plan answers to the latter question(s), which carry over half the marks, in the way you would plan an essay answer.

## Question types and analysis

In general terms, there are four types of question.

- A Description questions which require you to narrate (describe) the history, i.e. the events.
- B 'How far ...?' and 'To what extent ...?' questions.
- C 'Why? ...' questions that require you to give reasons, influences, factors or causes.
- D 'Discuss ...' questions which ask you to discuss a statement or quotation.

Now look at these questions. To which of the four types does each of the following questions belong?

- 1 Why was there so little opposition to Hitler's regime, 1933-41?
- 2 Was Italian Fascism anything more than a cloak for Mussolini's personal dictatorship?
- 3 'Distrust between the USSR and the Western powers was the single most important factor in bringing about the outbreak of war in 1939.' Discuss.
- 4 How far were the Liberal governments, 1906-1914, the 'true heirs' of 'Gladstonian Liberalism'?
- 5 How complete was Hitler's control of the Third Reich?
- 6 Discuss the career and achievements of MacDonald.

Question 1 is type C; 2 is mostly type B but partly type A; 3 is not type D but type B; 4 is type B; 5 is a mix of types A and B; 6 is type D.

## Comments on question types

Type D is the hardest question to organise an answer to because the question gives no help with the content for an answer. Type B may look difficult but if you have identified the main influences, you need only decide which is the more important, give more space to that in your answer, and also mention the less important influences. The influences provide the themes of your paragraphs. Type C questions are, seemingly, more straightforward but take care to add information to support or illustrate your reasons, etc. Types A and D require you to arrange your paragraphs in order of importance of influence.

## The exact question asked

The greatest reason why students do not gain as good a reward as they should deserve for their answers is that part or much of their answers is irrelevant to the questions asked. So before you plan and write an answer take care to understand the question that is asked. This is how to do it.

## Answer preparation

Underline the key words and rephrase the question in your own words so that you understand its meaning. Keep this meaning in your mind all the time as you scribble the key ideas and information that are relevant to an answer. Review your rough notes and decide on a conclusion or theme to your answer: now order your ideas to effectively support your conclusion or theme. Congratulations! You have prepared your answer and are free to concentrate on writing it clearly. This is the procedure for a course essay. It is exactly the same for an exam answer except you have to rely on your memory for ideas, arguments and information (but see the 'answer planning and revision' section on the next page) and you will have limited time in which to write it.

## Organising your answer

With your essay plan structure your answer, that is order it, for greatest effect. Summarise your argument or theme by a short introduction. Readers will, thereby, know straight away where your answer will lead. Aim to have only one idea or argument in each paragraph and write that idea or argument in the first sentence of

the paragraph, but the paragraph will not be just one sentence in length because after your idea or argument add the history, the events, which support or illustrate your idea or argument. Repeat this with all your paragraphs and put the stronger arguments before the less strong. With some answers you may need to have paragraphs with arguments that amend earlier points you made - history answers are often in 'shades of grey'.

## Clear and robust English

An answer writer can be likened to a lawyer in a trial. The lawyer must master the case (understand it and have all the details) and present it in an ordered and tellingly persuasive way. Even a weak case persuasively presented and supported by evidence can 'win' against a stronger case poorly presented and poorly expressed. Examiners expect answers in formal English: this is not the way we talk day to day. Here are a few simple rules to follow. Don't use slang or colloquialisms (such as 'Gladstone lost out at the 1874 election', write 'Gladstone was defeated ...'), aim to use active verbs (such as 'Hitler was supported by ...' rather than 'Hitler was getting support from ...'), write in sensible length sentences with capital letters in the correct place - at the start of sentences and for names and don't use contractions (such as 'don't', write 'do not' ... [this is not a formal essay if you think the writer a hypocrite]).

## Answer planning and revision

As mentioned earlier, when you have consolidated and learned a topic apply that to past questions. Analyse the question and write skeleton answers (they are much quicker than answers in long-hand) to several questions. Thereby you will have prepared conclusions, themes and arguments and you will have listed key, telling, evidence (events, facts ...) which support your conclusions and arguments. Therefore, in your timed and busy period in the examination room you need only modify and apply pre-thought out arguments, ideas and judgements to the exam questions you are asked.

## A good answer's characteristics

Examiners look for four features in exam answers. *Argument or theme* focused to the question; *evidence* to support the argument; *clear and persuasive expression* and *understanding* of the topic. Your under-

standing of your period of history will have increased throughout your course and it is implied by how you think and write about the period. Discussion, in class or with friends, can help a great deal to extend your understanding. And remember, your English should be correct, clear and persuasive to the reader. Month by month, during the course, your English expression will improve. Take care to make your argument clear (but not exaggerated) and choose your words with care.

## Document questions

Skills required with document questions are separate from core course work skills and you will have practised these with your teachers but a few points cannot be made too often.

**Context.** Place the source in the context of what happened before and the events which occurred afterwards.

**Understanding.** You do need to know the meaning of the key ideas, words and phrases.

**Comparison** of two or more documents may be required. Have a check list of questions to ask of the document in order to develop an answer. Do the documents contradict each other? If so, how far, and in what ways? Do they support one another? Are there inconsistencies within a document?

**Evaluation.** This is a more demanding task and it will be based on an assessment of authorship, bias, extent of information/misinformation and degree of corroboration. Successful evaluation is possible only with some knowledge of the author, the history of the document, the purpose of the document when written and some appreciation of its language and tone.

## Last words

So good luck with your exam preparation and when you tackle the question papers in June, especially if you are in the final year - not that you will need much luck if you have completed a fair amount of the programme outlined here.

## Question, Answer, Comment

All A Levels currently have a special document study component and, subject to change, this will continue into the new exams starting in September. Whereas the skills for answering an essay question apply to most of the assessment students have to face, those for the documentary section are different. As always, targeting

the answer on the question asked is crucial. The exercise below is taken from a trial exam set this January. The student would be expected to be familiar with the set documents from the Noakes and Pridham books on the rise of Hitler and the establishment of the Third Reich. In this paper there aren't any unseen documents. The topic area for study is 'The Nazis' rise to power, 1930 to January 1933'. Here are Darren's answers (in italics) with my comments.

**Question:** WHO WAS OTTO STRASSER? EXPLAIN HIS IMPORTANCE IN THE PASSAGE (which was taken from the interview between Hitler and Strasser in 1930).

*Otto Strasser is a member of the Strasser family. His brother Gregor is a high-ranking member of the Nazi party. However, the Strassers represent the Socialist anti-capitalist wing of the Nazi party. Both Otto and Gregor become disillusioned with the form of Socialism that is offered by Hitler. As we can see from Document A, Otto was far more left wing in his Socialist ideals compared to Hitler. On the 7th December 1932, Gregor Strasser handed in his resignation to Hitler and joined von Schleicher with his work-creation schemes.*

**COMMENT.** Darren is not obviously on top of this answer! It is evident that he knows more about Gregor Strasser than Otto, which is not surprising considering there's more written about him than Otto. However, he's got to focus this answer better and should know about the author of this prescribed source by the time he gets into the exam. He doesn't emphasise the issue of importance much at all. As a result this answer is only worth 2 marks out of 4.

**Question:** WHAT DOES HITLER'S BRAND OF SOCIALISM MEAN IN THE DOCUMENT (same document as for question above)?

*Hitler claimed to be a National Socialist, claiming that he would use Socialist ideals to create a National end. However, the ideology of National Socialism was very vague, so the extent to which he was a Socialist is debatable. In Source A we see this vagueness of ideology as Hitler claims to be a 'different kind of socialist', yet to what extent he is socialist is not specified.*

*The interview is dated 1930, this was an important time for the Nazis as they were really starting to increase in popularity due to the recent economic crisis in 1929. The party's aim was to become appealing*

to all classes and breakdown class barriers. By being vague about ideology, Hitler could attract more members. Socialism was regarded with the working class, yet by not making any direct definition of his Socialist ideology, Hitler could make the party appealing to all classes. Hitler succeeded in September 1930 in making his party the second largest in the Reichstag, compared with 1928 when they just received 26%. By toning down its working class, Socialist, revolutionary image he managed to make his party appealing to all without alienation.

**COMMENT.** Darren has a better go at this question on the surface, though the answer is characterised by a lack of sharp focus. I'd want to see a clearer appreciation from the student that he really understands what socialism usually means before trying to analyse Hitler on this. Look how Darren writes about the appeal of the Nazi party, rather than fully examining what Hitler says in the passage or developing his own knowledge of this issue. The passage also contains two wonderful soundbites to hang an answer around: firstly, Hitler arguing that he treats his chauffeur as he treats himself and that the working class need no more than 'bread and games'. These don't provide much real evidence of classic socialist thinking. A good answer would also bring out the great animosity between the Nazis and Communists/Socialists at this time (1930). I gave this 3 out of a possible 7 marks.

**Question:** TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE PASSAGES AGREE ON THE REASONS FOR THE GROWTH OF NAZI SUPPORT UP TO 1933? (Sources: B, Frau Solnitz on April 1932 election rally; C, Goebbels' diary entry in August 1932 after Hitler has rejected the Vice-Chancellorship; D, Otto Meisner writing after the war about the political intrigue which occurred in January 1933 to place Hitler in power.)

*Hitler had great determination and the belief that he would eventually triumph. Document B, is an account of an election meeting, the date is 1932, in which year Hitler fought in three elections. In April Hitler stood against Hindenburg in the Presidential election and although he failed to win, he had created great prestige for himself and his party. As Document C shows us, Hitler had one aim and that was to become the Chancellor, with undisputed power. Goebbels refers to the 'Struggle' - something that Hitler had started ever since he had come to lead the NSDAP in 1921. By the time this document was produced*

*the Nazis were already the largest party in the Reichstag and had come a long way from the days of being a small fringe group. Through the struggle we can see that Hitler had picked up support because of his power and self determination. Hitler eventually came to the end of the struggle, 30th January 1933 and had large backing and support behind him.*

**COMMENT.** Some characteristics seen earlier are also evident here. Darren does know a fair bit more than he appears to give away in this answer! Credit for looking at each of the documents and for starting to critique them. However, one would expect a much greater depth for an answer to get to higher levels than this. He could have made much more of the obvious contrasts between all three documents (which is why they were chosen!). Some attempt to show own knowledge is made but, once more, evidence of thorough understanding is limited. This answer was thus given 4 marks out of 8 marks.

**Question:** USING ALL THE SOURCES AND YOUR OWN KNOWLEDGE EXAMINE THE VIEW THAT 'HITLER CAME TO POWER IN JANUARY 1933 MORE BY POLITICAL INTRIGUE THAN POPULAR SUPPORT'.

*Hitler had come to lead the NSDAP from 1921 as a small Bavarian right-wing fringe group in 1921 and led them in power from 1933 to 1945. It could be argued that Hitler achieved Chancellorship through political intrigue rather than popular support. However, I believe that both political intrigue and popular support gained him the power he desired.*

*The NSDAP aim was to be a classless party, appealing to all. However, as Hans Mommsen believes they were more of 'a catch-all party of protest'. The party main support came from the rival middle-class voter, yet Fischer argues they had the support of more of the working class than might be believed. Yet as Document A shows, the National Socialist ideology was very vague so, in a way, not to alienate any of the classes. By making political U-turns in the actions of the party and taking a path of legality after his release from imprisonment in 1925, they started to increase their share of the popular vote. However, it was not until the economic crisis of the early 1930s that they reached the pinnacle of popular support.*

*Source B shows that through an exciting and fresh style of campaigning they could also win popular support. Yet again,*

*as in Source A, Hitler makes no 'definite' assertion of ideology and everything he talks about is vague. Yet by 1932, Nazis in the July election had become the largest party in the Reichstag. Though refusing to take up a place in government, unless offered Chancellorship with complete power.*

*Although he had popular support he was not to gain Chancellorship without some form of political intrigue. Document C clarifies that after his second meeting with Hindenburg he had failed to win Chancellorship, so Hitler returns to opposition to wait. Political violence is to follow through the SA, which Brüning, the Chancellor from May-March, had failed to keep at bay. As Document D explains the traditional Conservatives could not tame Hitler unless in government. Otto Meissner, the State Secretary in 1932, to President Hindenburg, explains that Hitler had to be offered Chancellorship to create some sense of social stability and to prevent 'civil war'.*

*Therefore, we can see that Hitler had popular support of the largest party in the Reichstag. Yet not made Chancellor through the ballot box but more through political intrigue. Therefore, both political intrigue and popular support gained Hitler Chancellorship.*

**COMMENT.** Darren does get his act together more effectively in this final question to show more of his potential. The requirement for this question is to do just as the question asks: examine critically all the documents and use your own knowledge to evaluate how true the assertion of political intrigue versus popular support is. Darren shows evidence of a real attempt to structure his answer as a small essay with an introduction, body and conclusion. He looks at all the sources and is reasonably critical of them. This is something too many students fail to do for this part of the question. He builds up some quite solid analysis of his own to tie the answer together. However, for a top level he does need to show a better appreciation of the debates amongst historians on this issue; Bullock's 'jobbed into power' would have been a good point to raise. I gave this 8 marks out of a possible 14. It needs work before the summer exams.

Overall, Darren's answers are typical of many at this point in the Upper Sixth: potential for a solid grade in June, appreciation of the sources and use of his own knowledge is evident. However, work is needed to consolidate understanding of each to put it all together for the A Level itself.

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