Tackling the Documents paper at AS

Italian Unification

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AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT IN THE NEW A LEVEL is the source work. In the AS Level it is worth 40 per cent of the total marks awarded for the exam. (The questions reproduced here are copyrighted to OCR.)

How you can achieve a good grade

Common sense points

1. The first requirement is to know your subject. If you are studying the unification of Germany, for example, make sure that you have revised the syllabus thoroughly, as the documents set you in the exam will cover some key aspect of the course. Without having a good background knowledge, you will not be able to interpret the documents effectively.
2. Read through the documents in the exam paper carefully. They usually contain several different points. Note the mark allocation, as it indicates how much you should write. Each question also tells you which document(s) it is asking you to analyse. Only bring in information from the other documents if it is relevant, or tests the reliability of the document you are evaluating. If you are asked to use your own knowledge as well, you are expected to use relevant background information from your course.

What analytical skills are needed?

1. Accurate comprehension. This is the basis of all interpretative skills. You need to understand what the sources are saying. Are they a factual account, propaganda or satire?
2. Evaluation. This means making an assessment of the evidence in a document. Ask yourself what the particular document you are studying actually shows and how reliable is it as a source. For instance, where does it come from and what is its date? Use your background knowledge and, if relevant, the other documents, to check its reliability and utility - that is, what use is it to you in solving the question you are asked? A satirical cartoon may be helpful in shedding light on why a particular policy is unpopular. Similarly, a government propaganda document can indicate what a government wants to hide. In evaluating a cartoon or picture, ask yourself what is the overall message the artist wants to communicate. Then go on to see what it tells you about the events and people portrayed.

A worked example

These documents cover the period from 1848 to 1870 and relate to the period of Italian unification, which was largely achieved by Cavour before his early death in 1861.

SOURCE A. On 21 July 1858 Cavour, the Prime Minister of Piedmont, meets Emperor Napoleon III of France, secretly at Plombières

> The Emperor began by saying that he had decided to support Piedmont in a war against Austria, provided the war could be justified in the eyes of French public opinion. The Emperor also said: 'I must treat the Pope carefully so as not to stir up French Catholics against me'. Then we discussed the objective of war. The Emperor readily agreed that it was necessary to drive the Austrians out of Italy once and for all. After we had settled the fate of Italy, the Emperor asked whether your majesty would give up Savoy and Nice. He merely remarked that this was a secondary question which we could discuss later.
>
> From an account of the meeting, written on 24 July 1858 by Cavour to Victor Emmanuel.

SOURCE B. A journalist, working for a British newspaper as its correspondent in Paris, reports his understanding of what was agreed at the meeting at Plombières

> Ever since the publication of Orsini's letter, hopes that France is disposed to assist the Italian cause have been growing. Now, the predictions have been heard that French troops will attack Austria on one side, while the little army of Victor Emmanuel will revenge an unforgotten reverse on a detested foe, and co-operate in the liberation of Lombardy. We are convinced that the interview at Plombières caused great satisfaction in Piedmont. There is a certain warlike tone in the news today from the capital Turin.
>
> *The Times* Newspaper, 2 August 1858

SOURCE C. A modern historian comments on the situation after the battles of Magenta and Solferino which were followed by the agreement with Austria at Villafranca, 11 July 1859

> Although the war was being won, it is easy to understand how the arguments against continuing it must have seemed overwhelming to Napoleon. The terms of the Villafranca agreement were very different from the plan which Cavour and Napoleon had devised at Plombières. Cavour was furious when he read the text of the agreement. Italian patriots shared Cavour's opinion that they had been betrayed by Napoleon. Yet, all the contemporary indignation at Napoleon's 'betrayal' cannot hide the fact that the Italian situation was greatly improved by the war of 1859 and the revolts that accompanied it.
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> Edgar Holt, *Risorgimento*, 1970

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SOURCE D. An English cartoon shows Napoleon III apparently comforting a distressed Pope Pius IX and advising him to leave quietly and give up his political power

The Friend in Need

Questions and comments

1. Study Source B. From this source and your own knowledge, explain the reference to 'Orsini's letter'

The focus of this question is to test your ability to explain a reference from the source. A lengthy answer is not required. Clear presentation of what you know and some link to the source in which the reference is found is essential to achieve a top mark level. For this your own knowledge is essential, as the source doesn't provide much more apart from some background material. To achieve a top mark it would be expected that you identify Orsini and provide explanation of Orsini's motives and develop analysis of the content of the letter and its context within the source. Such context might include reference to *The Times* and Britain's sympathy for Italian unification throughout the 1850s. A sentence to conclude would round off this answer well.

2. Study source D. How useful is this source as evidence for Napoleon's attitude and motives towards the Pope?

The focus here is on the usefulness of the source to a historian looking at events. You may draw different conclusions about the attitude of Napoleon. Some might see the usefulness of the cartoon in portraying Napoleon as an altruistic figure willing to help the Pope. Other interpretations may regard Napoleon's attitude as opportunistic in trying to exploit the Pope's difficulties to his advantage. Comments should be made on Napoleon's posture, the Pope's evident distress and the caption. However, the cartoon should not be taken at face value, but evaluated in order to get access to the top bands of marks. To achieve a top mark, you would be expected to provide contextual knowledge of Napoleon's attitude to the papacy since 1849, with mention of the proposed Congress and Napoleon's deal with Cavour over the Papal States. Analysing the British perspective of the cartoon would also commend your answer to the examiners. Overall, therefore, a range of factors and perspectives need to be applied to convince the examiner that your answer is worth a top band.

3. Study sources A and B. Compare these two sources as evidence for relations between France and Piedmont at the time of the Plombières meeting

The objective in this question is to directly compare both sources. Similarities and differences need to be identified and brief conclusions drawn. Sources A and B indicate agreement between France and Piedmont on ejecting Austria by combining military forces. Co-operation to achieve this end is stressed in both sources, each suggest that public opinion would support joint action although this was clearly less assured in France according to Source A. Arguably, Napoleon is seen as the dominant factor in the relationship between the two states. However, while in Source A the Piedmontese attitude to the French is deferential, the implication in Source B that it was only pressure that brought the French to support the cause, gives a different slant on the relationship. Objectives for the future of Italy are not the same, and this points to a lack of clear agreement between the two states. Good use of contextual knowledge would need to be applied around such points to secure a top band mark.

4. Study all the Sources. Using all these Sources and your own knowledge, explain to what extent you agree that Napoleon was more concerned with French national interests than the Italian cause

The focus for this question is on judgement in context, based on the use of all Sources as a set and a student's own knowledge. This question brings together the skills and work which should have been demonstrated in the previous answers. Your response needs to clearly demonstrate that you are able to analyse the Sources individually and as a set. Throughout the answer, you should demonstrate own knowledge to support analysis. A clear and well thought through conclusion to what is a small essay is required to round off a top band answer.

Sources A and B provide an insight into the situation prior to war. Napoleon's concern for land and glory is evident in Source A but his desire for Nice and Savoy could be regarded as of secondary importance to securing Italy's interests. Source B, likewise, could be used to suggest French concerns and Piedmont's satisfaction with the Plombières agreement, however, the best answers will provide details about the agreement at Plombières and explain how France's interests were catered for. It will be noted that French support for Italian unification was more apparent than real.

Source C provides information about the situation during the war and allows students to argue that Napoleon put French interests first, though best development might see the deployment of own knowledge to show that the terms of the peace of Villafranca and the revolts would be very helpful to Napoleon's cause. Students should use Sources A and D to assess Napoleon's attitude to the papacy. Source A suggests that French public opinion was an overriding concern, with Source D confirming Napoleon's support of the papacy as contrary to Italian interests.

Conclusions. Source-based questions provide their own particular challenges. Be aware of these and have a secure grasp of the context of the period studied to make the most of the marks available.

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