

Tips on how to answer exam questions CIE IGCSE History

Paper 1 (Core material)

How to answer part (a) of a question [4 marks]

This question is purely knowledge-based; no analysis is at all required.

In this question, you get 1 mark for each fact you have written. The facts should be presented in very brief statements. You are wasting your own time if you decide to turn this simple answer into an essay. It should take up no more than 4-6 lines. For developing one point, you may be awarded an additional mark for that point. However, the examiners are very stingy about awarding the development mark, so don't rely on it. 4 facts, 4 marks. Keep it that way.

1 mark per point, total 4 points needed.

How to answer part (b) of a question [6 marks]

This question tests both knowledge and understanding. You are awarded 1 mark for explaining a relevant point and an additional mark for explaining and analysing that point fully, which means that potentially you can gain 2 marks per point. That means that a minimum of 4 fully explained points will get you full marks. If you have not properly explained a point, you won't get the mark for it. Once again, don't waste your time by turning a simple answer into an essay. Yet, giving each point its own paragraph will help the examiner keep track of your points and appreciate their value the way you want them to.

1 mark per explained point

2 marks per fully explained point.

How to answer part (c) of a question [10 marks]

There is no need for an introduction paragraph. However, you need to have a clear structure in this answer so that the examiner can keep track of your points.

In this answer, you **MUST** show both sides of the topic. You must show both why you **AGREE** with the question and why you **DISAGREE** with the question. Ideally, the best candidates will provide three points in agreement with the topic and three points in disagreement with the topic. You then **MUST** give a conclusion, which involves:

(i) Which one point is the most important and why

(ii) Why you agree or disagree with the topic in the question.

Once again, don't waste your time by turning a simple answer into an essay. Yet, giving each point its own paragraph will help the examiner keep track of your points and appreciate their value the way you want them to.

How to answer Paper 2 (Source-based paper)

In this paper, the candidate is provided with around ten sources, which include pictures and extracts. A set of questions follow, asking you to comment on particular sources and compare sources with one another. There is one question at the end that asks you to entertain an overall issue using all the sources provided on that paper.

While answering the parts leading up to the main question, some key principles should be kept in mind:

Don't Summarize/ Explain/ Describe: The examiners know very well what every source is saying/ looks like, so your job becomes not to explain the source but answer the question relevantly.

Show Both Sides of the Argument: Every question will entail evaluating sources in particular directions. As a historian, you are expected to show why the source is and is not very reliable, and why two sources agree and disagree, etc. It is likely that you will not gain marks in the higher bands of the marking scheme if you fail to show both sides.

Find the 'Spirit': The marking schemes favour the candidates that can give a beyond-the-obvious explanation. Think, "what is the central message of this source". If you can manage to hack that, the examiner will know that you are no doubt a solid candidate. Even when comparing two or three sources, remember to compare the main or "big message" first, and then later you may compare the smaller, subsidiary messages.

Look at Provenance: In the vast majority of questions, you should also use the provenance of the source in the answer. The provenance is written below the source in italics, and describes the origin of the source. For example, a source written in Germany could potentially have a bias toward Germany. A history book extract is likely to be objective. Extracts from speeches may contain false information that politicians use to misguide the crowds, etc.

Cross Reference: Support every point of analysis you make with a relevant fact or two from your memory, or a reference to a quote from another source. This an important step in reaching the top band of the marking scheme. Avoid going into lengthy descriptions using your own knowledge, I'll say it again, just a quick "fact or two" to give your point the maximum band of achievement.

In certain questions, you may be required to suggest *why a particular source was published or what the 'purpose' of a source is*. In this, the vast majority of past marking schemes have suggested the inclusion of three main items in the answer:

1. Why did the author publish this? Here, you need to analyse the context of time and place of the author and use that to deduce the reason for that publication.
2. What is the spirit or big message of the publication? Here, you deduce the central idea the artist or author is trying to convey to you. Explain this message clearly and fully, while avoiding extensive answers.
3. What is the desired effect on the audience? By audience, one could mean the public, the media or politicians etc. What does the author want them to do? How does the cartoonist want them to feel?

Recently, some more interesting questions aim to put you in the shoes of others. For example, a recent question once placed the candidates in the shoes of Woodrow Wilson, requiring you to write how he would react to a particular source. Here, you get to become biased, and are not required to

show both sides of the argument. Use the following steps to answer this;

- (i) Analyse Woodrow Wilson's views using your own knowledge. (Note: the views and ideologies of people may change over time, so be sure to check the date in which the question has been placed)
- (ii) With those views in mind, begin analysing the sources like you usually do.

In more complex cases, they have asked the candidates to look at a source with the viewpoint of the author of another source. This means you really have to use analysis of time/place/situational context as well as analysis of the message of that source to successfully hack into the mindset of its author. Then go on to answer the question.

The last question on each source-based paper is worth 12 marks (two are marks for your evaluation) .

You need to go through each and every source and briefly explain why it supports the stance in the question or opposes the stance in the question. Sometimes, a source can be both for and against the issue, in such cases don't panic- allot that source the side you feel it belongs in. While you briefly go through each source, remember to pick out any two or three of those sources and fully evaluate and analyse them (in reference to the question) to get the bonus marks reserved for such. The CIE examiners have announced a precaution in regard to this question type:

“Source use must be reference to a source by letter, by provenance or by direct quote. There must be examples from source content. There must be an explanation of how this supports/does not support the statement.”

More on how to answer Paper 2 (source Paper)

- First read the questions.
- Then read ALL sources because the last, BIG question will require you to use your knowledge of all the sources...so if you have read it you can already be thinking of your answer as you go through the paper.
- Use info from source, but also background knowledge. Answers should focus on the sources supported by knowledge of the bigger picture. Always support an answer with examples and explanations. Avoid too much knowledge. IT IS ALL ABOUT THE SOURCES AND WHAT THEY MEAN! The examiner is looking for evidence of the use of sources supported by contextual knowledge.
- Be concise and relevant. There are no “right” answers – only well-supported opinions!!! However, DO NOT rewrite the source! The examiner is very familiar with it and expects you to interpret it or to use it in order to answer the specific question regarding the source.
- Take the questions in order – using the sources as directed. *Allow twice as many minutes for each question as there are marks for that question, i.e. allow at least 16 minutes for an 8 mark answer.* Focus on what is being asked (or suggested).
- **Always refer to the ‘source’ of the source**, e.g. “A cartoon from a German newspaper of September 1939”, or “A speech made in Parliament by Winston Churchill”. Refer to bias, propaganda, self interest, etc. This is called the **provenance** of the source. ALSO mention

the relevance of the provenance to the meaning/message/intention of the source.

- Repeat info if necessary: if information is relevant to two questions write it down twice.
- Other sources on the Paper, not mentioned in the question, can be used if they contribute to a better answer.
- Refer to sources by stating “According to Source C ...” or “From Source A it is clear that ...” or “Source B mentions...”. **Never write an answer to a question without mentioning the source/s that is/are being referred to.**

'RULES' for Paper 2

Rule #1 – Thou shalt answer the question directly in your first sentence. No need for an introduction (use the keywords from the question).

Rule #2 – Thou shalt not summarize. No question will ask you to summarize the sources, so never do it.

Rule #3– In comparison questions, thou shalt state exactly what the similarity/different is (discussing sources separately will be a fail)

Rule #4 - Any question that involves 2 or more questions are comparison questions. In these questions, be CAREFUL: What does the question ask you to compare? Sometimes it's only attitude or view about something, or sometimes it's usefulness, or sometimes reliability

Rule #5 – Thou shalt USE THE SOURCE(s) to back up your arguments i.e. lots of evidence and quotes from the sources

Rule #6 – Thou shalt check if the question wants to you have 2-sided arguments.

Rule #7 - Thou shalt not just look at the surface meaning. You may be expected to also discuss the irony, tone or hidden messages sometimes.

Rule #8 - How useful is the source ≠ how reliable is the source:

USEFULNESS: What can the source show that is helpful for us to understand something VS. What the source fails to show that's important and should be shown (mainly the content of the sources, but also providence!

RELIABILITY: Reasons we can trust the source VS. Reasons we can't trust the source. Use provenance of the sources to judge ("provenance" means date, author's position, purpose, reasons for bias...)

How to answer each type of Paper 2 question

1 - How far do Source X and Source Y agree/disagree with each other?

- The two sources agree/disagree only to some extent.
- On one hand the sources agree because they both have a _____ attitude/view about.... → quote
- The sources agree in their view about... / The sources both view as.....→ quote + explain
- However, the sources disagree in the way they look at... → quote + explain
- One sentence to sum up your judgement on 'how far'

(Note: Make sure you are identifying the similarities and differences, NOT just summarizing. Make sure you're comparing how the sources interpret the historical events (e.g. 'Both sources have a negative view on...'), NOT just comparing what the sources are about (e.g. "Both sources are about USA and Cuba). Sometimes the agreements / disagreements are not directly expressed in the sources, but implied. The fact that the sources have the same focus doesn't mean they agree! The fact that the sources are about different topics doesn't mean they disagree!)

2- Does Source X prove Source Y to be true/wrong?

- On one hand, Source A proves Source B to be true because.... → quote
 - Source A proves/affirms Source B's point about....by saying...→ quote
 - On the other hand, Source A may prove Source B to be wrong because...→ quote
 - Source A disproves Source B by saying... → quote
- +One sentence to sum up your final judgement

(in this question, you can focus on the content of the sources, but also the provenance of the sources: e.g. if a source can be biased, it can't be used to disprove another source. But you must explain why you think the source is biased)

3- Why was Source X published in the year 19xx?

Source A was published in 19... because it aims to.... (+ evidence)

(Make sure you first identify the big picture of the source. Then explain why the author published it in that particular year. This question involves lots of contextual knowledge. Show that you understand the main message of the source, and discuss clearly the purpose / intention of the source, in the context of your own knowledge of the context of that period, and what did the author want to achieve by making the source known)

4- Study Sources X and Y. Is one of these sources more useful than the other about...?

- Yes, Source... is more useful than Source ... in different ways.
- In terms of content, Source... can be more useful than Source ...
- Both sources can be similarly useful.
- In terms of reliability,
- In conclusion, Source ... is more useful because.../ both sources are almost equally useful because...

5 - Are you surprised by this source?

- Yes, I'm quite surprised by the source as it confirms that ... instead of...
 - Taking into account the fact that the source was written by ... it makes me more/less surprised... (discuss the parts you don't expect, either the content, the message, author, the date)
 - The fact that "... " does / doesn't surprise me because... I expect it to be... because... I'm not surprised by the claim that.... because the source is written by....(discuss the parts that are reasonable or things you've already expected)
 - Overall I am only a bit surprised that....because...
- (Your answer should discuss content, provenance, and your own knowledge)

7. Other types of questions

There are times when a question is not like any of the above. But don't worry! They are probably asking the same thing if you read carefully.

E.g. *"Source A is about events before the Cuban Missile Crisis. Does it mean it has no use to historians studying the Crisis?"* This is basically asking "how useful is the source"

E.g. *Why do you think Kennedy recorded this meeting?* This is basically asking "what is the purpose of the source" (like question #3 above)

E.g. *How do you think the cartoonist in Source X would react to what Kennedy says in Source Y?"*
This is similar to "how far do the sources agree"

THE LAST QUESTION

This is the only question that does not change, so it's the one you can prepare for best of all. Make sure you keep this question in mind while working through the sources.

***Top tips:**

- **a 2-sided answer will be immediately awarded 7 out of 12 marks!**
- **You don't need to use every source, but don't skip more than one**

The last question involves all the sources: take them one by one and formulate an all-inclusive answer to the specific question. The sources used will support two different viewpoints or 'sit on the fence'. Ensure that the different viewpoints are explained and show how they are supported by the sources. The conclusion reached should be based on the evidence given. This should come at the end. Sort sources into categories: Sources SUPPORTING; Sources AGAINST; Sources doing NEITHER You can use high lighters or symbols to indicate the three groups.

Firstly, work out which sources support the statement and which ones don't AND which sources do neither.

Secondly, plan to write a balanced answer which clearly addresses both sides of the question.

Third, simply evaluate the sources: quote from sources as evidence and back up your opinions using contextual knowledge to explain how the source supports a side. For some sources, you may need to evaluate their reliability and purpose in order to judge whether they prove the statement or not (this gives you the highest marks)

Finally, remember to answer the question at the end! Give a short final judgement on "how far"

The basic rule for this question is that you must always make specific reference to the sources in your answer. That means saying things like 'Source A supports the statement because ...' and 'I can trust Source B because ...' Use your contextual knowledge to back up your opinions about the sources and also to fill in the gaps in the story: e.g.: The sources don't mention that Britain and France led the League of Nations, which in turn was responsible for upholding the terms of the Treaty of Versailles – and which had forbidden the Anschluss in the first place!

***Top tip - There are two bonus marks available in this last question for assessing or reassessing the RELIABILITY of some of the sources you are considering! Every year more students lose marks on this part of the paper than any other.**

How to answer Paper 4 (extended essay on Depth Study)

Read the mark scheme below. The maximum mark you can get is 40 (Level 5).

Highest Level 5

33-40 Your answer is well written, balanced and highly focussed on answering the specific question set. You have shown that you have a good understanding of the significance of the key features that are relevant to the question such as reasons, results, changes, events and situations, and are aware of the importance of the wider context of this knowledge. You are making effective links between different factors in the question to reach conclusions that are well developed, well explained and effectively supported by factual knowledge that is relevant and accurate to answer the whole question.

Factual and relevant material is used to support statements, accurate, well selected. Answer follows a clear and coherent structure that keeps to an explicit focus on the question asked sustained throughout. Evaluation of the key arguments and interpretations implied by the question. Broad range and depth of factual material is shown in the answer. Answer is balanced in covering different points of view. Links are made between different factors to reach conclusions

If you have it, study Walsh (2013), p. 319 for valuable information on how to answer Paper 4 questions. The CD with Cantrell's 20th century history book may also be useful.

In this paper you will be focusing on whichever Depth study you have followed. There will be two questions and you have to choose one of them. The question will ask you to make a judgement on how important or significant a particular event, person, group or development was.

Your aims

A good answer to these questions will need to do the following things:

- Make a strong case that X (your given event, person or group) was or was not significant. You should aim to make a strong argument that focuses mainly on X.
- Support your argument by selecting relevant events and developments and explain how these events support the argument you are making.

- Show you are aware of other factors that you think are more/less significant than X.

You should:

- Explain why you think they are more or less significant than X.
- Explain how they might be connected to X – how X and the other factors are interrelated (e.g. it could be that other factors created problems that gave an advantage to X).

- Produce a well-argued conclusion that sets out your view on the significance of X. This does not mean summarising the essay you have just written. It means saying that overall you think X was/was not the most significant factor and the reasoning which brought you to that conclusion (e.g. none of the other factors could have happened without X, or all the leading historians seem to argue X was not significant).

A possible approach

The important thing is to make up your mind on your key argument and then use the rest of your research to support it. To help you think through the issue and reach a conclusion you could use a table like this.

QUESTION

... X was significant because: This mattered because:

Reason 1

Reason 2

Reason 3

QUESTION

Other significant factors that This mattered because ... More/less important than played a part include ... X because ...

Factor 1

Factor 2

Factor 3

...

Significance or importance is difficult to assess. These ideas might help you as you plan your argument.

- Did X bring change in the way people acted?
- Did X change people's ideas or beliefs?
- Did X force authorities (governments, monarchs, police forces, etc.) to change?
- Was the impact of X long lasting or short term?
- Did X have a major impact on people's lives? How many lives? For how long?
- If you remove X how far do you think events would have been different?