



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/1E: Russia in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment, 1682-1796
Report on the Examination

7042
June 2019

Version: 1.0

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Question 01

All students answered this question and most tried to identify the arguments in the extracts in order to assess how convincing they were. This was done with varying degrees of success.

Most students identified that Extract A was arguing that Catherine was trying to develop Russia's economy through the establishment of the Free Economic Society, but fewer picked up that the historian was arguing that the limited progress was due to the actions of the nobility. Some also commented on the importance of serfdom in Russia but fewer noted that the extract argued that a debate about the future of serfdom was started. Some students were able to comment effectively on these arguments by making reference to Catherine's views and actions about economic reform generally and serfdom in particular, or by pointing out the poverty and/or illiteracy of the nobility. However, many students tended to have only very generalist knowledge or did not develop their arguments: for example, writing that there was a debate about the future of serfdom because Catherine was enlightened, without explaining this further.

Some students found Extract B quite difficult to understand, for example, assuming that the argument was that Catherine did not realise how important agriculture was to the Russian economy. However, most identified that the extract was arguing that Catherine only made limited reforms to agriculture. Many students did not develop the social and political context for this, even where they recognised the argument in the extract about Catherine's desire not to upset the social order. Better responses demonstrated how this argument reflected Catherine's growing conservatism, especially in the context of the Pugachev Revolt. Other students picked up on the points in the extract about provincial towns. Sometimes these were examined effectively but the commentary often led to a description of Catherine's reforms of local government and/or education which had little relevance to the question about economic development. This exemplifies a continuing problem in answers to the extract questions, where candidates look at specific phrases from the extract with no regard for the overall argument.

Almost all students recognised that Extract C was arguing that Russia's territorial expansion under Catherine was the primary reason for economic development, although many concentrated on the partitions of Poland, rather than New Russia. There was some excellent evidence offered by some students. Very few students recognised the argument in the extract that these successes made more fundamental reforms less likely and hence Russia stayed overwhelmingly rural and dependent on an agrarian, serf-based economy. Some students discussed the balance between agriculture and industry and made valid points both challenging and supporting the argument in the extract.

There is still a tendency for students to make comments on the use or value of the extract. So, for example, it was not uncommon for students to argue that an extract was or wasn't convincing because it did or did not mention a particular factual detail. Similarly, some students commented that an extract was convincing because it was factually accurate. Students need to keep their focus on the task of assessing how convincing the *argument* in the extract is. To do this effectively they need to identify what the argument is and offer evidence *from their own knowledge* that supports or challenges that argument. Too often students identified the argument and evaluated it based on what else was or was not in the extract. Students should bear in mind that, by definition, the extract is only a summary of an argument and the task is to provide the evidence that supports or refutes it.

Most students recognised the need to provide balance in their assessment of each extract. However, for many this meant trying to find something in the extract that they agreed with and

something else that they disagreed with. Sometimes this worked, but it tended to lead to students losing sight of the overall argument. Balanced evaluation was usually more successfully demonstrated when students were able to discuss the nuances of the overall argument in the extract, with evidence offered on both sides, before coming to an overall conclusion about how convincing that argument was.

Question 02

This was a popular question and most students had a reasonable knowledge both of the Great Embassy and of westernisation in Russia. Less able students tended to describe the events of the Great Embassy and/or westernisation without any explicit links between them. Better students were able to link what Peter had seen on the Great Embassy with subsequent reforms, for example, the architectural design of St. Petersburg. There were a few students who did not offer any balance, which limited their assessment but most students were able to offer alternative influences, mainly the demands of war or Peter's childhood experiences. Some students were confused about chronology which led to some spurious comments, for example, that Peter only decided he wanted to construct a navy after the Great Embassy. The best answers were able to link together the different influences in order to assess their importance, for example, Peter's childhood interest in the sea, his realisation of a navy's worth in Azov, and his use of the Great Embassy as a way of gathering knowledge and expertise about naval matters.

Question 03

This was quite a popular question and the majority of students that attempted it had a solid knowledge of Peter the Great's government reforms. Central government reforms tended to be known better than local government ones but few students made no relevant comment on local government. Students tended to offer evidence on the Senate and College system mainly. Some students just described the reforms. Better students assessed the changes in the context of what had been replaced, but some made only very general comments about the success of the reforms, for example, that the change led to more efficiency, or alternatively did not work. Better answers had clear and relevant examples to support their arguments.

Question 04

This was the least popular of the optional questions and there was a wide variety in the quality of answers to it. It seemed that some students wanted a question about Peter the Great's foreign policy and attempted to shoehorn as much detail about the Great Northern War and Peter's conflicts against the Turks into their answers as possible. Other students compared change and continuity in foreign policy in the years 1725 to 1762, with their knowledge of foreign policy before 1725. Where arguments were valid for the years 1725 to 1762, credit was given but these strategies meant that a lot of irrelevant material was included. Students that focused on the years 1725 to 1762, were usually able to make comments on change and continuity based on the specific preferences of Tsars, for example, Elizabeth (France) and Peter III (Prussia), although less was known about German influences in Anna's reign. Students were usually more confident commenting on each Tsar separately and were less able to draw out the trends across the whole period, which a breadth study demands. Such understanding would have been helpful in recognising Russian interests over time and how these affected both Russian diplomacy and involvement in conflict. Better candidates were able to demonstrate this.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.