



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2S: The Making of Modern Britain, 1951-2007
Report on the Examination

7042
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General

The total entry increased from 3451 in 2018 to 3547 in 2019. The mean mark decreased from 40.9 in 2018 to approximately 39.9 in 2019, suggesting that this year's paper was slightly less accessible than in 2018.

Question 01

It was noted last year that many students seem to have adopted a relatively formulaic methodology for answering this question, which was usually composed of three elements: first, a commentary on 'provenance', incorporating, perhaps, a discussion of 'tone'; second, an analysis of the content of each source and third, a judgement, often perfunctory, of the value of the source overall. This formula seems to have become more commonplace this year. When done well, such an approach can indeed reach the higher levels and enable students to demonstrate both their understanding of the skills of source evaluation and of the historical context. However, it can also serve as something of a straitjacket, particularly for stronger students, limiting their opportunity to develop synoptic understanding.

Question 01 is a challenging question, giving students one hour to analyse, in context, the value of three sources for historians for studying a specific issue. Therefore, it is important that students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

The value of the provenance of all three sources must be evaluated. The attribution (the background information provided for each source) is the key element for evaluating provenance. Many responses, however, remain too generic and too partial and are insufficiently linked to value.

Key questions students should be asking themselves are:

- what value can the historian attribute to the author/origin of the source?
- How objective/subjective is the authorship?
- Is the type of source or its date of writing/publication significant?
- Might the author have a particular purpose or intention in mind?
- Might any of the language (tone) used in the source be of particular value to the historian in understanding the issue?

Not all of these questions need an answer for every type of source, but if students are to reach the top levels of response they need to go beyond simplistic comments about 'bias' or 'hindsight' or that 'newspapers are written to entertain and/or inform'.

Tone is the least well understood and probably the least significant element for evaluating the value of the source. A close analysis of grammar and vocabulary within each source is unnecessary but, where appropriate, students might effectively reflect on the overall impression given by the language or terminology used. However, some sources do not lend themselves to a discussion of tone. The best advice to students is: if in doubt, do not try to fabricate or invent something; commentary on tone is not always an absolute requirement for effective source analysis.

Own knowledge can be used to support the evaluation of provenance but it is particularly important, of course, for analysing the value of the content of the source for the historian. The content of the source has to be put into context if it is to be analysed effectively.

When analysing the content of each source, perhaps the least useful approach is to comment sentence by sentence. A better approach is to identify the key argument(s) within the source and to use own knowledge to evaluate the value of this information for an historian studying the issue identified in the question. Own knowledge needs to be used both to corroborate and to challenge the content of the source.

Judgement is an important element of question 01 but this requires more than a basic sentence or two tacked onto the end of a source evaluation stating whether a source is valuable or not. It is worth reiterating that all sources offer some value; students need to judge the strengths and limitations of each source and address its specific value for the issue in question. Overall judgement is based on their evaluation of provenance and content and their own knowledge of the historical context/issue. The generic mark scheme particularly rewards substantiated judgement, which is judgement that is supported by own knowledge rather than by some abstract assertion.

Another approach to avoid is to evaluate the sources by commenting on omission. It is worth repeating what was written in a previous report: less effective answers ‘tend to attempt to reach a judgement on the value of a source by what it does not say or does not include. It is, of course, appropriate to comment that a source may be one-sided, or has a narrow focus, but to offer a long list of what is ‘missing’ (omitted) is unhelpful. Students should evaluate what is included in the source – the list of what is not included could be infinite!’

No comparison of the sources is required and no marks are awarded for comparison.

Source A

Most students knew of Peter Mandelson and his role as a key strategist and ‘spin doctor’ under New Labour and were able to use this knowledge to support their evaluation of provenance. Sadly, those who linked the title of his memoirs to Blair’s ‘third way’ were rather off the mark. Many less effective answers asserted simply that this source lacked value because Mandelson would be ‘biased’. Some basic credit was given for this but the more effective answers were able to offer greater depth, arguing that his insider role – as a key, experienced political strategist and close confidante of both Blair and Brown – made his evidence uniquely valuable in understanding Labour’s campaign strategy and the calculations and decision making at the very highest level of government. Many students, unfortunately, failed to discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of a memoir as historical evidence. The source content offered a great deal of scope for students to corroborate and challenge Mandelson’s views on Hague, Brown’s economic record and Blair’s policy priorities and their impact on the Conservative defeat in 2001.

Source B

Many students unfortunately dismissed this source as ‘not valuable’. Certainly, it had a narrow focus (psephology) but it offered a good insight into the way modern elections are increasingly conducted in our first-past-the-post political system. It was a relatively neutral, objective source as many students correctly identified. More effective answers understood the source in the context of New Labour’s attempt to hang on to the many Conservative voters who had switched allegiance in 1997 and to the linked necessity of ‘getting out the vote’ in key marginal seats. Some students suggested that the low overall turnout in the election meant that ‘Operation Turnout’ failed; others better understood that New Labour largely managed to keep its landslide majority *despite* the low turnout, suggesting that in modern elections success is often about targeting specific voters and constituencies. Some students confused election strategy with presentation and drifted off focus by

discussing Blair's personal appeal and charisma and youth in contrast to Hague, forgetting that Hague was actually younger than Blair.

Source C

This was the most challenging source, requiring students not only to evaluate its provenance as a newspaper article but also to assess the value of its reported views: one from a former Conservative cabinet minister, and a second from an historian. Many students did not recognise that the article was published a week before the election took place, which suggested that the writing was on the wall for the Conservative's election chances even before a vote had been cast. The source reflected the difficulties facing a demoralised Conservative Party in 2001 when even a former cabinet minister could so publicly and dismally criticise his own party. More able students corroborated this through the context of continuing Conservative divisions: the unsatisfactory choice of Hague as leader as 'anyone but Clarke'; the persistent disagreements over policy and direction; the feeling of inertia within the party since 1997. Some rightly challenged the view that the election defeat was largely down to Tory failings, citing instead New Labour strengths.

Question 02

This produced the least successful answers of the three essays and this perhaps suggests that many students feel less competent with the non-domestic policy aspects of the specification. However there were some nuanced answers; students balanced their understanding of the impact of the Suez crisis, Britain's defence and nuclear policy and relationship with Europe, decolonisation and Britain's relative world power status to reach a substantiated judgement on the state of the so-called special relationship. Other less effective answers resorted to basic, descriptive accounts, usually comprising of Suez, the end of empire and Britain's application to join the EEC in 1961. It seemed as if many less well-prepared students chose this question, relying on largely descriptive accounts of the Suez crisis to make up for their lack of depth knowledge on the question overall. The least effective answers went completely off focus, offering detailed accounts of the 'age of affluence' in an attempt to argue that Britain was doing well in economic terms, independent of the USA.

Question 03

There were many very effective answers to this question, illustrating a strong understanding not only of a wide range of relevant legislation but more importantly of the origins of the reforms. The most simplistic answers merely asserted that Labour was in power and therefore could take all credit and described a limited number of reforms (not all relevant to the period). The most successful answers were much more analytical, separating reforms originating directly from the Labour Party from those emanating from private members' bills (often championed and facilitated by Roy Jenkins), balanced against the impact of a changing, permissive society and public pressure - both for and against reform - from the late 1950s into the 1960s.

Question 04

There were some outstanding answers to this question, superb in their depth of relevant detail, balancing economic transformation against social cost. The least effective answers either did not focus fully on 1983 to 1987 or took refuge in listing snippets of poorly understood terminology (particularly monetarism) supported by inaccurate statistics and generalised assertions. Some students did not adequately discuss what they considered an 'economic miracle' to look like. Others merely assumed that all Mrs Thatcher did was 'good' in comparison to all that the previous

Labour governments did, which was ‘bad’. Students may need some encouragement to move away from such simple black and white assessments, particularly at a time in current affairs when critical political judgement is at its most needed.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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