# Modern History Subject Assessment Advice

## Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

# School Assessment

## Assessment Type 1: Folio

It was pleasing to see that more teachers and students made the effort to access the 2016 Chief Assessor’s report, and where appropriate take measures to amend and improve practises based on explicit feedback provided. Teachers should recognise that task design and the types of task being set are critical in providing students with opportunities to attain the highest levels of achievement against each performance standard. There were a number of examples of Folios where teachers clearly provided opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and understanding beyond the content being taught in class.

The more successful responses commonly

* allowed students to develop and demonstrate a selection of 2-3 performance standards in each task
* were creative on nature. These tasks were often seen to be accessible for more students and provided them more freedom to demonstrate the performance standards
* allowed for insightful reflection on why people reacted to different events and developments the way they did and the impact on groups and individuals. (Reflection and Evaluation)
* encouraged students to use a variety of carefully chosen academic sources
* included a range of different types of assessments in the Folio. Tasks included research analytical essays, multimodal tasks, sources analysis, and empathy type tasks. These tasks allowed students to display critical analysis, develop their own hypothesis and structure critical responses
* were interesting and increasingly sophisticated. Examples include the study of different historical schools of thought and also the writing of history, with tasks requiring students to compare and contrast specific historians
* included tasks that demonstrated the application of historical conventions
* prompted students to develop arguments, especially focussed on motives of individuals and groups
* required students to use a consistent form of referencing and provide a bibliography. This approach effectively demonstrated student’s achievements against the second communication criteria
* adhered to the word count or equivalent time frame for Multimodal tasks
* encouraged students to identify their own historical topic in relation to the Depth topics studied in class and constructing their own sources analysis broadsheet and providing an answer sheet. These tasks often allowed students to demonstrate evidence of learning at the A grade bands of Inquiry and Analysis.

The less successful responses commonly

* assessed too many performance standards in one task. Tasks that assessed all performance standards tended to demonstrate superficial evidence against some performance standards
* lacked complexity and did not provide enough scope for achieving at the higher band grades for Inquiry and Analysis and Reflection and Evaluation
* were open-ended research and report style tasks. These task types did not give students the opportunity to show the reflection and evaluation, and inquiry and analysis criteria
* exceeded the word limit
* contained no research undertaken in any task throughout the folio, with no use of referencing or bibliography
* were predominantly essays and sources analysis completed under test conditions. This approach disadvantaged students
* lacked application of historical conventions in essays and sources analysis tasks.

New feedback

Essay questions which invited a narrative response limited opportunities for students to demonstrate learning at the highest levels of the performance standards. Students are encouraged to consider structuring their essay responses with sub headings. Essay questions which invite the student to explain ‘why’ something has occurred provides more scope for an in depth and perceptive argument, encourages engagement with sources and evidence, and avoids students providing knowledge in a list fashion.

Using only past Sources Analysis from SACE exam papers should be considered carefully as it may be difficult for students to show perceptive application due to the answers being readily available.

## Assessment Type 2: Essay

As noted in previous years the formulation and construction of the essay question is the most critical factor that influences success in this assessment type. Teachers are encouraged to work closely and guide students in the initial stages of beginning this assessment type to help in the formulation of an effective historical essay question. The most effective essay questions have a very clear specific focus, including time frame and place. The most effective essays were those that used the correct conventions of history essay writing, with clearly defined and relevant arguments.

The more successful responses commonly:

* focussed on a historical topic that had a clearly defined and specific scope, including time frame and place. Students often saw it as an opportunity to construct an independent academic historical inquiry by focusing on an area of particular interest
* focussed on a question that invited reasoned historical argument. This approach was critical to allow students the opportunity to achieve at the higher grade bands of K&U2 and I&A
* used the maximum five sources in their essays. Students should carefully consider what constitutes a source when deciding on their five sources
* demonstrated the use of a variety of primary and secondary sources, including speeches, diaries, artwork, propaganda and eyewitness accounts. These sources were used to demonstrate a critical understanding of evidence
* were film analysis and literature analysis style questions. Higher achieving students used these texts as historical sources and engaged in a reasoned historical argument of reliability and limitations. Most successful essays carefully chose other primary and secondary sources to compare and contrast these
* used correct conventions of history essay writing, with clearly defined and relevant arguments
* offered a clear counter argument
* used a consistent form of referencing and a bibliography and adhered to the word count
* demonstrated a high level of academic research being undertaken. This was evident by a number of students who showed a sophisticated use and engagement of historiography
* demonstrated careful consideration of the types of sources used - including use of academic journals and scholarly works. With the restrictions of the number of sources that can be used being removed from next year it is important that students consider the reliability and credibility of the types of sources they use.

The less successful responses commonly:

* were narrative in nature. Questions need to be worded carefully so it does not lead to students simply retelling how events and developments unfolded. Questions that focus on a particular historical event in general often resulted in a retelling of the story and did not engage with historical thought, motivations and focus
* did not effectively conclude or resolve the question. Some students simply presented information without bringing the ideas together into a conclusion which answered the question
* were selected from the time frames preceding 1500
* were not of a historical nature. Some responses focussed on contemporary, moral or philosophical arguments which do not meet the assessment design criteria
* used more than five sources
* overused unreliable internet sources. Students should critically evaluate the reliability and validity of sources they use
* lacked a consistent form of referencing and use of bibliography
* were poorly structured and lacked clear topic and closing sentences
* lacked a counter argument
* were film analysis style questions that often provided a film review. In many cases students simply reviewed the text rather than the arguments about the history.

## Assessment Type 3: Examination

The 2017 examination provided students with a broad scope of questions that challenged them to demonstrate the extent of their learning and also apply the skills they had developed throughout the year.

This year’s cohort of students demonstrated a wide range of skills and levels of understanding both of the content and many historical concepts (e.g. cause and effect, sources and evidence, significance). However, when writing an essay, a significant proportion of students seemed to lack the skill of constructing and sustaining a coherent argument that addressed the question.

Markers made general observations that:

* There is a need to develop a clear counter argument
* Students should clearly articulate what they mean by key words or terms in the question (e.g. ‘plight’, ‘escalated’, ‘counter-revolution’)
* More successful responses addressed the premise of the question first before engaging in counter-arguments
* More successful responses contained body paragraphs that started with topic sentences connected to the overall argument, then supported the point with relevant and concise examples and explanations
* Less-successful responses used information from the wrong Key Area of Investigation
* Less-successful responses described events rather than explain their relevance to the question
* Less successful responses contained no counter-argument or only referred to it in their introduction and conclusion.

There were a surprising number of students who seemed not to read the instructions on the front cover of the paper and answered each question from a topic or multiple questions in Part A or B. Due to the brevity of the responses, these students only received low marks.

Overall, students engaged well with the information in Question 45. While many responses successfully analysed and compared the sources on Empress Cixi, a number of students did not construct an argument when answering question (f).

While much of the knowledge students require in 2018 will be very different than in past years, due to the new Modern History topics, the skills required remain unchanged. Teachers are advised to spend time refining their students’ Senior History Skills contained in the Subject Outline, particularly:

* Researching, evaluating, interpreting and analysing historical materials
* Thinking critically about the uses and limitations of primary and secondary sources
* Forming judgements and defending them.

This Subject Assessment Advice and previous Chief Examiner’s Reports may require some adaptation depending on the topics chosen but they nevertheless contain invaluable guidance for teachers and students.

Teachers are encouraged to refer to these documents throughout the year to reinforce the skills as they apply to the chosen topics. This suggestion is particularly pertinent to teachers who have previously taught very popular topics, such as Revolutions and Turmoil, The War to End All Wars and An Age of Catastrophes.

**Specific comments in relation to the assessment design criteria**

*Knowledge and Understanding*

Overall, students demonstrated a very good level of knowledge and understanding of the topics they had studied throughout the year. However, this, by itself, is not enough for students to receive an A or B for their extended responses.

A high proportion of students simply provided detailed narratives, within an essay structure, to answer essay questions. It is essential that teachers help students of all ability levels to identify relevant pieces of information and use them succinctly to support their argument. This should help them focus more on their argument.

For students to achieve higher results they must clearly understand the terms and phrases used in the question. This will enable them to select relevant information from the Key Area of Investigation.

*Inquiry and Analysis*

This remains one of the design criteria that many students seem to struggle with and, as a result, they don’t achieve a high score for their essays. A key reason for this is the lack of an effective counter-argument.

One strategy that teachers could adopt, if they’re not already doing so, is to encourage students to view people, events, issues and periods of time from a range of perspectives (e.g. those who supported the old order and those who opposed it, the Polish view of Soviet-style communism as well as the American view). Those students who presented one perspective would find it very difficult to successfully analyse a person, event, issue or period. Perspectives and empathy are two historical concepts that seem to be neglected compared to other concepts. By adopting an empathetic approach to a situation, the student can quickly and clearly understand a different perspective. Consequently, students would be more likely to avoid simplistic arguments and it would also make it more likely that they would produce at least one counter-argument.

It was clear to markers in many cases that students had constructed an argument and counter-argument, as seen in the introduction and sometimes the conclusion. However, in the body of the essay, those students who did not expand on that argument led to mid-range scores. In some cases, there were only two or three body paragraphs, making it very difficult to provide deeper analysis. Many students attempted to outline an argument in their introduction then wrote everything they knew about that time period and finally attempted to write a conclusion that linked back to the question. These responses attracted low marks.

Another aspect that students could help themselves in is understanding the key words and remaining within the time period of the KAI. For example, many students did not seem to understand what ‘plight’ meant in Question 9 and seemed to consider ‘the people’ as an homogenous group instead of recognizing that there were different plights of rural and urban workers as well as soldiers and liberals (e.g. in France and Russia).

*Reflection and Evaluation*

Many students displayed a good understanding of short-and long-term impacts of events and decisions. Students were well-prepared to explain the ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ of an event or decision but their understanding of the ‘why’ appeared to be simplistic overall. For example, why did ‘political mistakes escalate a regional conflict into a world war’ or ‘why did a dictator use force’ and ‘why was force so successful in helping him achieve power’?

As was the case in previous years, more successful students were able to show the inter-relationship between the focus of the question and the people, groups, events and phenomena of the time. Those who wrote less successful responses seemed to understand people, groups, events and phenomena quite well but in isolation from each other.

As in past years, most conclusions summed up the argument quite well or better. However, few conclusions reflected on the person, event or issue over a longer period beyond the time frame of the question.

*Communication*

Once again, the large majority of students demonstrated a good to high level of communication skills. Most answers were clearly structured, and their arguments were generally easy to follow.

Teachers could enhance the quality of communication by familiarising students with connectives and providing them with multiple opportunities to practice using them.

**Specific comments about commonly answered questions**

**Part1: Thematic Study**

**Topic 3**

Once again, this was the most popular topic in this part of the examination. As usual, a high proportion of responses to questions were based on the French and Russian Revolutions. A few students still compared two revolutions and their responses tended to be more superficial.

**Question 9**

There were two aspects of this question that students consistently failed to address effectively. The first was the ‘plight’ of the people. It appeared that few students knew the meaning of the word and, as a result, were not able to explain what it was for different, social and economic groups. The overwhelming majority of students based their response on the February and October Revolutions in Russia, instead of just one, while most of the others dealt with the French Revolution. Some based their responses on the American colonies, Iran and Cuba.

More successful responses:

* clearly identified which ‘pre-revolutionary government’ they were referring to in the case of Russia (i.e. the tsarist regime or the provisional government)
* clearly understood the meaning of ‘plight’ and recognised that there were multiple plights (e.g. poverty, lack of hope, oppression, low pay, starvation, lack of supplies)
* distinguished between different groups of ‘people’ (e.g. third estate, farmers, middle class, factory workers, the soviets)
* explained how and why pre-revolutionary governments ‘underestimated’ the people’s plight (e.g. the king/tsar was too removed from the people, officials chose not to inform the monarch of the people’s plight)
* provided a clear counter-argument (e.g. the government knew of the people’s plight but couldn’t or wouldn’t address them or why the government addressed the plight of some groups but not others, the government refused to share power with others)
* maintained a consistent argument.

Less successful responses:

* concentrated on the 1905 revolution and neglected other examples of the people’s plight
* explained problems in pre-revolutionary society and how the government did or did not address them
* provided general information that lacked historical detail
* included detailed but irrelevant information.

**Question 10**

More successful responses:

* clearly identified the ‘old order’, especially when referring to the February or October Russian revolution
* clearly identified a range of internal factors (political, social and economic)
* clearly explained how those factors contributed to the collapse of the old order
* clearly identified at least one external factor (e.g. the first world war, communist ideology, modern military technology and tactics in other countries) and how it contributed to the collapse of the old order
* evaluated the importance of those factors.

Less successful responses:

* lacked detailed knowledge of internal and external factors
* did not explain how the different factors, both internal and external, contributed to the collapse of ‘the old order’
* described those factors in excessive detail.

**Question 12**

More successful responses:

* clearly understood the terms ‘counter-revolution’ and ‘revolutionary ideology’
* identified the threats to the counter-revolution
* explained in detail any changes a counter-revolution had or didn’t have on the revolutionaries’ ideology
* showed a complexity of argument that explored parts of the ideology that did or did not change
* considered other factors that led to short- and/or long-term changes to their ideology.

Less successful responses:

* contained little or no counter-argument
* claimed that violence was a new ideology.

**Part 2: Depth Study**

**Question 29**

More successful responses:

* clearly described the political mistakes and supported them with relevant examples
* explained how decisions and actions of political leaders, including ministers or advisors, were made hastily or based on fear or a desire to achieve greater power
* clearly explained how and why the 1914 Balkans crisis expanded into a world war when earlier crises did not.

Less successful responses:

* explained the best-known causes of the first world war (e.g. nationalism alliances, arms race)
* made no attempt to analyse whether actions taken were mistakes or not
* made little or no reference to an escalation of the conflict beyond Europe.

**Question 30**

More successful responses:

* clearly understood and explained the different theatres of war beyond Europe (e.g. the Dardanelles, middle east, Africa, the Atlantic ocean and south-east Asia) that made this war a world war
* referred to the involvement of non-European nations that made this war a world war
* provided a clear and well-justified counter-argument (e.g. that the outcome of the war was determined by the result on the western front despite allied losses elsewhere, most men and resources were directed towards the western front).

Less successful responses:

* simply focused on the course of the war on the western front
* explained that most of the war was fought on the western front but provided little or no information about conflicts elsewhere.

**Question 31**

More successful responses:

* made the distinction between political reform and political changes as a result of the first world war
* clearly understood the connections between the collapse or overthrow of governments (e.g. in Germany and Russia) and the first world war
* described examples of political changes (e.g. votes for women in Britain) and the impact of the war on those changes.

Less successful responses:

* provided no counter-argument (e.g. maintaining the status quo in France)
* described political reforms without connecting them to the first world war.

**Question 32**

More successful responses:

* clearly defined what they meant by ‘short-term solutions’ and ‘long-term goals’
* clearly articulated the motives of each of the leaders (e.g. revenge, regaining lost or new territory, sustained peace)
* discussed the changing attitudes of national leaders over time and why those changes happened
* explained why different leaders had different motivations
* discussed how some short-term solutions (e.g. disarmament, self-determination) were intended to achieve some long-term goals (e.g. peace in Europe)
* explained the different features and outcomes of treaties other than the Versailles treaty (e.g. Locarno pact, Kellogg-Briand treaty).

Less successful responses:

* made generalised comments about the reasons for the leaders’ treatment of Germany and other nations
* claimed that all leaders had the same or similar motives
* made little distinction between ‘short-term solutions’ and ‘long-term goals’.

**Question 33**

More successful responses:

* focused on one society, usually the USA but others based their answer on Germany
* described actions taken by Roosevelt to reverse the effects of the depression in the USA
* considered the impacts of the depression on different social groups (women, workers, farmers etc.) and different regions of the country (e.g. Munich, mid-west USA).

Less successful responses:

* did not provide a counter-argument (e.g. increased despair, increased anti-government protests, increased rates of poverty).

**Question 34**

More successful responses:

* discussed events and causes prior to 1933
* provided a counter-argument that explained other means by which the dictator achieved power (e.g. offering popular solutions to economic problems and political threats, the ineffectiveness of the existing government).

Less successful responses:

* explained the dictator’s use of force once he was in power
* were too generalised and simplistic
* described the use of propaganda, violence, weakness and lack of support for the Weimar government, treaty of Versailles and Hitler’s oratory skills without explaining how they contributed to his rise to power.

**Question 37**

More successful responses:

* understood misunderstandings between the superpowers (e.g. expansion of Soviet control in Eastern Europe, the timing of Allied invasions in Western Europe)
* provided a clear counter-argument (e.g. ideological differences, fear, differing views of decisions made at Yalta and Potsdam).

Less successful responses:

* did not seem to understand the misunderstandings between the superpowers
* explained events that took place in the early years of the Cold War (e.g. Berlin Blockade, Korean War)
* made generalised statements without referring to specific and relevant examples.

**Question 38**

More successful responses:

* considered a range of media types (e.g. government posters, newsreels and public information films, feature films, television programs, newspaper articles)
* analysed the portrayal of events through the media and the effect that information had on public opinion about their own and other governments
* explained the relationship between public opinion and government actions
* discussed other factors that contributed to the nature of the Cold War (e.g. fear of nuclear war, fear of the destruction of their way of life, espionage, space race).

Less successful responses:

* focused on the causes of the Cold War
* ignored the premise of the question and discussed other features.

**Question 40**

More successful responses:

* clearly understood the nature of Soviet-style communism
* considered the public in different countries or regions (e.g. Eastern bloc countries, Russia, Soviet republics)
* clearly explained how their discontent contributed to the collapse of Soviet-style communism
* considered other factors that led to the collapse of Soviet-style communism (e.g. leaders’ decisions and actions, economic conditions, relationship between U.S and Soviet leaders, the media in different regions or countries)
* explored the impact of a combination of factors on the collapse of Soviet-style communism.

Less successful responses:

* described the actions of some members of the public in the USSR.

**Part 3: Sources Analysis**

**Question 45**

It was noted by many markers that the quality of responses overall was better than in previous years. However, there were three major concerns raised by many markers.

One was that, yet again, too many students do not seem to know how to draw conclusions. This skill deficiency has been evident for a number of years and teachers are advised to address this when preparing students to analyse sources.

The second concern was a first for all markers. In answering question (e), many students apparently didn’t read the question carefully enough and assessed the strengths and limitations of all six sources, instead of sources 1 and 6.

The third concern was, again, the simplistic statements about the merits or otherwise of primary and secondary sources and the unsubstantiated assertions of bias in one or more sources. For some reason, most students believe that primary sources are clearly more credible and accurate than secondary sources. Students need to recognise that both primary and secondary sources have their advantages and disadvantages and that, most importantly, together they provide historians with a more complete picture of the event, person, period or phenomenon being studied. One type of source can also highlight flaws in the other type of source.

1. Generally, this was answered very well. Students stated that Cixi was generous, kind, motherly etc. A few students placed too much emphasis on what the author had heard about Cixi (i.e. she had a fierce temper) and seemed to ignore the rest of the comments.
2. Most of the students, who drew conclusions, drew them about Cixi rather than China. Those who scored well in this question concluded that China’s rulers could do as they pleased and that China was a very wealthy country.

More successful responses concluded that:

* china’s rulers could do as they pleased
* thina was a very wealthy nation
* The people were unaware of the empress’ behaviour or could do nothing to stop her living such an extravagant lifestyle.

Less successful responses:

* drew conclusions about Cixi instead of China
* used facts instead of conclusions.

1. Most students provided answers that showed the usefulness and lack of usefulness of photographs.

More successful responses:

* stated the degree of usefulness of photographs (e.g. extremely, very, slightly)
* described how photographs are useful in some ways (e.g. showed what the person actually looked like, showed the lifestyle they had or environment they lived in, information can quickly be extracted from them, indicate the nature or personality of the subject)
* described ways in which photographs are not useful for historians (e.g. they have been altered, the impression they give is controlled by the subject of the photograph or the photographer, lack of context, they only capture a moment in time).

Less successful answers:

* stated that photographs were useful to ‘some extent’, ‘an extent’ etc
* focused on Sources 5a and 5b rather than photographs generally

1. This response was generally better done than in previous years.

More successful responses:

* made a statement at the start or the end of their response that quantified the extent to which Source 3 supported Source 4 (e.g. ‘to a strong/considerable/slight/minor extent’)
* explained examples of the ways in which Source 3 supported Source 4 in one paragraph (e.g. photographs were used to improve diplomatic relations between China and other nations, Cixi received foreign visitors, Cixi used the photographs to improve her image)
* explained examples of the ways Source 3 did not support Source 4 in another paragraph (e.g. Cixi’s role in encouraging the killing of Christians and foreigners, newspaper observations of Cixi, Cixi manipulated her portraits) between the sources
* provided quotes from each source to justify.

Less successful answers:

* described similarities or differences. Did not state the extent to which Source 3 supported Source 4
* made a non-committal statement that one source supported the other to ‘an extent’, ‘some extent’ or ‘a certain extent’
* presented their response in the form of a table containing dot points (this may be a useful planning tool but answers should be presented in sentences)
* described ways in which Source 3 supported Source 4 but omitted describing the ways that it did not support the other source.

1. Responses to this question were generally better than in previous years. Many students made much of the fact that the author of Source 6 was born in China and that therefore she was biased in favour of Cixi. Others saw the broad scope of Chang’s assessment of Cixi and the evidence she used to support her position.

More successful answers:

* identified the nature of each source (i.e. extract from a contemporary memoir by someone who new Cixi well and a biography written a century later)
* provided clear strengths and weaknesses for each source
* provided specific evidence (e.g. quotes) and examples from both sources to support their judgements.

Less successful answers:

* didn’t seem to understand the nature of one or both sources
* described the content of each source
* presented their response in the form of a table containing dot points
* simply stated that a source was biased without explaining how that characteristic affected the source’s strength or weakness
* dismissed a source as having no strengths simply because it was secondary (i.e. written long after the event by a person living in another country but born in China)
* claimed a source was relevant, reliable and/or representative without explaining how it was and to what degree it was and therefore whether this was a strength or a limitation
* conjectured that evidence could be changed or biased without making specific reference to how either Source 1 or 6 had been changed.

1. There were still a disappointing number of responses that stated whether or not each source supported the view without attempting to construct an argument.

More successful answers:

* clearly evaluated the view
* stated their evaluation in one paragraph (introduction or conclusion)
* justified their evaluation in detail with relevant and brief quotes or references to visual sources
* made detailed reference to all sources.

Less successful answers:

* made no attempt to construct an argument
* briefly explained how some sources described Cixi as motivated by a desire to improve her image
* made no reference to sources that did not support that view
* lacked clearly separated paragraphs.