2019 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: Historical Skills

It was pleasing to see that more teachers and students made the effort to access the 2018 Subject Assessment Advice, 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 demonstrate achievement against a limited number of select performance standards in each task
* featured insightful reflection on why people reacted to different events and developments in the way they did, and the impact they had on groups and individuals
* referred to a variety of carefully chosen academic sources
* included a variety of assessment types including research essays, multimodal tasks, sources analysis, and empathy tasks
* allowed students to display critical analysis, develop their own hypothesis and structure critical responses
* demonstrated sophisticated engagement with different historical schools of thought
* included tasks requiring students to compare and contrast specific historians
* included tasks that demonstrated the application of historical conventions
* prompted students to develop reasoned historical arguments which especially focused on the motives of individuals and groups
* encouraged students to identify their own historical topic in relation to the content studied in class, construct their own sources analysis broadsheet and provide answers
* explored how events and ideas shaped nations and the resulting short and long-term impacts.

The less successful responses commonly

* were assessed against too many performance standards in each task resulting in students only providing superficial evidence against the performance standards
* were simplistic resulting in a recount or very basic analysis
* lacked detail and/or analysis (e.g. photo stories that were comprised of images and headings)
* did not analyse the short and long-term impacts of interactions and relationships in the modern world
* lacked complexity and did not provide sufficient scope for achieving at the higher band grades
* were open-ended research and report style tasks which did not provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate evidence of learning against the analysis criteria
* provided limited evidence of research having been undertaken in any of the folio tasks
* were essays and sources analysis completed under test conditions
* lacked application of historical conventions in essays and sources analysis tasks.

General Comments

There was an over-reliance on Sources Analysis from past SACE examinations that did not link to either area of focus, *Modern Nations* or *The World Since 1945*.

Essay questions which invited a narrative response limited opportunities for students to demonstrate learning at the highest levels of the performance standards. 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.

Assessment Type 2: Historical Study

The formulation and construction of the 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 this assessment type to help in the formulation of an effective question/hypothesis to form the focus of the historical study. The most effective questions/hypotheses have a very clear specific focus, including time frame and place. The most effective responses were those that used the correct conventions of history essay writing, with clearly defined and relevant arguments and counter-arguments. Students often saw the historical study as an opportunity to construct an independent academic historical inquiry by focusing on an area of particular interest.

The more successful responses commonly:

* evaluated the differing views and perspectives of historians and/or contemporaries
* focused on a historical topic that had a clearly defined and specific scope, including time frame and place
* focused on a question that invited reasoned historical argument; this approach allowed students the opportunity to achieve at the higher grade bands
* demonstrated the use of a variety of primary and secondary sources, including speeches, diaries, film, literature, artwork, propaganda and eyewitness accounts
* demonstrated a critical understanding of evidence
* drew conclusions and provided evidence to justify them
* compared and contrasted the reliability and limitations of sources
* adopted the structural conventions of history essay writing
* established clearly defined and relevant arguments and offered a clear counter argument
* engaged with and integrated a variety of primary and secondary sources as supporting evidence
* demonstrated a high level of academic research being undertaken evidenced by a sophisticated understanding of and engagement with historiography
* demonstrated careful consideration of the types of sources used including use of academic journals and scholarly works.

The less successful responses commonly:

* were selected from time frames outside ‘the modern world’
* focused on contemporary issues without establishing sufficient connections with the historical background/nature
* were narrative in nature
* were in response to questions that lead to students simply retelling how events and developments unfolded
* did not effectively conclude or resolve the question
* drew conclusions but provided no evidence to substantiate their findings
* simply presented information without synthesising ideas
* relied on internet sources and did not evaluate their reliability or validity
* were poorly structured and lacked clear topic and closing sentences
* did not actively engage with sources
* lacked a reasoned historical argument including a counter argument.

Assessment Type 3: Examination

The students of 2019 were the first to experience the Modern History examination on-line while retaining the familiar format, which exemplified the historical concepts of continuity and change. As in previous years, students were presented with essay questions in the form of a proposition which provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of and ability to apply both knowledge and skills. Overall, students adapted to the electronic exams very well, and the quality and quantity was on par with previous years, if not better.

There was a high level of engagement with this year’s Source Analysis section which focused on Mahatma Gandhi’s Salt March. However, three concerning features continued to appear in student responses despite comments being made in Chief Examiners Reports/Subject Assessment Advices for over a decade:

* Simplistic and/or unsupported views in a response to a number of questions about the usefulness of primary and secondary sources.
* Implying bias by an author/artist simply because of their nationality and without any evidence from the source (e.g. an Indian historian is pro-Gandhi, a Chinese-born British historian is pro-Cixi, an American journalist is anti-Russian).
* In Question (f), many students responded by stating whether or not each source, in order, supported or opposed the view in six separate paragraphs.

Markers’ overall observations were that:

* as in previous years, responses to the Sources Analysis questions were generally better than those to the essays
* once again, Germany was by far the most studied topic
* a higher proportion of responses to questions on the United States of America, the Soviet Union and Russia and China were generally more detailed, relevant and better structured than responses to Germany questions
* a very high proportion of essays were well-structured with an introduction, clear body paragraphs and a conclusion
* the majority of responses clearly outlined their argument in their introduction
* most students attempted to provide at least one counter-argument but many were simplistic or superficial
* more students included quotes to illustrate or support their points than in previous years
* there was an increase in the number of responses that substantiated arguments with relevant historians
* a high proportion of students appeared to have difficulty interpreting what the questions were asking of them
* many students included information beyond the time frame of the question
* as in previous years, too many students did not address the question, preferring to present a seemingly prepared answer.

More successful responses commonly:

* manipulated their knowledge in order to answer the question posed to them and argue a point
* created a clear and coherent argument and at least one sound counter-argument
* incorporated pertinent quotes from historians or relevant people
* included specific historical nomenclature and terminology
* linked their counter-arguments back to the proposition
* explained the difference between diverse historical interpretations
* incorporated historical concepts, particularly, continuity and change, cause and effect, contestability and evidence into their responses
* considered internal and external forces when appropriate.

Less successful responses commonly:

* had difficulty interpreting the question and understanding what they were expected to do
* presented pre-planned responses that did not address the proposition
* provided a mix of information that may or may not have been relevant
* presented simplistic or superficial arguments and counter-arguments
* were primarily narrative
* did not clarify what they meant by key terms (e.g. national identity, national infrastructure, developments in the arts and culture, political fringe, Nazi economic policies)
* addressed only part of the time frame or was outside the time frame of the proposition (e.g. discussing Nazi economic policies after they came to power, discussing the experience of Nazism up to 1939, Mao’s role in the Four Modernisations)
* over-used quotes without integrating them into their responses
* included informal expression
* considered only one perspective (e.g. ‘most Americans’ (Q.6), ‘German society’ (Q.7), ‘most Germans’ (Q.9), ‘economic challenges’ (Q.11), ‘social benefits’ (Q.16)).

Essay

Question 1

Very few responses.

More successful responses:

* explained how more ports, railways, bridges etc. facilitated the movement of raw materials, equipment, imports and exports between different parts of Australia which in turn produced economic growth.

Less successful responses:

* could not describe or explain what ‘economic growth’ or ‘infrastructure’ were
* did not explain how infrastructure was connected to economic growth
* many knew little about economic growth and talked mainly about general pivotal moments in Australian history without linking them back to the question
* most were only able to mention the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge as an example of infrastructure development
* mainly discussed the Depression era.

Question 2

Few responses.

More successful responses:

* described the new forms of leisure and entertainment or the growth of existing forms, including sport, movies and music.

Less successful responses:

* provided simplistic responses and generalised examples
* didn’t address the question (i.e. the connection between national identity and new forms of leisure and entertainment)
* didn’t mention what Australia’s national identity was previously to provide a point of comparison
* failed to explain the ways in which Australia’s national identity changed
* failed to provide a counter-argument (e.g. impacts of the First World War, immigration, continuation of pro‑British influences).

Question 3

There were very few answers that were generally poor.

Less successful responses:

* did not provide a clear definition of socialism
* did not provide the political and social contexts for the formation and development of new or existing political parties
* struggled to explain the nature and responses of specific political parties to socialism and other factors
* focused on Billy Hughes’ decisions and actions
* failed to consider external factors (e.g. Bolshevik Revolution in Russia)
* responded to the question based on Germany.

Question 4

More successful responses:

* were able to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of the New Deal generally
* used particular decisions or Acts to illustrate their views
* identified the regions or groups (e.g. workers, farmers, rural communities, young people, black women) who did or did not benefit from particular decisions or Acts or the New Deal overall
* mentioned the limitations of the actions.

Less successful responses:

* did not discuss whether or not the New Deal contained desperate actions
* did not identify criteria to determine the effectiveness of different actions and Acts.

Question 5

More successful responses:

* demonstrated a sound understanding of isolationism and its impact on foreign policy
* noted that America’s foreign policy changed over time in response to external events
* provided insightful counter-arguments (e.g. America was superior to European and Asian nations and didn’t need or want to become directly involved in foreign disputes or conflicts, by remaining isolated they could be effective mediators to resolve conflicts).

Less successful responses:

* did not articulate what America’s foreign policy was or how and why it changed over time (e.g. banning exports to Japan, supplying Britain after 1940)
* did not specify what American policy makers feared (e.g. loss of lives, loss of trade, invasion)
* most answers ignored ‘fear’ altogether and focused mainly on describing what the policies were (i.e. isolationism, and Roosevelt’s actions)
* focused on Roosevelt’s leadership style.

Question 6

More successful responses:

* identified large groups who experienced hardship with specific examples
* identified ways in which some groups benefitted from the Second World War (e.g. workers, farmers).

Less successful responses:

* did not identify or refer to most Americans
* ignored deprivations suffered by most Americans (e.g. rationing, employment relocations)
* attempted to claim that military deaths affected the majority of Americans without explaining how
* attempted to claim that the internment of Japanese-Americans brought hardship to most Americans.

Question 7

This was a very popular question however responses were generally superficial or didn’t address the proposition.

More successful responses:

* discussed the ways in which German society had changed since the end of the First World War (e.g. increase in freedom of thought and expression under a more democratic political system, relaxation of censorship laws, growing status of women, fluctuating economic conditions)
* provided diverse examples of arts (e.g. Bauhaus, Dada, cinema, Otto Dix, architecture) and social activities (e.g. jazz clubs, cabaret) that reflected changes to attitudes (e.g. gender roles, gender identities)
* provided detailed and persuasive counter-arguments (e.g. changes were limited to young urban Germans who were influenced by external trends (e.g. jazz, socialism), other groups (e.g. rural people, conservatives, autocracy) resisted changes and disapproved of progressive attitudes and artistic expressions
* discussed how artworks reflected changing attitudes and behaviours.

Less successful responses:

* were seemingly unable to identify and discuss specific developments in the arts and culture in detail
* suggested the proposition was incorrect then discussed Weimar politics, economic issues and the rise of Hitler
* referred to the ‘liberal experiment’ without clarifying what it was and how it related to the question
* considered arts but neglected culture
* chose to discuss political and economic changes without connecting them to social changes or developments in the arts and culture
* discussed artistic changes as causes of, rather than a reflection of, social change.

Question 8

This was a very popular question.

More successful responses:

* were also able to identify specific groups and sectors in society to whom the Nazi party appealed
* provided evidence (e.g. election results) to support their argument
* identified and used short-and long-term factors (use of force, propaganda, disillusionment of large sections of the German people, fear of communism, anger at being blamed for starting the First World War, flaws in the Weimar Constitution, fractured political opposition) in their counter-arguments.

Less successful responses:

* did not clearly explain the Nazi’s economic policies
* did not seem to understand the term ‘political fringe’ and use it correctly in their response
* included events after the Nazi Party came to power
* focused primarily on the state of the German economy and generalised about Hitler’s (not the Nazis’) promises to address them
* attempted to write a ‘rise to power’ essay
* occasionally used informal language out of context (‘make Germany great again’).

Question 9

This was quite a popular question.

More successful responses:

* included aspects and examples covering the whole period from 1933 to 1945
* identified majority groups (e.g. women, workers, youth, nationalists) and how they benefited from Nazi rule
* discussed short- and long-term aspects of living under Nazi rule
* considered impacts of the war years that continued after the end of the Second World war and the Nazi Party (e.g. destruction of infrastructure, dislocation of peoples, refugees, division of Germany, Allied reconstruction)
* included impacts of military losses and Allied bombing and invasion (e.g. recruitment of younger and older males near the end of the war, civilian deaths, property destruction and disruption through Allied bombing, censorship, rationing, refugees)
* discussed positive aspects (e.g. increased employment, political and economic stability, growth of national unity and pride, economic growth) as well as negative aspects.

Less successful responses:

* highlighted only negative impacts
* emphasised the impact on Jews and other minority groups (e.g. Communists, disabled) within Germany throughout Nazi rule
* rarely discussed positive or negative impacts between 1939 and 1945.

Question 10

More successful responses:

* clearly defined ‘Soviet nationalism’
* provided a clear connection between nationalism and sport, particularly the Olympic Games
* presented counter-arguments showing how the arms race, technological developments, the status of women and the arts (e.g. ballet, circus) also promoted nationalism
* discussed the suppression of other cultures to promote Soviet nationalism.

Less successful responses:

* included little evidence of sport being used to promote nationalism apart from the 1980 Olympic Games
* attempted to use the Warsaw Pact and COMECON as examples of other methods to promote nationalism.

Question 11

More successful responses:

* described the general decisions of various leader of the Soviet Union and explained how and why they were ineffective
* demonstrated a familiarity with a range of economic policies and responses made by a variety of Soviet leaders in response to those challenges
* identified glasnost and perestroika as key policies made in response to those challenges
* made clear connections between those failures and the collapse of the Soviet Union
* discussed internal (e.g. public discontent, divisions between those favouring and opposing change, reduced media censorship) and external factors (e.g. war in Afghanistan, arms race) that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union
* presented counter-arguments covering the rise of nationalism in the republics, increase in public opposition to the nature and pace of government responses, growing divisions within and between republics.

Less successful responses:

* were unable to identify specific examples of economic challenges (e.g. food shortages, declining productivity, declining living standards, stagnating economy).

Question 12

Insufficient responses to provide meaningful feedback.

Question 13

Insufficient responses to provide meaningful feedback.

Question 14

More successful responses:

* discussed factors such as unpopular economic policies, declining living conditions, restriction of civil liberties.

Less successful responses:

* contained superficial counter-arguments
* disregarded external factors (e.g. Asian economic crisis, U.S. response to human rights violations).

Question 15

Insufficient responses to provide meaningful feedback.

Question 16

More successful responses

* showed a clear understanding of the negative consequences ramifications of Mao’s tyrannical rule
* explored political and economic benefits of the Cultural Revolution
* included clear and specific evidence to support their arguments, particularly the role and effects of Mao’s status and the Red Guard.

Less successful responses:

* argued that there were no social benefits but did not provide a counter-argument
* discussed events outside the time frame of the Cultural Revolution.

Question 17

More successful responses

* demonstrated an understanding of the long-term impact of Mao’s despotic rule
* were adept at conveying an understanding of how the Four Modernisations led to industrial reform
* were able to link agricultural, defence and scientific advancements as integral components of industrial reform.

Less successful responses:

* discussed Mao’s role in initiating the Four Modernisations.

Question 18

Insufficient responses to provide meaningful feedback.

Sources Analysis

(a) More successful responses:

* referred to what could be seen in the image
* identified that the protestors were led by Gandhi, a group, men, wore white, were barefoot, non-violent, had a long way to walk so they carried sticks.

Less successful responses:

* included information from the preamble instead of or as well as from the source
* wrote too much
* paraphrased details not contained in the photograph.

(b) More successful responses:

* wrote two sentences with an aim in each, or one sentence with two aims (e.g. two of Gandhi’s aims for the salt march were to ‘make [the British] see the wrong they had done to India’ and to ‘rebel through non-violent protest’.)
* quoted from the source, indicating the passage that was a direct quote using either quotation marks or italics
* identified that Gandhi aimed to educate or convert the British people, use non-violent protest, make the British see the wrong they had done to India, disregard the salt laws, stand up for the poorest in the land, remove the cruel monopoly, encourage tens of thousands to take up the mantle if he was arrested.

Less successful responses:

* failed to provide supporting evidence from the source for their answer
* used quotes from the source as their answer
* evaluated the text for bias, reliability and usefulness when they weren’t required to do so.

(c) More successful responses:

* focused on the relationship between Gandhi and Lord Irwin
* provided evidence from the source to support their conclusions
* stated conclusions about the relationship between the two figures (e.g. Gandhi was in control of the relationship, the relationship was important to a great many people (as indicated by the crowd surrounding the pair), the relationship was publicly scrutinized, the relationship was humorous to people in Britain as a cartoon was drawn about it, their apparent class differences influenced the way that they interacted and engaged with each other).

Less successful responses:

* focused on Gandhi and Lord Irwin in isolation from each other
* commented on aspects of the cartoon (e.g. the location, the number of people in the crowd, the sitting position, social standing, personalities or appearance of each person) that did not relate to the relationship between the two men
* failed to provide evidence to support their conclusion
* drew conclusions about Gandhi representing India and Irwin representing Britain, but did not draw a conclusion about their relationship
* only provided one conclusion supported by evidence.

(d) More successful responses:

* identified in the first sentence the extent to which one supported the other
* used quantitative terms to show the extent to which Source 3 supported Source 5 (e.g. great, large, significant, substantial, considerable, small, minor, limited)
* provided a qualifying statement, a discussion of the similarities, a discussion of the differences.
* explained at least one similarity and one difference.

Less successful responses:

* did not state the extent to which Source 3 supported Source 5
* did not provide sufficient detail
* provided only similarities or differences
* focused too much on the nature of the sources and their apparent bias
* provided confusing answers with poorly chosen quotes.

(e) More successful responses:

* included the strengths and limitations ‘for historians researching the Salt March’
* focused mainly on the strengths and limitations of each source while incorporating comments about the influence of their origin and nature
* linked general points with specific examples
* considered the publication date of the cartoon in relation to the event
* discussed the tone of the sources as evidence
* provided justifications as to why certain aspects were considered strengths or limitations (e.g. identifying that the purpose of a political cartoon is to reflect and reinforce the perspectives of the audience that it is directed at, thus providing a biased view, indicated the general opinion of the British population at the time)
* juxtaposed the texts (e.g. ‘Source 3 suggests… This is supported in Source 5 where it…’) and give clear textual references to support their points.

Less successful responses:

* did not refer to the origin and nature of the sources or connect them to the strengths and/or weaknesses of each source
* focused solely or overwhelmingly on the content of the sources
* provided superficial differences (e.g. one is a cartoon, the other is written)
* stated that one or both sources were biased without providing specific reasons or examples
* claimed that each source could be biased or exaggerated without using evidence to support their claim
* presumed that a source is limited by its nature without explaining how or why
* made assumptions about one or both sources (e.g. using terms like ‘could be’, ‘might be’, ‘potentially’)
* stated that secondary sources are less valid, reliable or useful, often without explaining how or why
* provided simplistic criticisms of the reliability, accuracy of the author artist (e.g. ‘he wasn’t there’) or made unfounded assumptions (e.g. ‘he was manipulated’)
* compared the sources
* claimed the cartoon was undated when the date was clearly stated
* provided lengthy descriptions without evaluations.

(f) More successful responses:

* used all the sources
* created a mini-essay (i.e. included an introduction and/or conclusion that clearly stated their evaluation of the view, synthesised supporting and opposing arguments into two distinct paragraphs)
* cross-referenced sources
* used linking words
* labelled the sources they were discussing, which made it clearer for markers to identify whether or not all sources had been used in the response
* used brief, relevant quotes or evidence to justify their views
* recognised the nuances of a source which contained evidence supporting and opposing the view.

Less successful responses:

* briefly described whether each source supported or opposed the view in separate paragraphs
* argued only in favour of the view
* did not draw a conclusion
* used evidence from sources to describe or highlight non-violent civil disobedience without considering its strengths or weaknesses
* included lengthy or irrelevant quotes
* used quotes alone to make their point
* discussed the nature of each source.