

2022 ASSESSMENT REPORT

HSM315117 - MODERN HISTORY

The general feedback from the 2021 examiner's report still very much applies. Students consistently demonstrate a strong understanding of the factual content in each major unit of study. However, there is quite a stark contrast between students who are able to present that factual content as part of an evaluative argument and those who are merely offering a narrative recollection of events. Some of the questions in the 2022 exam consisted of three components and many students made little to no attempt to address all components of the question. Even though many students have an excellent grasp of the course content, many still neglected to address core components of the question. This was particularly evident in the Cold War question where few attempted any discussion on how the Cold War was fought. Once again, Markers would like to advise students that they should address the question to the best of their ability even if that means leaving out some course content that you may have prepared. It would be good for time in class to focus on basic essay writing skills and practising writing those essays by hand. Some papers were noted for being evaluative, well-communicated and factually correct but not following a basic essay structure. While historical content is obviously paramount, the skills that we hope to develop in this course are related to communication and analysis.

QUESTION 1 - USA

Completed to a high standard overall. A great variety of topics chosen with the vast majority of students focussed on the 1917-1932 period. Most students focussed on the social and cultural changes during this period, while some other students discussed economic challenges and foreign policy. Only a small number of students explicitly addressed the second part of the question about whether the USA was left in a stronger or weaker position. Those who were able to evaluate this broad but poignant part of the question were rewarded with strong marks on Criteria 3 and 5.

QUESTION 2 – AUSTRALIA

No candidates completed this question.

QUESTION 3 – USSR

This was given students some freedom to pick and choose the main focus of their essay. However, the question did ask students to assess the impact of the changes they wrote about, and the assessment part of the question was not addressed by many students. As noted in the feedback last year;

- Some students spent too much retelling events and seemed to run out of time.

- Some students wrote too much on pre-1917, not adding to an argument or addressing the question.
- Good structure and use of evidence, lots of good quotes and statistics used to illustrate a point.

QUESTION 4 – GERMANY

This also was a very general question that gave students some freedom to pick and choose the main focus of their essay. However, the question did ask students to assess the impact of the changes they wrote about, and the assessment part of the question was not addressed by many students.

Some markers identified that there was some confusion around the significance of the German revolution. It is important to note that the Weimar Republic was a consequence of that revolution, not a condition of the Versailles treaty. There was noisy opposition to the new democracy from Communists and Fascists, but for most of the Weimar period these voices were on the political fringe.

The periods were not always clearly adhered to and many students writing about the latter period often stopped at 1939. As the question clearly states, the time period is up to 1945. Top marks on Criterion 3 were not awarded to those who did not include some discussion of the war period.

QUESTION 5 – JAPAN

Students struggled to engage with the third part of the question, which was to comment on the inevitability of Japan's actions. Many responses were stronger on Criterion 4 – they were able to carry an argument and engage well with evidence in support. Stronger responses were able to engage with the entirety of the chosen time period and analyse threats and challenges throughout, rather than focusing on narrative or one aspect of the period. In order to address the question, students doing the later period should comment on the war, the occupation, reconstruction, and changes right up to 1953.

QUESTION 6 – INDIA

Most students discussed the second period and most had a strong knowledge of key events and the general timeline of Indian history during this period. The internal and external threats mentioned varied. Separatist movements and the general threat of poverty to the state's stability were often discussed, as well as the external threats of China and Pakistan. Stronger responses did not just mention what the threats were but offered an evaluative discussion of how Nehru and Indira Gandhi responded to them, and whether or not that response was beneficial to the Indian state. A couple of students mentioned Indira Gandhi's 'emergency' powers threatening the democratic system.

QUESTION 7 – INDONESIA

There were only small number of students who answered this question which make it difficult to comment on general trends. Most papers were in the ‘B’ range and demonstrated a sound understanding of the main events of Indonesian history, however, students did not always answer the question directly. It was concerning that students’ analysis of how leaders could have avoided tensions etc., was that Sukarno should have been less ‘left-wing’.

QUESTION 8 – CHINA

A number of students opted for the first period. Unfortunately, many of these were pre-prepared narrative responses that outlined key events and periods, such as the Long March and the Yan’an Way, but failed to explore the internal threats that led to these. Similarly, very few explored the nature of the competing political ideologies that drove the political leaders and, as a consequence, failed to address the last part of the question – “Briefly consider the opinion that political differences exacerbated (made worse) those threats and challenges”. Many of these students also provided too much back story and hence were unable to cover adequately the time period asked for.

Better responses were confined to the second period. Here students were able to explore a range of internal and external threats as well as provide sound argument on the notion that Mao, himself, became a major threat to China’s development during this period. Weaker responses, once again, were limited to information dump narratives.

QUESTION 9 – COLD WAR

As with other sections, students demonstrated a very good understanding of the factual content. Most were able to give a narrative overview of key events that caused and further fuelled the Cold War. Most students were clearly able to articulate the diverging schools of historiographical thought, although a number still have issues in fully elaborating their understanding of post revisionism. As a result, they provided generalised responses, such as, ‘both sides were equally to blame’ etc., rather than exploring the complex range of factors that acted to drive continued animosities. This sort of superficiality meant that many students did not achieve above a ‘C’ on Criterion 7.

Markers noted that the last part of the question about ‘how the Cold War was fought’ was hardly addressed at all. It appeared to many markers that quite a sizeable number of students appeared to have run out of time or energy, as there were many papers that were incomplete or far too brief for such a dense unit of study. Time management is paramount in order to achieve the best marks possible in this external assessment.

QUESTION 10

Only one student.

QUESTION 11 – TERRORISM

Terrorism responses overall were quite strong. Papers often followed a similar structure and almost all students demonstrated sound knowledge of Rapoport's 'wave theory' of terrorism. The strongest responses engaged quite skilfully with this theoretical approach to understanding terrorism and these students had clearly been exposed to a wide range of different historical/political commentators who had written on this topic. Similar to other sections, weaker responses gave more of an information dump about different terrorist organisations. However, the range of different terrorist groups was impressive – the IRA, PLO, the FARC, the Weather Underground, Al-Qaeda, the Tamil Tigers and more were discussed by various students.

QUESTION 12

Only one student.