

2024 ASSESSMENT REPORT

HSM315117 MODERN HISTORY

General Comments

Markers this year noted a number of structural inadequacies which interfered with the fluency of candidates' answers. While students need to master the historical facts, the course is externally assessed by way of three formal essays. As such, students must be able to write essays in which they formulate a thesis, and develop an argument which proves that thesis, supported with evidence in the form of facts (including events, dates, statistics) and argument of recognised historians. Historical essays are written in the third person and in the past tense. Candidates should write in pen (and avoid erasable pens), cross out mistakes and not worry about white out. Abbreviations used should be widely accepted, not made up on the run. For example, USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) not SU (Soviet Union). And finally, a country takes the "it/its" pronouns – always.

It is good practice to plan the essay in the preparation time. This allows an argument to be built rather than a load of information dumped in a narrative saying "what you know about..." and probably not answering the question. Reviewing this plan keeps the essay on track and ensures the essay builds as was suggested in the introduction.

A large percentage of responses were descriptive, and the essay structure was organised around three body paragraphs: political, social and economic. Weaker responses lacked proper introductions and conclusions. Criterion 3 requires candidates to include in their discussions the arguments and perspectives of others.

Better responses refer to specific fact and the interpretations of (named) historians in discussing the question. They cite events rather than describe or narrate what happened, avoiding a chronological narrative. Quotes from named historians help. These essays consistently referred to the question and the stimulus – but without rewriting it repeatedly. Candidates were rewarded for synthesising quotes meaningfully into their discussion. They used a wide range of sources and perspectives, which is an element in Criterion 3.

"Reputable historians" does not include Alpha History, Britannica, or Lowe, the author of a text most students use. Rather, these do quote historians that may be useful for candidates.

Written Component

Section A

Question 1: USA (15 responses)

Candidates answering this question responded well to the stimulus, whether tackling the early period or the latter period. More candidates selected the early period. The question specifically directed candidates to assess the extent to which poverty drove change in all three areas – Social, Economic, and Political. Few papers actually made this final assessment. Only a couple

responded to the invitation to suggest other drivers of change apart from poverty. However, overall papers did address what happened as a result of events that took place or policies that were implemented. Most showed a solid understanding of the country in the period.

The second half of the question received limited discussion, though the sequence was mentioned. Those handling the latter period needed to address the four phases of Roosevelt's administration from reconstruction to war. A challenging assignment.

Question 2: Australia (2 responses)

Both candidates attempting this question did a reasonable job. The reference to the ANZAC Legend in the question while potentially misleading was better interpreted as a driver of post-war social change, particularly in respect of things like the soldier settlement scheme. While the ANZAC Legend is not specifically mentioned in the course, the consequences of Australia's involvement in World War 1 are key drivers of change during the period referred to in the course. Both papers addressed the early period.

The focus of Section A is Criterion 5, drivers of social, economic and political change – what changed, why it changed and the effect of change. The stimulus specifically challenges the candidates to take a position as to whether pride prevented change. Neither candidate managed to do this. Both had a sound working knowledge of the period but found it difficult to use that information confidently.

Question 3: Germany (179 responses)

A majority of candidates attempted this question. Generally, the question was well handled, with a sound knowledge of the period. The stimulus quote's reference to the Treaty of Versailles seems to have resulted in more candidates writing on the first period (1919-1933), and an analysis of a wider range of drivers other than the role of Hitler and fascist ideology. Thus, there seemed to be more nuanced, sophisticated responses than have been seen in previous years.

Better responses were able to align the stimulus as a driver of change rather than a precursor. Candidates who produced stronger responses were able to state their argument in an introduction; proceeding to address how the Treaty drove change in Social, Economic, and Political arenas; finally, assessing the extent of the humiliation in the conclusion. Those who wrote on the second period used the effect of the Treaty of Versailles to connect to key drivers of change that Hitler and the Nazi party implemented in response to aspects of the Treaty such as economic issues or nationalism and re-building the pride of the Germans.

Rather than exploring what happened, why it happened and the effect, less articulate answers tended to narrate the chronology of events. These outlines lacked any meaningful introductions or conclusion.

Question 4: Russia (70 responses)

The majority of students completed the later period which may have been because the wording of the stimulus challenged some candidates. This said, it clearly contrasted the regimes of Lenin with his ideals and Stalin with his extreme pragmatism. Section A requires candidates to identify the drivers of political, social and economic change. In Russia and later the Soviet Union, the desire for change and how that change was to be achieved was deeply rooted in the country's leadership. It was the candidate's ability to address this that differentiated stronger responses.

There were a lot of strong responses this year – many of whom offered a thesis statement arguing for or against the application of the Brzezinski quote to their chosen time period. Many students demonstrated a strong engagement with their time period of choice, which was pleasing. They tried to analyse the reason behind the changes and discuss the interrelationship behind some of those changes. The question made it quite easy for students to forward a thesis throughout their essay, tying their discussion of the nature and impact of changes back to the idea of a prison or a religious revival. Answers on the early period struggled with the concept of a “religious revival” – something appealing to the needs of the masses and responding accordingly. The later period questions did well in referring to the question, referencing Stalin’s purges, show trials, and collectivisation as a means for Stalin to run a totalitarian state.

Weaker responses tended to not address the quote, or superficially mention it in their discussion. They did not show as in-depth an understanding of the nature and impact of the changes Russia underwent (although most still did this to a degree) nor were they able to bring as many pertinent references to the history or thoughts of historians to their discussion. Such candidates tended to use prepared answers and would write a single paragraph for each of the three changes required of them.

Section B

Question 5: Japan (73 responses)

Japan’s periods of study are clearly defined and very distinct: Early – The rise of Militarism to war (Pearl Harbor); Latter – War and reconstruction (Withdrawal of US Forces). Candidates should stay within the time period chosen. While contextualising Japanese responses to the threats and tensions they faced during this period can require reference to events outside of this period, such as the Paris Peace Conference, the Russo-Japanese War or the First Sino-Japanese War or the London Naval Treaty, students can assume that the markers have knowledge of events and spend no more than a sentence on each, indeed they can deal with this in the introduction. Students are also advised to address the entirety of the chosen period. Many responses failed to address the full period, particularly the latter period, which needs to address both the war in the Pacific, the defeat of Japan and the US occupation and reconstruction. An argument should be constructed in response to the question rather than giving a chronological retell of events.

Stronger responses were characterised by the candidates’ capacity to formulate a thesis as to the role of the Japanese in creating internal and external threats and to analyse and evaluate how the historical events during both periods supported their contention. These students also showed a good understanding of the changeable nature of Japan during this period, and the diversity of internal and external threats the Japanese faced. They explained the event in a clear, concise way, and then went on to analyse it. Some not so strong responses jumped head-first into analysis without giving any context, expecting the marker to “fill the gaps”.

Weaker responses were generally recounts which failed to address the entirety of the period studied. These candidates needed to address not just the internal and external threats faced by the Japanese, but also why the Japanese government responded to the threats in the way they did. Many of these candidates assumed the markers knew absolutely nothing and provided a narrative with no discussion.

Question 6: India (36 responses)

Generally, the candidates who answered the question on India handled it reasonably well. Candidates who produced stronger responses found a balance between relevant facts and pertinent discussion of the internal context for their chosen period and a measured response to the second part of the question arguing whether or not it was more an internal power struggle. A thorough understanding of the sequence of events forms the foundation for any effective response to the question.

Weaker responses contained flawed factual accuracy creating confusion for some candidates when considering external challenges, such as the cause of 1973 oil crisis, which had nothing to do with Kuwait; the extent of the Sino-Indian war of 1962 was exaggerated; and so on. The breadth of responses varied: many candidates referred to just Nehru and his daughter as leaders but left out Shastri, which could have tied into war with Pakistan. There was no mention in any 1947-74 essays of conflict over NE States or the problem of creating new states after independence or the invasion of Goa. Many students combined internal and external threats in their answers, transitioning between them in a manner that compromised clarity, leading to weaker responses.

Students are reminded that a clear grasp of the political systems and ideologies is essential for addressing how these influenced reactions to perceived threats. Stronger responses demonstrated a balanced analysis of the two leaders, Nehru and Gandhi, and the principles they embodied. High-performing students highlighted the differing approaches of Nehru and Gandhi, emphasizing the distinct priorities they addressed concerning internal challenges.

Students are also reminded of the importance of correctly spelling names, which was problematic this year; especially Gandhi but also Nehru, Delhi, Sikh and Buddha. While candidates are not penalised directly for this, it impacts the marker's judgement, particularly for Criterion 3.

Question 7: Indonesia (0 responses)

Question 8: China (157 responses)

Most candidates in this section were able to describe a good variety of internal threats, though some lacked external threats such as the US or the Sino-Soviet split. Responders for the early period generally had a good variety of internal and external threats, referencing the invasion of Japan and US involvement in the civil war. Strong answers managed to answer the second half of the question and made a clear argument for or against the opinion. The best answers were able to analysis the connection between the internal and external threats and gave an explanation of the relationship between these threats.

Generally, those students who wrote on the second period provided better responses. Many students were able to provide more evidence to support the notion that internal chaos had a greater impact; deeper examination of Mao's policies engendered this, thus creating a thesis statement which sought to answer the essay question. For the 1949-1976 era, key events generally included the 3 and 5 anti's campaign, the hundred flowers campaign, the great leap forward and the cultural revolution. The discussion of external threats was not often given much weight. Many students discussed the Korean war as 'being a threat', they would give a brief narrative of the war and end by saying the 'Korean war was a threat'. However, nuanced discussion of the more general threat the US posed was often lacking. The US remained from

1949 -1972 an ideological, economic and geopolitical rival to China's power in East Asia. A cooling of relations occurred in 1972 when Richard Nixon visited China, but this critical change in the relationship was seldom mentioned.

Discussion of the Sino-Soviet split tended to be a bit more detailed, but often followed the formula of narrative retelling of events, sometimes simplistically saying the relationship deteriorated as a result of destalinisation. This lack of detail meant that some students weren't really able to offer a meaningful evaluation of whether or not the internal threats were greater than the external.

Many of the responses tended to be chronological historical narrative and did not explore and evaluate internal and external threats to any great extent. A large number of responses covered only one of each. Candidates are reminded that the basis of strong historical analysis is a thorough knowledge of what happened, when and the effects. Accuracy in respect of names, dates and events, particularly the chronology of events, is vital to producing good historical analysis.

Markers observed that the chronology was particularly problematic when it came to the first period, in particular. A number of students stated or implied the wrong order in which events occurred. Tools such as timelines should form part of student preparation to help avoid this type of error.

Too many students simply described a series of internal conflicts, and one or two external threats, then concluded that one was worse than the other without explaining why. The better essays justified their evaluation by pointing to (for example) the number of people who died at the hands of Japanese soldiers versus the number who died as a result of GMD or CCP action, or something along those lines.

Section C

Question 9: Cold War (252 responses)

This section revealed the largest variety of responses, and unfortunately, overall was not dealt with well. Stronger answers tended to try to tackle the question through formulating a thesis statement in response to the question – i.e., that ideology was or was not a key contributor to the development and continuation of the Cold War, and why this was their position. They then were able to engage in an analysis of the competing ideologies with reference to the opinions of specific historians, as well as a discussion of other factors that may have contributed to the Cold War. Such students were able to use a variety of named historians correctly. Teachers are encouraged to explore a wide range of Cold War historians with their students, particularly those who postdate the end of the conflict.

The weaker answers tended to use the quote in their introduction, without recognising it as identifying ideology as the predominant cause of the Cold War, and a primary reason for the conflict's continuation. Some students were able to identify the three historiographical schools, however they did not engage with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the schools. As Cold War scholarship develops, it is becoming increasingly important to explore how historians have been analysing and evaluating the conflict in its aftermath. Students would describe three events of the Cold War, without reference to how these events connected to the question, then concluded that they agreed with the quote without explaining why.

Students also struggled with addressing the full scope of the question, particularly in respect of the origins of the conflict. This aspect was not addressed well by the majority of candidates. The quote

gave students the opportunity to consider the role the respective ideologies of capitalism and communism played in the development of the conflict, as opposed to other aspects, such as the role of individuals, the failure of the west to open a second front and the burden the Soviets faced in respect of fighting the Nazis, the reality of the postwar world, Stalin's security concerns etc. This could be done through an analysis of the wartime conferences at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam, the crises in Iran, Greece and Turkiye, and ultimately the conflict over Berlin. Depending on the nature of the student's argument, they could then analyse how their position was further proven through reference to specific events in the duration of the Cold War.

Students and teachers are reminded that the elements of Criterion 7 are all to do with historiography/historical debate. A concerning number of students failed to even mention historical debate, instead describing moments in the Cold War. Students need to identify the position of historians, particularly in respect of the cause of the Cold War, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of those interpretations. Some students discussed one interpretation, whereas the criterion elements refer specifically to 'differing historical interpretations', so such students were penalised.

Students and teachers should also be aware that during the Cold War, historical debate formed part of the Cold War itself. Teachers and students are encouraged to embrace more contemporary historians like Odd Arne Westad, Marvin P Leffler and David Engermann, and to recognise how Cold War historiography has continued to evolve after the end of the conflict. Teachers can also explore the rise of historical interpretations outside of the polarity of the US and USSR, for example considering the role of Third World Nations.

Question 10: Aus/Asia (0 responses)

Question 11: Terrorism (14 responses)

This group of essays reflected a solid grounding in Rapoport's Theory of Terrorism. Many responses suggested pre-prepared answers. The examples of terrorist groups given were limited, focussing on IRA, EOKA and the New Left in Europe.

Better papers managed to tie Rapoport's approach to the question posed in the exam.

Question 12: Migration (0 responses)