

2025 ASSESSMENT REPORT

HSM315117 MODERN HISTORY

General Comments

Congratulations to our 2025 Modern History candidates. The complexity of some of the stimulus quotes and questions in this year's exam is noted by the marking panel and was taken into consideration.

We continue to remind candidates that while sound historical knowledge is essential to Modern History, students need to apply that knowledge to construct an argument in response to the question. Candidates need to ensure that they formulate a clear thesis statement/contention in response to the question asked, including any stimulus quote. This argument needs to be sustained throughout their response. Stronger candidates had a clear line of argument and used topic sentences in each paragraph. This helped avoid historical recount. Candidates are reminded that they do not have to agree with the stimulus quote. Stronger responses evaluate the accuracy of the quotes and often disagreed with them in part or in full.

Many candidates only addressed the argument in the introduction and/or conclusion. Candidates must support general statements with precise, specific evidence. Evidence in Modern History includes relevant dates, events, statistics, quotations and primary and secondary sources. Candidates are encouraged to use a wide variety of evidence types, not just one kind. There is no need to use intext referencing in this exam. While it is good for candidates to use historians in their discussion, these should be integrated into their argument. Candidates should explain the context of the quote and how it supports their line of reasoning. There are no minimum historians' quotes that are needed; however, stronger discussions were able to synthesise historians' views meaningfully into their discussion. Sites like Alpha History and Britannica should not be used as references.

Candidates are reminded about the importance of addressing 'significance'. Students need to consider why events, policies, key figures, etc. were important or relevant. This forms part of Criteria 5, 6 and 7.

The legibility of handwriting continues to be an issue. It is recommended that candidates do **not** write in either pencil or erasable pen.

Students should state the date range they are responding to in their introduction.

Students should avoid using "this essay will" or "in this essay I will" or "I will now quote".

Use capital letters for proper nouns (The Great Depression, State of Emergency, Five Year Plans, Partition).

Section A

Question 1 – United States of America

The stimulus for this question was challenging and did not necessarily position candidates to address what drove social, economic and political change in the United States of America and the effect of this change. As such, a number of candidates struggled to integrate the stimulus into their response, while also addressing the standards of Criterion 5.

Question 2 – Australia

There were no responses to this question.

Question 3 – Germany

As in previous years, the majority of candidates attempted this question. The stimulus quote for Germany was better suited to the period 1918 to 1932, and most candidates wrote on this period. Overall candidates attempted to address the question, integrating Kershaw's quote which identified drivers of Hitler's rise to power. Students are reminded that it is good practice to include an analysis of other factors that need to be taken into consideration for changes that occurred in Germany. Most students are still using three body paragraphs, one on social change, one on economic change and one on political change. This format does not necessarily give candidates the scope to respond appropriately to the stimulus and question, particularly if the response has been pre-prepared. Essay paragraphs should be structured around the arguments candidates are making to support their thesis statement.

A number of candidates conflated the Hyperinflation Crisis of 1923 with the Great Depression (1929/1930) and were confused about the role and reforms of Gustav Stresemann, who is a key Weimar figure. Weaker responses provided a chronological recount of Hitler's rise to power, without factoring in other drivers of change. Candidates need to ensure that they are using their historical knowledge to create an argument, not just retelling what happened.

Question 4 – Russia/Soviet Union

As in previous years, the stimulus and question for Russia and the Soviet Union caused many candidates to write on the second period, 1929 – 1953. Those who had prepared to respond to the first period, which predates Stalin's atrocities and most of his influence on Russia and the Soviet Union, had difficulty in addressing this aspect of the question. This disparity was considered by markers. Stronger responses covered the entirety of the period being discussed and analysed the effect of key drivers of change, developing their argument using precise historical knowledge, including key dates, figures and events. It was noted that a number of candidates writing on the first period mainly discussed the revolutions of 1917, ignoring the rest of the period up until 1929. Candidates are cautioned to avoid excessive retelling of events or background pre-1917.

Section B

Question 5 – Japan

Markers acknowledged the high standard of responses to this question. Most candidates wrote on the first period (1931 – 1941). The strongest candidates were able to analyse the respective significance of internal tensions versus external threats, as well as the role that the Japanese (particularly the government) played in the nature and seriousness of those factors. Candidates are reminded that they do need to address why the Japanese responded to threats and tensions in the way they did. Responses need to provide a balanced coverage of events throughout the time period. Those writing on the first period often neglected a discussion on the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Japanese expansion into French Indochina, which is crucial to the threat posed by subsequent embargos of oil and other key resources and its growing tension with the west. Those responding to the second period often overemphasised the war in the Pacific to the detriment of both the initial expansion into South-East Asia following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Allied occupation and reconstruction of Japan. In both periods, Japan undergoes substantial transformation and this needs to be addressed in candidates' responses.

As in other sections, weaker responses tended to be a recount of key events during the period. They also spent too much time giving context by examining events pre-1931.

N.B. Pearl Harbor is a place name; thus, it should not be spelt 'Pearl Harbour'.

Question 6 – India

The vast majority of responses to this question addressed the later period (1947-1984). Candidates demonstrated sound historical knowledge, but they were not always able to use that knowledge to construct a thesis statement/contention in response to the question. It is important that candidates take the time to develop a response to the question and use their historical knowledge as evidence for their line of reasoning.

Candidates need to take care with the spelling of key names, particularly Gandhi, which was repeatedly spelt incorrectly.

Question 7 – Indonesia

Those candidates responding to the Indonesia question generally demonstrated a sound understanding of the main internal and external threats Indonesia faced during the period 1942 to 1965 and 1965 to 1975 and were able to identify the role of Sukarno or Suharto in Indonesia's history. Students who wrote stronger responses were able to understand and articulate the nuances of the interaction between international and domestic challenges and how they often influenced each other; including the role of the United States and the Soviet Union in heightening existing tensions between key groups. These students were also able to analyse the nature and challenges of Indonesian nationalism, as well as evaluate how this affected responses to internal and external threats, particularly from the key figures identified in the question.

Question 8 – China

The majority of responses for this question discussed the later period (1949 – 1976). Generally, the historical knowledge displayed in these responses was sound. Most candidates were able to identify a range of internal and external threats and make a determination as to whether Mao’s leadership was the most important factor in China during either period. The focus on Mao meant that other leadership figures were neglected, including Jiang Jieshi during the first period and Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping during the second.

Stronger responses justified their argument through the use of specific evidence and evaluated the relative significance of internal and external threats.

Section C

Question 9 – Cold War

“The Cold War contest itself needs to be approached as a fluid, evolving entity rather than a static or stable structure: the Cold War world of the 1970s or 1980s, for example, was very different from the 1940s or 1950s.” (O’Riordan, 2023, p.9)

The stimulus quote in this question was problematic for many candidates. While John Lewis Gaddis is indeed the ‘father of post-revisionism’, following the end of the Cold War, he has continued to develop his position. The quote was from Gaddis’ Neo-Traditionalist period, which was influenced by the end of the Cold War and the US’s perceived victory. Thus, this quote is commentary on why the US was apparently ‘victorious’ in the ideological struggle. Unfortunately, many students wrongly identified this statement as either traditionalist or post-revisionist. Without an understanding of the First and Second Waves of New Cold War history, students struggled to effectively engage with this quote and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Gaddis’ position. Other candidates ignored the stimulus quote and instead produced a pre-prepared essay on the three ‘historical schools’: ‘Traditionalist/Orthodox, Revisionist and Post-Revisionist’, but failed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these interpretations, including that in many ways they form part of the Cold War itself and are more applicable to a discussion of the origins of the conflict rather than key events. Students are also oversimplifying those historical schools and speaking in absolutes. Candidates are encouraged to discuss the specific historical interpretations of key historians throughout the Cold War, rather than oversimplified generalisations.

There is much new scholarship on the Cold War. It is important that teachers are aware of the developments in historiography and are communicating these to their students. Elspeth O’Riordan’s 2022 book *Understanding the Cold War: History, Approaches and Debates* provides an excellent overview of these developments. While students were not penalised by markers for not discussing historical debate post 1991, those students who had the understanding of such scholarship were in a far better position to respond to the stimulus quote.

Many candidates had difficulty in addressing both the origins of the Cold War and the three main events over the course of the conflict. Candidates are also reminded that the Cold War was a clash of ideologies between the United States of America and The Soviet Union (USSR), not Russia. Russia was a part of the Soviet Union.

Question 10 – Australia’s Engagement with Asia

There were no responses to this question.

Question 11 – Peace, Conflict and the Nature of Terrorism

Candidates are reminded that the date range for this topic only goes up to 2010, as a number covered the events of October 2023 in Israel and Palestine. There were good references to commentators and historians; however, a wider range of examples could have been used. Candidates often limited their discussion to the IRA or the FLN in Algeria. No candidates discussed the Tamil Tigers, who introduced suicide bombing as a terrorist tactic.

Question 12 – Patterns of Migration

There were no responses to this question.