Examination Technique

This presentation shows you how to approach your GCSE examination in Humanities: what to expect, what the examiner wants from you, what you need to do, and how to make sure you get the best possible marks.
The importance of good examination technique

• If you want to achieve a high grade at GCSE, good organisation and being confident that you know what to do are almost as important as good quality revision.

• Obviously if you do not know enough about the content of the course you will struggle to get a good grade but it is also important that you have good examination technique.
Before the examination

• Make sure you know the dates of the examination and which units you will be doing when. There is nothing worse than planning out your revision only to find that you have mixed up the dates of the examination.

• The GCSE Humanities exam is always in two parts:
  • Paper 1 includes the RS Core Unit and the Contemporary Issues Unit
  • Paper 2 includes the Geography and History Core Units
When you get into the examination hall - 1

DON’T PANIC!

• You will have seen exam papers very similar to the real thing many times before. There should be no surprises.
• Even if you feel that you haven’t done enough revision, there is nothing you can do about it now.
• Try to stay calm, if you panic you will just make things worse.
When you get into the examination hall - 2

• Make sure you are given the correct exam papers.
• Pay particular attention to the Contemporary Issues unit
• You should have an exam paper on the unit you chose to study, e.g. do not try to answer questions on Tourism, Travel & Leisure if you should be doing the exam on the Conflict & Reconciliation unit.
When you get into the examination hall - 3

- Fill out your personal details at the top of each exam paper.
- Read through the instructions on the front cover.
- Remember to stay calm, if there is anything you don’t understand - ask one of the supervisors.
When the exam starts - 1

- Don’t rush straight in once you are told you may start.
- Take time to glance through the whole exam paper and look at some of the questions.
- In the core unit papers you must complete section A but you have a choice in section B where you must choose one question from two.
- It is good practice to study both questions in section B and decide which you would prefer to do before you start.
When the exam starts - 2

• Don’t try to do both questions! You will not have enough time to do good answers to both questions and the examiners hate it - it means more work for them!

• In the Contemporary Issues paper you do not have a choice but read through the paper all the same.

• Even if it takes you 5 or 10 minutes - don’t worry! Time should not be a problem and seeing what the exam paper is about is always time well spent.
And now for the really important part!

- You are ready to start answering the questions
- This is where good exam technique can gain you a lot of extra marks.
How to answer the questions - 1

- Read each question carefully.
- Read it once, and then read it again noting any important key words.
- It is good practice to use a highlighter to pick out the key phrases to help you with your answer.

(b) Explain why it may be difficult to solve the problem of acid rain without international cooperation.
How to answer the questions - 2

• Check the marks available for the question (the number that appears in brackets on the right hand side of the paper).

• This will give you a good indication of how much you are expected to write.

• Obviously you will be expected to write more for a six mark question than for a two mark question.

(b) Explain why it may be difficult to solve the problem of acid rain without international cooperation.

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How to answer the questions - 3

• It does vary from question to question but as a rough guide you will get 1 mark for each relevant point you make.
• So even on the very early questions worth two marks you will be expected to make two points or make a statement and elaborate or give an example of what you mean.
• Use past papers & sample questions to practice examples of how to do this.
How to answer the questions - 4

• The space given for your answer will vary according to the marks available.
• The amount of space you are given is a good guide to how much you should write.
• If you need more space, use an extra answer sheet and place it inside the question paper at the end of the examination.

(b) Explain why it may be difficult to solve the problem of acid rain without international cooperation.

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How to answer the questions - 5

• Unless you are really pushed for time don’t answer a question by just giving a list or using bullet points.
• The examiner will be expecting you to show good use of English and if you use bullet points you will not get the highest level marks no matter how good your knowledge or understanding.
• Avoid “waffle” - when you write a lot without actually saying much that is worth any marks.
• The best way to avoid waffle is to plan your answer before you start to write it.
How to answer the questions - 6

• Plan your answer by jotting down words or phrases that you will need to include in your answer.
• Do this in the margin or on the back of the exam paper - you can cross it out once you have written your answer.
• Planning is also useful as it helps you sort out the facts in a logical way before you start writing your answer.
• Planning helps you to stay focussed and stick to the main point of the question.
How to answer the questions - 7

• Give as much detail as you can in your answers.
• The difference between a C grade and a D grade student is often not how much they know but more about the quality of what they write. The more detail you can give the better your chances of picking up extra marks.
• E.g. if you are asked to describe something, do this and then give an example as well.
• Practice with sample questions will help you get used to doing this.
How to answer the questions - 8

• If the question asks you to look at a source - **USE IT!**

• Some questions are specifically designed to be answered by analysing or getting information from a source, but all sources will help you to answer the question.

• Be very careful when using sources on the history exam paper. There is a particular way of answering these questions.

• Practice on the sample questions will help you with these history sources
Key words and phrases - 1

• It is important that you recognise the key words and phrases used by the examiners in a question
• You need to know what each key word or phrase means and what you are expected to do.
• The following slides explain the most common key words and phrases that you are likely to come across in the examination.
Key words and phrases - 2

• Key word or phrase: “describe”

• What it means: the examiner is testing your knowledge of the topic

• What you are expected to do: You should say what you know about the topic and add an example or extra details.
Key words and phrases - 3

- **Key word or phrase:** “explain”
- **What it means:** This type of question wants you to show your understanding of the topic.
- **What you are expected to do:** Here you would say why something is like it is. You shouldn’t describe what something is like - give reasons why it is like that.
Key words and phrases - 4

- Key word or phrase: “using examples that you have studied”

- What it means: This type of question wants you to apply your knowledge and understanding of a topic to a different situation.

- What you are expected to do: You must use a named case study from your classwork. Make sure it is suitable by checking the question for any examples you must not use.
Key words and phrases - 5

- Key word or phrase: “use the source …”
- What it means: Study the information given in the source (often a photograph, map, graph or quote)
- What you are expected to do: The answer that the examiner wants can usually be found from the information in the source. Look at what it tells you and answer based on that.
Key words and phrases - 6

- Key word or phrase: “to what extent …”
  Or
  “what arguments could be used for and against this view?”

- What it means: These types of question ask you to make a judgement whether or not you think that a statement is true or false.

- What you are expected to do: Use your knowledge to give a balanced answer. The statement will rarely be completely true or false and you must consider both viewpoints. You will lose marks if your answer is not balanced.
Key words and phrases  -  7

• Key word or phrase:  “do you agree with this statement ?”

• What it means:  This is virtually the same as the last two examples (above) although it wants you to give more of your own opinion rather than just using facts.

• What you are expected to do:  Again you should try to give a balanced answer. Even if you feel passionately one way or the other you should least mention an alternative viewpoint.
Key words and phrases - 8

- Key word or phrase: “how useful is this source?”

- What it means: This question wants you to say what the source does tell you about a topic but you must also say what it doesn’t show.

- What you are expected to do: The source will always be both useful and not useful. Start your answer by saying “it is useful because it shows ....” and then say what it doesn’t tell you.
Key words and phrases - 9

- Key word or phrase: “is this a valid interpretation?”

- What it means: This question is the one that most students find most difficult. It will give you a source, often a quotation that gives a point of view about an issue. From your knowledge of the issue, you must say whether or not you agree with this point of view.

- What you are expected to do: Again your answer must be balanced. The point of view given in the question will usually be partly true but there will also be facts that the source misses out & you must mention these. You will be given hints about what things you should include in your answer.
At the end of the exam

• If you have enough time when you have finished the exam paper, read through your answers to check them.

• Remember that in order to achieve a C grade you will normally have to get half-marks or better on each question.

• This is not difficult if you have revised enough and if you think about what you are doing.

Good Luck!