



Common questions about National 3– Advanced Higher Modern Studies Courses

Course assessment — National 5

If there are no marks for the ‘research topic’ section of the assignment, can candidates write the topic/hypothesis/aims, etc on their research sheets?

Yes. While no marks are specifically awarded for this section, an appropriate Modern Studies topic is essential if candidates are to access the full range of available marks. Writing this on the research sheets would not disadvantage a candidate.

Now that the ‘research methods’ section is worth 10 marks, are candidates required to write about three different sources from their research sheets?

No, candidates should still only write about two of their sources. The maximum mark for an evaluation of any one source is still only 6 marks and both sources evaluated should still be included as part of the candidate’s research. Candidates who do not make reference to the sources on their research sheets, giving only generalised comments about things such as ‘the internet’ will gain a maximum of 4 marks. This change means candidates who demonstrate well developed skills, will gain additional marks.

How will the new wording of knowledge questions (ie describe/explain) change the demand on candidates?

The amount of information that candidates are expected to provide for 1 mark in an exam answer has not changed from 2015. The National 5 Marking Instructions will still award 1 mark for a valid point, 1 mark for an accompanying explanation and 1 mark for a valid example. Therefore, in a 6-mark question, a candidate who gives two valid points, accompanying explanations and valid examples would gain full marks.

If a candidate writes more than the required number of points, they would gain marks for their best two. They may write three points but if one point was very weak, then full marks could still be achieved.

In many cases, candidates could actually save time and write less in order to gain the marks. Some candidates write far more than is necessary and then fail to complete the paper or have to rush the final section. Candidates who wrote five points using the 'point, explain, example' method will now only have to write two points in a 4- or 6-mark answer and three points in an 8-mark answer.

These changes will allow candidates to gain marks for providing more detailed/analytical answers. A greater degree of discrimination could also be achieved, providing a fairer, more accurate picture of ability. In turn, this will help prepare candidates for the demands of the Higher question paper.

In 4- and 6-mark questions, candidates will gain marks for their best two descriptions/explanations if they have provided more.

In 8-mark questions, candidates will be asked to provide a maximum of three explanations for full marks. As 4 marks can be awarded for explanations which demonstrate analysis, full marks can still be achieved if only two explanations are provided. If a candidate gives more than three explanations, their best three will gain marks.

Will the 'selective in the use of facts' question always have evidence in the sources which is both selective and not selective?

Yes.

Will candidates be expected to make an overall conclusion regarding selectivity?

No, there is no need to comment on the degree of selectivity.

Will the single statement contain more than one piece of information, such as 'Barack Obama had overwhelming support of his party and the American people'?

The statement will vary. It may contain a single piece of information but it is also possible that it will have two or three parts.

Do candidates need to use two different sources in each explanation?

No. There is no requirement to use two sources in each explanation.

Do candidates have to offer complete balance in arguments made, (ie two points for bullet point one and two points for bullet point two), or can they go to three and one or vice versa?

There is no need to balance arguments, ie two for and two against. 'Three-one' in either direction is acceptable. Full marks will only be awarded if all the sources are used across the whole answer. In fact, if the candidate only ever makes 3-mark points, then 'two-one' could be good enough for full marks.

Can the research sheets for the assignment be typed? If candidates take them into the ‘write-up’ exam, do the sheets need to contain just the two research methods or can they also be used for a plan?

Yes, research sheets can be typed and should contain research. No marks are awarded for the resources taken into the assessment; however, candidates must make reference to the results of their research contained in the resources in the sections on ‘research methods and research findings’. A detailed plan may stop candidates accessing the full range of marks available, as it may lead to copying.

Course assessment — Higher

What is the purpose of the Higher assignment?

The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate challenge and application by demonstrating skills, knowledge and understanding within the context of a contemporary issue.

The assignment is intended to assess the Added Value contained in the Course and is an opportunity for the candidate to show their best work. The assignment is worth 30 marks, one third of the total marks available and, therefore, can have a big impact on the candidate’s overall grade.

Is there a template for the Higher assignment write up? (as there is for National 5)

No. The assignment should be written following the conventions of a report but there are various ways to present this.

How long should a candidate’s response be for the Higher assignment?

There is no set word or page limit; candidates are only limited by the 90 minute time allocation to write up their assignment. Candidates should aim to write a well-structured, report-style assignment, which presents logical evidence and makes a clear recommendation.

Would it be acceptable for Higher candidates to follow a structure similar to that used in paper 2 (decision-making exercise) of the old Higher?

Yes, that would be acceptable.

Do all assignments have to include three options?

No. Some candidates may choose this type of multi-option assignment but for others, two options could be more appropriate. A candidate may begin their assignment with two but could then consider a third as part of their analysis. Without any consideration at all of a third option, a candidate could score a maximum of 29 out of 30 marks.

The Course Assessment Specification states that the assignment will give candidates the opportunity to 'show an awareness of alternatives to the decision.' Therefore, an in-depth analysis of a third option is not required, but an awareness of alternatives is.

Must a candidate make specific references to their sources in their assignment write up?

Yes, there are 5 marks available for referencing sources which are included on the research sheets. To achieve these marks, the candidate must take information from a referenced source and use it appropriately in their analysis.

How many different points should candidates make when answering 12-mark and 20-mark extended response questions?

There is no specific number. The more fully developed and analysed a candidate's points are, the fewer they will have to make overall.

Do candidates have to give a conclusion in 12-mark extended response questions?

There are no specific marks for conclusions (as there are in 20-mark extended response questions). An evaluative point or statement may be considered as part of the candidate's overall analysis (and vice versa) and this is one of the skills which can gain marks. It may also prove to be good practice to advise candidates to always write a conclusion, to avoid confusion in the exam.

Will conclusions in 20-mark extended response questions gain marks no matter where in the answer they appear?

Yes, conclusions do not need to be at the end of an extended response question.

How will the 2 marks for structure be gained in 20-mark extended response questions?

Any extended response question which successfully addresses the question, presents relevant arguments with supporting evidence and provides conclusions linked to the question (not necessarily at the end), will gain 2 marks. It should follow a logical sequence and a consistent line of argument. An answer that may have been rushed and just contains hastily written, disorganised information is likely to gain no marks for structure.

How many sources will there be in the skills questions?

There can be either two or three sources in each question.

In 'conclusions' questions, how many marks are awarded for the conclusion itself?

No marks are awarded for the conclusion itself. All of the marks are awarded for the use of the source material in supporting the conclusion. A very simplistic conclusion is, however, less likely to allow the complex analysis of information required for full marks.

In ‘degree of objectivity’ questions, is the candidate required to provide a balanced answer and an overall conclusion on the extent of objectivity?

Candidates are required to give an overall conclusion on the extent of objectivity in order to gain full marks. Their overall conclusion should reflect the evidence presented in the sources. If their overall assessment does not do this, then it cannot be considered ‘objective’. If a candidate presents evidence that only supports or opposes the view, then their overall assessment based on this evidence cannot be ‘objective’ and cannot gain marks.

In the assignment, will the same rules apply regarding copying from the sources, as applied in previous years?

Yes, copying directly from the research sheets will not gain marks in any section of the assignment. Quoting sources in order to support a wider analysis of a point is acceptable.

Are some types of source not suitable to use for the two A4 research sheets?

The candidate gains marks for their use of the research material to support their report. No marks are awarded for the quality of the sources themselves. The only limit regarding research sheets is that they must not exceed two sides of A4 paper.

Can the research sheets be used to include a plan for the assignment?

Using the sheets as a plan is likely to lead to copying. Even if it does not, it will mean that the candidate may be unable to attract all of the marks available for structure. Research sheets should show information collected by the candidate during the research stage of the assignment and should have references to specific sources. These could include websites, newspapers, TV programmes, surveys, questionnaires, books and periodicals. Notes from written, audio/visual sources or from visits/observations are also acceptable.

Research sheets which simply include lists of points which are then joined together are likely to attract few marks. As will a plan which contains pre-prepared analytical and evaluative comments/argument.

Is a ‘hypothesis and aims’ approach necessary in the assignment?

No, it is not necessary or mandatory but has proved useful for many candidates.

Will questions in the ‘International’ section of the paper continue to refer to ‘a world power you have studied’ or ‘a world issue you have studied’ rather than to actual countries/issues?

Yes, questions in this section cannot refer to specific countries or specific issues, as centres have a large number of options for study. Papers will include an instruction that candidates should make it explicit in their answer which country or which issue they have studied.

Are written notes allowed on the assignment research sheets?

Yes. Written notes on articles, books, videos, visits, etc are perfectly acceptable, as long as the source of the notes is clearly indicated on the sheets. Candidates will gain marks for using their notes, provided they don’t just copy them without any analysis or evaluation.

If statistical information is presented as part of a candidate's research sheets and is then used to support written analysis, would this gain marks?

Yes, as long as the candidate actually processes the information and doesn't just copy it out in the same format. For example, a graph of survey results may be included, which can then be commented on, developed, evaluated, analysed, etc. Candidates gain marks for their use of their source material and not for the quality of their sources.

Course assessment — Advanced Higher

Do all dissertation titles/topics need to be submitted to SQA for approval?

No. A dissertation feedback form is available to allow candidates/centres a mechanism to gain feedback on the suitability of the topic area proposed, however, the Course allows candidates to choose any contemporary political or social issue. In addition, an approved list of dissertation titles has been designed to exemplify a range of topic areas that candidates may find suitable for investigation for their dissertation.

Given that the Advanced Higher exam only requires candidates to answer questions on two contexts, do they have to study them all?

The Course consists of three key areas of content (A, B and C) plus the research section (D)

There will be three 30-mark extended response questions in the question paper and candidates will have to choose two. If candidates have studied all three areas, they will therefore have a choice. If they have only studied two, they will have no element of choice in the question paper. The exam paper will clearly state which key areas each 30-mark extended response question refers to. Providing that candidates focus on answering the question, they are completely free to enhance their response with content from other areas to make a convincing argument.

While SQA does not dictate how centres teach their candidates, each of the three content areas complement each other and can be of use in the exam. By only teaching two areas, candidates may be disadvantaged by removing the element of choice and limiting their generic knowledge of the whole Course.

Is there a requirement for an international dimension/comparison to be brought into the dissertation?

Candidates can cover an international dimension where it supports critical analysis of their dissertation hypothesis. Alternatively they can focus solely on a singular country.

For example, a dissertation on racial inequality in crime could focus on the UK or could include comparisons with other countries such as the USA or South Africa. There is no approach deemed 'better' than another. The quality of the candidate's work will be determined by their ability to demonstrate the required skills, knowledge and understanding, ie justification of topic/research methods/analysis/evaluation/synthesis/organisation and presentation.

The candidate should make it explicit in the title/introduction/aims what the terms of reference will be, ie the UK, US, South Africa, etc.

In the Advanced Higher question paper, is the international comparison mandatory in extended response questions?

Yes, an extended response question without an international comparison cannot achieve more than 24 out of 30 marks.

Is there a preferred style of referencing that candidates are required to use in their dissertation? eg Harvard, MLA, etc.

In Advanced Higher Modern Studies, there is no preferred/official style of referencing. Candidates should make sure they follow the same layout and style every time they reference something and use one referencing style throughout the dissertation.'

When answering questions in the Advanced Higher question paper on research methods, can candidates refer to their own research as examples?

Candidates may refer to their own research/understanding of methodologies and can gain marks if it is relevant to the context of the question.

In the 'research methods' section of the Advanced Higher question paper, the first question is worth 15 marks. Will this always require the comparison of two methods or categories of method? eg 'To what extent are semi-structured interviews a more appropriate research method than focus groups for researching this issue?'

The 15-mark 'research methods' questions (questions 4, 8 and 12) will always have two suggested methods to compare and contrast **OR** be open to allowing candidates to bring in their own comparator method(s) with the one stated in the question.

Unit assessment

In National 5, can we expect the 'enquiry skills' (ES) questions to appear in the order set out in the Course Assessment Specification document, or can they appear in any Unit, as in the Specimen Question Paper?

For **Unit assessment purposes only**, specific skills are allocated to particular Units as below:

Democracy in Scotland and the United Kingdom	Exaggeration/selective use of facts
Social Issues in the United Kingdom	Decision-making
International Issues	Conclusions

This was designed to help centres and ensure that in designing Unit assessments they would meet the Course requirements by covering all the necessary skills. This does not mean that these skills would only be taught in the context of these Units — all the skills are transferable

and may be developed in teaching and learning across the Course in a range of different contexts.

For the **Added Value of the Course assessment**, the Modern Studies skills of using sources to explain exaggeration and selectivity in the use of facts, make and justify decisions, and draw and support conclusions may be assessed in **any section** of the question paper. The nature of Added Value and, in particular, the aspect of application means that the Course assessment (question paper Component) will assess these transferable skills in less familiar contexts. For this reason, as mentioned above, centres should not confine their development of these skills to the Unit contexts as in the table above.

In Unit assessment, candidates are assessed on their ability to meet Assessment Standards. Is it the case that candidates must fully achieve the standard?

Yes. To pass each Unit, candidates must show that they have met the requirements for all Assessment Standards. Unit assessment is about demonstrating the competences described in the Outcomes and Assessment Standards. So if the Assessment Standard says the candidate must use two sources of information to detect and explain exaggeration or bias, then they cannot pass if they have only used one piece of evidence.

It has been said that prompting should be allowed during Unit assessment, however, there seems to be a variety of definitions of 'prompting'. Please provide further explanation and exemplification of prompting.

Given the variety of ways in which evidence may be generated — eg written/oral presentations/visual products — the opportunity to prompt for further clarification would be useful. For example, if a candidate in an oral presentation gives insufficient detail in one Assessment Standard, the assessor could give a prompt such as 'can you say a bit more about the work of an MSP in the constituency?' In the case of a visual product, a prompt such as 'what does that picture of a pressure group show?' could confirm that the candidate has met the standard and also reassure the assessor that it is the candidate's own work.

Is it possible to put the 'judging evidence' requirements directly onto the candidate instructions, or is this too much of a prompt?

This would be too much of a prompt.

Can Units be covered at more than one level? For example, if candidates study social inequality for the 'social issues in the UK' Unit at National 4, must they study 'crime and the law' at National 5 or Higher, and vice versa. If the USA is covered as a study of a 'world power' at one level, can it be covered at another level or does 'a global issue' have to be taken instead?

Yes. A substantial amount of flexibility and openness has been built into the Courses to allow for a high degree of personalisation and choice, and to avoid excessive repetition of content. SQA does not prescribe what centres must teach. There are so many different circumstances that such a model would be impracticable, even if it was seen to be desirable. So you do not have to study crime and the law if you have previously studied inequalities, nor

do you need to do an international issue if you have previously studied the USA. In fact, in both these examples, you have even greater flexibility, as you may look at social inequality from the perspective of different groups, and the choice of world power is from any of the G20 group of countries.

SQA felt it was desirable to have this choice so that centres could keep the content of Courses fresh and interesting and avoid repetition of certain topics.

The National 5 Social Issues Unit assessment states that candidates should include their own knowledge as part of the decision-making exercise. Is this necessary, as this is different from how they will be assessed in the external exam?

In Modern Studies the decision-making skill (located within Social Issues in the United Kingdom) does involve making a decision using sources only and not using background knowledge. The first part of the task in the Unit assessment support pack states this and that candidates must use sources. This is also clear in the 'judging evidence table'. This activity will allow candidates to generate evidence to meet all the Assessment Standards in Outcome 1, ie 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. The second part of the task asks candidates to describe and explain, using their own knowledge. This is to generate evidence of Outcome 2 also shown in the 'judging evidence table'.

The aim of the task overall, and the scaffolding provided by the two parts, is to allow candidates to generate evidence for both Outcomes and all the Assessment Standards in the Unit within the one activity. It is suggested that this is done through a digital presentation — although again candidates have flexibility in how they present their information and centres do not have to adopt this approach. The other Unit assessment support packs show different ways and all make a point of stating that centres have flexibility and can adapt the packs if they want to use a different approach to gathering evidence.

Will there be any additional exemplar assessment materials?

There are no plans for SQA to produce further Unit assessments.

Centres can use the Unit assessment support packs to:

- ◆ assess their candidates
- ◆ adapt for their own assessment programmes
- ◆ help them to develop their own assessments

The example assessment task is designed to provide a valid assessment of relevant Assessment Standards, by making appropriate demands of candidates using a context that is meaningful and engaging. However, centres are encouraged to adapt the task and to use alternative approaches to facilitate personalisation and choice, while maintaining the validity and reliability of assessment.

Additional items will be added to the prior verified section.

General

Do candidates have a free choice of topic?

Yes, any topic from within the Modern Studies Course is acceptable. The topic chosen does not have to be one that the candidate intends to answer in the question paper. Assessors can advise their candidates on topic choice but should not 'give' them a topic.

How many sources can a candidate include in their research sheets?

As many sources as they find useful, provided it does not exceed the two A4 page limit.

In order to provide suitable assessments at all levels, can a variety of past papers and other assessment resources be used?

Yes. It is acceptable to re-use existing materials from National Courses and other resources. Where possible, adapt slightly and possibly substitute sources of a similar level of demand, eg use more up-to-date statistics. The key is to ensure that the assessments are valid for the Outcomes and Assessment Standards at the level of Unit for which they have been submitted.

It is important that whatever is used, allows for the generation of evidence that meets the Assessment Standards. Standards should not be inflated and marks should not be used to judge whether candidates have achieved or not.

If there is any doubt regarding the validity and reliability of assessment materials, then you should have them prior verified.

Each skills question at National 5 states something about linking sources in the judging evidence table. If a candidate writes only one paragraph for a conclusion question which has a valid conclusion (Assessment Standard 1.1) and then evidence which is synthesised between sources (Assessment Standard 1.2), is that enough for the candidate to pass Outcome 1? In the final exam, this type of response would probably only score 2 or 3 points in an 8-mark question.

Yes. What is described is enough to meet the Assessment Standards. It is not a requirement that the candidate meets each Assessment Standard several times by essentially repeating the same task.

Unit assessment and Course assessment have a different nature and purpose. Unit assessment is on a pass/fail basis. Candidates must show that they have met all of the Assessment Standards — a strong performance in one cannot compensate for a very weak performance in the other.

Course assessment, on the other hand, provides a basis for grading candidates and therefore has marks allocated.

General Curriculum for Excellence questions and answers can be found on the [frequently asked questions section](#) of SQA's website.