

Improving Candidate Performance

Advanced Higher Geography

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Introduction

The following notes were produced by SQA's Principal Assessor for Advanced Higher Geography as an aid to centre staff. We have decided to make these notes available to all centres in the Geography subject page of SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk) as they contain valuable advice on improving candidate performance in this Course.

Please note, however, that all of the following text is offered as guidance only — it should not be read as prescriptive or definitive. If you have any doubt about any aspect of the Course or its assessment, the Course arrangements document should be referred to as the definitive source of information.

Advice on ways to produce better externally assessed work

There is no single formula for candidate success in Advanced Higher Geography. Results depend on teacher enthusiasm and expertise, candidates' commitment and the resources available. The following points of advice may be used in different settings and in different ways.

Geographical Issues

Topic choice

- ◆ Relate the choice to available sources.
- ◆ Most manageable if focused on a specific issue.
- ◆ Essays are better when based on good robust sources, though it is possible to write a good essay where one source is less strong.

Essay writing

- ◆ Essay writing skills are invaluable for all Higher Education courses. The Geographical Issue is the first big essay done in the school geography programme.
- ◆ Critical thinking is the core of all academic work in Higher Education. This is a challenging aspect of the Course. It is also one of the most worthwhile parts of the Advanced Higher, and has been a cornerstone in the development of contemporary geography.
- ◆ Citation of the sources used in the Geographical Issue is essential. Full bibliographic information should be given. Though there is no prescribed format for references, the Harvard system, as used in many journals (eg *Scottish Geographical Journal*), is preferred. See Appendix 1, below.
- ◆ Strongly encourage the use of diagrams. Diagrams may be original or taken from another source (photocopying or scanning is permissible). In all cases the diagram source **must** be stated. Diagrams must be mentioned in text by reference to the diagram number (eg '... as is shown in diagram 3') and every diagram and illustration should have a clear and informative title as well as an acknowledgement of its source.

Presentation

- ◆ Virtually all essays are now presented in word-processed form. Paper copies only may be submitted (electronic media such as floppy disks or CDs are unacceptable). In no circumstances are difficulties with computers an acceptable excuse for late submission. A contingency time factor should be built into the delivery date by the candidate/centre.
- ◆ A very high standard of presentation is expected. Text must be error free and clearly written. Diagrams should be well produced (blurred, unclear reproduction is unacceptable). The page limit allows considerable scope for the appropriate use of diagrams. Credit will be given for good use of graphics.
- ◆ A word-processed essay should have a **continuous** text. Do not leave large empty spaces. Good formatting of text is a part of the required quality of presentation. The essay should use an easily readable font size and type. There is no prescription, but 11 or 12 point, with a widely used font type such as Times New Roman or Arial are suitable. This document uses 12 point Times New Roman for the main text.

Plagiarism and originality

- ◆ Though the essay is based on reading of sources and other material it **must** be the candidate's own work. Plagiarism, from external sources (eg internet) or other candidates is treated very seriously by SQA.
- ◆ Candidates may use the same topic but **must** produce their own essay in its **entirety**.
- ◆ Candidates should not include lengthy quotes in their text, even when properly acknowledged. This should be taken to mean that direct quotes be no longer than about one sentence at the most. All quotations and references to sources, or any other materials used in the preparation of the essay, should be cited in an appropriate manner (eg Harvard system) and full bibliographic details listed in the references at the end of the essay.
- ◆ Bibliographic references **do not count** in the page count. **All** other pages (including any title page) **do** count. This also applies to the Geographical Study.
- ◆ Candidates should cite the use of their sources even when using their own words when these relate to the sources. This is not only good practice but also shows the examiner that the candidate is making use of his or her sources.

How much help to give in the final product?

- ◆ Not beyond second draft stage. It is suggested that this is returned to the candidate with 3–4 weeks available for the candidate to produce the submitted version.
- ◆ Note points/areas for correction, but do not make those corrections.

An exemplar general structure of a Geographical Issues essay

- ◆ **Introduction**
Sets out the question(s) that are addressed in the essay. Explains the context of the essay, relating to wider geographical, policy, environmental or other relevant issue. This should be based on background reading and this reading referred to in the text and included in the references.
- ◆ **Source 1**
Précis of arguments and evidence advanced.
- ◆ **Source 2**
Précis of arguments and evidence advanced.
- ◆ **Source 3**
Précis of arguments and evidence advanced.

Each of these, which together will form the bulk of the text, will probably be no more than two short paragraphs – say 400 words. This is a challenging task, especially for substantial sources and sophisticated viewpoints. The use of diagrams to summarise factual content may be helpful.

- ◆ **Additional sources**
Candidates may use more than three sources. However given the word restriction this is difficult. A solution where there are more than three really good sources may be to pair some. Despite the difficulty of fitting it all into 2,000 words, other cited material may add to the strength of the essay
- ◆ **Critical commentary**
This will be a direct and explicit statement on the strength and quality of argument made in the sources. This may be handled by a comment following the précis of each source's argument, but a single section allows easier **comparative** analysis. This then forms the conclusion to the essay. It is not necessary to say any more. In particular, whilst candidates are expected to comment on the sources, they are not required to state their own personal opinion on the issue and no credit will be given for this.

◆ **Bibliography**

The essay **must** have a full and detailed list of references, including the sources and any other material used in producing the essay.

Exemplar Geographical Issues topics

- ◆ The environmental consequences of the Cairngorm funicular are greater than its economic benefits.
- ◆ Redevelopment of the Ravenscraig steel works site for retailing and housing is essential for South Lanarkshire.
- ◆ An analysis of the long-term sustainability of three different forest management systems in Rondonia, Brazil.
- ◆ A critical analysis of waste management policies in South Lanarkshire.
- ◆ The M74 extension in southeastern Glasgow – an economic necessity or environmental disaster.
- ◆ The spread of second homes in the Highlands of Scotland is damaging local communities. A case study of Skye.
- ◆ A critical review of water management schemes on the River Colorado in the U.S.A.

The Geographical Study

As part of the Geographical Folio, a lot of the points made above about the Geographical Issues essay have relevance to the Geographical Study. With both, timing of the work schedule is essential. Most centres will concentrate on one first, then the other.

The teaching programme may lend itself to starting with the Geographical Issue. If the study involves fieldwork, however, or is based on or reliant upon a field course, this may not be possible. Winter fieldwork is difficult, and if left to Easter may not leave enough time to produce a good Study for inclusion in the Folio, which must reach SQA by mid May.

Discuss this with candidates to help them understand why time scheduling is so critical for a good presentation. Every year the examiners see work from good, well taught candidates who have not allowed sufficient time to achieve the quality of presentation of which they are capable.

However, this is primarily the candidate's responsibility, not the teacher's. It also is one of the most valuable preparatory experiences for Higher Education for candidates.

Topics

- ◆ Candidates will need choice support and guidance in choice. Try to avoid formulaic topics. The best Studies invariably are based on demanding topics.
- ◆ Move from a general field of interest, to a final statement of say 4–6 research questions — eg bank slopes are steeper on bends in the lower part of the River Nith.

Data

- ◆ **Primary and secondary data**
The study may use either or both of these. If secondary data is used (eg meteorological data) it must be fully acknowledged and the source listed in the references. Group fieldwork data is perfectly acceptable. An example of this is data collected as a part of a river study. This may well be better for safe working and a larger set of data can be collected. However, the group nature of the data must be clearly acknowledged by the candidate. Individual members of a group using collective data must use it in different ways to examine different research hypotheses.

- ◆ **Fieldwork**
Fieldwork is not essential, but likely for the candidate to collect specific data. It also gives the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate skills in this area of the Advanced Higher curriculum.
- ◆ **Timing of fieldwork**
This can be tricky. If left until Easter this may not leave enough time for a good presentation to be completed. Winter in Scotland is a difficult time for fieldwork. However the time in the field will be 3- 5 days typically, so the problem is manageable with foresight. Explain all of this to candidates.
- ◆ **Resources for the study**
Try to build up a resource base of maps, air photos and satellite images. Some field equipment would be useful. For safety reasons, this might include GPS.
- ◆ **Fieldwork note books**
These are good practice, and may be useful for an appeal.
- ◆ **Safety**
Examiners are aware of the constraints that are imposed by the need for safe work procedure. Safety must always have top priority.

Analytical techniques

- ◆ Use a good range of appropriate techniques. Ensure tests are valid and mean something. There is no need to explain tests in detail, but choice and reason for use and meaning of results are all important.

Presentation

- ◆ A high quality integrated and succinct text is vital. A range of well-produced graphics is essential. There should be a concluding critique. Avoid over-elaborate presentations. Beware of overlays — these count as a page towards the page count. Studies should include a list of references used and an acknowledgement statement.

An exemplar general structure of a Geographical Study

- ◆ **Introduction**
An introduction which explains the context of the Study by reference to theory and current ideas about the Study theme, defines the Study area and theme and specifies the Study research hypotheses.
- ◆ **A method section**
A method section which explains what and why particular data were collected and used. It will then outline how the data has been analysed, including a brief comment on why the chosen methods are appropriate.
- ◆ **Results**
A results section should set out in succinct form the results obtained following data analysis. This section is likely to make extensive use of graphics, though they should be used where appropriate throughout the Study.
- ◆ **A commentary**
The commentary is an opportunity to evaluate the results obtained with respect to the research questions set out in the introduction.
- ◆ **A concluding critique**
The concluding critique should review the Study, and making suggestions for refinement of techniques and/or modification of the initial research questions.

Exemplar Geographical Study topics

- ◆ A study of the relationships between channel width, channel gradient and flow velocity in the lower part of the Endrick River, Stirlingshire.
- ◆ The relationships between soil organic matter content, pH and type of vegetation along three sand dune transects at Tentsmuir Dunes, Fife.
- ◆ An investigation into the morphology of glacial deposits around Carnwath, South Lanarkshire.
- ◆ Changing patterns of urban land use in the Byres Road area of Glasgow over the past 50 years.
- ◆ A comparison of the spheres of influence of the Kingdom shopping centre, Glenrothes, and central Dunfermline.

- ◆ A comparative analysis of tourist facilities in Anstruther and Pittenweem, Fife.

There have been a lot of studies on National Parks and other tourist areas recently. Some are good but others are rather formulaic and routine. Good studies were analytical and generally had original data. Wind farms may go the same way. Shopping centre studies need to go beyond basic description of patterns and compare and/or relate to theory, then explain the patterns revealed in the study data.

Good studies are ambitious in aim, intellectually demanding of the candidate and presented to very high standards.

The Written Examination

Map interpretation questions

- ◆ Make sure that candidates understand that they need to have a clear understanding of, and facility to use, the following basic elements:
 - Scale, including drawing to map scale
 - Relief patterns shown by contours
 - Grid referencing
 - Symbolisation on the Explorer 1/25,000 map series
- ◆ The questions are about **interpretation**: this involves 2 elements; **evidence** from the map and **contextualisation** of this evidence in a geographically based **analysis**. Candidates are given strong pointers in the questions. There are always sufficient elements of evidence, when taken with the required scope of the analysis, to match the marks available.
- ◆ Candidates are becoming quite adept at making use of the atlas. Continue to encourage this, perhaps with more class use of the atlas. A quiz to find a location from atlas clues may be a helpful exercise.
- ◆ More use could be made of diagrams in the answers to map interpretation questions.

Out of 200 marks for the whole AH programme 36 are available for map interpretation (ie 18% or nearly a fifth of the total!).

Geographical Methods and Techniques questions

- ◆ Candidates are getting good at doing the basic calculations, but ought to be reminded that answers should look sensible (eg correlation coefficients are in the range +1 to -1, so that a calculated value of 7.9 is not going to be correct).
- ◆ Responses to question elements on the utility of tests/alternative tests are quite good.
- ◆ Responses to open questions based on candidates' experience are mixed. There have been some outstanding answers but many miss the point. These questions encourage critical reflection of the work carried out in the GMT part of the Advanced Higher Course.

- ◆ The interpretative elements of these questions are answered badly. Candidates must think ‘outside the box’. Answers should be based on the test **and** the data set, atlas information and general analytical skills developed throughout candidates’ geographical education. Candidates should try to answer these parts of the question as fully as possible, but in a direct and sensible way. They should not speculate, but may draw reasonable inferences from the data. The atlas can be invaluable for this part of the examination.

Appendix 1

An outline of the Harvard referencing system

This is a brief summary of the widely used referencing system. It is recommended but not compulsory for use in both elements of the Advanced Higher Geographical Folio.

All sources used in the text, whether used in direct quotation or in derived form (ie ideas derived from a source), **must** be cited in the body of the text. If referring a direct quote the page number should be given in the text only. The author(s) surname followed by initial, and listed in chronological order should follow the citation. For multiple authors in journals or a chapter in an edited collection, second and subsequent authors are listed initial first. **All** of these must be listed at the end of the essay/study.

This list, headed references or bibliography, will give full bibliographic details in the following way:

Each reference is listed alphabetically by initial of the first author's surname. Multiple author references follow a single author's references. References should then be listed chronologically. Each reference will show authors, surname first, then initials, date of publication, title, if a journal its title and volume number and page numbers of the cited paper or piece, if a book publisher's name and place of publication. The title of the published work (ie book title or journal name) should be in italics (preferably) or underlined. ISBN or ISSN numbers are not required. Newspaper items should give author if shown or the newspaper title as author if not credited, the heading to the item and exact date of publication. Websites may be best grouped together alphabetically by first letter following www. The full address as used must be given, together with the exact date of consultation.

Examples of referencing

Dickinson, G. 1988. 'Countryside recreation', in P. Selman (ed.) *Countryside Planning: The Scottish experience*. Stirling University Press, Stirling.
—— 1995a. 'Conservation and environmental change', *Journal of the Association of Scottish Geography Teachers* 24, 38–42.
—— 1995b. 'Environmental impacts in the Loch Lomond area of Scotland', in H. Coccissis and P. Nijkamp (eds) *Sustainable Tourism*. Avebury, Aldershot.

Dickinson, G., Murphy, K. J. and Springuel, I. 1994. 'The implications of the altered water regime for the ecology and sustainable development of Wadi Allaqi, Egypt', in A. C. Millington and K. Pye (eds) *Environmental Change in Drylands: Biogeographical and geomorphological perspectives*. Wiley, Chichester.

Dickinson, G. and Murphy, K.J. 2005 *Ecosystems*. 2nd edition. Routledge, London

<http://www.snh.org.uk/scripts-snh/ab-pa04.asp>; consulted 7/10/5

<http://www.sepa.org.uk/pdf/publications/nws/nationalwastestrategy.pdf>; consulted 7/10/05

How to deal with big reference titles:

Diaz, S., Hodgson, J. G., Thompson, K., Cabido, M., Cornilissen, J. H. C., Jalili, A., Montserrat-Marti, G., Grime, J. P., Zarrinkamar, F., Asri, Y., Band, S. R., Basconelo, S., Castro-Diez, P., Funes, G., Hamxchee, B., Khoshnevi, M., Pérez-Rontomé, Shirvany, F. A., Vendramini, F., Yazdani, ., Abbas-Azimi, R., Bogaard, A., Boustai, S., Charles, M., Dehghan, M., de Torres-Espuny, L., Falczuk, V., Guerrero-Campo, J., Hynd, A., Jones, G., Kowsary, E., Kazemi-Saeed, F., Maestro-Martinez, M., Romo-Diez, A., Shaw, S., Siavash, B., Villar-Salvador, P. and Zak, M. R. (2004) 'The plant traits that drive ecosystems: Evidence from three continents'. *Journal of Vegetation Science*, 15, 3 295 – 304.

(**Note:** in the text this would be shortened to Diaz *et al.* 2004, but the full details are still needed for the list of references.)