Course Report 2018

Subject	History
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Candidate and teacher and lecturer commitment remain very apparent. Centres are now, in the main, very much aware of the demands of the course and its component parts.

This year, with a similar number of candidates, markers were pleased to see some exceptional work. The best dissertations produced reflected, genuine research and real engagement with history. Primary sources were more frequently used alongside narrative or historiographical references.

In some cases a mechanistic response to essay-writing was noted by markers. Essay questions should not be only topic-driven but should focus on an aspect or issue which involves the cause, nature or effect which should be tested in the answer. This should be addressed specifically; a generic response is not expected. The best responses answered the specific question set and many candidates wrote full, thorough, analytical and evaluative answers. There is no such thing as a 'banker' question in this paper. Source answers in the main recognised the distinct expectations of each of the three questions. Rarely did a candidate revert to an active comparison question when tackling the two-source question. The answer booklet has been increased in size and yet again candidates exceeded it.

This report gives a brief summary of question paper performance, and a general overview of dissertation performance before considering, in more detail, each field of study.

Component 1: question paper

The question paper was very well received and candidate responses in the main were more than competent. An exceptional standard of response was notable over all fields. Some outstanding work had historians' views embedded and used to drive forward the argument. The weakest candidates presented a generic essay response to the question set. It is vital for candidates to read and analyse the question, plan the answer and write to the question set. Very few essays were unworthy of a minimal pass, and those that were assigned a D grade or below appeared to have managed their time poorly.

The source technique is understood by most candidates, and where this was the case, the results were commendable, however, where this was not the case, candidates really suffered. It is a key point that the techniques are vital to gain marks. The marking template in the general marking instructions, published on the Advanced Higher History subject pages on SQA's website, gives a guide to the marks awarded. Scrutiny of this and the detailed marking instructions for the field of study benefits candidates.

Yet again provenance points proved difficult for some candidates to access. Linking comments to the question is essential.

Very few candidates applied an active comparison technique in the two-source question but where they did, they lost valuable marks for wider contextualisation.

Markers in all fields felt that the paper was fair, with sufficient challenge to give candidates the opportunity to present the knowledge and skills they had developed in this course of

study. Candidate response to the question set, rather than a generic response, is what is expected.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Titles

The majority of dissertation titles were selected from the approved list. This is updated regularly, and centres may review their selection of titles against the current list. Where an alternative title is selected, a centre can submit that suggestion to SQA for approval. Centres are advised to do so because in this way the examining team can comment on the issue or topic to help candidates produce a thorough and essentially analytical piece. Most dissertations included use of primary evidence which is now mandatory.

Structure

Year-on-year it is evident that candidates are much more aware of the significant role that structure plays in setting out the dissertation. Those candidates who lost track of their arguments did so most frequently in the essay-style approach. Chapter headings help give an idea of the direction of key areas of argument and inform candidates' selection of appropriate material.

Chapter headings should also highlight the individual nature of the research. While marking instructions for essays which are included in the question paper might give some guidance, they should not be seen as a template for a dissertation.

Mini-conclusions made throughout the dissertation are, on the whole, used effectively to draw the attention back to the issue and thesis underpinning the dissertation.

Word count

Writing beyond the word count of 4,000 words (excluding references, bibliography and appendices) rarely occurs. With the inclusion of a 10% leeway, candidates are managing their work well. Centre advice is obvious. The dissertation has to be, in part, a test of the selection skills of the candidate, and the word count allows for that. Again, this year there were instances of abbreviations being used which is not common practice. This should be avoided and should not be used as a tool to limit word count. The significant weakness which stood out once again in markers' reports was when major shortfall occurred, rather than excess wordage. Candidates who write to a word count of 3,000 words are not able to present the substance required and, even at 3,600 words, have omitted over 10% of the possible content.

Footnotes and bibliography

This continues to improve. A few candidates are still not citing sources properly, and even fewer are attempting to put text into the footnotes to remedy an excessive word count. Footnotes like this really stand out as contravening the expected structure of the piece, and do not enhance candidates' work. It is important to remember that footnoting is expected only to reference sources, and (in the exceptional case) to define or explain an unusual term.

The absence of footnoting is a concern. Markers need to see the recognition of sources researched as part of the dissertation and this can help avoid consideration of plagiarism. Similarly, bibliographies should be included, and some markers noted that the annotated bibliography (vital for the unit assessment) was particularly helpful to them.

Plagiarism

It is worth repeating a point made year-on-year. Markers are quick to recognise derivative work, not only if taken from standard texts. When this is recognised, the thoroughness of the piece is called into question as the research is obviously limited. Internet sources provided the most overt comments from markers. Overuse of material from less than rigorous authorities in an unquestioning manner is not recognised as good practice. There is however a recognition that online resources can be used well.

Typography and proofreading

The majority of candidates demonstrated professional standards and courtesy, and only a minority did not present work in a format that was easy to read. Good practice is double-line spacing and 12-point font. The time and effort many candidates put into this is appreciated and it is unfortunate if presentation limits the flow of their writing. Markers noted this year that closer proofreading would benefit candidates.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034

Component 1: question paper

Well-informed pieces were presented overall, and one marker highlighted those on the Iron Age. They had a clear depth of understanding of current historiography and engaged with the debate. There was good use of historians' views and archaeological evidence. The pictorial source, question 8, proved remarkably successful and the wording of the question — 'impact of Vikings on Northern Britain' — allowed candidates to access wider contextual development. The source answers were competent in their overall approach.

Component 2: project–dissertation

There was some excellent work, which was clearly research-driven. It was noted that there was outstanding work on ritual in Iron Age society and on the impact of the Vikings. Overall there was an excellent quality of argument. There was plenty of breadth and depth of knowledge shown and good use of primary works.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: Independence and Kingship, 1249–1334

Component 1: question paper

Candidates excelled with more challenging questions. The paper was considered very fair by the marking team, with a good spread across the issues, and accessible for candidates. Many candidates had an impressive grasp of the relevant detail and an ability to address the specific wording of the questions fluently. Candidates had a clear understanding of the expectations of the source questions, were well-versed in techniques, and analysed effectively.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Yet again this field reported a wide range of dissertation titles. There was some excellent engagement with topics, the best really explaining the accent in the title, for example, 'Toom Tabard' or patriot? Breadth of reading was commendable, and all candidates used primary sources, as expected. The better work contained chapter headings which were carefully constructed, and which made candidates focus on the argument. This, along with sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter, made for some excellent pieces of work where candidates addressed the issue consistently.

Field of study 3 — Italy: the Renaissance in the 15th and early 16th centuries

Component 1: question paper

In the best essays the analysis was good and drove forward arguments. In source answers, high-quality knowledge of the topics was often further substantiated by historians. The strongest candidates wrote fluently and were aware that interpretation means more than just 'lifting' from the source.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Dissertations covered a good range of possible topics. The standard was very good and some works were a pleasure to read. Dissertations on the methods of Medici control over Florence and the reasons for Medici patronage showed a real grasp of the manipulation of the political system and of the importance of retaining loyalty of 'amici'. The issue relating to the Renaissance Papacy; 'Princes or Churchmen?' was also impressive. There was evidence of a wide range of reading from both academic and general works. Candidates had clearly grasped the significance of what they had read and used content analytically.

Field of study 4 — Scotland: from the Treaty of Union to the Enlightenment, 1707–1815

Component 1: question paper

The challenging essay titles helped the majority of candidates. Essays were improved by a sharpened focus. Candidates presented well-written, detailed essays with carefully worded and apposite analysis and evaluation. Source responses again were good, and well-trained candidates scored well.

Component 2: project–dissertation

This field presented a wide range of appropriate titles which allowed candidates to perform to their ability. Excellent work was apparent where candidates really grasped the issue and engaged in the debate. There was notable use of several primary sources to make relevant points. In the best work, candidates were able to weigh up the arguments of rival historians, not merely assert their views.

Field of study 5 — USA: 'A House Divided', 1850–65

Component 1: question paper

Candidates wrote very balanced responses particularly for essay questions 36 and 37. There was a good grasp of historiography which was well-employed throughout. Many were well-versed in the formula for source answers. Candidates were able to access the full set of marks across the three question areas. The range of questions was considered fair, if challenging, in the named factor in the essays.

Component 2: project–dissertation

A wide range of resources were used including primary sources. There was some excellent work on the Emancipation Proclamation. Markers noted that candidates produced interesting dissertations on unusual areas such as slave identity.

The best work showed a clear control of the line of argument throughout the work sustained by bringing in short conclusions at the end of each chapter. The width and depth of evidence was referenced by strong bibliographies. The team noted that quality of use was better than quantity presented. The signs that a candidate had indeed engaged in wider reading came in the more confident engagement with the debates and/or arguments surrounding the issue.

Field of study 6 — Japan: the Modernisation of a Nation, 1840–1920

Component 1: question paper

The paper seemed to provide a challenge for all, with exceptional candidates able to shine. The appropriate structure, tone and history were delivered. Candidates were also well-prepared for the source questions.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Those candidates who had read relevant texts and articles, as opposed to lifting perspectives from classroom notes, were instantly recognisable. The context within which they were able to place perspectives, support and challenge them, was heightened. There was increased use of journals and greater evidence of wider reading.

Field of study 7 — Germany: from Democracy to Dictatorship, 1918–39

Component 1: question paper

The best work reflected an assured control of the argument in essays. Markers commented that they read work that was assured and fluent in its ability to express nuance in analytical points and evaluation. In particular the Volksgemeinschaft essay was well done. Some candidates were well-prepared in the use of historians' views. In general, the sources were well-considered, and the method of answering was well-employed. Markers noted that the two-source question was strongly tackled.

Component 2: project–dissertation

This year there seemed to be a move to the post-1933 period and many dissertations were on the role of the SS and Gestapo in the maintenance of power. Good access to books as much as websites featured in the best work. There was a greater engagement with current historians. The best work had a quality of argument which was driven from the outset and was matched by real depth of supporting evidence. In some cases, candidates challenged the views of some historians and advanced the debates even further. Some bibliographies were impressive. Markers commented on the clarity of writing and impressive structuring of the best work. The strongest candidates wrote with precision and detail, maximising their use of evidence and analysis.

Field of study 8 — South Africa: Race and Power, 1902–84

Component 1: question paper

Again, markers commented on the full range of essay questions being attempted, and that the work was very good overall. Question 57, the newest area, had some strong responses. There was some excellent engagement with historians in essays. There were outstanding answers which had analysis and evaluation embedded in the structure which often took a thematic approach. In the main, in part 2, candidates applied the expected source technique. Provenance was particularly thorough this year. Candidates also showed detailed recall of the whole course.

Component 2: project–dissertation

There was a wide range of topics and some candidates had obviously researched thoroughly and planned their dissertation carefully. There was some excellent engagement with historiography, particularly in the 'segregation after 1910' question. The introductions were much stronger. Candidates committed to a line of argument which allowed them to build it throughout the piece.

Field of study 9 — Russia: from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–45

Component 1: question paper

The strongest candidates handled all questions with confidence and focus. There was some excellent essay and source work here. There was some very good use of historiography; embedded and driving forward the argument. Question 70 was answered well with strong provenance points. Candidates were well-trained in source technique. Markers commented on the standard of work which was not mechanistic this year.

Component 2: project–dissertation

There was impressive work on the Civil War, Socialist Realism and the Great Patriotic War. Markers noted the outstanding research here. More left-field questions produced very impressive work. Stand-out pieces were presented on Bukharin as a viable contender in a 'third way', and on the examination of the nature of the Stalinist State, questioning if it was driven by the policy of 'Socialism in one country'.

In all the best dissertations, candidates directed the reader in the introduction, highlighting the key argument(s) and citing the debate(s). There was an excellent awareness of the need for analysis. Sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter were very effective.

Field of study 10 — Spain: The Civil War — Causes, Conflict and Consequences, 1923–45

Component 1: question paper

All questions were covered by candidates, and essays were generally well done with very good recalled knowledge and standard of analysis and evaluation. Essays had strong lines of argument and very impressive detail and embedded historiography. Markers noted that the essay work was excellent.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Markers commented that there was a varied selection of titles, which resulted in some excellent pieces of analysis and evaluation. Evidence of wide reading was seen in most cases and there was good use of primary sources. The best works were effective in the ability to use different sources to build and enhance the different perspectives.

Field of study 11 — Britain: at War and Peace, 1938–51

Component 1: question paper

While there is always a mix of responses, markers reported some fine essay work particularly in question 84 on women. A range of essays was tackled. Markers also felt that the source questions were well-answered, in particular the evacuation source. The best work was rich in relevant historical perspectives which were embedded in answers.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Social issues were popular this year — women, social change, and the impact of evacuation. Equally, political issues were presented — the 1945 election, the fall of Chamberlain, and Churchill's role in the war. Markers commented that many dissertations were a pleasure to read. There was considerable evidence of high-quality research and writing. Primary sources were integrated into the dissertation to enhance and push the argument forward. The best work was clear in presentation, used chapters, and carefully built the argument. A number of dissertations engaged with a wide range of historical interpretations.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034

Component 1: question paper

Some candidates had insufficient knowledge of Hadrian's Wall and referred to both Hadrian's Wall and Antonine's Wall. The result was work which was heavy in narrative with little evaluation.

Some candidates did not identify the interpretations in the two-source question and a few did not complete the paper.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Although the view was that candidates had produced very competent work, there were some observations. Some candidates presented thorough and accurate evidence but were either sparse or superficial in analysis. Others presented arguments or points which directly related to historians without attributing them by name, therefore losing possible marks for historical sources and their interpretation.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: Independence and Kingship, 1249–1334

Component 1: question paper

Several candidates did not attempt a second essay, but the first essay gained very high marks. Weaker responses in sources contained minimal development of points. Some candidates still find provenance problematic, and others misinterpreted the sources.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Some candidates had very limited reading and there was an increase in the use of online resources of a considerable variety of quality. Some candidates were stuck in a chronological narrative or, equally, argumentation was stronger, but quality and quantity of supporting evidence was less impressive. Chapters help candidates to focus on the themes they examine. Markers commented that there were some candidates who did not define the parameters of the question and the key points at issue. The result was inferred analysis and evaluation.

Field of study 3 — Italy: the Renaissance in the 15th and early 16th centuries

Component 1: question paper

Candidates, on the whole, answered the question set but some read like pre-prepared responses. Conclusions throughout were missing in some. Candidates had good understanding of source technique, but some needed more specific, wider contextual knowledge.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Dissertations were, on the whole, done well. Candidates attempting to write about the extent to which women had a Renaissance should be aware that it is good practice to define which groups or social classes of women will be considered, because in effect this debate refers only to the elite. By defining who may or may not be included in the dissertation, a candidate can legitimately concentrate exclusively on the elite.

Field of study 4 — Scotland: from the Treaty of Union to the Enlightenment, 1707–1815

Component 1: question paper

A few candidates found it difficult to adapt their prepared material to the question set. Some ran out of time.

Component 2: project–dissertation

The thorough effort was obvious but at times, even with a solid structure, some candidates struggled to develop analysis and evaluation. This was because some relied too heavily on marking schemes which, although thorough in their own right, would be meant as a starting point for this study. If work follows in a workmanlike fashion, faithful to the marking instructions, candidates limit their attainment. Where an introduction is not included, this impacts on the potential award.

Field of study 5 — USA: 'A House Divided', 1850–65

Component 1: question paper

Many candidates displayed a lot of knowledge but struggled to answer the specific questions or properly marshal their evidence. Candidates seemed to find 'clash of cultures' and 'states' rights' difficult concepts. Some did not link back to the aspect of the question throughout the work, while others tackled the two-source as a comparison question. Selecting the appropriate part of the source was not always accompanied by interpretation or, if it was, relevance to the question. Some did not check the date of the source or question and added irrelevant recall.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Markers noted that in some dissertations, assertions were not justified with either evidence or historiography, for example, simply showing that the North and South had divergent interests does not explain the war's outbreak. Not engaging with the issue limits attainment. Some candidates struggled with this, for example, 'Was slavery profitable?' or 'Did slavery shape the antebellum south?'

Some produced mechanical, analytical and evaluative commentaries that, quite often, had little grounding in factual evidence. Candidates could do this on their own terms rather than engage with historical debate on the chosen issue.

Field of study 6 — Japan: the Modernisation of a Nation, 1840–1920

Component 1: question paper

A meandering line of argument in essays hindered analysis and evaluation. Some candidates only decided on their line of argument halfway through writing their essay, which had an impact upon synthesis and the flow of ideas. In question 44 it was obvious that some candidates were more prepared for a 'causes of the war' rather than 'consequences' aspect, and made a determined effort to manipulate the question. Some struggled with the concept of 'national identity' in question 42. Some candidates are not fully interpreting the perspectives in sources. Rather than taking the entire phrase, they pick one or two words and interpret those. This can result in a misunderstanding of the complete point being made.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Candidates would benefit from making conclusions throughout their work. The integration of primary sources should be just that. At times it was simply a reference point with no real relevance to the argument. Some candidates lost sight of their question and produced a more general discussion of the issue.

Field of study 7 — Germany: from Democracy to Dictatorship, 1918–39

Component 1: question paper

In question 51 some candidates concentrated on methods of consolidating power rather than Hitler's leadership, while those attempting essay question 50 often did not address over-reaction but focused on whether the Treaty was justified. Some misinterpreted questions, for example, 'the impact of Versailles' was answered as 'years of crisis 1919-23'. Some had no historians at all in any question.

Component 2: project–dissertation

In terms of structure, chapters are vital for most work, however, too many chapters caused some work to lack depth. Some work was irrelevant in terms of the period set down in the question. Some candidates struggled with the question that they had set themselves and produced essays with fairly simple analysis and evaluation. The least successful candidates suffered from an inability to explain and evaluate. References to websites without any sense of evaluation of their worth, and equally referencing Internet PowerPoints, limits the sense of rigour.

Field of study 8 — South Africa: Race and Power, 1902–84

Component 1: question paper

Some candidates found it difficult to relate to points in their wider contextual development to the issues, for example, not focusing on ineffectiveness of resistance but successes, or going beyond Black consciousness without relating to other forms of resistance, as the question wanted.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Some adaptation of titles was self-penalising, either limiting evaluation possibilities or ineffective application of time periods. Candidates were generally widely read but struggled for weight of evidence. Assertions without substantial evidence can limit attainment. In the work on the 'turning point' or 'extent of change' there should be acknowledgement of the situation prior to that moment. When looking at the impact of events on apartheid, some candidates gave little reference to policies but tended to have a broad discussion of the nature of the state.

Field of study 9 — Russia: from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–45

Component 1: question paper

Some candidates still ignore the question or make unsupported statements, and write a structured answer which is pre-prepared. Some responses were very formulaic and recall points were very brief at times. Candidates focused on Stalin's role in the leadership struggle rather than the role of Trotsky leading the answer. In question 72 some candidates approached the question by giving as many answers as possible, in the hope that some would gain marks — here are all the reasons I know why the Soviets prevailed in the Great Patriotic War. The two-source question in itself was a challenge for some. In source answers some candidates gave vague and general points of recall.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Some excellent history was let down by clumsy expression and/or a lack of proofreading. Candidates were challenged by the depth of knowledge needed to prove points made, and others found it difficult to build an argument throughout. Indeed, some did not reveal the argument until the conclusion. Work was weaker when opinion was not backed up by good evidence and historical sources were used only as illustrative points with no sense of evaluation. Some did not have chapters and lost their way.

Field of study 10 — Spain: The Civil War — Causes, Conflict and Consequences, 1923–45

Component 1: question paper

Candidates struggled with the sources section. The provenance points were not developed enough. Some also misinterpreted the questions, for example, in the two-source question taking it as 'impact' rather than 'motivations of foreign powers'. Markers noted that most candidates performed well overall.

Component 2: project–dissertation

As in other fields of study, for some the challenge was in proofreading and the ability to adhere to formatting guidelines (such as double-line spacing and 12-point font). It was also noted that some candidates tried to make any question an isolated factor when that was not the case. Arguments were sustained but the presentation at times lacked subtlety, for example, use of 'The most important factor...'.

Field of study 11 — Britain: At War and Peace, 1938–51

Component 1: question paper

It is important to note that essay questions require a response to that specific question. In question 81 some candidates produced a very prepared response for a preparedness question which did not work well. In source answers some candidates did not include any historiography, losing 2 marks in each question.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Yet again, the team remarked that for many we have moved clearly into the digital age. Candidates are using the Internet instead of academic books to access relevant information. This is met with varying degrees of success in the quality of information gathered.

Candidates do not always answer the question they set themselves. Some tended to give a general overview of the topic. Some tended to employ a very narrative approach, discussing events without analysing their impact. Some struggled to engage with historiography, offering quotes as exemplification but not delving into the debate.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

The following points may help clarify key issues and areas of preparation for the question paper and dissertation.

Component 1: question paper

Essays

♦ In a formal question paper, the best essays are those that answer the question — a simple point to make but something many candidates find difficult to do. Expecting a prepared essay to a 'banker' question is wrong. The expected topic may appear, but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate. Candidates should read the question carefully. One word can change the expectation of the response.

♦ The isolated factor means that significant attention should be given to it, not just a cursory comment.

♦ Candidates may refer back to the isolated factor in discussion of subsequent factors.

♦ Balance in the discussion is also vital. Use of historians to highlight the range, or not, of arguments, not as 'history' but as evidence of the arguments, is good practice. Candidates can also challenge views as long as this can be justified.

♦ Markers expect to read the candidate's view, not a synopsis of the viewpoints currently held.

♦ Candidates' own conclusions are vital.

Sources

♦ To ensure the best answers to source questions, candidates can prepare by using the marking instructions grids to evaluate class work. They are published on the Advanced Higher History subject page on SQA's website under the heading 'Assessment support'.

♦ Interpretation is more than repetition of sources — candidates need to explain why their selected point is important to the issue being discussed. The 'scaffolding' of English is necessary, and the addition of further recall gains more marks.

♦ The two-source question is not the same as a comparison question. Differing viewpoints may be read but these sources are not set out to contrast one another. Here candidates are required to provide a substantial amount of wider contextual development. Refer to the mark allocation for interpretation, contextualisation and historians' views.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Titles

♦ Dissertation grades can be improved by careful planning and monitoring of the process. In the first instance, choosing a title from the current approved list is advised. If a candidate wants to deviate from this, submitting the proposed title to SQA allows advice to be given.

Structure

♦ Candidates will benefit from establishing a clear structure at the outset. Key here is the function of the introduction. It is very similar to the abstract in university work. It should contextualise but it should also focus the reader on the key areas of debate and present

the writer's hypothesis. In this way the reader is prepared for a line of argument to be proved in the following chapters.

♦ Chapter headings provide direction, and the majority of candidates need that. They should be used to inform the reader of the area and its value to the research. It does not need to be a question. It is important to read the candidate's views as the synthesis of all points of argument in each chapter. These conclusions should be seen throughout the work and in the conclusion itself.

♦ Thoroughness is one of the main drivers, particularly so in the dissertation. The depth of research is demonstrated by the selection of fine detail which then links to the chapter argument and to the line of argument as a whole. The task is to present carefully chosen apposite evidence. This refinement of the narrative should take much of the time in this task. Wholehearted acceptance of detail is not advised. The Internet is rich in resources which have not been verified and might not be reliable. Citing a PowerPoint can be problematic. In any research, at least two sources are needed to confirm the authenticity of the point.

♦ Analysis and/or evaluation is also a main driver which needs the support of substantial evidence. This can be much more nuanced than essays that have been written. But grand, eloquent assumptions based on minimal research have a 'ghost-like' impression. Cross-referencing and evaluation of sources of evidence helps.

♦ Footnoting is a vital part of the task. It substantiates what the candidate asserts and makes it valid.

♦ Bibliographies help markers to understand what candidates have read. Candidates should include only what they have read. Better to have consulted fewer sources but used them very well, rather than provide an extensive list which, on closer examination, could not have been consulted.

♦ In terms of presentation, the following points are considered good practice:

  — standard font (Arial or Times New Roman), in 11 or 12-point type and in one-and-a-half or double-line spacing
  — referencing of quotes, statistics, and arguments in some cases, by using footnotes — this gives the work validity
  — contents page
  — numbered pages
  — word count on each page
  — bibliography (annotated)
  — pages printed single-sided and unstapled
  — proofreading of final piece

Internal assessments

♦ If used, the prelim paper should mirror the question paper exactly. This means that there should be no overlapping of questions, and the best way to ensure this is to check it against the extended descriptor for the chosen field of study.

♦ In marking essays, refer to the marking instructions grid on SQA's secure website, and consider the drivers to be thoroughness and analysis. Note the minor alteration in phrasing to clarify expectations in progression for all factors, particularly for introductions and conclusions, and also in the analysis comments for the 15 up to the 22-mark range.

♦ Also note the expectation of primary sources in the dissertation. These should be more than a bolt-on reference point.

SQA website

♦ Consult SQA's website.
♦ Every year the approved list of dissertation titles is updated.
♦ Materials from the Understanding Standards events are useful exemplification.
♦ Marking templates and instructions are helpful.
♦ Detailed marking instructions are not to be seen as a catch all or a 'must include' list, rather a suggestion about what may be included. That being said, they are a very useful guide in terms of the detail, argumentation and historians' viewpoints.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	1543

Number of resulted entries in 2018	1525

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	30.2%	30.2%	461	98
B	28.1%	58.4%	429	84
C	23.6%	82.0%	360	70
D	7.3%	89.3%	112	63
No award	10.7%	-	163	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary).

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.