



National
Qualifications
2026

2026 Geography

Physical and Human Environments

Question Paper Finalised Marking Instructions

General marking principles for Higher Geography

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

- (a) Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- (b) If a candidate response does not seem to be covered by either the principles or detailed marking instructions, and you are uncertain how to assess it, you must seek guidance from your team leader.
- (c) Where the candidate does not comply with the rubric of the paper and answers two parts in one section, mark both responses and record the better mark.
- (d) Marking must be consistent. Never make a hasty judgement on a response based on length, quality of handwriting or a confused start.
- (e) Use the full range of marks available for each question.
- (f) The detailed marking instructions are not an exhaustive list. Award marks for other relevant points.
- (g) Award marks only where points relate to the question asked. Where candidates give points of knowledge without specifying the context, award marks unless it is clear that they do not refer to the context of the question.
- (h) Award marks for knowledge/understanding where points are:
 - relevant to the issue in the question
 - developed (by providing additional detail, exemplification, reasons or evidence)
 - used to respond to the demands of the question (for example evaluate, analyse).

Marking principles for each question type

There is a range of question types in this question paper. For each question type, the following provides an overview of marking principles, and an example.

Describe questions

Candidates gain marks for making relevant, factual points. These should be key points. The points do not need to be in any particular order. Candidates may provide a number of straightforward points or a smaller number of developed points, or a combination of these. Candidates must provide more than an outline or list to gain marks. They could refer to, for example, a landscape feature, a landscape formation process, a situation or facts demonstrating geographical knowledge.

Explain questions

Candidates gain marks for explaining or suggesting reasons for the cause or impact of something, or for referring to causal connections and relationships. Candidates must do more than describe to gain marks here.

- Where the question asks about a landscape feature, candidates should refer to the processes leading to landscape formation.
- For a source-based question, candidates should make use of these and refer to them within their answer for full marks.

Where candidates provide a purely descriptive answer, or one where development is limited, award no more than half the available marks for the question. Other questions look for candidates to demonstrate higher-order skills and will use command words such as analyse, evaluate, to what extent, and discuss.

Analyse questions

Candidates gain marks for identifying parts, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole; and for drawing out and relating implications. Award an analysis mark where candidates use their knowledge and understanding or a source to identify relevant components (for example of an idea, theory, argument) and clearly show at least one of the following:

- links between different components
- links between component(s) and the whole
- links between component(s) and related concepts
- similarities and contradictions
- consistency and inconsistency
- different views or interpretations
- possible consequences or implications
- the relative importance of components
- understanding of underlying order or structure.

Where candidates are asked to analyse they should identify parts of a topic or issue and refer to the interrelationships between, or impacts of, various factors. For example, where a question asks for an analysis of the soil-forming properties which lead to the formation of a gley soil, candidates should refer to how the various soil formatting properties contributed to its formation.

Evaluate questions

Candidates gain marks for making a judgement of the success, failure, or impact of something based on criteria. They should give a brief description of the strategy or project being evaluated, before offering an evidenced conclusion.

Account for questions

Candidates gain marks for giving reasons which are often (but not exclusively) from a resource, for example: for a change in trade figures; a need for water management; or differences in development between contrasting developing countries.

Discuss questions

Candidates gain marks for exploring ideas about a project, or the impact of a change. They should consider different views on an issue or argument. This might not be a balanced argument, but they should give a range of impacts or ideas within their answer.

To what extent questions

Candidates gain marks for considering the impact of a management strategy or strategies they have explored. They should give a brief description of the strategy or project being evaluated, before offering an evidenced conclusion. They do not need to offer an overall opinion based on a variety of strategies, but should assess each separately.

Marking instructions for each question

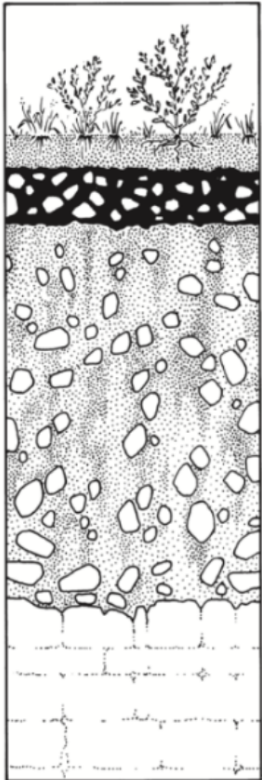
Section 1 – Physical Environments

Question	General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
1.	Check any diagram(s) for relevant points not present in the text and award marks accordingly. Candidates can gain full marks for well-annotated diagrams that explain the formation of a pyramidal peak. Award a maximum of 1 mark where candidates provide a list of unexplained processes with at least two processes required for this mark. Award a maximum of 6 marks where candidates provide three fully developed processes (up to 2 marks per developed process). A mark for a named process should only be awarded if the candidate develops this in some way. Award a maximum of 2 marks for the formation of a glacier. Award a maximum of 1 mark for a correctly named example of a pyramidal peak. Award a maximum of 9 marks for answers which do not develop past the development of a corrie.	10	Points may include: Glacier formation includes: • snow accumulates in north facing hollows (1 mark) when more snow falls in winter than melts in the summer (1 mark) • north/north-east facing slopes are more shaded, so snow lies longer (1 mark) with accumulated snow compressed into névé and eventually ice (1 mark) Processes include: • plucking when ice freezes on to bedrock (1 P mark), pulling loose rocks away from the backwall (1 P mark) • abrasion when the angular rock embedded in the ice (1 P mark) grinds the hollow as glacier moves (1 P mark) • frost shattering/freeze thaw weathering when water in cracks in the rock freezes (1 P mark), expands and contracts weakening the rock until fragments break off (1 P mark) Pyramidal peak: • the glacier moves downhill due to gravity/weight (1 mark) • a bergschrund crevasse opens up at the back of the hollow (1 mark) • this allows meltwater and rock fragments to get to the base of the glacier increasing erosive power (1 mark) • rotational sliding, over deepens the hollow (1 mark) • a pyramidal peak is formed when three or more corries erode back each other (1 mark) • frost shattering can make the peak more pronounced (1 mark) • an example is Helvellyn (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
2.			Check any diagram(s) for relevant points not present in the text and award marks accordingly. Candidates can gain full marks for well annotated diagrams that explain the formation of a sand spit. Award a maximum of 4 marks where candidates provide a fully developed explanation of longshore drift. A mark for a named process should only be awarded if the candidate develops this in some way. Award a maximum of 1 mark for a list of unexplained processes with at least two processes required for this mark. Award a maximum of 1 mark for a correctly named example of a spit.	8	Points may include: Processes: - spits are formed by the process of longshore drift which is lateral/zig-zag movement of the waves (1 P mark) - swash is where waves push material up the beach at an angle (1 P mark) due to the prevailing wind (1 P mark) - the returning backwash is dragged back down the beach at right angles (1 P mark) due to gravity (1 P mark) Sand Spit: - spits form when there is a change in direction on a coastline (1 mark) allowing a sheltered area for deposition (1 mark) material slowly builds up to appear above the water (1 mark) - the spit develops as long as the supply of deposits is greater than the amount of erosion (1 mark) - the shape can become hooked or curved at the end in response to changes in wind direction/currents (1 mark) - a salt marsh may form in a sheltered area behind a sand spit (1 mark) - an example is Spurn Head (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
3.			Check any diagram(s) for relevant points not present in the text and award marks accordingly. Candidates can gain full marks for well-annotated diagrams that explain the formation of a meander. Award a maximum of 4 marks where candidates provide two fully developed processes (up to 2 marks per developed process). A mark for a named process should only be awarded if the candidate develops this in some way. Award a maximum of 2 marks for a list of unexplained processes, with at least two processes required for each mark.	8	Points may include: Processes: - hydraulic action which is when water compresses air (1 P mark) into the riverbank causing materials to be dislodged (1 P mark) - abrasion when the force of the water throws bedload (1 P mark) against the banks causing a scouring action (1 P mark) - solution when acids in the water (1 P mark) react with soluble bedrock (1 P mark) - attrition when load is thrown against other particles in the water (1 P mark) causing them to become smaller and rounder (1 P mark) Meander - in a straight river channel, water twists and turns around obstructions such as large boulders (1 mark) - resulting in areas of slower and faster water movement (1 mark) - riffles and pools lead to changes in speed and depths in the river channel (1 mark) - pools are areas of deeper water whereas riffles are shallower (1 mark) - pools are slower moving whereas riffles have greater turbulence (1 mark) - river flows fastest on the outside bend increasing the erosive power (1 mark), undercutting to form river cliffs (1 mark) - river flows slowest on the inside bend leading to deposition (1 mark) - helical flow transfers sediment from river cliffs to river beaches (1 mark) in a corkscrew movement (1 mark) - meanders become more pronounced over time/migrate downstream over time (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
4.			Candidates must include both descriptions and explanation for full marks. Award a maximum of 5 marks for descriptions. Candidates may answer each command separately or as a holistic answer; award marks accordingly.	10	Points may include: Descriptions may include: • The first lag time is fourteen hours (1a mark) • there is slow rise in discharge from 01:00 from 2 cumecs (1a mark) to a peak discharge of 30 cumecs at 18:00 (1a mark) • there is a gentle recession limb from 18:00 until 23:00 (1a mark) • The second lag time is seven hours (1a mark) • there is a second rising limb/peak discharge which reaches 28 cumecs at 02:00 (1a mark) • there is a steeper recession limb from 02:00 to 07:00 (1a mark) Explanations may include: • the rising limb is caused by the initial rainfall which began at 20:00 (1b mark) • there is a second smaller peak due to a secondary period of rainfall starting at 16:00 (1b mark) The long lag time/gently rising limb may be due to: • the initial rainfall may have been intercepted by vegetation (1b mark) • likely a rural area with a lack of tarmac increasing infiltration (1b mark) • there may be a low number of tributaries transporting water to the channel slowly (1b mark) • the catchment area may be gently sloping leading to slower initial overland flow to the channel (1b mark) • it may be a large catchment area meaning more travel time to the main channel (1b mark) • there may be porous soils/peaty soils increasing soil storage (1b mark) • there may be permeable rock allowing for increased groundwater storage (1b mark) • the river rises because soil storage has been exceeded (1b mark) Or any other valid point.

Question	General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
5.	Award a maximum of 5 marks if candidates do not provide an annotated profile Award a maximum of 5 marks where candidates provide a 'ladder' type diagram with a separate text answer. Candidates may choose to describe a tundra or alpine gley and marks should be awarded accordingly.	6	Points may include:  shrub/grasses/heather/moorland (1 mark) short roots (1 mark) black humus (1 mark) acidic/mor humus (1 mark) rocks throughout profile (1 mark) blue/grey colour (1 mark) red mottling (1 mark) limited soil biota (1 mark) waterlogging (1 mark) clay texture (1 mark) impermeable parent material (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
6.			Check any diagram(s) for relevant explanations not present in the text and award marks accordingly. Well annotated diagrams can gain full marks.	8	Points may include: • due to the curvature of the Earth (1 mark), in the tropics the Sun's rays are concentrated on a much smaller area (1 mark), resulting in more intense heating (1 mark) • rays have less atmosphere to pass through at the tropics (1 mark), so less energy is lost through absorption and reflection (1 mark) • albedo is the reflectiveness of the land surface (1 mark) darker forest surfaces at the tropics absorb more energy (1 mark), lighter snow/ice covered areas at the poles reflect more energy (1 mark) • due to the tilt of the Earth (1 mark), limited insolation is received at the Poles in winter as days are shorter/there is complete darkness (1 mark), whereas tropical areas receive solar insolation all year round (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Section 2 – Human Environments

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
7.			Award 1 mark for each relevant point. Candidates could discuss the positive and/or negative consequences of the predicted population structure. Credit points that are specific to an ageing population.	8	Points may include: - the increase in elderly will lead to an increased cost of pensions to the government (1 mark) and increased tax contributions for the economically active population (1 mark) - in-migration may need to be encouraged (1 mark) which may lead to tension between different cultures and or ethnic groups (1 mark) - the retirement age may need to be increased (1 mark) and more services for older people provided, such as care homes (1 mark) - there may be a lower unemployment rate in the future (1 mark), however a decrease in the economically active population may lead to a skills gap (1 mark) - citizens may be encouraged to invest in private healthcare schemes and/or pension (1 mark) - the falling number of children may lead to a decline in demand for services for children such as schools (1 mark) - there will be an increased strain/costs on the Health Service to meet the needs of the ageing population (1 mark) e.g. more hip-replacements/heart medication (1 mark) - there may also be more demands placed on adult children to care for elderly parents (1 mark) - there may be an increase in robots doing the jobs of people (1 mark) - in the longer term, companies may have difficulty recruiting workers and international investment will fall (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
8.			Award 1 mark for each explanation. Do not credit direct reversals. Where candidates give generic answers which do not refer to a specific case study, a maximum of 5 marks should be awarded.	6	Possible answers for Mexico to USA may include: Push factors: • low paying jobs with very few opportunities (1 mark) e.g. 12% of population in Mexico employed in agricultural sector (1 mark) • low GDP resulting in a lower standard of living (1 mark) Mexico's GDP is 17 times less than the USA (1 mark) • due to increased mechanisation/privatisation of farms rural unemployment has risen (1 mark) • the pandemic has exacerbated inequality and poverty in Mexico (1 mark) with around 30% of Mexicans living in poverty (1 mark) • violence rates in Mexico have risen since 2020 (1 mark) with the murder rate being over four times higher than the USA (1 mark) Pull factors: • Mexico shares land border with the USA meaning easier access (1 mark) • Mexico is seen as a gateway for migrants from further afield e.g. Central America (1 mark) • the exchange rate means that the Dollar conversion into Pesos is favourable (1 mark) and means that people can send money back to family members in Mexico (1 mark) • there were plenty of available jobs in parts of the economy in the USA, such as tourism and construction (1 mark) • hourly rate of pay is 8 times more in the USA than Mexico (1 mark) • working conditions are better in the USA with reduced hourly working weeks (1 mark) on average the USA working week is 8 hours less than in Mexico (1 mark) • the change in presidency from Trump to Biden changed the views of migrants in that it was easier to enter the USA (1 mark) • new 'humanitarian parole' program makes migration easier to the US (1 mark) • birth right citizenship means babies born in the USA get American citizenship (1 mark) this leads to a higher percentage of pregnant females migrating in late pregnancy (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
9.			Award 1 mark for each relevant point. Award a maximum of 5 marks for a generic answer which does not refer to a specific named developing world city.	6	Points may include: • lack of basic facilities such as clean drinking water can lead to disease (1 mark) • open sewers and poor sanitation in streets surrounding housing can attract vermin (1 mark) • houses are poorly constructed using scrap materials such as corrugated iron sheeting (1 mark) • much of the electricity is illegally tapped and dangerous/can cause fires (1 mark) • some housing is located on riverbanks and liable to flooding during periods of heavy rainfall (1 mark) • overcrowded buildings lack privacy (1 mark) • houses are not legal and are cleared intermittently (1 mark) • open housing allows mosquitoes access to sleeping residents (1 mark) • communal latrines are shared by many people leading to poor hygiene/sanitation levels (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
10.	(a) and (b)		Award a maximum of 7 marks for description, including a maximum of 1 mark for an appropriate specific named example within the chosen city. Award 1 mark for each comment on effectiveness point. Where candidates give generic answers, which do not refer to a specific case study, award a maximum of 9 marks.	10	For Glasgow answers may include: - damp/anti-social high-rise flats were demolished or upgraded (1a mark), and new tenement style housing with security entry/off street parking has been built (1a mark). This has attracted more affluent residents have been attracted to the area which has improved the perception of the area (1b mark) however, increased house prices have priced original residents out of the market (1b mark) - older tenements were renovated with improved insulation/glazing (1a mark), which has lowered energy bills (1b mark) - new build homes are fitted with solar panels / energy conserving/efficient materials (1a mark) for example in the Athletes Village in Dalmarnock (1 EG mark) - many buildings have been reclad to improve appearance/updated safety regulations (1a mark) - some new housing has been designated to reflect the local heritage of the area (1a mark). This has made the area more attractive and increased the local population (1b mark) - more affordable housing has been provided by local housing associations (1 a mark), e.g. Wheatley Homes (1 EG mark) - new housing was designed as a village design (1a mark) this has allowed residents to access local amenities on foot (1b mark) - a new retail park has been built (1a mark) e.g. Crown Street Retail Park (1 EG mark) which has allowed residents to access a supermarket without taxis (1b mark) increasing jobs and income in the local area (1b mark) - street/wall art has been introduced to improve the look of the area (1a mark), and this contributes to a sense of place and community (1b mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
11.			Award 1 mark for each valid point. Award a maximum of 1 mark where candidates give appropriate named examples of strategies or places within the chosen case study. Award a maximum of 7 marks where candidates give generic answers which do not refer to a specific case study.	8	For the Sahel, answers may include: • loss of fertile topsoil (1 mark) reducing the fertility of the soil affecting crop production (1 mark) • crop failures/death of livestock, reducing food supply (1 mark), leading to malnutrition and famine (1 mark) • large scale rural migration into overcrowded urban areas in the south (1 mark) causing more pressure and the growth of informal housing (1 mark) • the collapse of the nomadic way of life (1 mark) forcing many nomads to settle in villages increasing pressure/tension in these areas (1 mark) for example the Fulani/Tuareg (1 EG mark) • economically, farmers have lost their income as a result of poor crop yields (1 mark) meaning they can no longer afford to pay for their basic needs, such as schooling (1 mark) • conflict within and sometimes, between countries (1 mark) as people are forced to move and re-settle in large refugee camps (1 mark) for example Darfur (1 EG mark) • countries increasingly reliant on international aid to gain access to food and water (1 mark) impacting development as debt repayments are high (1 mark) • desertification has become so severe that it has led to the southward expansion of the Sahara Desert into the Sahel (1 mark). In the last 50 years, 65 million hectares of the Sahel have turned into desert (1 mark) Or any other valid point. For the Amazon Basin, answers may include: • loss of fertile topsoil (1 mark) reducing the fertility of the soil affecting crop production (1 mark) and can result in the silting up of rivers (1 mark) • heavy rain can infiltrate the soil leading to leaching (1 mark) • there has been a loss of biodiversity with a danger of extinction (1 mark) • it can also lead to the destruction of sustainable development of rubber plantations (1 mark) • the collapse in the ability to practise shifting cultivation (1 mark) for example the Yanomami (1 EG mark) • the creation of reservations for indigenous people who have lost their land (1 mark) has contributed to an increase in ‘western’ diseases and alcoholism (1 mark) Or any other valid point.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
12.	(a) and (b)		Award 1 mark for each relevant point. Award a maximum of 8 marks for description including a maximum of 2 marks for named examples. Award a maximum of 2 marks where candidates give appropriate named examples within the chosen case study. Award a maximum of 11 marks where candidates give generic answers which do not refer to a specific case study.	12	For the Lake District, answer may include: - removing litter bins in remote areas (1a mark). This has encouraged people to take their litter home (1b mark). This has also stopped bins from overflowing (1b mark). - traffic restrictions such as one-way streets/limited waiting times (1a mark) for example, Ambleside (1 EG mark) - improved public transport to lower congestion (1a mark) e.g., Lake District Park and Explore (1 EG mark) has had limited success as people prefer the convenience of their own vehicle (1b mark) - using farmers' fields as temporary car parks reduces on-street parking (1a mark) and can bring in additional income for farmers (1b mark) - planting trees around unsightly developments can reduce visual pollution (1a mark) however this is a long-term solution (1b mark) - new developments are controlled by NPA by-laws (1a mark) ensuring they use local materials which means they blend in with the landscape (1a mark) - speed limits on the lakes to reduce beach erosion/noise (1a mark), e.g. Lake Windermere (1 EG mark), however users have simply moved the problem to other lakes (1b mark). This has impacted on local businesses due to reduced custom (1b mark) - stiles have been built on fences/walls (1a mark) - sprung gates/kissing gates have been installed to stop livestock escaping, (1a mark) however these can restrict access for prams/wheelchair users (1b mark) and signs are placed on gates to remind dog walkers to keep their dog on a lead (1a mark) - footpaths have been improved by laying local stone (1a mark) for example, Fix the Fells (1 EG mark) however this is costly to implement (1b mark) and relies on volunteers so can take a long time to complete (1b mark) - full council tax is now applied to second homes (1a mark) resulting in increased revenue for local services (1b mark) - new and affordable housing has been built, for example in Keswick (1 EG mark) to allow locals to remain in the area (1a mark). These houses are only available for people who have lived and worked in the area for over 3 years (1a mark) however the number of applicants is oversubscribed for every new house built. (1b mark) and this only applies to a small number of new homes (1b mark) Or any other valid point.

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTIONS]