Questions & Answers

Advanced Higher History project–dissertation

How important are chapters to the dissertation? Could a candidate score well without chapters?

The use of chapters gives the candidate focus and supports the need for sub-conclusions. However, candidates can score well without chapters, but it can be self-penalising to take this approach.

Could you tell us what grade the two examples of abstracts were given?

The two Abstract Introduction examples were very well laid out and included most of the requirements expected and therefore attained an A Grade in both cases. In the candidate 1 example, a more specific reference to sources rather than the generic would improve the result and in the candidate 2 example, perhaps a sense of a comment rather than just a list would have improved the result. However, these are two very strong Abstract Introductions.

Are your grade boundaries always 50, 60, 70 etc or do these ever rise or decrease?

The notional cut-off scores for course assessment are:

70%   A grade
60%   B grade
50%   C grade
40%   D grade

However, the grade boundaries are not set until after the project–dissertations and the question papers are marked, and candidates' total scores are considered in light of the performance of the exam. Grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual and can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual. Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Would critical use of a primary source include such things as a comment on the potential impact of when the source was written/ or the mood of the author when it was written?

Yes, candidates might consider these very much when evaluating the sources strengths or limitations. The candidate would be applying the skill gained in the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question to this task.

I didn't realise you were able to adapt the approved list of dissertations? ie dates/factors/wording. Does this not defeat purpose of the list being provided? Just to clarify - they can change wording as long as it is on the same topic?

The approved list of dissertation titles can be useful to centres as a reference point. It provides support to learners and teachers in their decision-making process. Candidates can see typical questions on differing types of history and with teacher guidance can begin their work.

It is updated on a regular basis when new and interesting titles are submitted. This also helps centres to see what other possibilities there are.

If a minimal alteration is made – and that might be the isolated factor – then there is no need to consult SQA. However, if you are considering a question which is not on the list, then it would be advised to send that in. You will then receive a response from the team as to its viability. Advice is given at this stage. We hope that his also supports learners and teachers.

Are you allowed to change dates without sending the title to the SQA for confirmation?

Yes, it is possible to alter dates in the approved list. Using dates to set out the parameter of the piece is certainly advised.

Can primary sources still be credited whilst cited within secondary sources? What is best practice when referencing this?

Primary sources/evidence will appear in secondary works. Collections of sources are an example. Also, historians do reference primary evidence in their texts. This is accepted at this level since accessing original work would be difficult for some topics.

The book should be referenced and then the source if needs be, such as who the speech was made by, the Treaty the evidence came from, etc.

In terms of the referencing, is Harvard style preferred or is something else acceptable such as Oxford style so long as it is applied consistently?

There is no stipulation about preferred referencing, but it has to be consistent.

The introduction for candidate 4 is much shorter than the two abstracts. Would there be a ballpark average for the abstract?

All five full project–dissertation examples given are from the 2019 diet of exams. These are the most recent we have. As you will be aware, the Abstract Introduction was part of the changes introduced for the 2020 diet of exams, and as the 2020 exam diet did not take place, none of the full examples used in the webinar have the Abstract, but they do have introductions.

Candidates have to use their own judgement on this, but you will notice that the second example does this very well in approximately 500 words.

Is there an understanding that this year the amount of sources pupils have access to will be significantly reduced and thoroughness might not be at the same level as previous years?

As stated in the *Advanced Higher History: Guidance on gathering key evidence in session 2020-21*, you can use complete or incomplete project–dissertation evidence from candidates to make holistic judgements on which to base your provisional results. However, year on year we find more candidates are accessing online resources and they can be academic works. In our digital world this is only going to develop.

I notice that the candidate uses BBC Bitesize. Is this a suitable source to use?

Candidate research might include resources on sites such as Bitesize. However, it would be expected that this is not the only resource and that other sources of information might be used to back up this information, or indeed refute it.