



Higher Geography

Assignment

Assessment task

This document provides information for teachers and lecturers about the coursework component of this course in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed. It **must** be read in conjunction with the course specification.

Valid from session 2024-25 and until further notice.

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications only on a non-commercial basis. If it is reproduced, SQA must be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be reproduced for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from permissions@sqa.org.uk.

This edition: May 2024 (version 3.0)

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2013, 2019, 2024

Contents

Introduction	1
Instructions for teachers and lecturers	2
Marking instructions	4
Instructions for candidates	11

Introduction

This document contains instructions for teachers and lecturers, marking instructions and instructions for candidates for the Higher Geography assignment. You must read it in conjunction with the course specification.

This assignment is worth 30 marks. This is 27% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

This is one of three course assessment components. The other components are question papers.

Instructions for teachers and lecturers

Specified resources to be taken into assessment: Processed Information

During the final production of evidence stage, candidates should only have access to their Processed Information.

This Processed Information should consist of no more than two single sides of A4 or one single side of A3 paper. Candidates should process, annotate or highlight this Processed Information during the research stage, prior to the production of evidence stage. This Processed Information must be submitted to SQA with the candidate evidence.

Processed Information may include:

- ◆ evidence or data from primary or secondary research
- ◆ bullet points and headings
- ◆ mind maps
- ◆ statistical, graphical or numerical data
- ◆ Ordnance Survey (OS) map extracts
- ◆ data collected from fieldwork
- ◆ summary notes or quotes from sources
- ◆ information extracted from maps
- ◆ survey results
- ◆ interview questions and/or answers
- ◆ questionnaires and/or results
- ◆ details of internet search engine results
- ◆ newspaper articles or extracts
- ◆ summary notes taken from a visit or talk
- ◆ summary notes taken from a written or audio-visual source

Candidates should refer to the information in the Processed Information but should not copy or paraphrase large parts from it. The Processed Information is not marked, however, candidates must make reference to it to support their findings in order to be awarded full marks. If a candidate does not submit Processed Information, a penalty of 6 marks out of the total 30 marks is applied.

Candidates may take the Processed Information, gathered from fieldwork or other forms of research, into the production of evidence stage in a variety of forms:

- ◆ Candidates should reference statistical, numerical and graphical information with evidence selected to support their explanation, analysis or evaluation of a topic or issue. Candidates will not be awarded marks if they merely repeat information from the source as this does not demonstrate their skills or knowledge and understanding. Candidates may highlight key figures or trends on the source prior to the production of evidence stage. Processed Information which shows pre-prepared, in-depth analysis of statistical, numerical and graphical evidence may not demonstrate the authenticity of

a candidate's own work and assessors may be unable to award the full range of marks for the use of this evidence.

- ◆ In their reports, candidates may refer to a list of selected research methods and sources of information used during the research stage of their assignment.
- ◆ Candidates may include selected extracts or quotations relevant to different views on an issue and refer to these in their report. They should give reference details, for example, source, author, date.
- ◆ Candidates may include brief prompts to assist them in the production of their evidence. Detailed or extensive notes of the topic or issue which candidates quote from or paraphrase during the production of evidence stage may be difficult to credit fully as being their own work.
- ◆ Candidates may include articles or extracts from articles; summary notes from fieldwork, or from a written, visual or audio source; or a visit or talk. Where candidates use this evidence, it should be referenced and must be in support of their explanation, analysis or evaluation. Excessive use of this information, without acknowledging sources or which doesn't support a candidate's explanation, analysis or evaluation, will receive limited marks.

The production of evidence stage takes place under a high degree of supervision and control.

Marking instructions

In line with SQA's normal practice, the following marking instructions for the Higher Geography assignment are addressed to the marker. They are also helpful for those preparing candidates for course assessment.

Candidates' evidence is submitted to SQA for external marking.

General marking principles

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 The purpose of the Processed Information is to support candidates in presenting the findings of their research and applying their skills, knowledge and understanding. You will not mark it, however, it may assist you when marking the assignment by enabling clarification of points which the candidate has made in the presentation of their evidence, and may allow you to gain an insight into what they intended.

Candidates are awarded marks for demonstrating specific skills, knowledge and understanding when producing their report, as follows:

A Carrying out research on a geographical topic or issue

- ◆ Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways **up to a maximum of 6 marks**.
- ◆ Candidate may demonstrate:
 - detailed knowledge of the geographical methods and techniques they have used in their research
 - and/or
 - an evaluation of the usefulness/reliability of methods of research or sources of information

B Use of and reference to Processed Information

- ◆ Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways **up to a maximum of 6 marks**. Marks must not be awarded for work which is directly copied from the Processed Information.

C Drawing on knowledge and understanding of the geographical topic or issue

- ◆ Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways **up to a maximum of 6 marks**.
- ◆ For a knowledge and understanding mark to be awarded, points must be:
 - relevant to the topic or issue chosen
 - developed (by providing additional detail, exemplification, reasons or evidence)
 - used to respond to the demands of the task

D Analysing information

- ◆ Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways **up to a maximum of 8 marks**.
- ◆ An analysis mark should be awarded where a candidate uses their knowledge and understanding/a source, to identify relevant components (for example, of an idea, theory, argument) and clearly shows 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/interpretations
 - possible consequences/implications
 - the relative importance of components
 - understanding of underlying order or structure

E Reaching an overall conclusion, supported by a range of evidence

- ◆ Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways **up to a maximum of 2 marks**.
- ◆ Candidates use their knowledge and understanding of the topic or issue, and their analysis, in order to make an overall judgement about the topic or issue.

F Communicating information

- ◆ Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways **up to a maximum of 2 marks**.

Detailed marking instructions

		General marking principles	Max mark	Additional guidance
1	A	Carrying out research on a geographical topic or issue	6	<p>Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways up to a maximum of 6 marks. Marks are awarded for commenting on the effectiveness of their research methods.</p> <p>For full marks, candidates must include two research methods. Up to 4 marks are available for any one research method.</p> <p>Candidates may demonstrate the following as appropriate to their topic or issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ detailed knowledge of the geographical methods and techniques they have used in their research and/or ◆ an evaluation of the usefulness/reliability of methods of research or sources of information <p>Depending on the nature of their assignment, candidates may have undertaken different approaches to their research. Award marks as appropriate to the research methods used, for example, a detailed description of fieldwork techniques may be appropriate and could be awarded marks, while for ‘desk-based’ research a description may not be appropriate and would not be likely to gain many marks. When a geographical issue has been researched, an evaluation of the usefulness/reliability of different sources of information and views may be appropriate and could be awarded marks.</p>

	General marking principles	Max mark	Additional guidance
B	Use of and reference to Processed Information	6	<p>Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways up to a maximum of 6 marks.</p> <p>Candidates can be awarded marks for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ identifying trends, patterns, comparisons, anomalies and backing this up with evidence from the Processed Information ◆ linking their Processed Information to their knowledge and understanding in order to support their analysis <p>Do not award marks for work that is directly copied from the Processed Information.</p> <p>Award up to 6 marks for use of and reference to Processed Information. Reference may be made to Processed Information throughout the report and should be credited wherever it appears.</p>
C	Drawing on knowledge and understanding of the geographical topic or issue	6	<p>Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways up to a maximum of 6 marks.</p> <p>Candidates may demonstrate knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways as appropriate to their topic or issue, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ explaining an appropriate geographical topic or issue ◆ explaining background/context of the topic or issue ◆ explaining the significance/importance of the topic or issue

	General marking principles	Max mark	Additional guidance
D	Analysing information	8	<p>Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways up to a maximum of 8 marks.</p> <p>Marks can be awarded in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the level of detail ◆ the quality of analysis ◆ identifying different factors ◆ use of Processed Information <p>Analysis involves identifying parts, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole. It can also involve drawing out and relating implications.</p> <p>Award an analysis mark where a candidate uses their knowledge and understanding, and/or a source, to identify relevant components (for example of an interaction, process, theoretical model, or issue) and clearly shows at least one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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/interpretations ◆ possible consequences/implications ◆ the relative importance of components ◆ understanding of underlying order or structure <p>Analysis involves consideration of various aspects/factors, for example, physical, human, local, global, economic or environmental impact.</p>

	General marking principles	Max mark	Additional guidance
E	Reaching an overall conclusion, supported by a range of evidence	2	<p>Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways up to a maximum of 2 marks.</p> <p>Candidates could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ make an overall judgement about the issue or topic ◆ make a decision about the issue <p>Candidates should make a single overall developed conclusion in addition to any sub-conclusions reached as part of their analysis. In the case of some research topics, this overall conclusion may be a summary of their key findings. Candidates may give an overall conclusion at the end of their report or at the beginning. Award marks for any valid conclusions wherever they appear in the report. Do not award marks for repetition of points previously credited.</p>
F	Communicating information	2	<p>Candidates may gain marks in a number of ways up to a maximum of 2 marks.</p> <p>Candidates could demonstrate aspects of the following as appropriate to their report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ structure, including the use of headings and sections where appropriate to organise the main sections of the report ◆ use of geographical terminology appropriate to their topic or issue

Note: the overview of marking instructions grid provides further clarification on the allocation of marks.

Overview of marking instructions

Marking principles	Mark	1-2 marks	3-4 marks	5-6 marks	7-8 marks
Carrying out research on a geographical topic or issue	6	Knowledge of the research methods/techniques used. 1 mark for each research method/technique.	Up to 3 further marks for additional detailed knowledge of each of the complex geographical methods/techniques used. and/or Evaluation of each of the research methods/sources used.		
Use of and reference to Processed Information (PI)	6	1 mark for each appropriate reference to PI or 2 marks for each detailed reference to PI (detailed use of PI is linked to knowledge and understanding to support analysis).			
Drawing on knowledge and understanding of the geographical topic or issue	6	Up to a maximum of 6 marks for knowledge and understanding of the topic or issue. Award 1 mark for each detailed point of knowledge and understanding. Award these marks wherever in the assignment the candidate demonstrates knowledge and understanding.			
Analysing information	8	Up to a maximum of 8 marks, 1 mark for each comment which analyses separate factors relating to the topic or issue.			
Reaching an overall conclusion, supported by a range of evidence	2	For 1 mark candidates should give a summary of key findings or overall judgement linked to the topic or issue. For 2 marks candidates should give a detailed summary of key findings or detailed overall judgement linked to the topic or issue.			
Communicating information	2	1 mark for a structure appropriate to the topic or issue.	1 mark for the use of appropriate geographical terminology/ diagrams.		

Instructions for candidates

This assessment applies to the assignment for Higher Geography.

This assignment is worth 30 marks. This is 27% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

It assesses the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ identifying a geographical topic or issue
- ◆ carrying out research, which should include fieldwork where appropriate
- ◆ considering the suitability of the methods and/or reliability of the sources used
- ◆ processing and using a range of information gathered
- ◆ drawing on detailed knowledge and understanding of the topic or issue
- ◆ analysing information from a range of sources
- ◆ reaching a conclusion supported by a range of evidence on a geographical topic or issue
- ◆ communicating information

The assignment has two stages:

- ◆ research
- ◆ production of evidence

Your teacher or lecturer will let you know if there are any specific conditions for doing this assessment.

In this assessment, you have to demonstrate your ability to apply your skills, knowledge and understanding to research and reach a conclusion about a geographical topic or issue of your choice. This may be related to areas you have studied in class, or you may choose to research any relevant geographical topic or issue.

When doing your research and writing your report, you can demonstrate these skills in any way that you think makes sense for the issue you have chosen. You do not have to demonstrate them in any set order.

During the production of evidence stage, you must produce a report based on your research and the analysis that has led to your conclusion. You must complete this report within 1 hour and 30 minutes. This can be a continuous period of time or split over a number of subject lessons.

If your report is produced over a number of lessons, then your teacher or lecturer will keep your work and store it securely between lessons

You must work independently in direct sight of your teacher or lecturer. Your teacher or lecturer is not allowed to assist you in writing your report. You must not communicate with any other candidate during this time.

If your report is word-processed, your centre must ensure that you do not have access to the internet or any other files (either on hard drives or portable storage).

You may refer to the Processed Information collected during your research as you write your report. You should refer to this Processed Information in your report. This Processed Information must be no more than two single sides of A4 paper or one single side of A3 paper. You must submit this Processed Information with your report to SQA. If you do not submit this Processed Information, you will lose 6 marks.

The following information helps you understand the requirements of the assignment.

Identifying a geographical topic or issue

The geographical topic or issue you choose should allow you to:

- ◆ carry out research on the topic or issue
- ◆ show your knowledge and understanding of the topic or issue
- ◆ use your skills to analyse the topic or issue
- ◆ reach a conclusion about the topic or issue

You have a wide choice of possible geographical topics or issues to research. You can research something you have studied in class, or a topic or issue of personal interest. It may be a physical or human topic, or a local, national or global issue.

It is important that the topic or issue you choose is one which allows you to carry out research in different ways. If possible, this should include fieldwork. Not every topic or issue is suitable for this type of research but many geographical studies provide opportunities to do fieldwork.

It is helpful if you have a clear idea of the background to the topic or issue you are going to research. It is important that you have a clear idea before you start in order to focus your research.

It may be helpful to think about:

- ◆ a clear description of the topic or issue
- ◆ the different views on the topic or issue
- ◆ why this is an important geographical topic or issue
- ◆ questions or aims which will help you to focus your research

Your teacher or lecturer may support you by commenting on the suitability of your chosen topic or issue, and can advise on the likely availability of relevant resources.

Carrying out research

Considering the suitability of the methods and reliability of the sources used

Once you are clear about the topic or issue you are going to research, and have thought about the background of it to help focus your research, you can begin to collect information.

Depending on the topic or issue you have chosen, some methods of collecting information will be more suitable than others. You should plan which methods will be most suitable for your topic or issue.

Your research methods may involve carrying out:

- ◆ primary research, where the evidence you collect is original to you and/or
- ◆ secondary research, where the information you use has been produced by someone else

Primary research you could use might include:

- ◆ physical geography fieldwork techniques such as:
 - river fieldwork techniques (for example, measuring river depth, width, bedload shape, size, velocity)
 - coastal fieldwork techniques (for example, measuring beach profile, wave surveys, pebble analysis)
 - glacial fieldwork techniques (for example, till fabric analysis, slope profiles)
 - soil fieldwork techniques (for example, measuring soil texture, colour, depth, moisture content, organic content)
- ◆ human/environmental geography techniques such as:
 - interviews
 - questionnaires
 - traffic/pedestrian counts
 - land-use surveys
 - environmental quality surveys
 - litter and other pollution surveys

For both types of primary research, other relevant fieldwork techniques could include:

- ◆ taking photographs
- ◆ drawing field-sketches

Secondary research you could use might include gathering information from:

- ◆ maps
- ◆ official reports
- ◆ letters/emails

- ◆ internet sites
- ◆ newspaper/magazine articles (in print or online)
- ◆ television/DVD/digital streaming programmes
- ◆ radio programmes/podcasts
- ◆ textbooks

For secondary research methods in particular, it is important that you keep a note of the source of information (for example, the internet address/URL and date that it was accessed; the title, author and page number from a textbook).

In the production of evidence stage you are asked to:

- ◆ describe the research methods used and/or
- ◆ evaluate the usefulness and/or reliability of any techniques or sources used

When evaluating the usefulness and/or reliability of the methods you used, you should think about any aspect of your fieldwork techniques that could have strengthened or weakened your results. For example, it might be relevant to comment on:

- ◆ sampling strategy used
- ◆ sample size collected
- ◆ time of day that you carried out your fieldwork
- ◆ weather on the day(s) of your fieldwork
- ◆ drawbacks of the fieldwork instruments used and alternative ideal fieldwork instruments that could have been used
- ◆ advantages or disadvantages of the fieldwork techniques

When evaluating the usefulness and/or reliability of the sources you used, you should think about where your information came from, and whether or not this makes the information reliable and trustworthy. For example, for secondary sources it might be relevant to comment on:

- ◆ qualifications and/or experience of the authors
- ◆ any bias the authors/publishers may have
- ◆ date of publication/information
- ◆ balance of arguments
- ◆ amount of evidence referred to in supporting points of view
- ◆ whether any significant aspects are omitted
- ◆ benefits of using secondary rather than primary sources of information for your topic or issue

If you've used primary sources of information it might also be relevant to comment on the advantages of using primary rather than secondary sources of information for your topic.

Processing and using a range of information gathered

Once you have gathered your information you will process it before using it and referring to it in your report.

You will process the data and information you have gathered in order to show clearly the key information it contains, so you should think carefully about your processing techniques.

Possible techniques you may wish to use are:

- ◆ annotated field-sketches
- ◆ annotated photographs
- ◆ annotated map extracts, including OS maps
- ◆ thematic maps, for example showing urban or rural land use, choropleth, isoline, proportional symbol, topological
- ◆ graphs, for example simple line, multiple line, complex bar, divided bar, histogram, scatter graph, pie chart, pictograph, climate graph, hydrograph, population graph, river flow data, rose diagram
- ◆ calculations, for example mean, range, speed
- ◆ diagrams, for example cross-section, transect, population pyramid, soil profile, flow diagram
- ◆ tables, for example data from soil, employment, land use
- ◆ extracts from interviews, letters, emails, official reports, newspapers, books, magazines, websites
- ◆ questionnaire results
- ◆ written notes from television programmes, DVD, digital streaming, radio, podcasts

You must be able to fit your Processed Information on to two single sides of A4 paper or one single side of A3 paper. You take this Processed Information with you when you write your report during the production of evidence stage. You should use and refer to this Processed Information in your report but you should not copy large parts from it. You will gain marks for how well you use the evidence from your Processed Information in your report. If you do not make use of your Processed Information you will not be able to achieve full marks.

This Processed Information is submitted to SQA with your report. Make sure you understand the guidance on Processed Information below.

Drawing on detailed knowledge and understanding of the topic or issue studied

As you carry out your research you will be learning a lot about your topic or issue. In your assignment report you will be expected to show a detailed knowledge and understanding of your topic or issue. You can do this in a number of ways, depending on your topic or issue, for example by:

- ◆ explaining the background to the geographical topic or issue

- ◆ explaining why it is an important or significant topic or issue
- ◆ showing knowledge of geographical models of the topic
- ◆ showing understanding of the processes relevant to the topic
- ◆ showing an awareness of different viewpoints on the issue
- ◆ explaining the causes or consequences of the issue
- ◆ using geographical language and terminology appropriate to the topic or issue

You may show your knowledge and understanding of the topic or issue in both an introduction to your report and in support of your analysis throughout your report.

Analysing information from a range of sources

You should have collected a wide range of evidence and data on your topic or issue. You may analyse this information by:

- ◆ identifying significant features of the topic or issue, for example:
 - If development X goes ahead, the impacts on the local area will include ...
- ◆ establishing links between evidence, such as using your Processed Information along with your own knowledge of the topic or issue, for example by:
 - comparing the main characteristics of the soil along slope X and discussing their impact on soil formation
- ◆ comparing evidence with geographical concepts, for example:
 - How does River X compare to the river model? How does Town Y compare to the concentric ring model?
- ◆ establishing contradictions/inconsistencies, for example:
 - While the economic reasons for the policy include ..., the negative environmental impacts mean that ...; While certain aspects of the river match the model, others such as ... do not.
- ◆ establishing comparisons and contrasts, for example:
 - How and why standard of living varies between area X and area Y; How do physical and human factors in area X affect the hydrograph in River Y?
- ◆ exploring different views/interpretations of components, for example:
 - Source X supported the development whereas Source Y opposed it.
- ◆ identifying possible consequences, for example:
 - If development X is given the go-ahead, the economic, social and environmental consequences may include ...
- ◆ combining information from different sources to make a stronger argument, for example:
 - Both the questionnaire results and the traffic count showed that ...

It is likely that you will make a series of smaller conclusions as you analyse your topic or issue, which will help you come to an overall conclusion.

In order to achieve the maximum 8 marks for analysis, you will need to address at least two different factors. If you only analyse one factor, you can only achieve a maximum of 4 marks for analysis.

Reaching a conclusion supported by a range of evidence on a geographical topic or issue

Once you have analysed the evidence and information you have collected, you will be able to reach an overall conclusion.

Your overall conclusion must be either:

- ◆ a detailed summary of key findings on the issue or topic
or
- ◆ a detailed overall judgement about the issue or topic

You may present your conclusion as:

- ◆ a decision about a policy or development
- ◆ a judgement about the causes of an issue
- ◆ a judgement about whether your findings are consistent with a geographical model
- ◆ the most significant or most likely consequences of an issue
- ◆ the most important or significant factors relating to a topic or issue

It is important that you show how your conclusion is based on the evidence from your research.

Communicating information

Your report must communicate information clearly to the reader. It should show clearly the evidence you have used to reach your conclusion. Your report should include:

- ◆ a coherent and logical report of the findings from your research (as recorded in your Processed Information)
- ◆ use of geographical diagrams if relevant to your issue or topic
- ◆ use of geographical terminology relevant to your issue or topic

In geography the use of diagrams is important, and you may also wish to include them in your Processed Information. Your report should also include:

- ◆ a title
- ◆ section headings breaking up the information, evidence and arguments you are using into a clear and logical structure

Processed Information

You can take your Processed Information that you have collected and processed during the research stage of your assignment into your assessment. You should use and refer to this Processed Information to support your report, but you must not copy large parts from it. You will gain marks for how well you use the evidence from your Processed Information in your report.

Some examples of the sort of Processed Information you can take in are:

- ◆ evidence you have collected from fieldwork you have carried out, for example, annotated photographs or field-sketches
- ◆ written, statistical, notes from an interview, extracts from a newspaper article
- ◆ tables of figures, graphs, charts, diagrams – you may annotate these, for example, by highlighting significant or important information. These are useful forms of information to include in your Processed Information as they are difficult to remember and are helpful to refer to and use to support your conclusion
- ◆ details of sources for secondary information

Working with others

While you should choose your own topic or issue to research, others in your class may have chosen a similar topic or issue. You might want to work with others for part of the time, when you are collecting information. If you choose to do this, it is important that you are able to show what you have contributed to this part of your assignment, and that the Processed Information you take into your assessment is your own work.

Overview of marks

Total marks available	30
Carrying out research on a geographical topic or issue	6
Use of and reference to Processed Information	6
Drawing on knowledge and understanding of the geographical topic or issue	6
Analysing information	8
Reaching an overall conclusion, supported by a range of evidence	2
Communicating information	2

Administrative information

Published: May 2024 (version 3.0)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	Penalty for non-submission of Processed Information added to 'Instructions for teachers and lecturers' and 'Instructions for candidates' section.	July 2019
3.0	Instructions for candidates updated to clarify that the report can be produced during a continuous period of time or split over a number of subject lessons and that if the report is produced over a number of lessons, then the teacher or lecturer will keep the work and store it securely.	May 2024

Note: you are advised to check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.

Security and confidentiality

This document can be used by SQA approved centres for the assessment of National Courses and not for any other purpose.

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2013, 2019, 2024