

The syllabus and your exams

For Common Entrance History, you will sit an exam lasting an hour, for which you will need to answer one question from Part A and one question from Part B.

Part A: the evidence question

- The evidence question is worth 20 marks and it is recommended that you spend 20 minutes writing your answer to it.
- You will be presented with three sources. These may include an entry from a historical chronicle, an extract from a book written by a modern historian or a piece of correspondence from the time. At least one of the sources will be a picture, either produced at the time or a modern reconstruction.
- The first question will ask you to look at the first source and describe what the source is telling you.
- The second question will ask you to look at the second source and describe what the source is telling you in a little more detail.
- The third question will ask you to compare two of the sources and describe where the sources say different things.
- The fourth question will ask you to look at all the sources. It may ask you to give your opinion on which source is the most reliable. To answer this effectively you will need to understand the issues of **provenance**, **first-hand evidence** and **hindsight**.
- **Provenance** is the issue of where a source comes from. An account of the Battle of Hastings written by a Norman source would be very different from one written by an English source. A Norman author would write from a winner's perspective. He might exaggerate the bravery and skill of the Norman soldiers, or the cowardice and incompetence of the English. An English writer would write from a loser's perspective, and might argue that the Normans won purely by luck and that battle was a great tragedy for England.

- **First-hand evidence** is that produced by an author who was actually present at the events described. An author who actually fought at the Battle of Hastings might write differently from an author who heard about the battle from another person. Sometimes authors write based on folk tales that have been passed through hundreds of people. Detail can be lost and exaggerations added. But a story that has been passed on before being written down may still have important things to say about another person's perception of events.
- **Hindsight** is the knowledge gained about an event after it has taken place. An author writing on the day after the Battle of Hastings might write differently from an author writing a hundred or even a thousand years later, who does so with the benefit of hindsight. Sometimes details may be forgotten or changed over time. But don't assume that a source will always be less reliable because a lot of time has passed. Modern historians — who generally write a long time after the event — can have a better overall view of the historical events.
- When you consider each source for the fourth question, you will need to look at these issues and see which ones are relevant. It is important to remember that there is often no 'right' or 'wrong' answer. You are being asked to argue your opinion, based on the evidence presented.
- You will not be asked for historical facts about the topic the sources refer to. But it may help you to give a strong, full answer if you know at least a little about the topic, for example, the background to it, the events of the time and any future consequences.

Find your copy of "The Masked Historian's Guide to Answering the Common Entrance Evidence Section" for further help on structuring your written responses to this section.

Part B: the essay question

- The essay question is worth 30 marks and it is recommended that you spend 35 minutes on it. There are two parts to the question: the **narrative essay** and the **analytical essay**.
- The **narrative essay** (worth 20 marks) will ask you to '**describe**' an event or events. You will need to be able to remember the historical facts and re-tell them in an understandable way.

- You should make sure that your answer has a sentence or two of introduction, a few paragraphs that describe the events and another sentence or two in conclusion.
- It will help to include the dates of the events you describe. This will prove to the examiner that you have learnt the material properly and will earn you more marks.
- **You should write your answer in the past tense.**
- You **should not** include any of your personal opinions: that comes in the next part.
- The **analytical essay** (worth 10 marks) will ask you to '**explain**' the reasons for something. You will need to consider why something happened and state your opinion, using sources to back up your claims.
- You should not waste time re-telling the events, as this will not earn you any marks. You need to look at the causes behind the event or the consequences of it.
- You will earn most marks for giving a balanced opinion. Try to argue two different opinions, then come to a conclusion where you reject one in favour of the other.
- There is never a 'right' or 'wrong' answer, only 'strong' and 'weak' ones. Another pupil could arrive at a completely different conclusion and receive the same number of marks. The examiner is looking for evidence that you understand the causes or consequences of an event, know how to analyse them properly and can back up your analysis by reference to the sources.
- When using historical sources to back up your claims, make sure you consider how reliable they are by considering provenance, first-hand evidence and hindsight. This could affect your conclusion.

Tips on revising

Get the best out of your brain

- Give your brain plenty of oxygen by exercising. You can revise effectively if you feel fit and well.
- Eat healthy food while you are revising. Your brain works better when you give it good fuel.
- Think positively. Give your brain positive messages so that it will want to study.
- Keep calm. If your brain is stressed it will not operate effectively.
- Take regular breaks during your study time.
- Get enough sleep. Your brain will carry on sorting out what you have revised while you sleep.

Get the most from your revision

- **Don't** work for hours without a break. Revise for 20—30 minutes then take a five-minute break.
- **Do** good things in your breaks: listen to your favourite music, eat healthy food, drink some water, do some exercise and juggle. Juggling with hamsters or other furry rodents is best. **Don't** read a book, watch TV or play on the computer; it will conflict with what your brain is trying to learn.
- When you go back to your revision review what you have just learnt.
- Regularly review the facts you have learnt.

Get motivated

- Set yourself some goals and promise yourself a treat when the exams are over. A small Kit-Kat as a reward will always motivate the most reluctant student.
- Make the most of all the expertise and talent available to you at

school and at home. If you don't understand something ask your teacher to explain.

- Get organised. Find a quiet place to revise and make sure you have all the equipment you need.
- Use topic and subject checklists to help you keep on top of what you are revising.

Know what to expect in the exam

- Use past papers to familiarise yourself with the format of the exam.
- Make sure you understand the language examiners use.

Before the exam

- Have all your equipment and pens ready the night before.
- Make sure you are at your best by getting a good night's sleep before the exam.
- Have a good breakfast in the morning. You can't think if your stomach is rumbling.
- Take some water into the exam if you are allowed.
- Think positively and keep calm.

During the exam

- Have a watch on your desk. Work out how much time you need to allocate to each question and try to stick to it.
- Make sure you read and understand the instructions and rules on the front of the exam paper.
- Allow some time at the start to read and consider the questions carefully before writing anything.

- Read all the questions at least twice. Don't rush into answering before you have a chance to think about it.
- If a question is particularly hard move on to the next one. Go back to it if you have time at the end.
- Check your answers make sense if you have time at the end.

Now let us begin to revise...