

GCE

Research-based Essay Guide

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Part One (Generic)

Edexcel Advanced GCE in French (9FR01)

Edexcel Advanced GCE in German (9GN01)

Edexcel Advanced GCE in Italian (9IN01)

Edexcel Advanced GCE in Russian (9RU01)

Edexcel Advanced GCE in Spanish (9SP01)

Edexcel Advanced GCE in Urdu (9UR01)



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Part 1 Generic guidance

Introduction

This guide is intended to support teachers and students preparing the research-based essay section of Unit 4 of the Edexcel Advanced GCEs in French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish and Urdu.

The guide should be used in conjunction with the appropriate Specification and the Sample Assessment Materials.

The first section contains guidelines for all the languages offered and the second section is relevant to each individual language.

The language specific section (Part 2) contains examples of student work which have been assessed by Edexcel senior examiners. Edexcel acknowledges thanks to the schools, colleges, teachers and candidates who helped in the production of these materials.

Rationale

The idea of the research-based essay is to allow students to study an area related to the target-language culture (French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish or Urdu) which is of genuine interest to them. It encourages a smooth and logical transition from either the Topics and Texts examination or the coursework option available in previous specifications

It encourages wide reading, individual research and personal initiative. It offers an important intellectual challenge for students to acquire the skills of researching, selecting and organising material.

Students will have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and understanding of target-language culture by exploring an aspect of that culture which interests them. They will have a wide choice of topics within the four areas of **geography, history, social events and issues and literature and the arts.**

The research-based essay should encourage students to develop analytical and interpretive skills, develop ideas on a range of issues and express these ideas critically.

Benefits of foreign exchanges and links as well as study visits and work experience can, where possible, be exploited as part of the preparation for the research-based essay.

Key requirements of the research-based essay

- Students must choose an area of research from the four areas specified in the Specification (Section C - Unit Content) namely:
 - Geographical area
 - Historical study
 - Aspects of the modern target-language culture and society
 - Literature and the arts
- The chosen topic must be firmly rooted in modern target-language speaking culture.
- Texts, plays and films chosen for the Research Based Essay must have been written or produced originally in the target language.
- Preferably the area of research should reflect personal interest
- The research-based essay should reflect the candidate's own ideas and be expressed in his or her own words.

Getting started

Teachers may wish to begin work on the research-based essay after the AS examinations. There are various ways in which it can be taught:

- A whole class project where all students study the same area of research.
- A completely free choice for all students
- An option of two areas of research, which could be studied together and/or individually. This could also be two strands from the same area of research.

Each of the above has its advantages and disadvantages. A whole class approach may well be easier to organise and the progress of the students can probably be more easily monitored. On the other hand, teachers may prefer to offer students a free choice of area of research. The third option would enable students to broaden their appreciation of the target-language speaking culture and would also offer them greater flexibility on the day of the examination.

Whichever approach is taken, teachers would be expected to direct and guide their students appropriately. This would include suggesting how to focus research and giving advice on how to access the full mark range.

It is recommended that teachers discuss different options for possible areas of research with the students. This could mean, for example, providing students with brief descriptions of two different literary texts to gauge where there is most interest. Teachers may decide to choose one of the texts or topics previously offered on Topics and Texts papers from former specifications. This is perfectly acceptable, although it would also be possible to undertake further research beyond the text or film that could be linked to another area of research. *For example, GCE German students may study the film 'Der Baader Meinhof Komplex' as well as considering and researching the student revolts of the Sixties and Seventies.*

It is important that teachers choose an area of research where information is easily obtainable. This may well involve a wide use of the Internet but other sources such as books, newspaper and magazine articles, text books, film and television documentaries as well as personal contacts should be used as appropriate. School textbooks from a target-language country may well be useful particularly for geographical or historical studies. A visit to a target-language country or community although, understandably not always possible, to pick up such materials would be recommended if feasible. Specific websites and other sources of information can be found in the language-specific part of this guide.

Writing the essay

It should be remembered that the essay is much shorter than any produced as coursework in previous specifications with a word limit of **240-270 words (180 - 200 words in Russian)**. This is also very different from Topics and Texts essays which did not have an upper word limit. This will require students to focus their research effectively and be very concise when writing. The essay must reflect the views and opinions of the students and also have an analytical and an evaluative approach. This means for example that an essay on a geographical region which just reads like a tourist brochure will score a low mark.

The essay question must be answered as fully as possible within the restrictions of the word limit.

The best work must show evidence of individual research. Candidates may do this by producing a very brief bibliography with the name(s) of the most important book(s), writer(s) or website(s) consulted at the end of the essay. Full referencing will not be required. This will not be included in the word count but will have to be memorised. Students may also refer to their research in the body of the essay with a phrase such as 'As says in his work'. Quotes from background sources are very much encouraged to support ideas and will not be counted in the overall word limit. It would be useful to see them attributed as footnotes if appropriate. If choosing the literature option this may not be necessary. Similarly, it is worth noting that proper nouns (eg. the title of a book), will not be included in the word count.

Candidates may show evidence of research and analysis by clearly weighing up different views on a topic in their essay and drawing an appropriate conclusion.

It is very important that all the subtopics listed in each area of research are covered. This is to ensure that students are well prepared to answer the question set in the examination as only one question per area of research will be set. Nevertheless, the question set will be general enough to enable any topic, book, play or film to be attempted. The following must, therefore, be considered:

Geographical area e.g. a region or a city

- Key people, events and issues (demographic, environmental, economic, social, political) that have impacted or are having an impact on the area
- Customs, traditions, beliefs and religions

Although this area of research is non-prescriptive, students are advised to study a region or city of significant size and importance that offers real scope for research.

Historical study

- A specific period in history of particular relevance to the chosen target-language country
- Key people, events and issues from the above period

Aspects of modern society

- Key current and recent (21st century / late 20th century) events and issues eg social, cultural and political and their impact on the target-language society.

'Modern society' is understood to mean the following for each of the countries below:

- Germany - Post 1990
- France - Post 1980
- Spain - Post 1975
- Italy - Post 1992
- Urdu - Post 1970
- Russia - Post 1991

For advice on dates for other target-language speaking countries not listed, please consult one of the Edexcel examining team via the 'Ask the expert' email address. Please see *Appendix 3* (page 11) for relevant contact details.

It is important that the focus is on social, cultural *and* political changes in the German/French/Italian/Spanish/Urdu/Russian-speaking countries and that the students do not produce *historical* essays. Teachers should guide students in the choice of the *aspects of modern society* to ensure that sufficient consideration is given to a range of issues. It is envisaged that the chosen aspect of society will have a social, cultural and political dimension.

Literature and the arts

Students would be expected to undertake an in-depth study of a substantial target-language text, play or film. They would need to consider and demonstrate understanding of the following:

- Different characters
- Key themes and issues
- Social and cultural setting (requiring wider research beyond the text)
- Styles and techniques employed.

A *substantial* text, play or film is simply one which allows candidates to consider and demonstrate understanding of the different characters, key themes and issues, social and cultural settings, and styles and techniques. It is unlikely that the study of poetry, biographies and autobiographies or documentaries would satisfy these requirements.

It is acknowledged that the term '*Literature and the arts*' could imply coverage of a much wider range of areas (eg art, architecture, music etc) than those stipulated above. However, students must be advised that **examination questions will only be set in relation to an in-depth study of a substantial target-language text, play or film.**

Hints for teachers and students

1. Well before the date of the examination students and teachers should make a decision on which area of research is to be chosen for this essay - possibly even before the end of the first year of A level, if following a traditional 2 year course.
2. Students will need to integrate evidence of reading and research into the essay to show that they have the required knowledge and understanding of their chosen issue. This could be done with footnotes on each page giving the source, with a simple bibliography if appropriate at the end of the essay or, more simply, with phrases such as '*As ...says in his book...*' in the body of the essay. If choosing the literature option this may well not be necessary.
3. Students will need to adhere to a limited word count. For that reason they should look at the question carefully. It is likely to demand factual information, but also evaluation and analysis. They should not be tempted to tell the story if choosing literature or to write everything they know about a region, if choosing geography.
4. In many cases, depth of knowledge will require examples, facts, statistics and expert opinions. In literature however, illustration or reference to the text, film or play can suffice.
5. If choosing a geographical region, students should avoid choosing somewhere too small. Capital or other major cities such as (eg. Berlin or Munich/Paris or Marseille/Rome or Milan/Moscow or St Petersburg/Madrid or Barcelona/Karachi or Islamabad) can easily stand alone but research of wider regions would otherwise be recommended. Students will need to research political, cultural, economical and social issues in detail.
6. If choosing an historical study, students should avoid making their research too narrow.
7. If choosing an aspect of modern society, students should be sure to cover social, cultural and political issues in detail.
8. If choosing literature or a film, students may choose to use critical guides either online or in print to help with research.
9. It is vital that students show what they know and refer to their sources when appropriate. However, **they must avoid learning huge chunks of text off by heart**. As far as possible, they should use their own words.
10. Students should use a range of structures and check for accuracy as they go along.
11. Questions in the exam will have quite a broad focus, as all candidates will have studied very varied texts, regions etc. Nevertheless students should make sure that they are not diverted from the requirements of the question.
12. Any research undertaken should primarily involve reading in the target language. If any English-language source materials are used, these must only be used to supplement target-language reading.
13. Areas of research not deeply rooted in target-language culture are not acceptable for this assessment.
14. In order to access the higher mark range, purely factual and descriptive work should be avoided.
15. It is unlikely that a pre learnt essay will represent a fully relevant response to the question.

NB: A checklist has been produced in *Appendix 1* (page 9) to help students check that they have written the appropriate response. **This may only be used when practising essay writing.**

Possible research-based essay titles

The following provide illustrations of possible research-based essay titles for each of the prescribed areas of research.

Geographical area

- 1) Describe the main festivals in the region or city which you have studied. How important are these festivals for the economy of the region or city?
- 2) Describe some of places of worship in the region or city which you have studied. What importance does religion have in this region or city?
- 3) What factors influence the economic development in the region or city which you have studied? What is being done to promote the economy of the region or city?
- 4) What social problems are there in the region or city which you have studied? Is enough being done to solve these problems?
- 5) Describe the geographical situation of the region or city which you have studied. To what extent does this situation influence the day to day life of the inhabitants?

Historical study

- 1) Describe two important people from the period which you have studied. What role did they play in this period?
- 2) Choose an important year in the period which you have studied. Why was this year particularly important?
- 3) Choose an important event in the period which you have studied. Why was this event so important in history in your opinion?
- 4) Explain the most important social and economic changes from the beginning to the end of the period which you have studied. Why did these changes happen?
- 5) Compare two people whom you have studied. To what extent was their contribution to history similar or different in your opinion?

Aspects of modern speaking society

- 1) Choose a social issue in modern *German/French/Italian/Russian/Spanish/Urdu* speaking society. Explain why this issue is particularly important in modern *Germany/France/Italy/Russia/Spain/ Pakistan* or another *German/French/Italian/Russian/Spanish/Urdu* - speaking country.
- 2) Describe an important recent political event in *Germany/France/Italy/Russia/Spain/ Pakistan* or another *German/French/Italian/Russian/Spanish/Urdu* - speaking country. Why is it so important, do you think?
- 3) Explain recent important cultural developments since *XXXX* in *Germany/France/Italy/Russia/ Spain/ Pakistan* or another *German/French/Italian/Russian/Spanish/Urdu* - speaking country. Why are these developments important do you think?
- 4) How has *Germany/France/Italy/Russia/Spain/ Pakistan* or another *German/French/Italian/ Russian/Spanish/Urdu* - speaking country changed politically in recent years do you think? Why is that the case?
- 5) What do you consider typical of *German/French/Italian/Russian/Spanish/Urdu* culture? Why do you think this?

Literature and the arts

- 1) Take the main character or characters from your chosen book, play or film. How does this character/these characters develop in the work, do you think?
- 2) Choose an extract from the book play or film which you have studied. How important is this extract for the development of the work do you think?
- 3) What aspects of the book play or film which you have studied did you find particularly interesting? Why is that the case?
- 4) What message does your chosen book play or film still have for today's society? How important is this message do you think?
- 5) Discuss one of the most important themes in the book play or film which you have studied. What does the author/director want to say do you think?

Appendix 1 - Student checklist

Student may refer to the following checklist when practising research-based essay writing. This checklist must **not** be used in the examination.

Research-based Essay Checklist	
Knowledge	
Have I shown a good and relevant knowledge of the topic I have chosen?	
Have I written concisely and avoided waffling?	
Have I indicated from where this knowledge has been acquired?	
Understanding	
Have I evaluated the knowledge I have acquired and then given my own ideas and opinions?	
Organisation	
Have I organised and planned my essay remembering the restriction on words?	
Have I avoided an over long introduction or 'telling the story'?	
Development	
Have I developed the ideas and opinions I have given?	
Accuracy	
Have I written in as accurate language as I can?	
Have I tried to use appropriate but also challenging syntax and structures?	

Appendix 2 - Assessment criteria

Students will be rewarded for their performances according to the following assessment criteria, which will be applied on a 'best fit' basis.

Mark	A02 - Reading Research and Understanding
0	No rewardable material presented.
1 - 6	Minimal understanding. Almost no evidence of reading and research.
7 - 12	Limited understanding. Little evidence of reading and research.
13 - 18	Adequate understanding. Some evidence of reading and research.
19 - 24	Good to very good understanding; clear evidence of in depth reading and research.
25 - 30	Very good to excellent understanding; clear evidence of extensive and in-depth reading and research.
Mark	A02 - Organisation and development
0	No rewardable organisation and development.
1 - 2	Limited organisation and development; structure almost wholly lacking in coherence.
3 - 4	Some organisation and development; may be rambling and/or repetitive.
5 - 6	Adequate organisation and development of material; development patchy and/or ambiguous.
7 - 8	Good organisation and development; material well planned and sequenced with minor lapses.
9	Very good organisation and development; material very effectively marshalled and developed within a carefully planned framework.
Mark	A03 - Quality of language
0	No rewardable language.
1	Very basic level of communication; language often breaks down because of lack of linguistic knowledge and/or ability to use structures; very inaccurate.
2	Some communication achieved on a basic level but often lacks comprehensibility; limited linguistic range; basic sentence construction; register often inappropriate.
3 - 4	Satisfactory communication; inaccurate language occasionally impedes comprehensibility; fair range of appropriate lexis; structures often well handled.
5	Good communication; errors rarely impede comprehensibility; language mainly accurate and appropriate; good range of lexis and structures; good handling of complex structures and use of idioms.
6	Very good communication; language almost always fluent, varied and appropriate; wide range of lexis and structures; high level of accuracy.

- Students are **not** permitted to take any books or texts into the examination room.
- Inadmissible pieces will receive zero marks for that question.

Appendix 3 - Support

If you have any queries relating to the assessment of the research-based essay, you are able to email a member of the Edexcel GCE examining team for advice via our 'Ask the expert' service. The email contact addresses for the relevant languages are given below.

French	gcefrench@edexcelexperts.co.uk
German	gcegerman@edexcelexperts.co.uk
Italian	gceitalian@edexcelexperts.co.uk
Russian	gcerussian@edexcelexperts.co.uk
Spanish	gcespanish@edexcelexperts.co.uk
Urdu	gceurdu@edexcelexperts.co.uk

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Acknowledgements

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