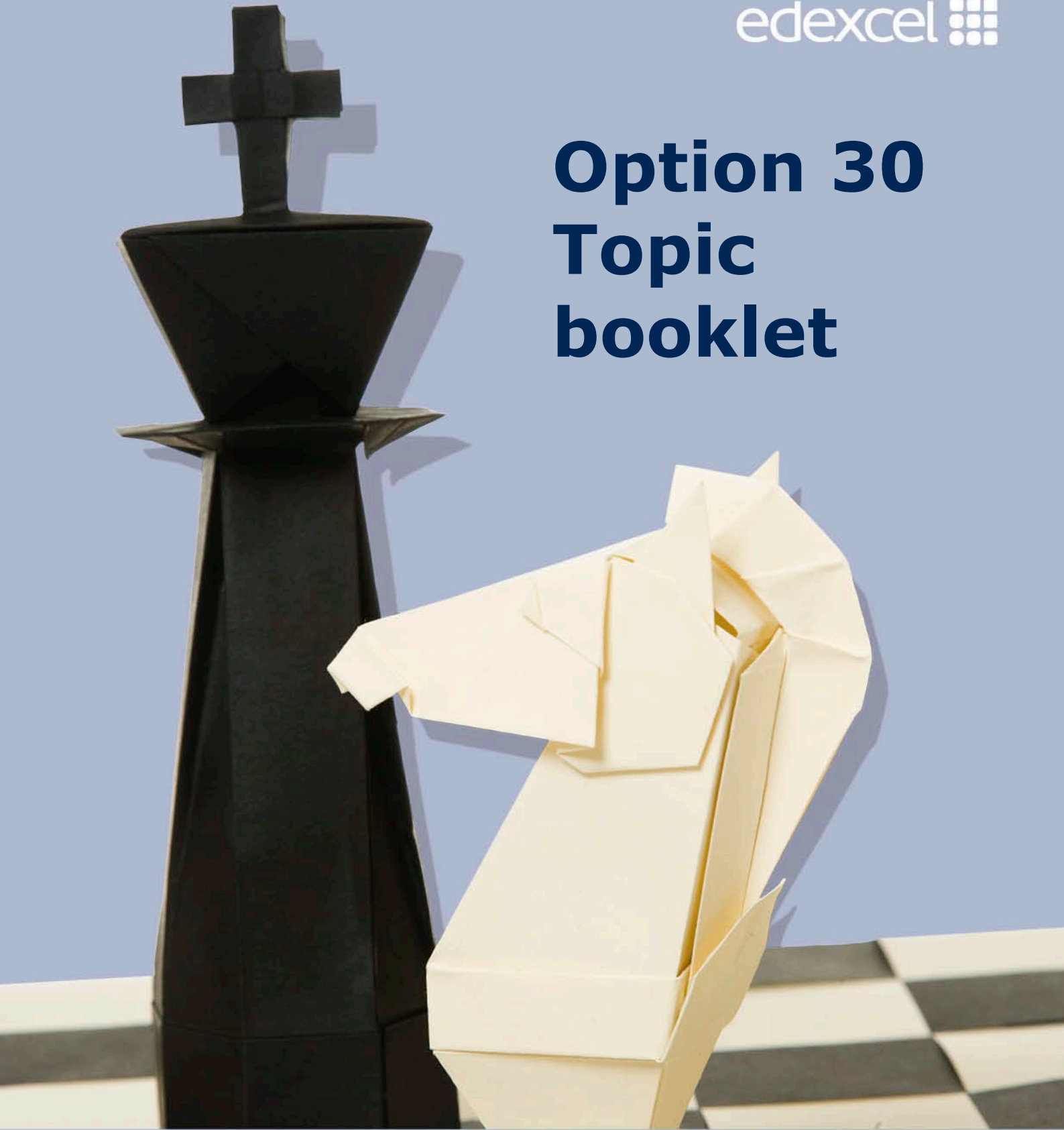


Option 30

Topic booklet



Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41
GCSE (9–1) History

Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9–1) in History (1HI0)

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Version 4 (March 2025)

This topic booklet has been updated to include changes made to new issues of the specification and sample assessment materials.

- Issue 5: language and assessment changes, for first assessment June 2025.
- Issue 6: content changes, for first teaching September 2024 and first assessment June 2026.

Information on new resources has also been added.

Summary guidance on the changes can be found [here](#).

1. Overview

The study of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41 allows students to gain knowledge and understanding of one of the greatest social, economic and political experiments of the twentieth century.

This option focuses on a period of radical and revolutionary change. Beginning with the last year of the Tsar's reign, it considers the revolutions of 1917, the establishment and consolidation of the world's first Communist regime, the period of Lenin's rule, the power struggle after his death and finally the nature of Stalin's regime from his emergence as leader in 1928 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1941. Throughout, there is a focus on the transformation of Russia, first through a genuinely spontaneous and popular revolution, then through a *coup d'etat* and finally as a result of Stalin's revolution from above. Beyond politics, the course examines the impact of Soviet Communism on the Soviet economy, society and culture. Specifically, students will consider how War Communism, the New Economic Policy and finally collectivisation and the Five-Year Plans affected the economy of Russia and then the Soviet Union. Moreover, the course considers the impact of Communism on education, art, the media, and religion as well as women, the family and minority ethnic groups.

The course is structured into four key topics, each of which contributes to a modern depth study focusing on a relatively short time span. Moreover, while the course is organised into four topics it has an overarching coherence. Indeed, it requires students to understand the complexity of a society or historical situation and the interrelation between different aspects of Russian politics, society and culture during this period. Significantly, the four topics contain some chronological overlap, and this structure is designed to highlight the complexity and interplay of different aspects of the history that it covers. Students will not be assessed on Soviet foreign policy or the last years of Stalin's rule after the outbreak of war in 1941.

Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41 is a genuinely exciting study, as it allows students to explore issues of freedom and coercion, idealism and Machiavellian manipulation, propaganda and consent. It also allows students to explore a value system wholly alien to that which prevails in the contemporary West. In this sense, it allows students to study a regime which became increasingly totalitarian and in which power was used to conduct a profound social, economic and political experiment which cost the lives of millions and ultimately failed to create an egalitarian utopia. What is more, the course focuses on some remarkable individuals, such as Alexander Kerensky, V. I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin.

1.1 Assessment (from June 2025)

Students answer three questions for the modern depth study: Question 1, either Question 2(a) or Question 2(b). and Question 3 parts (a)–(d). Students are assessed on all four Assessment Objectives. The questions may be related to any content specified in the four key topic areas.

- Question 1: targets AO3, and requires students to make inferences from one source.
- Question 2(a) or 2(b): students have a choice of two questions. These target AO1/AO2, and focus on explanation of causation.
- Question 3(a): targets AO3 and uses two contemporary sources. One of them may be visual, but at least one will be written. Students assess the usefulness of both sources for a specified enquiry, making use of their knowledge of the historical context.

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- Question 3(b): targets AO4 and uses two written interpretations taken from secondary material. Students explain how the two interpretations differ.
- Question 3(c): targets AO4 and uses the same interpretations as part (b). Students suggest why the two interpretations differ. They may use the contemporary sources provided for Question 3(a) to help them answer this question.
- Question 3(d): targets AO4 and re-uses the interpretations. It requires students to evaluate one interpretation, making use of the other interpretation and their knowledge of the historical context.

Students should be aware that interpretations are based on evidence from their period of study and they should be aware of a range of evidence that can be used to reach conclusions. They should study examples of such evidence and consider ways in which it could give rise to and support different interpretations. Students should understand a range of reasons why interpretations may differ and should be aware that differences in view, based on conclusions drawn from evidence, are legitimate and can be explained. Students should be able to evaluate given interpretations using their own knowledge of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41.

Detailed information and guidance on assessment can be found in the separate [Getting Started Guide](#).

For more information on sources and interpretations, please refer to the [Guidance on sources and interpretations](#) and [Paper 3 guide](#), which look at question types, common problems, and teaching approaches and ideas.

2. Content guidance

2.1 Summary of content

The revolutions of 1917

The first Key topic examines the revolutions of 1917. In this part of the course, students should consider growing discontent among workers and peasants, the growth of political opposition and its impact on the tsarist regime. They should understand the significance of the First World War on the Tsar's government, including the consequences of Russia's military defeats; the economic, political and social effects; and the impact of the Tsar's decision to take personal command of the Russian army. Students should also understand the immediate causes of the February Revolution, including the Tsar's absence from Petrograd, events in the capital in February 1917, industrial unrest, and the army's mutiny against the Tsar's rule. Students should examine the immediate consequences of the February Revolution, particularly the Tsar's abdication and the establishment of the Provisional Government. This aspect of the course also examines the problems facing the Provisional Government, as well as the weaknesses and failings of the new government, including the decision to continue the war effort, the issuing of Soviet Order Number 1, delays to the creation of a constituent assembly, growing economic problems and sharing power with Petrograd Soviet. Students should also understand Kerensky's role in the development and decline of the Provisional Government, including, for example, the consequences of the failed June Offensive, and the significance of the Kornilov Revolt. Finally, Key topic 1 focuses on the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. Here, students should understand the significance of Lenin's return to Russia, the impact of his April Theses; the causes, events and significance of the 'July Days', and the growth of Bolshevik support throughout 1917. This aspect of the course concludes with the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917. Students should understand the reasons for the success of the October Revolution and the roles of Trotsky and Lenin in achieving the successful seizure of power.

The Bolsheviks in power, 1917–24

Key topic 2 considers the Bolsheviks in power in the period 1917–24. Students should explore the measures by which the Bolsheviks consolidated their power, including Lenin's initial popular decrees: the Decree on Land, the Decree on Peace, and decrees on workers' rights; as well as early repressive measures, such as the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the execution of the Tsar and the royal family. Students should also have knowledge and understanding of the controversial Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and reactions to the treaty within Russia. Students should understand the causes and key events of the Russian Civil War 1918–21, as well as the reasons for the Bolshevik victory, including the strengths of the Bolsheviks, the role of Trotsky, the impact of foreign intervention and the weaknesses and divisions of the Whites. Key topic 2 also includes the study of the impact of the Civil War on Russia, specifically the ways in which it changed Bolshevik government, leading to a more repressive and centralised form of rule. Students should understand these moves towards totalitarianism included the introduction of the Cheka and its role in the Red Terror, and the repression of the Kronstadt Mutiny. Bolshevik centralisation should be understood too, including the growing role of Lenin and the Politburo, and the establishment of the USSR. Economic and social change comprises the final aspect of Key topic 2. Here, students should understand the reasons for War Communism, for example Lenin's ideological motives, and the need to organise the economy in order to win the Civil War. Students should also understand the key features of War Communism, such as grain requisitioning, the abolition of money, and the employment of 'bourgeois specialists' to run Russia's industry. The ideological and economic reasons for the

2. Content guidance

unpopularity of War Communism are also essential to this aspect of the course. Students should understand the political, ideological and economic reasons for the introduction of the New Economic Policy; its key features, such as the tax in kind, and the introduction of a mixed economy, as well as the divisions over its appropriateness to the development of socialism in the USSR. Students should also be aware of its effects on the Soviet economy to 1924, considering the extent to which it solved the Soviet Union's economic problems, and the extent to which it created new difficulties. Social change is the final aspect of Key topic 2. In this part of the course students should focus on the impact of Bolshevik policies on women, for example, the limited impact of Zhenotdel; the impact of Communist education policies, for example the literacy drive; and the impact of Communist cultural policies, for example the influence of the *avant-garde* movement.

Stalin's rise to power and dictatorship, 1924–41

Key topic 3 concerns Stalin's rise to power and the key features of his dictatorship, in the period 1924–41. First, students should understand the struggle for power, 1924–28. Students should be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of Stalin and his key rivals: Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Bukharin, considering, for example, their ideological positions, their strategies and tactics. Students should also study the reasons for Stalin's emergence as leader and the steps by which he removed his opponents in the period 1924–28, for example his strategic alliances, and his decision to adopt a left-wing economic policy in 1928. Secondly, students should understand Stalin's use of terror in the 1930s. They should consider the reasons for the terror, such as the problems with Stalin's economic policy and the continued presence of rivals within the Party. They should also consider the nature of, and consequences of, the purges, including the purges of the armed forces. Additionally, students should understand the work of the secret police (NKVD) in intimidating, arresting and forcing confessions from Stalin's victims; as well as the use of, and conditions in, the Gulag labour camps. Students should study the show trials, understanding Stalin's reasons for the Moscow Trials and their political significance. Third, students should study the art, propaganda and censorship of the period. This includes the emergence of socialist realism and its key features; Stalin's control of education and religion; as well as an understanding of the nature of Stalin's censorship of the media. Finally, in Key topic 3, the course focuses on the Cult of Stalin and the methods by which the cult became such a dominant force in Soviet culture.

Economic and social changes, 1924–41

Key topic 4 deals with economic and social changes, 1924–41. In the context of collectivisation, students should understand the economic, ideological and political reasons for changes in Soviet agricultural policy, including the problems of the NEP, for example falling rates of agricultural production, and the disparity of industrial and agricultural growth. Additionally, this aspect of the course considers the organisation of collective farms; the extent of mechanisation through Machine Tractor Stations; the reasons for, and extent of, opposition; the government's response with the policy of 'liquidation of the kulaks', and the famine in Ukraine. Students should also evaluate the successes and failures of collectivisation to 1941. In addition to agriculture this aspect of the course focuses on industry. Here students should study Stalin's motives for rapid industrialisation, including the failings of the NEP. They should be aware of the ideological reasons for the introduction of the Five-Year Plans and investigate the operations of the Five-Year Plans, including the role of Gosplan, and the Stakhanovite Movement. Students should also be able to evaluate the success and failure of the Five-Year Plans in the period to 1941. Turning to social changes, students should understand the impact of Stalin's rule on the living and working conditions of different groups in the towns and the countryside; and the way in which Stalinism affected family life; the role

and status of women; and the reasons for, and features of, the persecution of ethnic minorities such as, Poles, Romanians, Chechens and Latvians.

Key terms

It may be useful at the start of the course to provide students with a list of key terms and concepts that they will need to be familiar with for this option. Students should be familiar with the terminology found in the specification content.

Please note here that the SPaG mark scheme which is applied to Question 3(d) refers to the use of specialist terminology.

The list of terms below is not intended to be a comprehensive checklist, rather simply a useful starting point for teachers to produce their own list of terms that their students may not fully understand or have difficulty spelling.

Students should also be familiar with broad terms such as economic, political, religious, social and cultural.

- abdication
- authority
- autocracy
- Bolshevik
- capitalism
- censorship
- centralisation
- Cheka
- civil war
- collectivisation
- communism
- Constituent Assembly
- Dual Control
- Exile
- hoarding
- ideology
- land reform
- Leninism
- Marxism
- Menshevik
- New Economic Policy
- personality cult
- Politburo
- propaganda
- purge
- Red Army
- regime
- revolution
- rural
- show trial
- Soviet Order Number 1
- terror
- totalitarianism
- tsarism
- urban
- War Communism

2. Content guidance

2.2 Content exemplification

This section provides additional guidance on the specification content. It should be remembered that the official specification is the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance. Any examples provided here do not constitute additional specification content and other relevant material illustrating aspects of the specification can be used.

Key topic 1: The revolutions of 1917		Exemplification
1 The growth of opposition to the Tsar in early 1917	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growing discontent among peasants and town workers.• The impact of the First World War: military defeats; economic, political and social effects; the Tsar as commander-in-chief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The impact of ideas such as Marxism and political opponents, such as the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks; conditions in Russian towns compared to conditions in rural areas.• Economic consequences, such as disrupted harvests and food supplies, labour shortages, and wartime industrial production; political discontent in reaction to military defeat and mounting economic chaos; the Tsar's decision to become commander-in-chief, its impact on weakening his authority among the nobility and the military elites.
2 The February Revolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The immediate reasons for the February Revolution: events in Petrograd in February 1917, including strikes and the mutiny in the army. The Tsar's absence and abdication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Triggers such as food shortages in Petrograd, demoralisation of the army. Events such as the International Women's Day march; mass demonstrations in Petrograd against the regime; and mutiny of the Petrograd garrison; loss of confidence in the Tsarina's rule; the Tsar's abdication; the refusal of Grand Duke Michael to take the throne, and the consequent end of the Romanov Dynasty.

Key topic 1: The revolutions of 1917		Exemplification
3 The Provisional Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The establishment of the Provisional Government and the problems it faced, including 'Dual Control' and Soviet Order Number 1. The role of Kerensky. The weaknesses and failures of the Provisional Government. The significance of the Kornilov Revolt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relationship between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet ('Dual Control'); the nature of the two bodies, Soviet Order Number 1. Kerensky's role liaising between the Soviet and the Provisional Government, and then as head of the Provisional Government. The problems caused by 'Dual Control', continued military action, continued economic decline, and the refusal to introduce land reform on the authority of the Provisional Government; the failure of the June Offensive. The Provisional Government's inability to defeat Kornilov without the support of the Bolshevik-dominated Soviet; the growing authority of the Bolsheviks due to their role in defeating Kornilov.
4 The Bolshevik Revolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lenin's return and activities, including the April Theses and the growth in support for the Bolshevik Party. The 'July Days'. The Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917. The reasons for their success. The roles of Trotsky and Lenin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The significance of Lenin's return, the key demands of the April Theses, for example Peace, Land, Bread, a second revolution and 'all power to the Soviets'; initial responses to Lenin's demands. The growth of Bolshevik support in relation to growing economic hardship, continued military setbacks, disillusionment with the Provisional Government; the 'July Days' and Lenin's temporary exile. Trotsky's position as Chair of the Petrograd Soviet and the Military Revolutionary Committee; his role in the October Revolution; Lenin's secret return from Finland and his authority within the Bolshevik movement; storming the Winter Palace.

2. Content guidance

Key topic 2: The Bolsheviks in power, 1917–24		Exemplification
1 Early consolidation of power, 1917–18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The early Bolshevik decrees of November–December 1917. The removal of opposition, including the Constituent Assembly and the execution of Tsar Nicholas II and his family. The reasons for, main terms, and significance of, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Different reactions in Russia to the Treaty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of Lenin's Decrees on Peace, Land, workers' rights and Nationalities. Lenin's abolition of the Constituent Assembly; the execution of the Tsar and family. The reasons for peace with Germany, such as the need for an economic 'breathing space', Lenin's anticipation of civil war, Lenin's hope of a revolution in Europe. The loss of territory, farmland and industry as a result of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Divisions over peace with Germany: the Left Communists advocate continuing the war, Lenin argues for peace, Trotsky takes a middle line; nationalists horrified by the national humiliation and loss of territory.
2 The Civil War, 1918–21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reasons for, key events and effects of the Civil War. The reasons for the Bolshevik victory, including the strengths of the Bolsheviks, role of Trotsky, foreign intervention and the weaknesses of the Whites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasons for opposition from the Whites, Greens and foreign powers. The role of the Czech Legion in the start of the Civil War. The progress of the war. Political, social and economic effects of the war. Bolshevik strengths, such as Trotsky's policy of employing tsarist generals, reintroduction of army discipline, War Communism, central geographical position and consequent access to industry and the railways; the discipline and unity of the Bolsheviks; Bolshevik propaganda appealing to nationalism after foreign intervention. Weakness of the Whites, for example divisions between liberals, radicals and monarchists; peasants' desire to retain their land; lack of a single leader; limited help from abroad; geographical division.
3 Moves towards totalitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Red Terror and the role of the Cheka. The Kronstadt Mutiny. Bolshevik centralisation, including the role of Lenin and the Politburo. Setting up of the USSR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lenin's reasons for establishing the terror and the methods of the Cheka; the use of terror in Red Army occupied areas during the Civil War; the demands of the sailors of Kronstadt, Bolshevik attempts to negotiate with the sailors; the repression of the mutiny; the implications of the mutiny for the authority of the government. The features of centralisation; the transition of power from the Soviets to the Bolshevik Party; the emergence of the Politburo and

Key topic 2: The Bolsheviks in power, 1917–24	Exemplification
	<p>its role as the key decision making body in the new government; Lenin's attitude to democracy and freedom; the establishment of the USSR, the relationship between Russia and the other Socialist Republics.</p>
<p>4 Economic and social change, 1918–24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for, and features of, War Communism. Reasons for its unpopularity. • Reasons for, and features of, the New Economic Policy. Different reactions to the NEP. Its effects on the economy, 1921–24. • Social changes, including the impact of Bolshevik policies on women, education and culture. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasons for War Communism, such as military necessity, and the ideological drive to abolish money, the free market and class distinctions. The features of War Communism, such as grain requisitioning by the Cheka, centralised food rationing based on occupation, the abolition of money, labour conscription, the employment of bourgeois specialists to run industry, redistribution of urban housing, free provision of transport in cities, the emergence of a black market. Reasons for unpopularity, such as discontent in factories at the loss of worker's control, discontent in rural areas at the requisitioning of grain and brutality of the Cheka, the destruction of market incentives for production, growing shortages of food and consumer goods, famine. • NEP as a response to the Crisis of 1921 and the economic consequences of War Communism. Features of NEP such as state-run factories, privately run farms, the reintroduction of the free market and money. Reactions to NEP, such as the Tambov uprising, the Kronstadt Mutiny and the demands for more democracy from within the Bolshevik Party. The consequences of the NEP such as significant growth of agriculture, sluggish growth of industry, 'scissors crisis', re-emergence of inequality. • Bolshevik education, for example the literacy drive inside the Red Army, limited schooling opportunities due to economic conditions. Culture, for example Anatoly Lunacharsky, Lenin and proletarian culture, the initial flourishing of the <i>avant-garde</i>, agitprop and the Commissariat of Enlightenment. Policies on women, for example the creation of Zhenotdel, conflict between Lenin and Alexandra Kollontai, post-card divorce laws, the decline of crèches and limited opportunities for women in factories under the NEP.

2. Content guidance

Key topic 3: Stalin's rise to power and dictatorship, 1924–41	Exemplification (note: the key topic ends in 1941)
<p>1 The struggle for power, 1924–28</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strengths and weaknesses of Stalin and his rivals (Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Bukharin). • The reasons for the emergence of Stalin as leader of the USSR, including the removal of rivals for the leadership in the years 1924–28. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stalin's strengths, for example, his position as General Secretary, his apparently moderate stance, his ability to manipulate alliances, his centrist and patriotic ideology – socialism in one country. Trotsky's weaknesses, for example, his apparent arrogance, joining the Bolshevik Party late, permanent revolution, lack of support outside the military. Kamenev and Zinoviev's record of cowardice in October 1917; Bukharin's inexperience. • Key steps in Stalin's emergence as leader, such as suppression of Lenin's Testament, manipulation of Lenin's funeral, manipulation of the Party Congress, making and breaking alliances, the impact of economic difficulties in the late 1920s.
<p>2 The use of terror in the 1930s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasons for, nature of and consequences of the purges, including the purges of the armed forces. • The work of the secret police (NKVD); the use of, and conditions in, the labour camps. • The reasons for, and the importance of, the show trials of 1936–1938. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasons for the terror, for example, Stalin's fear of Kirov, precedents set by Lenin, Stalin's paranoia, economic problems. The nature of the purges, for example, mass terror under Yezhov, forced confessions, the use of Gulags, attack on the Party and government. The consequences, such as Stalin's unrivalled dominance of the party, destruction of the 'old Leninists', chaos in the government and the economy, weakening the armed forces. • The NKVD's work such as the 'conveyor system', the use of slave labour or 'white coal' in Gulags. • The reasons for the show trials, for example, Stalin's need to remove and discredit his former rivals, and purge the Party of their supporters. Importance, such as the final consolidation of Stalin's position as leader.

Key topic 3: Stalin's rise to power and dictatorship, 1924–41		Exemplification (note: the key topic ends in 1941)
3 Propaganda and censorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official culture, socialist realism, control of education and religion. Media censorship. The new Constitution of 1936. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emergence of socialist realism, its key stylistic features, key examples. Educational reforms, for example, a new emphasis on discipline, the new curriculum and textbooks. Control of religions, such as persecution of the Orthodox church, closure of churches during collectivisation, attacks on Muslims e.g. Sufism in southern Republics. Media, for example suppression of Trotsky's works, Glavlit's control of economic data, suppression of bad news stories, focus on Stalin as leader. The 'Stalin Constitution', for example the guarantee of key rights and democratic participation, contrasted with the reality of repression.
4 The Cult of Stalin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meaning of the Cult of Stalin and reasons for its introduction. How the Cult of Stalin was achieved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nature of the Cult of Stalin, for example, the focus on his economic 'achievements', his role as the 'Lenin of today' and his persona as 'Leader, Teacher, Friend'. The need for the cult to gain support for the regime. The cultivation of the cult, for example through art, propaganda, literature and new histories emphasising Stalin's role during the October Revolution and the Civil War.

2. Content guidance

Key topic 4: Economic and social changes, 1924–41		Exemplification (note: the key topic ends in 1941)
1 Agriculture and collectivisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stalin's reasons for changes in agriculture, including the problems of the NEP. The organisation of collectives, mechanisation, widespread opposition and the attack on the kulaks. Famine in Ukraine. The successes and failures of collectivisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasons for agricultural reform, such as falls in grain production under the NEP, the grain procurement crisis, and plateauing of industrial production under the NEP; ideological reasons, such as suspicion of the capitalist aspects of the NEP; political reasons such as Stalin's attacks on Bukharin through attacking the NEP. Compulsory collectivisation and the backlash. The process of 'dekulakisation', the role of the Red Army and Communists in mass murder in the countryside; the destruction of crops and livestock; the limited impact of mechanisation through Machine Tractor Stations; the creation of a famine in Ukraine in order to subdue opposition to the regime. Successes, such as increased grain procurement and export to fund industrialisation. Failures, such as the significant reduction in agricultural produce, widespread inefficiency, fall in living standards in the country and city relative to the best years of the NEP.
2 Changes in industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stalin's motives for rapid industrialisation, including the failings of the NEP. Gosplan, Five-Year Plans and the Stakhanovite Movement. The successes and failures of industrialisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasons for the Plans, for example, industrial stagnation under the NEP; ideological motives, such as the desire to end the free market; political motives, such as Stalin's move against Bukharin and the right wing of the Party. Key features of the Plans, for example, Gosplan's centralised target setting role, the introduction of rewards and the Stakhanovite Movement in order to raise productivity. Successes such as massive growth of heavy industry, increase in the production of raw materials, re-armament. Failures such as low-quality production, low productivity, extremely limited production of consumer goods, wasteful and inefficient production techniques.

Key topic 4: Economic and social changes, 1924–41		Exemplification (note: the key topic ends in 1941)
3 Life in the Soviet Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living and working conditions in towns and the countryside. • The differing experiences of social groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features of living and working conditions under collectivisation and the industrialisation of the Five-Year Plans; limited availability of consumer goods and housing in the country and city. Food rationing in the country and city due to agricultural policies. • Differences between social groups, for example, the relative privilege and luxurious lifestyles of Party officials; better pay and conditions for urban workers, relative to rural workers. Inequalities between male and female workers in the country, and in the city.
4 The position of women and ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in family life and employment and the political position of women. • Reasons for, and features of, the persecution of ethnic minorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes, such as Stalin's emphasis on monogamous heterosexual marriage, strict new laws on divorce, sexuality, availability of contraception and abortion, abolition of Zhenotdel, official disregard for women's rights, incentives for women to have children, informal pressures limiting women's involvement in the higher ranks of the Party and government. • Stalin's suspicion of nationalist groups and ethnic minority groups in the Soviet Union; features of persecution, for example, quotas for the persecution of ethnic minorities including Poles, Romanians, Chechens and Latvians during the terror.

3. Student timeline

The timeline below could be given to students, and could be further edited and added to by them. Inclusion of dates and events in this timeline should not be taken as an indication that these are prescribed: the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance.

February 1917	February Revolution
March 1917	Provisional Government established The Petrograd Soviet offers support to the new government The Provisional Government introduces a series of reforms ending political repression
April 1917	Lenin returns to Russia and publishes his April Theses
June 1917	Kerensky launches the June Offensive
July 1917	The 'July Days' Kerensky becomes leader of the Provisional Government
August 1917	General Kornilov's attempt to overthrow the Provisional Government
October 1917	October Revolution Decree on Peace and Decree on Land
December 1917	Lenin establishes the Cheka
January 1918	The Constituent Assembly meets and is disbanded after a single day
March 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ending Russia's involvement in the First World War
Summer 1918	The beginning of the Russian Civil War War Communism introduced
August 1918	Attempted assassination of Lenin by Fanya Kaplan
Spring 1921	The Red Army suppresses the last opposition to the regime, ending the Civil War Russia experiences a famine
March 1921	The Kronstadt Mutiny is repressed New Economic Policy
April 1922	Stalin appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party
December 1922	The foundation of the Soviet Union

3. Student timeline

January 1924	Lenin dies Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev agree to suppress Lenin's testament Stalin speaks at Lenin's funeral; Trotsky absent
1926–27	The NEP begins to experience serious economic problems
1928	The Great Turn: Stalin initiates the Five-Year Plans
December 1929	Stalin initiates compulsory collectivisation and dekulakisation
1932	The beginning of the Great Famine in Ukraine
1931–35	Curriculum reform
December 1934	Kirov murdered in Leningrad, Stalin initiates the Great Terror
1935	Start of the Stakhanovite movement
1936	'The Great Retreat'
July 1936	The First Moscow Show Trial
December 1936	The 'Stalin Constitution' introduced
1938	Two histories of the Communist Party published, presenting Stalin as the 'Lenin of Today'
June 1941	The Soviet Union enters the Second World War

4. Resources

The sections below list a range of resources that could be used by students and teachers for this topic.

The first section lists information on free support materials available on the Edexcel website. On the [GCSE History \(9–1\) from 2016](#) page:

- select the [Teaching support](#) tab, where resources are separated out by Plan, Teach, and Track and Assess;
- or select the [Course materials](#) tab, and then select the appropriate tab for [Specification and sample assessments](#), [Exam materials](#), or [Teaching and learning materials](#).

The table below provides a selection of the free support materials available on the Edexcel website. Details and links for all the free support available can be found in [this document](#). It is updated regularly, so worth bookmarking.

The second section lists publishers who have been endorsed for GCSE (9–1) History. Endorsement means that a resource has been through our quality assurance process to confirm that it meets the teaching and learning requirements a specification is aimed at. Endorsement of a resource doesn't mean it's the only suitable material available, or that it is required to achieve the qualification.

The remaining sections list both endorsed resources and those that have not been endorsed. While these resources – and others – may be used to support teaching and learning, the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance.

There has been a rapid growth in podcasts in recent years, and we have added below links to a few well-known ones. Some may not be suitable for younger listeners, so please check carefully before sharing with students. Similarly, there are plenty of useful videos for History students on online sharing platforms, and any links below have been checked, but please exercise care before sharing social media links with students.

4.1 Free support materials

Resource	Details
Specification and sample assessment materials	The starting point for information on content and assessment in GCSE (9–1) History.
Past papers, mark schemes and examiner reports	An Edexcel Online login is required to access files with a silver padlock – check with your exams officer if you can't open them.
Getting Started Guide	An overview of the specification, to help you get to grips with the content and assessment requirements of the specification. Updated for Issues 5 and 6.
Summary guidance on changes for 2025 and 2026	Summary guidance with links on the changes being made for Issue 5 (first assessment 2025) and Issue 6 (2026).
Content changes for 2026: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic guidance • FAQs 	Guidance for each option on the changes being made to the content for Issue 6 of the specification (first assessment June 2026), and FAQs.

Resource	Details
Assessment changes for 2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide FAQs 	Guidance on the changes being made to the assessment model for Issue 5 of the specification (first assessment June 2025), and FAQs.
Specification language changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track changes on Rationale FAQs 	Guidance on the language changes made for Issue 4 of the specification (first teaching September 2023, first assessment June 2025).
Guidance on sources and interpretations	Guidance on AO3 sources and AO4 interpretations, looking at question types, common problems, and teaching approaches and ideas.
Paper 3 Guide	Teaching approaches and ideas for the modern depth study, with case studies from practising teachers.
Schemes of work	Sample outline schemes of work for each topic in the specification, in editable Word files. A digital interactive scheme of work is also available for both KS3 and GCSE.
Mapping documents	Mapping documents to help support teachers in moving to Edexcel GCSE History.
Exemplar student answers	Exemplar student answers, with examiner commentaries and mark schemes.
Student walkthroughs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 3 playlist 	A series of pre-recorded student walkthroughs, created in collaboration with Harris Federation. <i>Updated for Summer 2025.</i>
Revision tips	Some useful revision tips for students. <i>Updated for Summer 2025.</i>
Command words	A series of student-friendly files exploring each command word in turn, plus a summary document paper-by-paper. <i>Updated for 2025.</i>

4.2 Endorsed resources*

[Pearson](#) – Designed to help develop confident, articulate and successful historians.

[Hodder Education](#) – The Hodder GCSE History for Edexcel students' book helps students achieve their full potential while ensuring pace, enjoyment and motivation.

[Oxford University Press](#) – Oxford's Edexcel GCSE History student books help to develop young historians who have the confidence to succeed, with the most up-to-date exam practice and a tried-and-trusted, accessible approach.

[Zigzag Education](#) – Photocopiable resources for learning, revision and exam practice.

[Anglia Tours](#) – A range of fully-guided History tours which enhance both teaching and learning for the related Pearson qualification.

[NST Tours](#) – Guided History tours to support teachers and students with GCSE History.

* You don't have to purchase any resources, including those from Pearson, to deliver our qualifications.

4.3 Resources for students

Resource	Details
<i>Edexcel GCSE History (9–1) Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41</i> (Pearson, 2016)	Student book written for this option in the specification.
<i>Revise Edexcel GCSE (9–1) History: Russia and the Soviet Union Revision Guide and Workbook</i> (Pearson, 2017)	A combined revision guide and workbook written for this option in the specification.
<i>Hodder Edexcel for GCSE: Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41</i> (Hodder, 2016)	Student book written for this option in the specification.
Jane Shuter, <i>Edexcel GCSE History A: The Making of the Modern World: Unit 2B Russia 1914–39</i> (Pearson, 2013)	Written for the 2009 specification and updated in 2013, so the majority of the material is really useful for students of the new course. The book contains a glossary, activities and textboxes designed to engage and extend more able students.
Steve Waugh and John Wright, <i>GCSE Modern World History for Edexcel: Russia 1917–1939</i> (Hodder, 2009)	Written for the 2009 specification, it covers a great deal of the new 2016 material. Aimed at students, with a good coverage of most of the areas of the new specification. Contains activities and features to extend and challenge higher-ability students.
Michael Lynch, <i>Access to History: Russia 1894–1941</i> (Hodder, 2015)	Written for A Level students, this gives a detailed account of the politics, economics and society of Russia and the Soviet Union from 1894 to 1941. The early material is only relevant as background, but the sections on the period 1917–1941 are written in a way that is likely to engage higher-ability students.
<i>People's Century</i> (1999)	Episode 2 deals with the October Revolution and Russia's exit from First World War. Episode 3 concerns Lenin's attempt to create a new state and Stalin's agricultural policies including his war on the Kulaks and the famine in the Ukraine. The programmes could be used in class to provide an overview of some aspects of the new specifications.
<i>The Russian Revolution in Colour</i> (Alba Vision, 2006)	Colourised footage mixed with dramatised reconstructions. The documentary focuses on the revolutionary period of 1917–21, dealing with the seizure of power, the Civil War and the suppression of the Kronstadt Mutiny.

Resource	Details
<i>October 1917 – Ten Days That Shook The World</i> (1928)	Easily available on DVD, this film, made by Eisenstein to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, contains dramatised scenes that recreate the February Revolution, Lenin's return in April, the July Days and the October Revolution.
<i>Nicholas And Alexandra</i> (1978)	This provides an interesting contrast to <i>October 1917 – Ten Days That Shook The World</i> , in that it recreates the events of the First World War and the last years of the Tsar in a way that is sympathetic to the Romanovs.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/shows/horrible-histories	The iconic CBBC series that brings history alive. Not all episodes are available but between I-Player and YouTube many can be found.
The Russian Revolution 1917 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV9G1QUIm7w	13-minute documentary looking at the key events of 1917
The Russian Revolution https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ55ZvBe07U	'Ten Minute History' 10-minute animated documentary on the Russian Revolution and beyond. Fast talking and aimed at A level students but interesting and suitable for some GCSE students.
Epic History https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUOc2godFHp80tLm7W2rT0zXyMaXikeWS&si=6fo55BgIvcXsuNTk	Various short documentaries about relevant aspects of Russian history.

4.4 Resources for teachers

Resource	Details
S. A. Smith, <i>The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction</i> (OUP, 2002)	Oxford University Press, A Very Short Introduction Series A brief, well-written and interesting analysis of the key dynamics of the Russian Revolution. A good way into the subject.
Robin Bunce, Peter Clements and Andrew Flint, <i>Communist States</i> (Hodder, 2015)	Designed for A Level students, this book deals with Communist states in Europe and Asia in the twentieth century. It contains an excellent overview of the Lenin and Stalin period in the Soviet Union and comprehensive sections on politics, economics, art, culture, propaganda, women and society.

Resource	Details
Michael Lynch, <i>Russia 1894-1941</i> (Hodder, 2015)	Designed for A Level students, this book gives a clear and accessible overview of all the topics covered on the GCSE specification.
Ronald Grigor Suny (ed.), <i>The Cambridge History of Russia Volume III</i> (Cambridge, 2006)	Contains excellent accounts of Russia and the Soviet Union, with chapters on the revolutionary period of 1917 and 1918, on Lenin's Russia and the Soviet Union under Stalin.
Richard Sakwa, <i>Soviet Politics in Perspective</i> (Routledge, 1998)	Sakwa's book contains an excellent overview of the period 1918–41. It has a particular emphasis on analysing the politics and economics of the period.
Silvana Malle, <i>The Economic Organization of War Communism, 1918–1921</i> (Cambridge, 2002)	A highly detailed account of the nature and organisation of War Communism (see pages 495–515).
Sheila Fitzpatrick, <i>Everyday Stalinism – Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s</i> (Cambridge, 2000)	A brilliant account of the impact of Stalin's economic policies on the day-to-day lives of people in Stalin's Russia. Pages 35–66 deal with the role of women and the difficulties of acquiring consumer goods in Stalin's Russia.
Vladimir Brovkin, <i>Russia after Lenin, Politics, Culture and Society, 1921–1929</i> (Routledge, 1998)	Brovkin's book deals with art, culture and society in the Soviet Union in Lenin's last years, and during the rise of Stalin. It also deals with repression and terror under Lenin.
John Arch Getty and Roberta Thompson Manning (eds.), <i>Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives</i> (Cambridge, 1993)	An excellent re-evaluation of the Stalinist terror (see pages 40–62).
Schoolhistory website http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk	A very comprehensive website with resources for teaching history. GCSE resources are arranged by exam board and cover most modules. Some resources are free but to get the full range available there is a subscription payment.
https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources/hub/secondary	A comprehensive bank of resources for teachers, some free, some paid-for.
Teachithistory website https://www.teachithistory.co.uk/depth-studies/russia/tags/3757	A collection of resources for teaching the Russian Revolution
https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zr-gbkqt/resources/1	Three BBC class clips on the status of women, the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the Rule of Stalin.

Resource	Details
Podcast series Historical Association , free to members The Rest Is History Dan Snow's History Hit History Extra You're Dead to Me	There are lots of History podcast series available these days through various platforms. We have listed here a few well-known ones, and you can search for relevant episodes. There are also revision podcasts available. Please check they are suitable before sharing with students.

Educational Recording Agency

Transform History Teaching with Multimedia Resources from the Educational Recording Agency (ERA)

[The ERA Licence](#) provides seamless access to television and radio recordings, offering a single point of clearance for the rights needed to create and use authentic media resources in your classroom. With [ERA's free video streaming platform](#), licensed institutions can explore a rich library of curriculum-mapped TV and radio clips tailored to GCSE, AS, and A-level teaching.

Engage your learners with curated clips, full-length documentaries, and programmes that bring historical contexts to life. The platform also includes exclusive access to the **BBC Shakespeare** and **Literary Archives**, offering unique cross-curricular opportunities to enrich your lessons with impactful media—perfect for both homework and classroom activities.

To access this free resource [registration is required](#) - but is quick and simple. State schools in England are licensed under a central agreement with the DfE and the vast majority of independent schools also hold a current ERA Licence.