



Top revision tips for students: Summer 2025 onwards

Introduction

With the summer exam series just around the corner, these are some useful revision tips for Pearson Edexcel GCSE History students, covering aspects of assessment that some students struggle to get to grips with.

We've made some small changes to the assessment model, starting in Summer 2025.

- **Extra time on each paper:** you will be given an extra 5 mins on Paper 1, 5 mins on Paper 2, and 10 mins on Paper 3. Use the extra time in the exam hall to think and plan your answers – you aren't expected to write more!
- **Splitting up opening questions:** on Paper 1 and Paper 2B, you will now be asked to describe **one** key feature each of two separate topics, and on Paper 2P, you will now be asked to explain **one** consequence each of two separate events or developments.
- **Choice of explain why questions on Paper 3:** you will now have a choice of two questions for Paper 3 Q2 Explain why.
- **Renumbering on Paper 2B:** the question numbering will now be Q1a, Q1b, Q2, Q3/4. (This is a tidying-up exercise.)
- **Language amendments:** we've changed a few terms which are considered outdated and problematic. Only a few options are affected: the main changes are from 'Plains Indians' to 'Indigenous peoples', and from 'slaves' to 'enslaved people'. We will gloss the term 'Indigenous peoples' on any questions where it appears, to remind you that we previously used the term 'Plains Indians'. The American West is the option most affected – check with your teacher if you're unsure.

Make sure you know your stuff!

70% of the marks on your GCSE History exams are for knowledge and understanding so it's important that you know your topics well. Evidence shows that increased confidence in using and applying knowledge helps students to tackle questions in exams. Try creating revision flash cards and mind maps to help you to understand and memorise content and make sure familiarise yourself with key words from the specification and textbooks.

If you find part of a topic complicated, try talking it through with someone else, like a friend or member of your family. You could even give them a copy of the textbook or revision guide and get them to ask you some questions in the process. This will help ensure you have a confident grasp of the content. Another idea for challenging content is to read around the topic so don't just rely on your class notes – try reading a history website, watch a YouTube video or listen to a podcast.

When revising content try to think about it in terms of the questions you will be asked on that paper. For example, on the Paper 2 period study a lot of the question types focus on consequence or importance, so you need to be able to think about and explain the content on this paper in that way.

Dates and chronology are important

Try to understand the correct dates and order in which things happened – you can do this by creating basic timelines. In the Paper 1 thematic studies you need to have a good understanding of the terminology of the different time periods in history such as early modern, renaissance, modern etc. When answering a question in the exam pay close attention to any dates in the question – you need to make sure your response stays within the correct dates because you can't get any credit from examiners for content which is outside of these. Many students lose valuable time in exams by spending too much time scene-setting or describing later events which are outside of the time frame of the question.



Make use of past papers, mark schemes and examiners reports

There are a wide range of past papers available and by practising these you will gain a better understanding of what is required in the examination. It will also ensure you are familiar with the layout of the paper and give you more confidence on the day of the exam. The more you practice extended writing the better you will get at it. Try to understand how the mark schemes work for each question type and make sure you read of some of our examiners reports as they contain lots of exemplar responses and useful tips and advice from the senior examiners. You could even use highlighters to analyse some of the model answers to see if you can identify relevant parts such as different factors, supporting information, criteria to support the judgement etc.

Remember – *there are some small changes from 2025 onwards! See the table above.*

Plan your answer and remember to answer the question set

Planning your response to questions is very important so why not practice making plans for different past paper questions?

In the exam make sure you read the question carefully and plan how you will answer the question before you start writing. It's very important that you can identify and engage with the correct second order concept (eg cause, consequence, significance) in order to gain marks for analysis. Examiners are looking for students' ability to analyse the events they are writing about, and for 16-mark questions, to provide a judgement on the given statement. If you plan the structure of your answer first, you can then use your knowledge to support your argument. A good plan will help make sure your response is logical and coherent throughout and your judgements are clearly justified.

Remember – *you'll have a little bit of extra time on each paper to spend on planning your answers.*

Practice timing on exam questions

You should roughly allow 1.5 minutes for each mark available on the question paper. We often see some very able students write far too much for questions worth only 4 marks. These students can then run out of time or rush their responses on the higher mark questions. Make sure you leave plenty of time on Paper 1 and 3 to answer the final 16-mark questions as they also contain an additional 4 marks for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar.

Don't feel like you have to fill the whole answer space available for each question either – the answer booklet is designed to allow space for planning and some students write with very large handwriting.

If you find yourself in the exam and don't know the answer to something, then try not to panic as if you find a question hard there's a good chance lots of other students will too – but try to write something as our examiners will always try to mark positively.

Questions with stimulus points

On high-mark questions such as 'explain why' or essay questions we provide you with two stimulus points and you are also instructed to use information of your own. This means you should aim to write about three aspects of content in your answer to be able to score highly on the question – examiners are looking for a wide-range of knowledge. However, don't worry if you are only able to write about the two stimulus points – examiners will still reward you for doing this. Examiners try to choose stimulus points that will be familiar to students but don't panic if you don't recognise one of them or can't remember much about it – you don't have to use our stimulus points and you are free to write about what you know in answers.



The importance of contextual knowledge in source questions

Every year our examiners see some very good answers to source utility questions which could not access the higher marks because the responses did not include contextual knowledge. Remember that with source utility questions you must comment on the source content, consider one relevant aspect of provenance, and use one linked aspect of relevant contextual knowledge. Contextual knowledge is mentioned at every level of the mark scheme and many students fail to include it, which impacts upon a number of otherwise good responses. When including contextual knowledge, try to ensure it is relevant to the specific enquiry in the question and use it to assess the source, for example, to add detail about something mentioned in the source, to add weight to an aspect of the provenance, to place the source in a broader context, or to assess whether the source gives an accurate view or showed a typical situation.

Paper 2 – two topics in one exam

Paper 2 is the only paper which assesses two topics – the British depth study (eg Elizabethan England) and the Period study (eg American West). All of the questions assess knowledge and understanding, and many students find this challenging. On the day of the exam, you will be provided with two separate booklets – one for each of your topics. It will be up to you, which topic you answer first, and you need to divide your time sensibly between both of them. We recommend spending roughly half of your time on each topic (roughly 55 minutes).

The GCSE exam timetable can be very congested with exams taking place every day during this period so try not to leave your revision for Paper 2 too late. It's a good idea to put all your exams in a calendar so you can see clearly how long you have left to revise for each paper. Create a revision plan to make the most of your time – you can find lots of useful advice online about how to make a good revision plan such as this from BBC Bitesize: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zn3497h#zsy4kty>

Paper 2 – the Period study

The key to this paper is to think about the unfolding narrative – how events you have studied connect to each other. All three questions on this paper ask you, in different ways, to show the connections between events. Think about some of the ways you can do this, and some of the connecting phrases you can use in your responses.

There is a specific question called the 'analytical narrative' which requires you to create a logical sequence with links in-between each event, so it's important that you understand the correct order in which things happened. One way of practising this is to place events on cards or post-its then jumble them up and try to put them in the correct order.

Paper 3 Question 3d: historical interpretations

Paper 3 assesses historical interpretations and question 3d is the culmination of the enquiry package on this paper. It is considered to be one of the hardest questions on the GCSE History papers so it's important that you understand how to approach it.

Having worked with the sources and interpretations in parts a–c, you are then asked in part d how far you agree with Interpretation 2. The key thing to remember here is that the question directs you to make use of **both** interpretations in your answer, as well as your knowledge of the historical context. Remember, this question is asking whether you think the historian who produced Interpretation 2 'got it right'. Interpretations need to be treated differently to sources, so you do not need to evaluate the interpretations for reliability or utility. You can find guidance on interpretations questions on the Edexcel website and the examiners reports contain lots of exemplar responses and useful tips and advice from examiners.



Watch our student walkthroughs

In spring 2025, we will be releasing new student exam walkthroughs for the summer 2025 series. For now, you can still watch the 2024 student walkthroughs, but remember the small changes that are being implemented for summer 2025 onwards. There are recordings for each component; in them we provide reminders about the structure and focus of each paper, look in turn at each question and what it's assessing, and share some general revision tips.

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/news-policy/subject-updates/history/edexcel-gcse-history-summer-2024-student-walkthrough-videos.html>

Download our guidance on command words

We have created a set of documents looking at each command word in turn, explaining what each command word is prompting you to do when answering the question.

Download the zipped file [here](#) – *updated for summer 2025*.