



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI04)

Paper 4: International Study with
Interpretations

Option 1B: The World in Crisis, 1879–1945

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Introduction

As with previous series, the candidates for the 2025 series were well-prepared and were able to deploy often extensive knowledge of the period and area of historical interpretation being studied. For detailed feedback on some of the general areas of strength and weakness, it is recommended that centres refer back to the Examiner reports for June 2024 and January 2025. Most of the comments made in these series still apply.

For WHI04 units, the assessment model in Section A asks candidates to evaluate a view in relation to two extracts provided from historians/authors of history and to reach a judgement as to how far they agree with the views presented in the extracts (AO3/AO1). AO3 skills focus on the extract content and the AO1 historical context should be used to validate or challenge the views in the extracts. For Section B, candidates are asked to choose one question from two alternatives and to use their AO1 knowledge and understanding to address the focus of the question in relation to the second-order concept(s) being assessed (causation, consequence, similarity, difference, change, continuity and significance). Both require candidates to write a controlled extended response with an organised argument.

Key areas of note for this series are:

1) There continues to be an increase in the number of candidates who understand how to approach the Section A Interpretation question. Almost all candidates now understand the requirement to discuss the extracts in relation to the view. However, there are some candidates who still use the extracts as evidence for a Section B style response and so fail to discuss the merits of the views in the extracts. The relative value of the AOs for this question are 20 marks for AO3 skills and 5 marks for AO1 skills.

2) It is clear that candidates who plan their answers are able to organise their argument and deploy knowledge that is more precisely selected to substantiate their argument. Candidates do not need to write a response for the whole hour available to them. Those that do, often end up producing very long, sometimes contradictory and less coherent answers than those who can select and deploy sufficient knowledge to further their argument and come to an evaluated judgement. There is no need for candidates to write about everything they know about the focus of the question but to select and deploy with precision. Level 5 for both Sections refers to '*sufficient knowledge... precisely selected*' and in Section B to the argument being '*logical and coherent throughout...communicated with clarity and precision*'.

3) As noted in the two previous series, there are fewer candidates who are using the indicative content as model scaffolds for answering questions. There are still some candidates, however, who are defining every word in the question and using phrases in the generic mark scheme rather than developing an argument from the outset. However, formulaic introductions to Section A are now few and far between and some excellent discussion of extracts for their own value is being seen.

4) Some responses still dismiss the given factor and write about all the other possible factors without evaluating them in relation to the given factor. It is often difficult with these responses to tell what the original question was and leads to conclusions that do not determine relative significance or come to a judgement about the actual wording of the question. Along the same lines, other responses identify an alternative given factor as being more important or more significant but do not develop valid criteria to explain why this is the case. These responses again often ignore the specific wording of the question in the conclusion and it is difficult to determine what the original question was.

5) Centres are to be commended for the amount of content covered with candidates. Some of the best responses are detailed and interesting in the knowledge deployed. However, the deployment of knowledge often has weaknesses. Many candidates spend a great deal of time explaining the context of the period being assessed rather than directly analysing the key issues and features of the time being assessed. Some context may of course be valuable, but the questions are focused on the content in the specification. Also, there continues to be a significant number of responses that are chronologically and factually confused leading to arguments that lack logic, coherence and precision. Referring to point 2 above, this is often in responses where the candidate is attempting to write about 'everything they know'. This does seem to be particularly the case for many WHI04 1C candidates, who continue to confuse the different eras of the Cold War and particularly the different leaders involved at different times.

Please note: that it is recommended that centres look at a selection of Principal Examiner Reports from across the different options within WHI04 1A-1D and previous series to get an overall sense of examiner feedback, centre approaches and candidate achievement. It is also highly recommended that centres read the general Introduction and Section A and B introductions in the Principal Examiner Reports for June 2017. These generic introductions outline the assessment requirements for WHI04 and give an indication of the skills required.

Centres may wish to refer to the *Getting Started* guide that is to be found on the IAL History Pearson Edexcel website. It is also useful to take note of the indicative content in the mark schemes.

Further resources that may be of use are the *Applying Criteria* and *Developing Student's Understanding of Historical Interpretations* documents to be found on the Pearson Edexcel History GCE website along with the Principal Examiner Reports for Paper 1 of the Pearson Edexcel History GCE. The *Applying Criteria* document gives guidance with regard to the application of criteria for the different AOs tested at A level. The GCE Paper 1 Reports will be particularly useful for exemplification of AO3 interpretations skills (but please be aware that there are slight differences within the general Level descriptors and that AO1 is assessed for IAL). Exemplification documents are also available on the Pearson Edexcel History IAL website.

Section A

See above for general comments but it was very pleasing to see some excellent Interpretation responses.

It is worth reminding centres that although candidates are evaluating the extent to which the author's views in the Extracts are convincing, this is not a source evaluation exercise. There is no requirement in the specification for candidates to know any historiography surrounding the debate and candidates are not expected to know about the views of specific historians. In some responses, candidates evaluate the provenance of the Extracts. This is not required and can lead to time wasting in writing about the speculated origins of the books and the author's themselves, for example, making assumptions about nationality and bias. It is very helpful if centres clearly distinguish between AO2 source evaluation in Papers 2 and 3 and the AO3 evaluation of interpretations in Paper 4. One way to do this is to always refer to sources as Sources and interpretations as Extracts or referring to the names of the authors of the Extracts.

Also, candidates do have time to read the Extracts carefully and all the way through. Sometimes candidates only read partial phrases or statements and in doing so infer/suggest views that are actually contradictory to the overall view being presented. As mentioned above, it is not necessary to write for the whole hour available for this Section. Careful reading and planning can lead to a more focused and well organised response.

Question 1

Question 1 required candidates to analyse and evaluate the two Extracts provided while deploying knowledge related to the issues raised in the Extracts to determine whether the outbreak of war in Europe became unstoppable only after Russia's general mobilisation of its forces on 30 July 1914. The author of Extract 1, D. E. Lee, put forward the view that Russia's mobilization became the turning point in the events leading to war, having committed itself to the Serbian cause, and subsequent activation of the alliance system that turned a quarrel between Austria-Hungary and Russia into a general European war. The author suggests that once the Russian mobilisation had taken place, neither Russia nor Austria-Hungary were willing to abandon their courses of action to prevent war, with neither Germany or France able to persuade them to back down. The author of Extract 2, J. Joll, suggested that it was unlikely the Russian mobilisation was the event responsible for the outbreak of the war, but rather the determination of the Austrians to use war to get what they wanted. The Extract suggests the Austrian-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia, was not going to be fully accepted, and Serbia would be willing to go to war, with or without Russian support, and the Austrians had no intention, along with their German allies, of agreeing to a negotiated solution, regardless of if Russia became involved. There were fewer candidates this series developing a third strand of the argument and so were able to focus clearly on the two different points of view being developed in the extracts. However, as in previous series taking time to read Extract 2 might have resulted in a more direct discussion of the points of view put forward by Joll.

Candidates were well prepared for discussion of major themes raised by the Key Topic controversy. There was some excellent knowledge of the political situation in pre-war Europe and how this affected the build up to war. This knowledge was used to validate the context of international relations in terms of alliances, militarism, imperialism and nationalism. Most candidates were able to explain the historical context of the viewpoints in the interpretations, and some were able to show clear understanding of the basis of the views being outlined in the Extracts. For Extract 1, responses referred to the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 and Russia's unwillingness to back down again in the face of Austrian aggression, the bringing into play of the European alliance systems, with specific references to the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente, and the German Schlieffen Plan undermining the conflict remaining confined to the Balkans. For Extract 2, responses referred to the nature of the ultimatum given to Serbia, demonstrating Austria's unwillingness to mediate. There was also the significance of the assassination in Sarajevo provoking an existential crisis in Austria and opening the door for Germany to undertake a preventative war. One of the biggest factors raised was the 'blank cheque' offered by Germany to encourage Austria to agitate Serbia despite Russia's alliance. Many candidates were able to contrast the viewpoints in the Extracts well in coming to a judgement as to whether it was only after Russia's mobilisation that war became inevitable.

Section B

In section B, Q2 was slightly more popular than Q3.

Question 2

Candidates were required to determine whether the League of Nations was more a success than it was a failure in the years 1920-33. Most candidates had a very good grasp of the knowledge required to answer this question effectively and mainly used developments outlined in the specification, including the resolution of international disputes in the 1920s, and the makeup of the League. Typically, students approached this question in terms of successes versus failures which worked well enough given the nature of the question. The most common success discussed was around the issue of disarmament and the Geneva Disarmament Conference. The best responses focused on the success of associate organisations, such as ILO, Refugee Commission and Health Organisation, rather than simply focusing on international disputes. These students also tended to consider the limitations of the League in terms of its structure and membership, and the role of major powers, which was evident when discussing the Ruhr and Corfu. There were several candidates who attributed success to the League, such as the Dawes Act and the Locarno Treaties, whilst more perceptive responses recognised this more of a lack of success. The most common problem with this question was the drift outside of the given timeframe and a noticeable proportion referenced the League's reactions to Hitler breaking the Treaty of Versailles and the Abyssinia crisis.

Question 3

Candidates were required to determine whether the German success in the war in Europe in the period September 1939 - September 1941 was mainly due to the weaknesses and

mistakes of Britain and France. Common themes tended to include the impact of appeasement policies of Britain and France in the 1930s and the insufficient preparation of Britain and France in terms of rearmament. Some students were able to utilise some good knowledge regarding the preparation the Nazi regime made for war with rearmament and militaristic propaganda. Stronger students were able to appreciate the significance of the period of the 'phoney war' as a specific example within the time period where the Allies failed to take direct advantage, allowing Germany to secure its Eastern Front. A further feature of better answers was to include comment the nature of Germany warfare and the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The most common problem with this question was the drift outside of the given timeframe and a noticeable proportion referenced the role of Britain and France in relation to the Treaty of Versailles, the failure to confront Hitler over the Rhineland and the Anschluss, which was fine in terms of general context, yet the concern came with extended comment on the pre-1939 period.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A (AO3/AO1)

- Candidates should aim to interpret both extracts by analysing the issues raised and showing an understanding of the arguments presented by both authors. It is important to show awareness that it is historian's points of view that are the basis of a discussion; referring to the author by name helps this understanding (where there is more than one author, candidates can write the first name with et al after it.)
- Interpretations do not need to be evaluated in the same way as Sources. It is the views in the Extracts themselves that create the basis of the discussion. All the Extracts are 'secondary sources' and this does not need to be explained.
- Candidates should use their own knowledge of the specification content to validate and discuss the interpretations being presented.
- Candidates should come to an overall judgement with regard to the view stated in the question; it is not sufficient just to summarise the views presented in the extracts.

Section B (AO1)

- Read the wording of the questions carefully, particularly if the time period of the question is stated; responses that refer to the wrong time period deploy irrelevant and inaccurate knowledge that does not directly address or only implicitly addresses the question.
- Candidates should provide more precise contextual knowledge as supporting evidence. Use knowledge to provide evidence to support a sustained evaluation in relation to the conceptual focus of the question. Secure chronological knowledge enables candidates to produce a logical and coherent answer.
- Introductions do not need to reflect a large amount of contextual detail; use introductions to establish the foundations of the argument you are about to present and to show that you understand the focus of the question.
- Use conclusions to state the judgement reached clearly and to show the relative significance of or the inter-relationship between key issues discussed in the main

body of the essay; leave the examiner in no doubt as to what your judgement is and why.

