



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI04/1C)
Paper 4: International Study with Historical
Interpretations
Option 1C: The World Divided: Superpower
Relations, 1943–90

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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 most significant development in the Cold War division of Europe was Stalin's decision to reject Marshall Aid. The author of Extract 1, I Kershaw, put forward the view that the announcement of the Marshall Plan, as a symbol of US foreign policy intent in Europe politically, economically and psychologically, led to the decisive moment in dividing Europe, with Stalin's decision to refuse it, effectively prevented any future Western influence over the eastern European satellite states, leading in the fundamental division of Europe in two. The author suggests that Marshall had expected, possibly even planned for, the Soviets and their satellites to reject it, reflecting Stalin's fear that the USA would use its offer of economic aid to undermine Soviet political control over Eastern Europe. The author of Extract 2, J.W Young, suggested that Stalin's blockade of the western zone of Berlin in June 1948 was a major challenge to the Western powers in Europe and led directly to the fundamental division of Europe at all possible levels of international relations by the autumn of 1949. The Extract suggests the airlift was a great boost for Western powers in Europe and led to actions that indicated a mistrust of Russia was growing, such as the North Atlantic Treaty, and the subsequent Soviet response with the creation of an East German state. 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 Young.

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 post-war Europe and how this affected US and Soviet policies post-1945. This knowledge was used to validate the context of significant developments and the fears which arose from the period. 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 offer of Marshall Aid putting Stalin into a difficult position, with the rejection including the whole of the Soviet 'sphere of influence', with particular focus on Czechoslovakia, and the subsequent introduction of COMECON. There was also direct links to the build up to Marshall Aid, which obvious links to the Truman Doctrine and the realization of Churchill's 'Iron Curtain'. For Extract 2, responses referred to the division amongst the wartime allies leading to the Berlin Blockade as a response from Stalin to Western attempts to unify western Germany economically, along with the resulting establishment of NATO as a clear armed division of Europe, particularly in the context of the beginnings of the arms race. Many candidates were able to contrast the viewpoints in the Extracts well in coming to a judgement as to whether it was Stalin's rejection of Marshall Aid or the Berlin Blockade that was the most significant development of the Cold War. There is now very little evidence of time wasted by writing long explanations of the developments of the Cold War since 1917 or events after 1953.

Section B

Please note that, as indicated in previous Reports, it is of concern how many WHI04 1C candidates continue to deploy a confused chronology either in regard to specific time periods of the Cold War or to US and Soviet leadership. Clearly, where there this happens once or perhaps twice in a response it is possible to allow that the candidate is writing in stressful conditions but in too many responses, particularly in Section B, this is seen throughout the response. Common examples of this are Kennedy and Khrushchev as leaders in the 1970s, Gorbachev becoming leader of the USSR before 1985 and the period of détente happening in the 1950s.

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

Question 2

Candidates were required to determine the extent to which Khrushchev was successful in achieving peaceful coexistence with the USA in the years 1953-64. 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 establishment of the Warsaw Pact and the development of the 'Geneva spirit' and the change in relations between leaders due to the attitude of Khrushchev. Candidates had a very good understanding of the crisis points which countered the peaceful co-existence, particularly in relation to Cuba and the space race, but they sometimes failed to look at the whole period, either focusing on the 1950s or the 1960s, thus not providing the groundwork for a proper evaluation.

The best responses focused the success of peaceful coexistence based on the level threat of the Cold War, were more able to successfully discuss diplomatic developments (specifically referencing the Paris Summit and 'Geneva Spirit') and possessed a more nuanced understanding of the extent of success of Khrushchev's foreign policy of peaceful coexistence. These students also tended to make reference to Mutually Assured Destruction and the role that this played in promoting peaceful coexistence. The most common problem with this question was to drift outside of the given timeframe, and a

noticeable proportion referenced the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. A number also referred to the Brezhnev Doctrine. Typically, students approached this question chronologically which worked well enough given the nature of the question.

Question 3

Candidates were required to determine whether there was a significant improvement in US-Soviet relations in the years 1964-79. The most typical approach to this question was chronological. Whilst this was sufficient in the majority of cases, stronger responses adopted a more thematic approach. Common themes tended to include; diplomacy and arms limitation, proxy wars, economic cooperation and issues regarding China. In either case, the majority of students were able to utilise some good knowledge regarding the various treaties characterising the period, whilst others outlined diplomatic visits, most commonly explaining the extent of success of the Helsinki Accords. Others made reference to examples of co-operation such as the Apollo-Soyuz link up and quite a few mentioned ping-pong diplomacy. However, stronger students were able to appreciate the superficial nature of such 'diplomacy' and challenged the fact that relations were improving. These answers often cited Proxy Wars as a more realistic indicator of relations between the superpowers. Answers which discussed Sino-Soviet / Sino-US relations tended to be stronger responses, whilst weaker responses were sometimes restricted to a more straightforward consideration of US - Soviet relations. A further feature of better answers was to include comment on the nature of the leaders and how this contributed to improving relations. There seemed to be better focus on the time frame for this question in comparison to question 2, although some students did spend too much time discussing Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Whilst reference to this was allowed in terms of general context, the concern came with extended comment on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

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.

