



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Humanities 3071

Coursework

Report on the Examination

2008 examination - June series

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GCSE Humanities Coursework

General

The samples of coursework submitted for moderation reflected the considerable effort and hard work of candidates largely well supported by teachers who have a sound understanding of the specification and its requirements. Best practice was evident from centres which had clearly responded to advice from either standardisation meetings or previous years' reports. There were many examples of good practice.

There remains a balance between centres following the single assignment route and those following the two-assignment route. Centres producing two assignments are once again strongly recommended to review the division of the assessment strands. A tiny number of centres following the two-assignments route continued to make the mistake of assessing all three strands in each assignment and then 'cherry-pick' the best assessment outcomes from the two assignments. Centres are strongly reminded that this is not within the spirit or letter of the specification and are strongly recommended to end this practice. Centres should contact their coursework adviser if additional support is required.

Likewise, centres are once more reminded that where an assessment strand is divided the total for that strand is a **holistic mark** across the two assignments and not a simple arithmetic total. It is good advice to split the common strand unevenly as this helps to address the temptation to merely add the two scores. (A 12 / 8 split did appear to work effectively.)

Once again it was evident that centres are teaching specific evaluative and communication skills in order to support the candidates and their assignments. Centres are again strongly recommended to embed skills into the teaching of the Specification. Likewise, centres are strongly encouraged to support candidates in their planning of the coursework to ensure that the word limit is not ignored. Some assignments were far longer than is necessary to attain high levels of achievement. Centres are reminded that it is the quality of work rather than the quantity of work which candidates should focus upon. Evaluation skills are significant. Some centres still have problems with hypotheses and sub/key questions which are essential to give the right focus to the task. It is best practice for a student to have his / her title checked prior to commencing. It was evident that when this occurred candidates were more likely to produce work which was clearly rooted in the Humanities specification.

Summary

- Centres following the two-assignment route should review the balance of assessment objectives across the two assignments.
- Centres dividing an assessment objective should assess that strand holistically and not arithmetically.
- Skills tested through the coursework assignment should be fully integrated into the teaching of the Specification.
- Candidates do not need to exceed the word limit to achieve the top marks.
- Candidates should start with a clear hypothesis and sub-questions in order to stay focussed throughout the task.

Strand (i) Investigation

Successful investigations are explicitly based on either a well-focused hypothesis or key question. It is deeply disappointing to see too many candidates including a descriptive title or even a topic rather than a hypothesis or analytical key question.

Successful assignments, and their hypotheses, flow from a Key Idea in the Specification. It is good practice to begin with these Key Ideas when setting up assignments and for candidates to clearly state which Key Ideas are being addressed and how.

Moderators continue to record some centres setting a small number of closed, descriptive tasks often accompanied by a large source booklet which prevent candidates from planning a wide-ranging investigation of their own and deploying a suitable range of skills. Assignment tasks must enable differentiation between candidates to occur. Equally, the hypothesis or key question should be sufficiently open and challenging to enable individual candidates to plan a thorough and perceptive investigation.

Centres are once again strongly reminded that candidates really do need to draw upon more than a single source booklet, however good the sources might appear. Assignments should be structured in such a way so as to enable candidates to develop an investigation which certainly goes beyond classroom materials and which enables candidates to develop lines of individual research using a wide range of different types of evidence. Centres are strongly advised to review their assignment(s) in order to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging and stimulating.

The use of relevant and perceptive sub-questions not only supports the planning of the investigation, but also provides support for the evaluation and communication strands.

The investigation is not just about the collection of evidence on a given topic. It is essential that candidates are explicitly trained in researching and utilising a range of alternative **arguments** related to the issue under investigation. Centres need to ensure that candidates explicitly refer to, and critically evaluate, a range of arguments in a sustained and perceptive fashion and not just offer raw data from a survey or questionnaire.

Summary

- Assignments should have a well-focused hypothesis or key question.
- Candidates should be able to access primary and secondary information beyond the classroom.
- Candidates should address key arguments relating to their chosen topic and not just offer raw data collected through questionnaires or surveys.

Strand (ii) Evaluation

Centres are strongly advised to use the planning phase of the coursework to establish with candidates the exact focus of evaluation: sources, arguments, methods and/or data. It is essential that candidates are trained throughout the course in a wide range of appropriate evaluative techniques. Candidates need to demonstrate explicitly their understanding and application of provenance, utility, reliability as well as being able to make sustained generalisations based upon evidence collected during the investigation. Bias remains an overused word and is rarely discussed other than in a superficial manner.

It is the nature of Band 4 to explain with insight, development and supporting evidence. Centres must appreciate that candidates ought to be operating in an analytical rather than a descriptive manner.

In addition Centres still need to ensure that their candidates understand the difference between quantitative and qualitative information and can employ a wide range of techniques to evaluate information. These higher order skills are essential for the higher bands of the mark scheme.

Candidates can evaluate information, data, sources or methods throughout the assignment(s) and do not have to leave this to the final section of the assignment. Good practice again showed excellent evaluation embedded throughout the assignment which in many cases strengthened the overall assignment.

Summary

- Candidates should establish in their planning the focus of their evaluation.
- Candidates need to consider bias, provenance, utility and/or reliability in a rigorous fashion as appropriate to their study.
- Candidates should apply a range of evaluative techniques in their assignment.

Strand (iii) Communication

Centres are again reminded that the most effective assignments result from careful planning, a well-focused hypothesis or key question. The overall structure and shape of the assignment is therefore a significant issue and one to which candidates need to give greater consideration. Good practice shows that higher marks are gained when candidates have been explicitly trained throughout the course to produce critical and sustained narratives.

Samples demonstrated that too many candidates, often the most able, produce overly long, poorly structured descriptive assignments appearing to be little more than 'projects' rather than carefully focused and structured investigative or evaluative assignments. Candidates should always plan and edit their assignments to meet the word limit. The mark awarded for communication skills is a reflection of the structure of the whole assignment. A rambling discursive piece will not do well, neither will the 'scrapbook' approach; but a well honed hypothesis with supporting sub-questions, structure and techniques is more likely to reach the higher bands. In the two-assignment approach a range of suitable techniques should be evident across the two.

Candidates should incorporate and utilise different types of graphs, charts, diagrams and illustrations to develop their evaluation and support a sustained argument. Candidates are strongly recommended to use footnotes and endnotes in assignments such as the 'lamok Letter' assessing Evaluation and Communication. Far too many assignments continue to have strong narratives making use of relevant information but without acknowledging its provenance. The acknowledgement of sources is essential and to be expected. Candidates are reminded that they should be including detailed bibliographies with each assignment. Candidates are encouraged to make use of a small number of relevant appendices which are explicitly cross-referenced to the narrative.

As in previous years candidates made considerable use of material gained from the Internet. The Internet is a fantastic resource. However, far too many candidates are still simply 'cutting and pasting' material into their assignments without an explicit rationale for its inclusion or critical evaluation. This is often very obvious in the change in the sophistication and style of writing within the coursework. Such lengthy unacknowledged plagiarised insertions can be given little if any credit. Centres are therefore strongly advised to train candidates in the appropriate skills to undertake Internet research and evaluate materials obtained in a rigorous

and perceptive manner. This is a significant issue which centres are again strongly advised to respond to. All websites should be listed in the bibliography and caution should be made of the use of Wikipedia.

Summary

- Candidates need to be trained to produce sustained and critical studies.
- Candidates should produce investigations rather than 'projects'.
- Candidates should use a wide range of communication skills in their assignments.
- Candidates should make careful use of the Internet.
- Candidates should make use of footnotes or endnotes, fully acknowledging all sources and include a bibliography. The mere cutting and pasting of information from the Internet is to be avoided.

Administration

Mark allocation was a problem for some centres and they are advised to refer to the detail in the Specification. A number of centres split a strand into 2x10, which lends itself to a simple addition, whilst a 12/8 division enables judgements to be made by centres of a candidate's work in relation to the four bands in the marking criteria.

Administration was completed relatively well. Centres are reminded again that both sides of the Candidate Record Form must be completed in full. The Centre Declaration Sheet is to be signed by all teachers marking the work.

Centres are required to internally standardise and moderate the work of their centre. It is still the case that in a number of centres there was insufficient explicit evidence of internal standardisation/moderation. Standardisation needs to happen for each assignment followed by an overall moderation process. Where standardisation does not happen or is inadequate, variations in the marks for one candidate can adversely affect all candidates.

It is best practice to annotate assignments, which need not be extensive, but it does help the moderator to have achievement identified by band and the skill area. Annotation was again found to be variable, with a large number of centres merely logging the marks and little else whereas some teachers were writing extensive justification of their marks, which is extremely helpful to moderators. A feedback sheet is highly recommended from the point of view of both candidates and moderators.

It would help greatly if task sheets and any task-specific marking criteria were enclosed with the samples sent to moderators.

Centres are strongly recommended to produce a list of candidates and their marks in rank order for internal standardisation and moderation and to include this when they send their marks to their moderator.

Centres are reminded **not** to send candidates' work to moderators in plastic wallets or bulky folders, nor to include all copies of the survey or questionnaire. One example verified by the centre is sufficient.

Finally many centres might benefit from discussing their tasks with their Coursework Adviser. Before doing so, centres are strongly recommended to read the Coursework FAQs which are available on request from the AQA Humanities Department in Guildford.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.