Course Companion

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · History · SL

Every topic handout in one volume

exercises.lol

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Sources and the prescribed subject

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · History · SL

History: sources and the prescribed subject

IB Diploma Programme History SL (the guide first assessed in 2017). This topic prepares Paper 1, the **source paper**, which SL and HL students both sit. Schools choose one **prescribed subject** from five, and each has two **case studies** from different regions. In the exam you read four sources on one case study and answer four questions in 1 hour (24 marks; 30% at SL, 20% at HL). This handout teaches the source skills first, and then gives the facts for the most taught choice, *the move to global war*.

On 20 September 1939 a London newspaper printed a cartoon by David Low. Hitler and Stalin bow politely to each other over the body of a dead soldier, Poland. Hitler says: "The scum of the earth, I believe?" Stalin answers: "The bloody assassin of the workers, I presume?" Two enemies had just signed a pact, and Low showed in one picture that neither trusted the other. A historian reading the cartoon learns little about the pact's details, but a lot about how the British saw it. That is the skill Paper 1 tests: what a source can and cannot tell you.

Must-know for Paper 1:

Area	Key content
the paper	1 hour; four sources; four questions; 24 marks
Question 1	(a) what a written source says (3); (b) the message of a visual source (2)
Question 2	the value and limitations of one source: origin, purpose, content (4)
Question 3	compare and contrast two sources (6)
Question 4	a short essay using the sources and your own knowledge (9)
prescribed subjects	military leaders; conquest and its impact; the move to global war; rights and protest; conflict and intervention

The four questions

The sources are a mix of **primary sources** (made at the time: speeches, letters, photographs, cartoons) and **secondary sources** (written later by historians).

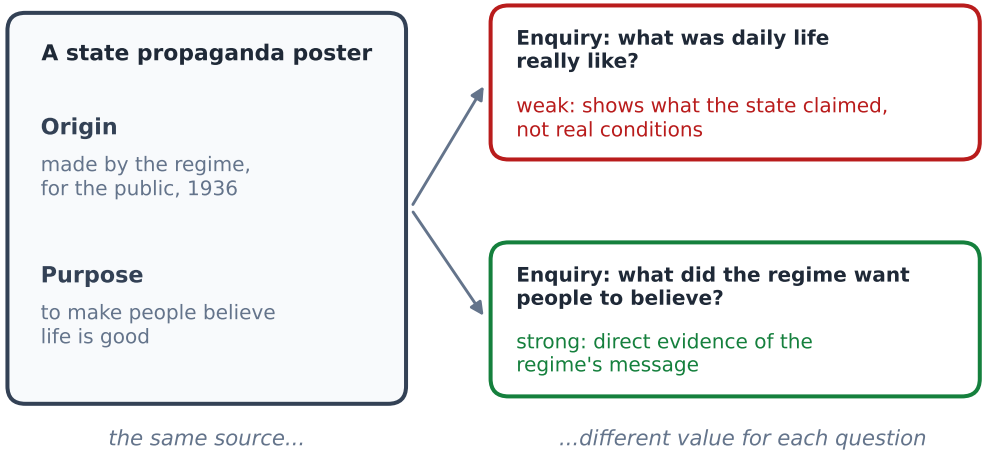
Question	Marks	Time	How to answer
1(a)	3	5 min	three separate points from the source, each with a short quotation
1(b)	2	3 min	the main message of the cartoon or poster, with two details that show it
2	4	10 min	value and limitation, each linked to the origin, purpose or content
3	6	15 min	similarities and differences, point by point
4	9	25 min	an argument with the sources **and** your own knowledge, and a judgement

For Question 1, use only the source: your own knowledge earns nothing there. Spend the most time on Question 4, which has the most marks.

Origin, purpose, value, limitation

For Question 2 you analyse one source with four ideas, often called **OPVL**:

- **Origin** : who made it, when, where, and what type of source it is.
- **Purpose** : why it was made and for whom: to inform, to persuade, to justify, to entertain.
- **Value** : what it can reliably tell a historian, because of its origin, purpose or content.
- **Limitation** : what it cannot show, or where it may mislead.



OPVL: origin and purpose are the handles; value and limitation depend on the question asked

Value and limitation always depend on the question you ask. A **propaganda** poster is poor evidence of how people really lived, but excellent evidence of what a government wanted people to believe. Never write "this source is **biased**, so it is useless": the bias itself tells the historian something.

Worked Question 2. *Source: the Lytton Report, published by a League of Nations commission in October 1932 after it visited Manchuria. With reference to its origin, purpose and content, analyse the value and limitations of the source for a historian studying the Manchurian crisis.*

> The source is valuable because the commission was sent by the League and visited Manchuria in 1932, so its members saw the situation shortly after the events and heard both Chinese and Japanese views. Its purpose, to give the League facts on which to act, meant it had to be careful and detailed. However, it is limited because it was written for a diplomatic audience: it uses cautious language to avoid closing the door to Japan. It also cannot show how the League's members would respond to it, which is what decided the crisis.

Each value and limitation is tied to a feature of the source (who sent it, when, why), not just to its content.

Comparing and using sources

For Question 3, **compare** means find similarities, and **contrast** means find differences. Link the two sources in every point:

> Both Source A and Source C show that Britain wanted to avoid war in 1938, but while Source A presents this as wise, Source C presents it as weakness.

Aim for at least two similarities and two differences. Describing Source A in one paragraph and Source C in the next earns few marks.

For Question 4, write a short essay: a **thesis** in the first sentence, two or three paragraphs that each use a source (named, such as "Source B") together with your own facts, and a judgement at the end. Use at least three of the four sources.

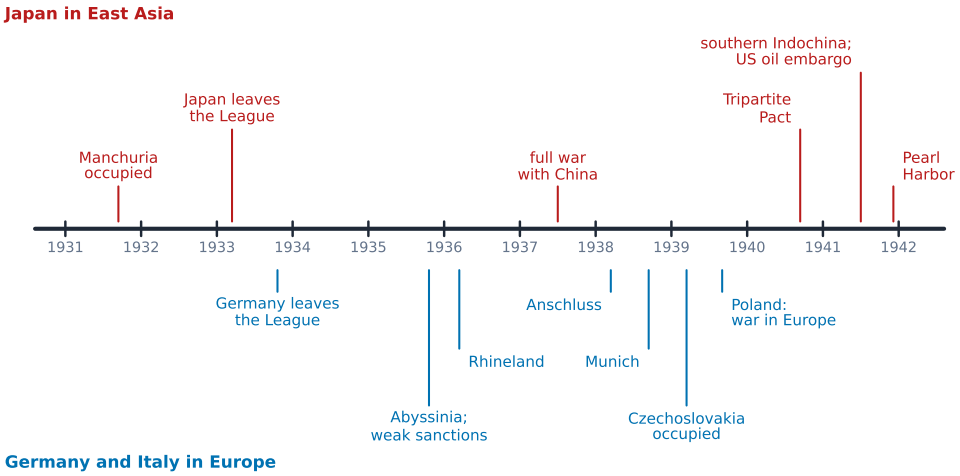
The five prescribed subjects

Prescribed subject	Case study 1	Case study 2
military leaders	Genghis Khan (c1200–1227)	Richard I of England (1173–1199)
conquest and its impact	the final stages of Muslim rule in Spain (1482–1492)	the conquest of Mexico and Peru (1519–1551)
the move to global war	Japanese expansion in East Asia (1931–1941)	German and Italian expansion (1933–1940)
rights and protest	the civil rights movement in the United States (1954–1965)	apartheid South Africa (1948–1964)
conflict and intervention	Rwanda (1990–1998)	Kosovo (1989–2002)

Each exam puts all four sources on one case study, so you must know both of your school's case studies.

The move to global war

After the First World War, the **League of Nations** (1920) was meant to keep the peace by **collective security** : if one state attacked another, all members would act together against it, first with **economic sanctions** and, if needed, with force. In the 1930s Japan, Italy and Germany expanded by force, and collective security failed. The key question is why.



Expansion in Asia and Europe, 1931–1941, and how other states responded

■ Japanese expansion in East Asia, 1931–1941

Date	Event
Sep 1931	the Mukden Incident: Japanese officers blow up a railway line and blame China; the army occupies Manchuria
Mar 1932	Japan sets up the state of Manchukuo, with Puyi as its head
Oct 1932	the Lytton Report says Japan's actions were not self-defence
Feb–Mar 1933	the League accepts the report; Japan leaves the League
Jul 1937	the Marco Polo Bridge Incident starts full war with China
Dec 1937	Japanese troops take Nanjing and kill very large numbers of civilians and prisoners
Sep 1940	the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy
Jul–Aug 1941	Japan occupies southern French Indochina; the US stops oil exports to Japan
7 Dec 1941	Japan attacks the US base at Pearl Harbor

Causes historians weigh: the Great Depression, which hit Japan's silk exports and made resources in Manchuria attractive; the growing power of the army over the civilian government; nationalism; and the weakness of the League, which had no army of its own and whose most powerful members did not act.

German and Italian expansion, 1933–1940

Date	Event
Oct 1933	Germany leaves the League and the Disarmament Conference
Mar 1935	Hitler announces conscription and a German air force, breaking the Treaty of Versailles
Oct 1935	Italy invades Abyssinia (Ethiopia); the League's sanctions do not include oil
Dec 1935	the Hoare–Laval Plan to give Italy much of Abyssinia is leaked and dropped
Mar 1936	German troops enter the demilitarised Rhineland
Mar 1938	the **Anschluss** : Germany takes over Austria
Sep 1938	the Munich Agreement gives the Sudetenland to Germany
Mar 1939	Germany occupies the rest of Czechoslovakia; in April, Italy invades Albania
23 Aug 1939	the Nazi–Soviet Pact
1 Sep 1939	Germany invades Poland; Britain and France declare war on 3 September
Jun 1940	Italy enters the war; France surrenders

Britain and France followed **appeasement** : giving in to some demands to avoid war. Reasons included the memory of the First World War, economic weakness, the belief that Versailles had been too harsh, and the need for time to rearm.

Worked Question 4 plan. *"Using the sources and your own knowledge, evaluate the claim that the League of Nations failed mainly because its members chose not to act."*

1. Thesis: largely true; the League had tools, but Britain and France put their own interests first.
2. Manchuria: the League investigated, but no member would fight Japan so far away (use the Lytton Report source).
3. Abyssinia: sanctions without oil, and the Hoare–Laval Plan, showed that Britain and France wanted to keep Italy friendly (use a cartoon source).
4. Counter-argument: the League had no army, and the US, the largest economy, was never a member; the aggressors were determined.
5. Judgement: the weaknesses of its structure made failure likely, but the members' choices made it certain.

Checklist

- The format: 1 hour, four sources, 24 marks; the marks and timing for each question.
- Question 1: from the source only, with quotations; the message of a visual source.
- Question 2: OPVL, each value and limitation linked to the origin or purpose; bias as evidence.
- Question 3: similarities and differences, point by point.
- Question 4: thesis, sources and own knowledge, a judgement.
- The five prescribed subjects and their case studies.
- The move to global war: collective security; the Japanese timeline 1931–1941; the German and Italian timeline 1933–1940; appeasement.

World history topics

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · History · SL

IB Diploma Programme History SL (the guide first assessed in 2017). This topic prepares Paper 2, the essay paper, which SL and HL students both sit. Schools choose two of the twelve **world history topics**, and study each through examples from more than one region. In Paper 2 you write two essays in 1 hour 30 minutes, each on a different topic and each marked out of 15. The questions ask about causes, effects, change and comparison. This handout teaches the essay method and then gives the key facts for the three most taught topics: authoritarian states, the causes and effects of 20th-century wars, and the Cold War.

In May 1928, the Nazi Party won 12 of 491 seats in the German parliament. Four and a half years later, its leader was head of the government. How could a small, extreme party take power in a modern democracy so quickly? Questions like this, about causes and change, are what Paper 2 asks. A good answer is an argument with evidence, not a story.

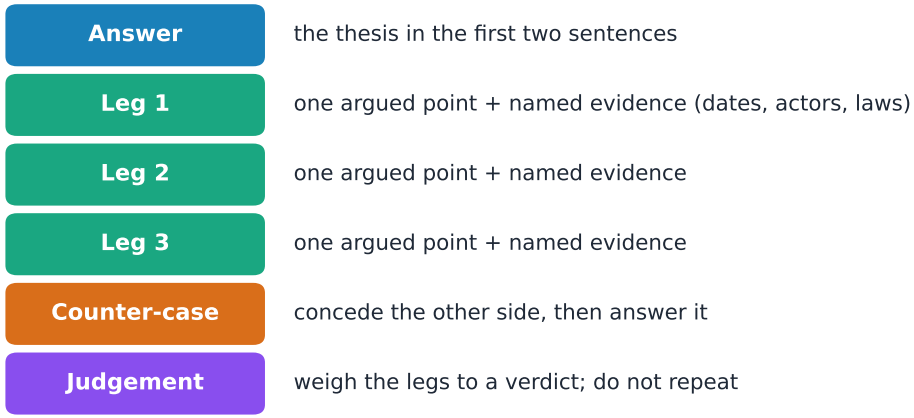
Must-know for Paper 2:

Area	Key content
essay method	a clear answer, argued paragraphs with evidence, a counter-argument, a judgement
command terms	discuss, evaluate, compare and contrast, examine, to what extent
authoritarian states	how they rose, how they kept power, what they did; Germany and Cuba as examples
20th-century wars	long-term, short-term and immediate causes; effects; the First World War
the Cold War	origins, crises, détente and the end, 1945–1991

The Paper 2 essay

An essay is an **argument**: it answers the question and proves the answer. Use this plan:

1. **Introduction**: answer the question directly in one or two sentences. This is your **thesis**.
2. **Three body paragraphs**: each makes one point that supports the thesis. Start with the point, then give precise **evidence** (dates, names, numbers), then explain how the evidence proves the point.
3. **Counter-argument**: give the strongest other view, then answer it.
4. **Conclusion**: a **judgement** that weighs the factors ("the most important cause was ... because ..."), not a summary.



45 minutes an essay: about 5 to plan, about 40 to write

The shape of a Paper 2 essay: answer first, three argued legs, a counter-case, a judgement

Precise evidence earns the marks: "the Enabling Act of 23 March 1933 allowed Hitler to make laws without parliament" is much stronger than "Hitler took more power".

Command term	What to do
discuss / evaluate	give arguments for and against, weigh them, reach a judgement
to what extent	judge how far the claim is true; "to a large extent, but ..."
compare and contrast	similarities and differences, side by side in every paragraph
examine	look closely at the claim and its assumptions

For "compare and contrast", never write about one state and then the other. Each paragraph compares both on one point, using words such as *whereas*, *similarly* and *in both cases*.

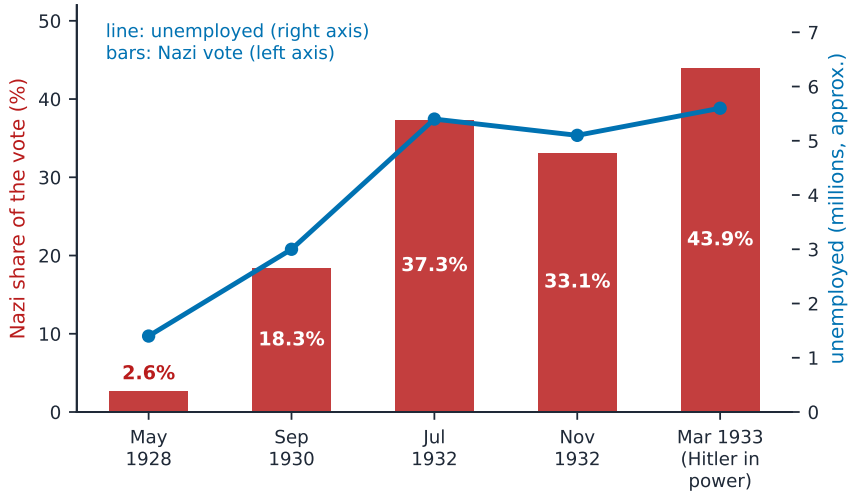
You have 45 minutes per essay. Spend about 5 minutes on a plan. The most common way to lose marks is **narrative**: telling what happened instead of answering the question.

Authoritarian states (20th century)

An **authoritarian state** is ruled by one leader or party that does not allow free elections or opposition. Questions ask about three stages: its **emergence** (how it came to power), its **consolidation** (how it kept power) and its **policies** (what it did with power). You must know at least two states from different regions. Germany and Cuba are a common pair.

Germany under Hitler

Date	Event
1919	Treaty of Versailles: Germany loses land and must pay reparations; many Germans feel humiliated
1923	hyperinflation; Hitler's failed Munich Putsch
1929	the Wall Street Crash; American loans stop; unemployment rises
1930–32	Nazi share of the vote rises from 18% to 37%
30 Jan 1933	Hitler is appointed chancellor by President Hindenburg
27 Feb 1933	the Reichstag fire; a decree suspends civil rights
23 Mar 1933	the Enabling Act: Hitler can make laws without parliament
Jul 1933	all other parties are banned
30 Jun 1934	the Night of the Long Knives: rivals in the SA are killed
Aug 1934	Hindenburg dies; Hitler becomes Führer



As unemployment rose, so did the Nazi vote

The graph shows a strong link between the **Great Depression** and Nazi votes. But the vote fell in November 1932, and Hitler became chancellor by a deal among conservative politicians who thought they could control him, not by an election victory. A good essay weighs economic crisis, Nazi **propaganda**, the use of violence, and the mistakes of other politicians.

To keep power, the Nazis used both **terror** (the Gestapo secret police, concentration camps) and the search for consent (propaganda by Joseph Goebbels, the Hitler Youth, jobs through rearmament and road building). Jewish people were removed from public life by the Nuremberg Laws (1935) and attacked in the violence of Kristallnacht (November 1938), the road to the Holocaust.

Cuba under Castro

Date	Event
1952	Fulgencio Batista takes power in a military coup
26 Jul 1953	Fidel Castro's failed attack on the Moncada barracks
1956–58	guerrilla war from the Sierra Maestra mountains
1 Jan 1959	Batista flees; Castro's forces take power
1959	land reform: large estates broken up
1960	Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) set up in every street
1961	the Bay of Pigs invasion fails; the literacy campaign
1962	the Cuban Missile Crisis
1965	the Communist Party of Cuba becomes the only party

Castro's support came from social policies: the 1961 literacy campaign sent about 250,000 teachers and volunteers into the countryside, and official figures show illiteracy falling from about 24% to about 4%. Free health care and schooling followed. At the same time, opposition newspapers were closed, opponents were jailed or left the country, and the CDRs watched each street.

Worked comparison. *"Compare and contrast the use of propaganda and force in two authoritarian states."*

> Whereas Hitler's regime won support mainly through propaganda and economic recovery, Castro's relied more on real social reforms such as the literacy campaign. In both states, however, force set the limits: the Gestapo in Germany and the CDRs in Cuba made opposition dangerous. Propaganda built consent, but terror was the final guarantee.

Causes and effects of 20th-century wars

Historians separate three kinds of cause:

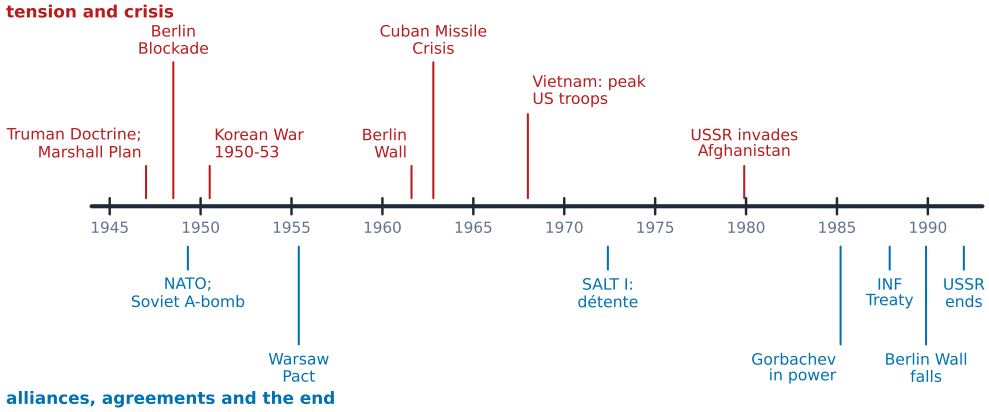
Kind	Meaning	First World War example
long-term causes	conditions over many years	alliances (Triple Alliance 1882, Triple Entente 1907); the naval race; nationalism in the Balkans
short-term causes	events in the months before	the July Crisis: Austria-Hungary's ultimatum to Serbia; Russia mobilises
trigger	the event that starts the war	the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, 28 June 1914

War came quickly: Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July, Germany on Russia on 1 August and on France on 3 August, and Britain on Germany on 4 August, after German troops entered Belgium.

Effects are political, economic and social. About 10 million soldiers died. Four empires collapsed (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire). In Britain, most women over 30 got the vote in 1918, partly because of their war work. The peace treaties, especially Versailles, created anger that later helped the Nazis, so the effects of one war became causes of the next.

The Cold War (1945–1991)

The **Cold War** was a long rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and their allies. They never fought each other directly, but they competed through alliances, an **arms race** and **proxy wars** in other countries.



The Cold War, 1945–1991: crises above, alliances and agreements below

- **Origins**: different ideas (capitalism and communism), Soviet control of Eastern Europe after 1945, and US policies such as the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Marshall Plan, which gave about US$13 billion to rebuild Western Europe.
- **Crises**: the Berlin Blockade (1948–49), the Korean War (1950–53), the Berlin Wall (1961) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962), when the world came close to nuclear war for 13 days.
- **Détente**: in the 1970s both sides reduced tension and signed arms agreements such as SALT I (1972).
- **The end**: the Soviet economy weakened; Mikhail Gorbachev (in power from 1985) introduced reforms; the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989; the Soviet Union ended on 26 December 1991.

Historians disagree about who was responsible. The **orthodox view** blames Soviet expansion; the **revisionist view** blames US economic interests; the **post-revisionist view** sees fear and misunderstanding on both sides. Using these views shows the examiner you understand that history is argued.

Checklist

- The essay plan: thesis, three argued paragraphs with precise evidence, counter-argument, judgement; the command terms; 45 minutes per essay.
- Authoritarian states: emergence, consolidation and policies; Germany (1919–1934 timeline, vote and unemployment data, terror and consent) and Cuba (1952–1965, literacy campaign, CDRs); a worked comparison.
- 20th-century wars: long-term, short-term and trigger causes of the First World War; its political, economic and social effects.
- The Cold War: origins, crises, détente and the end; the orthodox, revisionist and post-revisionist views.

The historical investigation

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · History · SL

IB Diploma Programme History SL (the guide first assessed in 2017, examined until the 2028 course replaces it). The internal assessment is the **historical investigation** : a piece of your own historical research on a topic you choose. It has a limit of **2,200 words**, and the bibliography does not count towards it. It is worth 25% of the SL grade. Your teacher marks it out of 25, and the IB moderates the marks.

On 30 June 1936 the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, stood in front of the League of Nations in Geneva. Italy had invaded his country in October 1935, using aircraft and poison gas. The League had called Italy the aggressor and voted for **sanctions** , but not on oil, which Italy's army needed most. In December 1935 the British and French foreign ministers, Samuel Hoare and Pierre Laval, had secretly agreed a plan to give Italy large parts of Ethiopia. The plan leaked to French newspapers, there was public anger in Britain, and Hoare resigned. By May 1936 Italian troops were in Addis Ababa. "It is us today," the Emperor is reported to have said. "It will be you tomorrow." A textbook tells this story in a paragraph. An investigation asks one sharp question about it, and answers that question from evidence.

Must-know for the historical investigation:

Area	Key content
the format	at most 2,200 words; three sections; 25 marks; 25% of SL
section 1 (A, 6 marks)	the question; two sources, their relevance, value and limitations
section 2 (B, 15 marks)	an organised, critical argument from a range of evidence; a reasoned conclusion
section 3 (C, 4 marks)	reflection on historians' methods and their problems, tied to your work
the question	narrow, answerable, debatable; at least ten years in the past
integrity	cite every source where you use it; a full bibliography

The investigation has three sections, and each section has its own criterion:

Section	Criterion	Marks	Suggested length	What it rewards
1	A: identification and evaluation of sources	6	about 500 words	a clear question; two sources explained and analysed for value and limitations
2	B: investigation	15	about 1,300 words	an organised, critical argument from a range of evidence, with a reasoned conclusion
3	C: reflection	4	about 400 words	what the work showed you about historians' methods and their difficulties



The three sections of the investigation: words follow the marks

Section 2 carries 15 of the 25 marks, so it gets most of the words. A long section 1 takes words from it.

Choosing and planning

The **question** makes or breaks the investigation. A good one is:

- **narrow**: a person, a decision, an event or a policy, not "a war";
- **answerable**: the evidence exists and you can reach it;
- **debatable**: historians disagree, or the answer is not simply in the textbook.



Each cut makes the question smaller and the judgement sharper.

Weak question	Why it is weak	Better question
Why did the League of Nations fail?	a whole field; invites a story	How far was the Hoare–Laval Plan (December 1935) the decisive blow to the League's credibility?
What was Mao's Great Leap Forward?	description only; no debate	To what extent were local officials, rather than central policy, responsible for the grain shortfall in Sichuan, 1959–61?
Was the atomic bomb on Hiroshima right?	a moral question, not a historical one	How far did the wish to end the war before Soviet entry shape the decision to use the bomb in August 1945?

Choose a topic at least ten years in the past, so that historians have had time to write about it. Your **research plan** is your own working tool, not a marked part: the question, the kinds of sources you will look for, and a first list of books and documents. It will change as you read. Choose a topic with a real **historiography**, a debate between historians, because section 2 rewards weighing different views. The classic failure is the biography report: a life story retold with no question.

A timeline that works. Most schools give about 20 hours of class time. A typical plan: choose a topic and a first question (weeks 1–2); read widely and narrow the question (weeks 3–5); choose the two section 1 sources and write section 1 (week 6); write section 2 from a theme plan (weeks 7–9); write section 3 and check citations (week 10). Your teacher may comment on one draft only, so make it a complete one.

Sources, evidence and evaluation

Section 1 states the question, then identifies **two sources** and explains why each is relevant to it. It then analyses both with OPVL from topic 01: origin, purpose and content as the handles, value and limitations **relative to your question**. Use one **primary source** (a document, speech, statistic or memoir from the time) and one **secondary source** (a historian's book or article) if you can: the contrast gives you more to say.

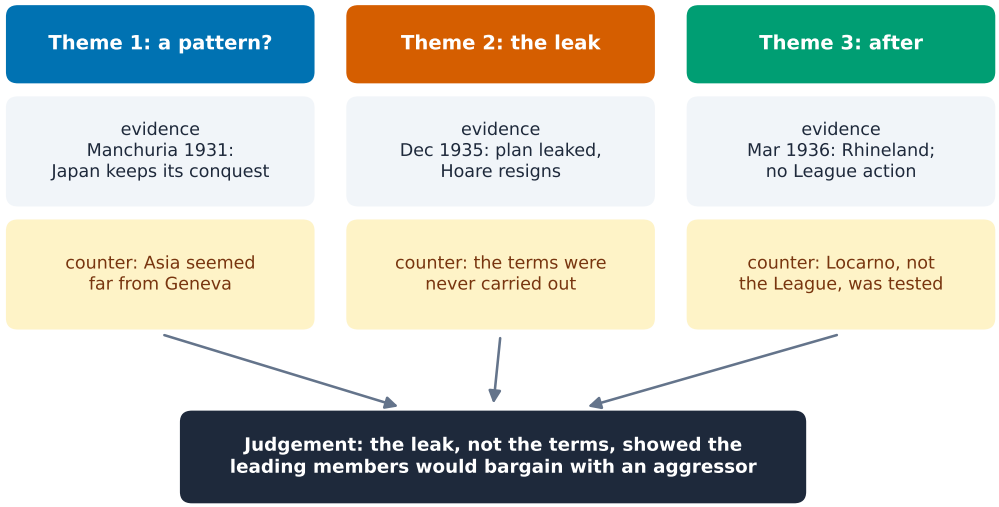
	Source 1: the plan as leaked	Source 2: Hoare's memoir
origin	text of the British–French proposals, printed in French newspapers, December 1935	Samuel Hoare, *Nine Troubled Years* (1954)
purpose	to offer Italy enough land to end the war; leaked by someone who opposed it	to explain and defend his own decisions as foreign secretary
value for the question	shows exactly what Britain and France were ready to give an aggressor	gives the motives of the man who made the plan, from the inside
limitation for the question	a proposal, never carried out; shows intentions, not effects on the League	written nearly twenty years later by a man defending his reputation

Weak and strong evaluation. Weak: "The memoir is biased because Hoare wrote it." Strong: "Because Hoare wrote in 1954, after the Second World War had made appeasement a word of shame, he had a reason to stress the danger of pushing Italy towards Germany. This limits the memoir as evidence of his motives in 1935, but it is still valuable for the British government's fear of a war on two fronts."

The rest of your reading feeds section 2. Group the evidence by **theme**, one group for each part of your argument, and check sources against each other: **corroboration** (two independent sources agree) and contradiction are both findings. Cite in the text (author, page) and give a full, consistent bibliography.

Analysis, conclusion and reflection

Section 2 is **analysis**, not narrative: each part argues one point with evidence, weighs the other side and leads into the next. Name the historians who disagree and explain why they disagree (different sources, different questions, different times of writing). The conclusion answers the question directly and follows from the argument.



A theme plan for section 2: every theme argues, weighs and leads to the judgement.

A section 2 paragraph, analysed. "The plan's terms mattered less than its leak. Italy had already been named the aggressor in October 1935, and the League's sanctions left out oil (Source A). What changed in December was that the public saw the League's two leading members bargaining with that aggressor in secret. Hoare resigned within a week, which shows how strong the reaction was in Britain. However, some historians argue that the League's credibility was already lost after Japan took Manchuria in 1931, then left the League (1933) and kept its conquest. This view is persuasive for Asia, but in Europe many governments still expected the League to act in 1935, so the plan was the moment that expectation ended." The first sentence argues, the middle uses evidence, the "however" weighs a counter-view, and the last sentence makes a judgement.

Section 3 is **reflection** on method. Say what the investigation showed you about how historians work and the problems they meet: choosing sources, missing voices, bias, archives that are closed, or how hindsight changes a question. Always tie the point to your own investigation. "I learned a lot" earns nothing; "I could read only English-language sources, so my answer leans on the British view, and the Ethiopian experience of the war appears only through outsiders" earns marks.

Worked example in brief. Question: "How far was the Hoare–Laval Plan (December 1935) the decisive blow to the League's credibility?" Section 1 evaluates the leaked plan and Hoare's memoir, as in the table above. Section 2 argues in three themes: the pattern since Manchuria (1931); the leak and quick withdrawal of the plan; and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland (March 1936), when no League member acted. The conclusion: the plan mattered less for its terms than for its leak and withdrawal, which showed that the League's leading members would bargain with an aggressor. Section 3 reflects on relying on British sources and on how later historians judged the League by its failure in 1939.

Common mistakes: a question too wide for 2,200 words; section 1 that describes the sources but does not evaluate them for the question; section 2 as a story in time order; historians named but not weighed; a conclusion that sits on the fence; a reflection that is about you, not about historical method; citations missing or inconsistent.

Checklist

- The format: 2,200 words at most, three sections, 25 marks; section 2 carries 15 (all).
- A narrow, answerable, debatable question, at least ten years in the past (section 1).
- Two sources identified, their relevance explained, and each analysed with OPVL relative to the question (section 1).
- Evidence grouped by theme, with corroboration and contradiction both reported, and historians' views weighed (section 2).
- A conclusion that answers the question and follows from the argument (section 2).
- Reflection on historians' methods, tied to your own investigation (section 3).
- Consistent citation and a full bibliography (all).

Boundary notes: this follows the guide first assessed in 2017; the suggested section lengths and the timeline are guidance, the 2,200-word limit is not. The worked example and the model paragraph are original.