



A Manual of Question Words Used in History (online version)

Online version of the Manual of Question Words Used in History

Foreword

A Manual of Question Words Used in History was published by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority in 2007. It discusses History-related assessment issues, namely logic, question words and level marking, the totality of which forms a set of feasible assessment philosophy for History and provides a common language for the stakeholders of the History examinations – setters, examiners, teachers, and candidates. With more than eight thousand copies sold thus far, it has become an important reference for the History examinations.

To achieve the abovementioned aims, a rather sophisticated framework was designed for the manual: first it elaborates on the relationship between logic and history assessment, then interprets each of the question words with logic, and finally discusses the importance of logic and question words when designing level marking schemes. Generally speaking, History teachers find the manual useful in their teaching, but many candidates find it rather difficult to follow, though it was written bilingually in English and Chinese.

With the approach of the year 2012, the first cohort of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education candidates are busy preparing for the examination. This online version is published with an aim to facilitate their understanding of the question words, by removing chapters 1 and 3 and revising chapter 2 of the original manual with more illustrations.

This online version is based on the original manual. It aims at helping candidates to understand the messages discussed in the original manual. However, this online version is not meant to be a substitute for the original one; candidates should also not consider that the two manuals have covered all the question words to be used in the History examinations. While candidates will benefit from the two manuals to enhance their skills pertaining to the examinations, they should not take studying these publications as an equivalent for historical study. Candidates may refer to the original version for more details on logic and level marking.

This online version would have been impossible without the help of many people. I am indebted to Dr. Chiu Shiu-yim, Ms. Lam Mei-yee, Ms. Liu Pik-yee, Mr. Poon Wing-keung and Ms. Sin Sze-man, who took part in the editorial committee; Ms. Lam Wai-fong read the manuscript and made invaluable comments.

Last but not least, my special thank is extended to Ms. Rebecca Tai, my administrative assistant, who provides timely clerical support as usual.

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Editorial notes

- ✍ This online version is based on Chapter 2 of *A Manual of Question Words Used in History* (2007). Candidates who intend to learn more about the assessment philosophy of this subject may refer to it.
- ✍ The question words/phrases are arranged alphabetically.
- ✍ There are two parts for each question word/phrase, namely ‘definition’ (🔑) and ‘highlights’ (💡). Past exam questions will be used when necessary for illustration purposes.
- ✍ The following six question words/phrases – compare, most, relative importance, to what extent, trace and explain and turning point – are known to be illustrative of the subject’s assessment philosophy. For candidates’ benefits, fictional examples are derived to enhance interest in learning.
- ✍ In case a question word/phrase involves more difficult skills, there will be a separate ‘Advanced study’ corner for them.
- ✍ This online version contains ‘Tips for candidates’, which serves as a reminder to candidates about relevant skills and information.
- ✍ At the end of the manual is an appendix of the marking criteria of essay-type questions for the HKAL and HKDSE History examinations, for the easy reference of candidates.



Tips for candidates

Candidates should know that good memory of facts has to go along with a good grasp of various concepts and skills in making well-grounded assertions. They should pay attention to the following when answering a question:

Importance of standpoints

Many data-based questions and essay-type questions require candidates to give their standpoints. An answer that merely narrates historical facts without any standpoints may indicate failure to respond to the question; candidates should focus on their standpoints with explanation using relevant historical facts.

No pre-determined 'correct' standpoints

Some candidates think that there is a 'correct' way to answer a History question; for example, when answering a 'to what extent' question, a good answer must adopt the 'large extent' approach. This myth will seriously affect their performance. Candidates should decide their standpoints after carefully analysing a given question, rather than adopt pre-determined standpoints.

Logical consistency

History emphasises logical consistency in a given answer. Some candidates switch their stances in the course of writing an essay. When responding to a 'to what extent' question, some candidates write in the first half of the answer that 'A was a cause', but state abruptly when starting the second half that 'however, A was not a cause'. Candidates should try their best to avoid similar logical inconsistencies.

'Question' more important than 'key words'

Some candidates merely pay attention to one or two 'key words' in a question rather than consider the question as a whole. For example, when responding to Question 5 of the 2007 HKCE History Exam ('Discuss the features of Hong Kong's different stages of economic development in the 20th century.'), many candidates merely focused on two phrases, namely 'economic development' and 'different stages', and ignored a much more important word –

‘features’. As a result, their performance was poor. Candidates should not pay disproportionate attention to any ‘key word’ and ‘question word’. Rather, they should make sure that they can understand the question as a whole. An assessment task of History does not assess candidates’ ability in tackling one or two question words, but in tackling the whole question.

Attention to the time frame set in a question

A question usually sets a time frame to contextualise a discussion. Some candidates think mistakenly that they do not need to cover the whole time frame in a question, and it suffices just to cover part of it. For example, the report on Question 8 in Paper 2 of the 2011 HKAL History Exam (‘Assess the importance of the Cold War relative to other factors in leading to the recovery and growth of Japan’s economy in the period 1945-80.’) pointed out: ‘Many candidates did make attempts to assess the relative importance of the Cold War in contributing to Japan’s post-War economic development, but, as in previous years, their discussions ended in 1952, that is, the end of the Allied Occupation of Japan.’ In other words, in a question that was meant to cover a time span of 35 years, many candidates only discussed seven years out of it. This is obviously far from sufficient. Candidates should not attempt a question if they do not feel confident of the major portion of the question’s time frame, otherwise their performance will be affected.

Arguments to be supported by evidence

Candidates need to support each of their arguments with evidence. Valid evidence requires not merely narration of relevant historical facts, but also discussion of how the stated facts can prove a certain argument. On the contrary, if candidates find that they have been merely narrating facts without raising any arguments in an answer, they should make necessary rectifications before it is too late.

Avoidance of antichronism

History distinguishes itself from other subjects with the important role played by ‘time’ and ‘chronology’. Antichronism will affect performance. Candidates should pay attention to the chronology of facts.

Careful time management and avoidance of unbalanced answers

Some candidates do not plan the use of time carefully; they write elaborately at the beginning, but conclude their answers sloppily when they suddenly wake to find that time has run out. As History requires effective response to questions, unbalanced answers will seriously affect performance. Candidates need effective time management and avoid unbalanced answers.

analyse assess discuss evaluate examine

🔑 Provide historical information, explain and expound on the topic set by the question.



These are general question words, and they may demand completely different tasks, depending on how the question is phrased. Refer to pp.36-38 of *A Manual of Question Words Used in History*.

attitude / view

🔑 ‘View’ refers to the author’s opinion and assertions (sometimes coming with justifications); ‘attitude’ refers more to the author’s feelings and emotions.



Usually, the handling of ‘view’ and ‘attitude’ is differentiated in the following way: ‘view’ is specific and should be elaborated in several sentences; ‘attitude’ is relatively simple, and the use of suitable adjectives will suffice.



Candidates should note the difference between ‘view’ and ‘attitude’. In public examinations, it is common that candidates have them confused.



When a question asks for someone’s view, candidates should refrain from writing something like ‘this is a positive view / optimistic view’. For example, ‘this is a positive view’ is equivalent to saying that ‘this view is positive’. By answering this way, the candidates is actually commenting rather than describing a view.

▶ Example:

What was Xu Dishan’s view on the revolutionary movement in 1911?
Explain your answer with reference to evidence from Source C.
(Question 1c of Paper 2 of the 2003 HKAL History Exam)

Illustration:

According to the source provided, Xu, after making some analysis of the situation, opined that the revolutionary movement in 1911 was pre-mature. However, if a candidate mistakes ‘view’ for ‘attitude’, he will probably say that Xu was indifferent and even hostile to the movement, as the Source contains negative remarks like ‘such kind of revolutionary idea was no different from the slogans expressed by rebels in the past’.

The exam report of that year pointed out: ‘A few candidates confused “view” with “attitude” and provided inaccurate responses to the question, thus adversely affecting their performance.’




Advanced study

‘View’ and ‘attitude’ are related but different. Many candidates take them as question words that require similar answers; as a matter of fact, this is not necessarily true. Consider the following paragraph:

It has been ten years since Hong Kong reverted to China in 1997. A sound and modernised society should base itself on a modernised political system. As the *Basic Law* has stipulated universal suffrage as the ultimate aim of Hong Kong’s political development, Hong Kong should speed up its pace of democratisation. However, ‘ideal’ is one thing, and ‘reality’ is another. There are still a lot of obstacles along the way of democratisation, which makes one feel pessimistic.

To the question ‘identify the author’s view towards Hong Kong’s political future’, the answer may be ‘the author thinks that Hong Kong should speed up its pace of democratisation, but there are a lot of obstacles.’ If asked about the author’s attitude towards Hong Kong’s political future, the answer should be ‘pessimistic’. It is thus obvious that the seemingly positive view ‘Hong Kong should speed up its pace of democratisation’ does not necessarily warrant an equally ‘positive’ attitude. Candidates should carefully read between the lines and understand the difference between ‘view’ and ‘attitude’.

bias

 A partial view.



An ‘impartial’ view is one that is made after considering a full range of available justifications; partiality entails inferences that are based on limited information or knowledge.



Candidates should pay attention to the difference between ‘bias’ and ‘view’. ‘Radical’ or ‘extraordinary’ views are not necessarily ‘biased’ if they are sufficiently substantiated.



Criticisms are not necessarily biases. Some candidates are used to an oversimplistic way of reasoning; say, if the author of a book on the history of the First World War thought that Germany deserved the ‘war-guilt clause’, that author must be biased against Germany. As long as a scholar has made a thorough study that is rich in evidence and sound in argumentation, his or her conclusion – though not necessarily up to our palate – should not be readily dismissed as biased.



A Manual of Question Words Used in History lists four kinds of biases, namely ‘bias in favour of’, ‘bias against’, ‘bias due to difference of value’ and ‘bias due to the making of sweeping generalisation’. Candidates may refer to pp.52-53 of the booklet for details.

characteristic / nature

- 🔑 nature: The subject's core, without which the subject in question will lose its inherent quality.
- characteristic: The subject's attributes outside its core; relatively, they are peripheral.

▶ Let's consider Sun Yat-sen's revolution as an example:

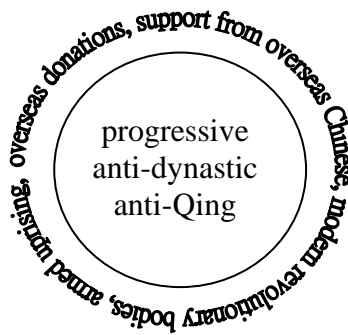


Illustration:

'Nature' is the core value of something. Relatively speaking, 'characteristic' (feature) is peripheral.

For example, the nature of Sun Yat-sen's revolution was 'progressive', 'anti-dynastic' and 'anti-Qing'; its characteristics included overseas donations, support from overseas Chinese, modern revolutionary bodies and armed uprisings. Why are 'nature' and 'characteristics' identified this way? Differentiating attributes of different natures is an important skill. 'Armed uprising' cannot be a nature, as it is too neutral to highlight Sun's revolution that was anti-dynastic and had fundamentally changed the nature of China's politics. We have different kinds of 'armed uprisings', some merely rebellious and bringing no results, and some like Sun's that successfully changed the course of a country's political development. Therefore, to triumphant revolutions like Sun's, 'armed uprising' could only be a characteristic, not a nature.



Advanced study

Identifying 'nature' is not an objective task. An event may come up with different 'natures' when considered from different perspectives or standpoints. The above-mentioned Sun Yat-sen's revolution was progressive to the revolutionaries; to the Qing power-holders, it was rebellious and traitorous, and never progressive.

compare

 Analyse the similarities and differences between certain things / people.



‘Comparison’ is an important assessment task in History, and comparison skills are tested in questions of different phrasings. For example, questions using the following question words/phrases ask for such skills:

- compare (and contrast)
- more / most
- relative importance
- to what extent
- turning point
- how effective
- how successful

In other words, History questions that demand higher-order thinking skills always ask for making comparisons. Candidates should be patient in acquiring comparison skills.



When making comparisons, candidates should not merely copy information from sources or by rote. Such information will be irrelevant if no comparisons are made and no arguments are presented.

The following are examples that illustrate some common approaches to handling the question word ‘compare’, arranged in ascending order of performance:

- (a) ‘The military budget of Peanutland was 2 billion dollars, and that of Giantland 1 billion dollars.’

This example merely produces separate descriptions without making any comparisons. In other words, it is not an appropriate response to a comparison task.

- (b) ‘The military budget of Peanutland was 2 billion dollars, and that of Giantland 1 billion dollars. Peanutland had a larger budget than Giantland, reflecting the former’s stronger economic strength.’

This example demonstrates a logical comparison after listing relevant information.

- (c) ‘There were similarities and differences between Peanutland and Giantland in their military developments. In the first half of the essay, I will discuss their differences. First, the military budget of Peanutland was 2 billion dollars, and that of Giantland 1 billion dollars. Peanutland had a larger budget than Giantland, reflecting the former’s stronger economic strength...[other points on differences]... Now I will discuss their similarities...’

This example, after listing the relevant information, manages to make logical comparisons in a well-formed writing structure.

Candidates should be held accountable for their own writings; they should make efforts to present arguments by making careful comparisons. Candidates should never think that good separate accounts of facts will automatically lead to good arguments. For example, the report on Question 11 in Paper 1 of the 2004 HKAL History Exam (‘Compare and contrast Stalin and Mussolini with respect to their domestic policies.’) pointed out: ‘... The weaker candidates tended merely to present separate, factual accounts of Mussolini’s and Stalin’s domestic policies and thus failed to make a comparison.’



Generally speaking, there are two basic ways to organise a comparison answer. Candidates may refer to pp.31-33 of *A Manual of Question Words Used in History*.

conclude

🔑 Derive something from facts or premises in a given source.



‘Conclude’ is similar to ‘infer’ in the sense that both question words demand an answer that cannot be readily found in the source.



However, ‘conclude’ is generally used when the source contains more relevant information; but this does not mean that candidates may complete their answers by merely making direct quotes from the sources.

▶ Example:

Conclude from the Source two features of the Restoration leaders’ economic policies.

(Question 1c of Paper 2 of the 2004 HKAL History Exam)

Illustration:

The Source provided sufficient information for concluding two features of the Restoration leaders’ economic policies, but indiscriminate quotes will result in irrelevant answers. For example, ‘They tried to revive the necessary public works system...’ in the text merely points out a historical fact; to change it into a ‘feature’, candidates should rephrase it to something like ‘attention to the improvement of infrastructure’.

As a matter of fact, the exam report of that year pointed out that some candidates ‘quoted indiscriminately from Source B.’ Candidates should avoid similar mistakes.

define

 Determine the essential nature or meaning of a given concept.



A definition, especially the topic sentence, should highlight important characteristics and nature of the object to be defined. The elaboration part should include basic facts pertaining to the object.


▶ Example:

- (a) What qualities should a great leader possess? Explain your answer. (10 marks)
- (b) Select any two leaders within your history course, and discuss whether they possessed the qualities you identified in (a). (20 marks)
(Question 9 of the 2011 HKCE History Exam)

Illustration:

Generally speaking, ‘definition’ questions will come with follow-up questions. When answering the follow-up question, candidates should be cautious to relate the answer in this part to that of the ‘definition’ part, otherwise they will risk losing their marks.

elaborate

 Provide relevant details to substantiate a given statement, following its logic and argument.



As this question word requires candidates to expand a given statement into an essay by providing the details, candidates should follow the logic and assertion in the question and should not refute the statement.



Some candidates may want to make a more comprehensive answer by examining the other side of the picture; hence they continue to say something like: ‘however, the statement is not totally correct because’ Such a twist in the answer will turn the question into a ‘to what extent’ one. Performance will unavoidably be affected.

► Example:

‘Mistrust between nations was an important factor that led to the First World War.’ Elaborate on this statement with reference to the Sources and using your own knowledge.

(Question 1f of Paper 1 of the 2011 HKAL History Exam)

Illustration:

Following the logic of the statement, candidates should discuss how and why ‘mistrust between nations’ was ‘an important factor that led to the First World War’. However, the exam report of that year pointed out: ‘most candidates still gave their own viewpoints, which meant that they had conducted unnecessary discussions. Some weak candidates overlooked the command word “elaborate” and opted to disagree with the quote. This resulted in lengthy and irrelevant discussion of “other causes” of the War.’

explain

- 🔑 (a) Give reasons for the issue(s) in question.
- (b) Clarify something.



History always has to deal with causal relationships, hence the high frequency of this question word. ‘Explain’ has two popular usages: (a) give reasons for something. For example, Question 14 in Paper 1 of 2006 HKAL History Exam read: ‘Explain the large increase in trade among Western nations after the Second World War.’



The second usage demands ‘clarification’. One often finds the phrase ‘explain your answer’ in both DBQs and essay-type questions. It does not mean ‘what makes you give such an answer’. Rather, it means ‘clarify’ or ‘discuss’.

fundamental

- ☞ Generally speaking, this adjective qualifies ‘changes’. ‘Fundamental changes’ refer to changes that completely shifted the course of historical developments. Therefore, candidates should not discuss trivial changes, but focus on those that were really important.

▶ Example:

‘The ways by which Western nations attempted to maintain peace underwent fundamental changes in the period 1871-1929.’ Do you agree? Explain your answer with reference to the Sources, and using your own knowledge.

(Question 1f of Paper 1 of the 2006 HKAL History Exam)

Illustration:

‘Do you agree’ implies that candidates should explore (1) whether there had been changes in the period, and (2) whether such changes, if any, were fundamental in nature. Therefore, the conclusion may be that the period had witnessed ‘fundamental changes’, ‘obvious but not fundamental changes’, ‘slight changes’, or even ‘no changes’ at all. Anyway, candidates should periodise the period 1871-1929 and compare the ways by which Western nations attempted to maintain peace in different sub-periods, so to conclude about changes and continuity of such ways. Indeed, the report of the 2006 exam pointed out that ‘some candidates merely described the various attempts for maintaining peace without making any comparisons.’

identify

🔑 Recognise something.



'Identify' is usually regarded as a question word reserved for questions that demand lower-order thinking skills. As a matter of fact, whether 'identify' is an 'easy' or 'difficult' task depends on the subject matter raised by the question. If the candidates are asked to deal with an unfamiliar topic, that will demand much more vigorous logical reasoning.


▶ Example:

Identify two forms of conflicts between Israel and the Arabs.
(Question 3a of the 2007 HKCE History Exam)

Illustration:

Some candidates chose 'war' and 'armed conflicts' as their answers; they failed to see that the two could only be regarded as *one* form of conflict, not two. Here, 'two forms' means 'two distinguishable forms'. 'War' is just a form of 'armed conflicts', not a form of conflict distinguishable from 'armed conflict'.

infer

 Derive something from facts or premises in a given source.



When candidates are asked to infer from a given source, it is usually the case that the answer cannot be readily found in the source. Candidates should apply logic to draw inferences from clues in the source.

When asked to explain their answers, candidates should carefully make use of such clues to explain their inferences. However, wrong use of logic may lead to problematic inference and in turn affect performance.



Candidates should not indiscriminately copy from sources.

► Example:

The following is adapted from a petition by the inhabitants of Saarbrücken in December 1918.

‘We are German as regards race, history, language and sentiment. We desire to remain united with our German brothers even in this time of trouble and misfortunate.

For more than 900 years Saarbrücken was an independent German principality. In 1807, at the time of the French Revolution, it was annexed to France, but was restored to Germany by the Second Peace of Paris in 1815, as a part of the Prussian Rhine province. The annexation of the region of Saarbrücken to France for the second time would be inconsistent with the principles of peace settlement laid down by President Wilson.’


Infer the purpose of the petition with reference to the arguments used in the Source. (Question 1f of Paper 1 of the 2004 HKAL History Exam)

Illustration:

Candidates should make use of clues such as ‘petition’, ‘desire to remain united with our German brothers’, ‘for more than 900 years Saarbrücken was an independent German principality’ and ‘the annexation of the region of Saarbrücken to France for the second time would be inconsistent with the principles of peace settlement laid down by President Wilson’ to infer the purpose of the petition.

Saarbrücken inhabitants petitioned to seek assistance outside Germany so that they could remain united with their German brothers. From the Source, ‘the annexation of the region of Saarbrücken to France for the second time would be inconsistent with the principles of peace settlement laid down by President Wilson’ reflected the inhabitants’ unwillingness to be annexed into France; ‘desire to remain united with our German brothers’ reflected their wish to stay with their German brothers, hence the petition.

justify

 Provide reasons to show the validity of something.




Both ‘justify’ and ‘explain’ require candidates to give reasons for the answer they make. However, ‘justify’ often appears after a question or statement. For example, Question 5 in Paper 1 of the 2005 HKAL History Exam read: ‘Was Russia’s participation in the First World War the most important reason for the downfall of Czardom? Justify your view.’



The key to tackling this question word is to thoroughly understand the ‘main question’ that goes before it, and to provide a well-grounded discussion.

language and arguments

 Evidence used to prove something.



Let's first explain these two words. 'Argument' is easier, as discussions will be rather impossible without making arguments. 'Language' here refers to the 'wordings' used by an author. 'Wordings' reflect an author's viewpoint: describing an event as 'uprising' or 'riot' definitely represents two distinct viewpoints.



Generally speaking, this question phrase is used only in DBQs, and requires candidates to use language and arguments in a certain source to prove something.



When both 'language' and 'arguments' are required by a question, candidates must tackle them separately. They should not confuse them, and should not think that the task is completed by merely tackling either of them.



Candidates should not merely cite information from a source when tackling the question word 'language'. They should qualify the information they have cited by examining the viewpoint behind.

most

 Determine and explain the degree of something.



When asked to ascertain whether a given factor was the ‘most’ important one, candidates must compare it with other relevant factors in order to determine its degree of importance. Similarly, when handling a question that asks whether a certain factor was ‘more important’ than other factors, comparisons are still necessary; otherwise it will be impossible to determine its degree of importance.



When answering a question using this question word in the DBQ section, a straightforward response rather than making comparisons may be more appropriate as the source information is limited and only a few marks are allotted to the question.



The following are examples that illustrate some common approaches to handling the question word ‘most’, arranged in ascending order of performance:

- (a) ‘The “Poisonous Peanut Incident” was the most important factor behind the First Giant-Peanut War.... [details on the Incident only in the essay]... To conclude, the “Poisonous Peanut Incident” was the most important factor that had caused the First Giant-Peanut War.’

Logically speaking, comparisons with other relevant matters are necessary in order to determine whether something is ‘most’ important. This example discusses merely one factor, and logically the best conclusion is that this factor was ‘very’ rather than ‘most’ important.

- (b) ‘The “Poisonous Peanut Incident” was an important factor that had caused the outbreak of the First Giant-Peanut War.... [discussion of the Incident]... Moreover, the “Yellow Peanut Incident” was another important factor.... [discussion of the “Yellow Peanut Incident”]... Furthermore, the “Black Sesame Incident” was also important.... [discussion of the “Black Sesame Incident”]... In a nutshell, although the “Yellow Peanut Incident” and “Black Sesame Incident” were important causes of the First Giant-Peanut War, the “Poisonous Peanut Incident” was the most important cause of the War.’

This example manages to list a number of causes and produce separate accounts of them, without relating and comparing them. Therefore, the conclusion is ungrounded.

- (c) ‘The “Poisonous Peanut Incident”, “Yellow Peanut Incident” and “Black Sesame Incident” were all causes of the First Giant-Peanut War.... [details on the three incidents]... Among the three, the “Poisonous Peanut Incident” should be the most important one. First, it was the first incident to take place among the three, and it had caused the remaining two to happen.... Second, the “Poisonous Peanut Incident” affected a much larger geographical area than the other two incidents did.... Third, the “Poisonous Peanut Incident” led to a coup that Peanutland’s parliament was taken over by the Peanut Armoured Force, which directly contributed to the rise of “Hard Peanutism” and the subsequent radical diplomacy.... Therefore, based on the above three observations, the “Poisonous Peanut Incident” was more important than the two other causes, and was the most important factor that contributed to the outbreak of the First Giant-Peanut War.’

This example succeeds in listing several factors and comparing them from several perspectives so to highlight the importance of a given factor; the conclusion is well-grounded.



Advanced study

When tackling a question that asks for assessing the importance of something, may candidates argue that something was ‘unimportant’? Theoretically this is possible, but candidates should understand that in a curriculum with only a limited scope of study, it is hard to imagine that the syllabus drafters would have included contents that are less important. Therefore, all the facts that candidates have to learn from a History curriculum must be important in this or that way. Candidates should not easily choose to argue something as ‘unimportant’ unless they are fully confident in doing so.

relative importance

- 🔑 Examine the inter-relationship of certain factors and weigh their importance by making comparisons.



There are typically two types of questions in which this question phrase may appear:

- Discuss the relative importance of Factor A in causing a certain event
 - Candidates have to decide on their own what other factors to bring in for comparison purposes.
- Discuss the relative importance of Factors A, B and C in causing a certain event
 - The question already spells out the factors for making comparisons. Candidates should not add in any other factors as this is against the intention of the question.



When handling questions that use this question phrase, candidates should not merely elaborate on the relevant historical facts; rather, they should derive some feasible strategies to assess the relative importance of the factors in question. Examples of such strategies are:

- Time span
 - Was the factor important throughout the entire period set by the question? Or was it important for only a small part of the period?
- Causal relationship
 - There may be causal relationships among the factors in question. If so, which was a cause and which an effect?
- Extent of impact
 - Among the factors in question, which had more profound impact? So profound that it had marked a turning point in history, or caused changes on a regional / global scale?



The following are examples that illustrate some common approaches to handling the question phrase ‘relative importance’, arranged in ascending order of performance:

- ‘The “Gossip Incident” was an important factor that led to the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.... [details on this incident only]... To conclude, the “Gossip

Incident’ was the most important factor that had caused the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.’

Logically speaking, comparisons with other relevant matters are necessary in order to determine the relative importance of factors. This example discusses merely one factor, and will in no way come to any meaningful conclusion about relative importance.


- (b) ‘Both the “Gossip Incident” and “Granite Incident” were important factors that led to the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.... [separate accounts on the two events]... To conclude, the “Gossip Incident” was more important than the “Granite Incident” in causing the War.’

This example manages to handle two factors; however, only separate accounts are produced without relating them together and making any comparisons. Therefore, the conclusion regarding relative importance is still ungrounded.

- (c) ‘Both the “Gossip Incident” and “Granite Incident” were important factors that led to the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.... [details on the two events]... Comparatively, the “Gossip Incident” was more important than the “Granite Incident”. First, war broke out ten days after the “Gossip Incident” whereas the “Granite Incident” happened five years before the War. It was obvious that the former had a more direct bearing on the outbreak of the War.... Second, the “Gossip Incident”, once after it took place, aroused immediate attention from the government and the public of the two powers, whereas the “Granite Incident”, though leading to tense relations between the two powers for a while, did not have long-lasting impact.... Therefore, the “Gossip Incident” was more important than the “Granite Incident” in causing the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.’

This example can compare the importance of the two factors, and the conclusion is valid and convincing.

role

 The function of an individual or event to a bigger issue.



Answers such as ‘their role is great / small’ or ‘they played a positive / negative role’ are not enough for a question that requires the examination of ‘role(s)’. These answers merely assess the importance of role(s), but do not describe the roles themselves.



Candidates should not merely narrate facts; they should attempt to infer roles based on such facts.


▶ Example:

What, in Cartwright’s view, was the Kaiser’s role in the making of Germany’s policy towards Britain?
(Question 1a of Paper 1 of the 2011 HKAL History Exam)

Illustration:

When attempting this question, candidates should not copy indiscriminately from the Source, such as making the quote that ‘His Majesty’s personality is more and more dominating every branch of public life.’ Candidates should read the Source carefully, try to understand the relationship between the Kaiser and Germany’s policy towards Britain, and identify the Kaiser as a ‘dominator’ in the decision-making process.

support your answer

 Produce reasons to establish an answer.




'Support your answer' and 'explain your answer' differ in that the former demands reasons / clues and no explanation while the latter demands both.



Candidates who proceed to give explanations will have no marks awarded or deducted. Penalty will nevertheless be imposed if such explanations contain factual and/or logical errors.

to what extent

 Discuss the relevancy of elements of a certain issue.



Some candidates think that they must hold the standpoint of ‘to a large extent’ when answering questions using this question phrase in order to have a good grade. As a matter of fact, there are no model answers to essay-type questions of History. What ‘extent’ to adopt in an answer depends on what question asks and what view a candidate holds.



Candidates may think that an extended discussion of a certain cause / factor / fact will automatically produce a ‘to a large extent’ answer. Actually, the other way is also possible: an extended discussion of a certain cause / factor / fact is necessary in order to construct a ‘to a small extent’ answer, that is, to prove that that cause / factor / fact had not played a significant role.



To determine an ‘extent’, it does not suffice to merely list some facts about a certain cause / factor; comparisons with other relevant causes / factors are a prerequisite to constructing a meaningful answer.



The following are examples that illustrate some common approaches to handling the question phrase ‘relative importance’, arranged in ascending order of performance:

- (a) ‘The “Gossip Incident” was an important factor that led to the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.... [details on this incident]... Therefore, to a large extent the “Gossip Incident” had caused the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.’

Logically speaking, comparisons with other relevant matters are necessary in order to determine the extent of significance of a certain factor. This example merely discusses one factor, and will in no way come to any meaningful conclusion about the extent of anything.

- (b) ‘The “Gossip Incident” led to the outbreak of the War.... [details on the effect of the incident]... On the other hand, other factors had also caused the War.... [details on the effect of other factors]... Therefore, to a large extent the “Gossip Incident” had caused the Second Giant-Peanut War.’

This example manages to handle several factors; however, only separate accounts are produced without relating them together and making any comparisons. Therefore, the conclusion regarding 'extent' is still ungrounded.

- (c) 'Both the "Gossip Incident" and "Granite Incident" were important factors that led to the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.... [details on the two events]... Comparatively, the "Gossip Incident" was more important than the "Granite Incident". First, war took place ten days after the "Gossip Incident" while the "Granite Incident" happened five years before the War. It was obvious that the former had a more direct bearing on the outbreak of the War.... Second, the "Gossip Incident", once after it took place, caused immediate attention from the government and the public of the two powers, while the "Granite Incident", though leading to tense relations between the two powers for a while, did not have long-lasting impact.... Therefore, to a large extent the "Gossip Incident" had caused the outbreak of the Second Giant-Peanut War.'

This example can compare the importance of the two factors, and the conclusion is valid and convincing.

trace and explain

🔑 Trace and explain historical development over an extended period of time.



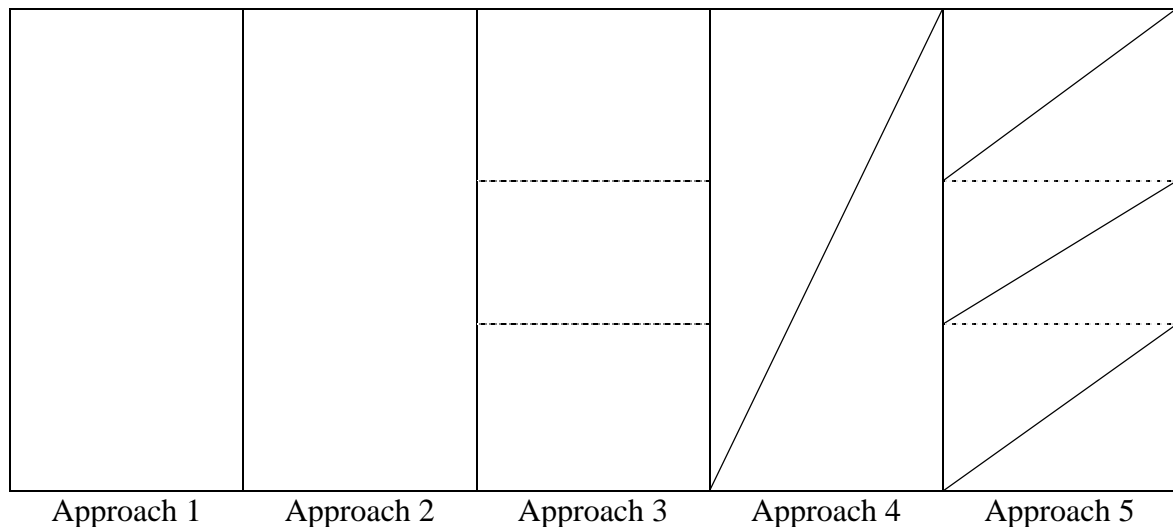
‘Trace and explain’ is a two-in-one assessment task. Candidates should exercise particular caution in differentiating the two tasks, that is, ‘trace’ and ‘explain’. Ignoring either will adversely affect performance.



Candidates should pay attention to the necessity of periodisation. Periodisation – dividing the time-period in question into stages – provides an effective tool for tracing events. Without periodisation, the tracing will be reduced to a merely chronology of facts without a clear picture of change and continuity over time.



The following are examples that illustrate some common approaches to handling the question phrase ‘trace and explain’:



Approach 1:

Merely presents a chronological account of facts, without any attempts to trace or explain.

Approach 2:

Merely explains events that took place in the period in question, without any attempts of periodisation.

Approach 3:

Traces historical developments by means of periodisation, but without any attempts of explanation.

Approach 4:

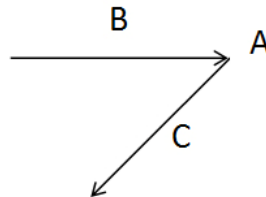
Attempts to trace and explain, but without any attempts of periodisation, hence failure to highlight changes and continuity in the historical developments.

Approach 5:

Succeeds in tracing – by periodisation – and explaining the developments.

turning point

🔑 Fundamental changes took place in history after a given point of time.



A turning point needs three parts to make good sense, as shown in the above diagram:

- a point that turns the course of history (can be a year, an event, an ideology, etc) – ‘A’ as shown in the diagram;
- a period of time preceding this point - ‘B’ as shown in the diagram; and
- a period of time after this point – ‘C’ as shown in the diagram.



To prove a certain year/event constitutes a turning point, a candidate has to provide the following evidence to show that:

- there were changes;
- such changes were *fundamental* in nature and ushered in a new era; and
- such changes took place after the point of time set by the question.



The following examples illustrate some common approaches to handling the question phrase ‘turning point’, arranged in ascending order of performance:

- (a) ‘The *Declaration of Peanut Oil* in 2056 was a turning point in the history of Peanutland.... [details on the *Declaration of Peanut Oil*]... The *Declaration* led to the outbreak of the Peanut Butter Revolution in 2060.... [details on the Revolution]... Moreover, it also caused the Flower Butterfly Assassination of 2061.... [details on the Assassination]... Therefore, the *Declaration of Peanut Oil* in 2056 was a turning point in the history of Peanutland.’

This example merely discusses the impact of the event by describing the various incidents caused by it, but does not compare historical developments before and after the event.

- (b) ‘The *Declaration of Peanut Oil* in 2056 was a turning point in the history of Peanutland. First, people did not enjoy democracy before 2056, and they began to enjoy it after 2056....’

This example attempts to compare developments before and after the event, but fails to identify the ways that turning point had functioned.

- (c) ‘The year 2056 was a turning point to Peanutland. First, people did not enjoy democracy before 2056, and they began to enjoy it after 2056.... The key to this fundamental change was the promulgation of the *Declaration of Peanut Oil* in 2056 by the parliament of Peanutland, stipulating that citizens who made an annual income of 100 kilograms of peanut oil would have the right to vote. This marked the beginning of democracy in Peanutland....’

This example succeeds in comparing developments before and after the turning point, identifying what fundamental changes had taken place, and elaborating on how the turning point had caused such changes.

usefulness and limitations

 The degree of relevancy of given source(s) in a data-based question.



Every single piece of data, no matter how comprehensive and encyclopedic it is meant to be, has its limitations.



The less details, the more limitations a source will have.



Many candidates too often regurgitated what was not mentioned in a given source, taking this as the source's limitation. This is dangerous, because it is easy to go off the track. Consider the following fictional question: 'How useful is the source in helping you to better understand China's revolutionary development?' If a candidate bluntly says that 'the source does not mention anything about the reformers', the answer will become irrelevant. A better way to relate this point to the theme of the question (that is, revolutionary development) is to say, for instance: 'the source does not reveal the relative strength of the revolutionaries and the reformers'.



Candidates should pay attention to the nature of the source in question when discussing its limitations. For instance, if the source is a poster, it is safe to infer that it is meant to serve propaganda purposes; therefore it will highlight features it deems necessary, and ignore disadvantageous details.

with reference to source / own knowledge

🔑 Giving instructions about where to cite evidence when answering data-based questions.



‘With reference to the source’ asks for information from the specified source(s) only, whereas ‘using your own knowledge’ asks for information from outside the source(s). Candidates must strictly follow these basic rules in attempting data-based questions. Those who fail to observe these rules may lose all the marks for a sub-question even if they write logically and demonstrate excellent historical knowledge.



‘Using your own knowledge’ asks for information from outside the source(s). However, in case there are several sources in a data-based question, may a candidate treat other sources not mentioned by a sub-question as ‘own knowledge’? The answer is negative: ‘own knowledge’ refers to information from outside all the sources in a data-based question.

Marking Criteria for Essay-type Questions

(Note: In the assessment process, markers should first determine an appropriate grade for an answer based on 3 factors, viz. understanding of the question, content, and presentation, and then convert that grade into a corresponding mark according to the following table.)

Criteria	Max band to be awarded	Range of Marks (Max. 30)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing a firm grasp of the gist of the question. – Balanced contents, with effective use of accurate and relevant material. – Clearly expressed, persuasive, and coherent, showing critical and analytical judgement. 	A	27–30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing a clear grasp of the gist of the question. – Relevant and reasonably balanced contents, generally free from inaccuracies and/or important omissions. – Clearly expressed and logically presented, showing some success in analysing relevant issues and/or in presenting a substantiated argument. 	B	24–26
	C	21–23
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing a general understanding of the question and a conscious effort to respond directly to the question. – Basically relevant and accurate contents, but lacking in balance. – Showing some attempt to argue and/or to analyse, but being marred by inconsistencies and an unduly narrative or descriptive approach. 	D	18–20
	E	15–17
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing inadequate understanding of the question and/or a weak knowledge of the subject matter. – Containing fundamental errors and/or gross irrelevancies. – Showing poor ability to communicate, and containing gross inconsistencies. 	E/F	13–14
	F	7–12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing a total misunderstanding of the question. – Totally inadequate and/or totally irrelevant, containing little that is worthwhile or factually correct. – Very poorly organised and difficult to understand. 	U	0–6

Appendix (B) **Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary of Education Examination History**

Marking Criteria for Essay-type Questions

(Note: In the assessment process, markers should first determine an appropriate grade for an answer based on 3 factors, viz. understanding of the question, contents, and presentation, and then convert that grade into a corresponding mark according to the following table.)

Criteria	Max band to be awarded	Range of Marks (Max. 15)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing a clear grasp of the significance of the question. – Balanced contents, with appropriate and effective use of relevant material. – Well organised, clearly presented and fluent. 	A	14-15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing an awareness of the significance of the question. – Fairly balanced contents, with reasonably accurate use of relevant material. – Reasonably well organised, understandable and fairly fluent. 	B	12-13
	C	10-11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing a general understanding of the question. – Generally narrative in presentation, and containing some irrelevant or wrong material. – Not well organised, but fairly understandable. 	D	8-9
	E	6-7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing inadequate understanding of the question, with little distinction made between relevant and irrelevant material. – Containing few relevant and important facts. – Poorly organised and barely understandable, with conspicuous mistakes in writing/spelling personal and place names. 	E/F	5
	F	3-4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Showing little understanding of the question, with no distinction made between relevant and irrelevant material. – Containing very few relevant facts. – Very poorly organised and difficult to understand, with annoying mistakes in writing/spelling important personal and place names. 	U	0-2