

History Extension Exam Essay Writing: a strategy for Question 1

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Marker feedback in the *History Extension 2014 Higher School Certificate Exam Workbook*, published by BOSTES, suggests that students could improve their responses in Question 1 of the History Extension HSC exam by:

- constructing a response that relates to the source and the question,
- not going into the exam with a prepared response that reflects a ‘narrative or biographical approach’,
- using a variety of sources, including traditional, contemporary and popular.

This advice should be used along with the History Extension marking guidelines for Question 1, published on the BOSTES website: www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/2015/

The following practice question and brainstorming activity is designed to alert students to the need to consider all three elements that must shape their response: the question, the source and the preparation they bring to the exam. While a thorough preparation is essential, it must not result in a ‘prepared answer’ that ignores the question and the source.

The brainstorming activity uses the terms SOURCE POINTS (to refer to discussion points derived from the source in the exam paper) and TAKE IN POINTS (to refer to discussion points that a student has developed from other sources during their class work). It is important that the TAKE IN POINTS be significant, wide-ranging and able to be used flexibly. It is also important that the TAKE IN POINTS be drawn from a range of traditional and contemporary sources and not focus exclusively on a few historians. Above all, the goal must be to address the question with a response that integrates relevant use of both SOURCE POINTS and TAKE IN POINTS.



Brainstorming Session

This is an outline for 1-2 full lessons. In an actual exam this brainstorming would happen in 5-10 minutes.

1. Students are asked to consider the Source. Ideally, they should be able to sum up what it is about as a whole. But this may not be possible for all students. Asking students to isolate what they don't understand is designed to show them that they should still be able to use the source even if they don't understand everything in it.
2. The students are asked to highlight SOURCE POINTS they feel they *might* be able to use in a response to the question. They should annotate the source to show how the points *might* be developed. It may be helpful to introduce the idea of SOURCE POINTS that can be ‘bounced off’ to link with TAKE IN POINTS. This will help to introduce an integrated response. (What points are actually used will be decided at the planning stage.)
3. Students are asked to closely examine the question. This essential exam technique is easily overlooked! Students should be able to identify what the question requires them to do. But Extension questions allow scope for originality and students should also think about what opportunity the wording offers for a range of different approaches.
4. Students are asked to list the TAKE IN POINTS that are relevant to the question.
5. Students are asked to integrate SOURCE POINTS and TAKE IN POINTS that may be used to respond to the question. (Not all points relevant to the question need to directly link with each other but identifying those that do will help the development of an essay plan.)
6. Students are asked to construct a plan for an an essay that uses a combination of major points to respond to the question. The individual student's interpretation of the question and personal ideas about history will determine which points are developed and how they are integrated to produce a coherent discussion.

This teaching idea is supported by the video ‘History Extension Question 1’ on the new HTANSW YouTube Channel. Access from www.htansw.asn.au



**Extract from Mark McKenna's 'The history anxiety',
The Cambridge History of Australia, Vol. 2, 2013**

By the 1980s a significant chasm had opened between academic history and popular history. The influence of French post-structuralism in the humanities only served to entrench this gap and further undermine traditional narratives of national progress. From this perspective, the nation was merely a construction, a web of myth hung on the artifice of narrative. The forms of historical writing that had previously framed national history, such as political, institutional and economic history, declined sharply. Thus at the same time as historians were asked to speak to the nation, they began to desert the nation. Verity Burgman and Jenny Lee's introduction to *A People's History of Australia*, for example, published in 1988, left readers in no doubt about their intentions: 'This history is critical not celebratory. It rejects myths of national progress and unity ...'

In the last decades of the twentieth century, anxiety concerning the potential loss and dishonouring of British heritage, and the equal determination of historians to expose the callous treatment of Indigenous Australians in the past, resulted in history occupying an unusually prominent position in Australia's public culture. Both the Liberal and Labor parties sought to define partisan ideology through competing historical narratives: the former prosaic, utilitarian, self-satisfied, congratulatory and overly sensitive to criticism of Australia's British heritage; the latter mildly republican, acutely self-conscious and self-serving in the construction of its own historical mythology, and willing to acknowledge historical injustice...

From the early 1990s, encouraged by a burgeoning tourist industry, thousands of 'pilgrims', many of them around the same age as the soldiers whose deaths they sought to understand, began to attend Anzac Day ceremonies at Anzac Cove in Turkey. Prime ministers also journeyed to Gallipoli, delivering misty-eyed speeches at the Dawn Service as part of fully choreographed spectacles that resembled concert entertainment ... As the nation approached the centenary of the Anzac landings in 2015, it appeared that the remaking of the Anzac myth had managed to provide many of the things that history on Australian soil could not: a history that was immutable, sacred and free of rancour and political division, a history that could justify the existence of the nation and remain uncontested.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the future of history in Australia is at once less certain and more hopeful than it was at the time of Federation in 1901. New technologies have altered our perception of time. An ever-quickenning present obliterates an ever-receding past. Yesterday appears as distant as 1788. Even more history will be produced in the course of the next century than ever before, the majority not by

professional historians but by history makers in the popular culture – in museums, government institutions and private corporations; in the tourist industry; in film, radio and television; in an ailing print media, and ‘online’, the place most likely to subsume all others.

Such history already shapes popular memory far more powerfully than the history emanating from the academy, although it often draws on academic expertise. In popular memory, the *distance* from the past prized by professional historians takes second place to being present in the past, to the language of immediacy, spectacle and recreation. The boundaries that once separated history from fiction and myth appear more blurred. Increasingly, the popular embrace of history is an emotional embrace, one that runs counter to the more critical understanding brought to the past by historians...*

Question (25 marks)

Evaluate the view that widespread anxiety about the role of history had developed by the start of the twenty first century.

Support your argument with reference to the source and your own reading.

Brainstorming Session

1. The source:
What, in a nutshell, is the extract about?
Highlight what you don't understand.
2. Annotate the source with ideas for *possible* development.
Highlight SOURCE POINTS that you do understand, can use to respond to the question and/or and can ‘bounce off’ to integrate your own TAKE IN POINTS.
3. Take the question apart. What does it require you to do?
What does it allow you to do?
4. List TAKE IN POINTS that are relevant to the question.
5. Integrate SOURCE POINTS and TAKE IN POINTS.
6. Use this combination of points to plan an answer that responds to the question.

* Mark McKenna, ‘The history anxiety’, in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *Cambridge History of Australia. Volume 2: The Commonwealth of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 575-576 & 579-580. Reproduced with permission.
