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History

How to get an A in the Junior Cert History Exam



By Eve L.

Eve L. got an A in her higher Junior Cert History paper. Here she shares what she learned.



For most students, History can be a hit or miss – it seems you either love it more than anything and have resolved to do it at Senior Cycle since first year, or you really dislike the rote-learning and memorization tactics involved and can't wait to be clear of it come June. Either way, you'll want to do well in it – and you can! The great thing about higher level History is that there is variation and diversity in the course, and you can opt out of studying some sections if you so wish. In this guide, I'll try to show you that getting an A grade in History isn't as hard as you think.

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Layout

The higher level exam is 2 hours and 30 minutes long and you must do 6 questions (there is a choice in question 6). Question 1, 2, and 3 are short answer sections and 4 through 6 require more lengthy answers. The exam is worth 180 marks altogether.

Final Examination (100%)

History comes somewhere in the middle of all your exams as it is compulsory in most Irish schools. Like I said above, the exam has long and short sections throughout the paper, each of which must be timed suitably to your needs and to the amount of marks it is worth on the paper. Time will separate the men from the boys in this exam, so pay close attention to the timing tips scattered throughout the guide! There are **six sections** to the higher level History paper:

1. *Pictures Questions - 15 marks (8%)*
2. *Documents Questions - 15 marks (8%)*
3. *Short Questions - 20 marks (11%)*
4. *People in History Questions – 40 marks (22%)*
5. *Source Questions – 30 marks (17%)*
6. *Long Questions – 60 marks (33%)*

1. Pictures Questions - 15 marks (8%)

For the **Pictures Questions**, you will be given a separate booklet containing the photographs or illustrations you must answer on. This will probably be given out before the exam paper so I would advise looking at the pictures (which will be on the front - don't go leafing through the booklet before you're permitted to do so) until you get your paper. Then, once you get your script, read through the questions and figure out what you have to look for in the pictures. Answer in as much detail as you can, and only write down what you can physically see in the photographs, as other information will be null and void. The last question, however, may be a question unrelated to the



photo but relevant to the topic at hand. For example, in my mock, they asked what groups in society were sent to safe houses in the country during the Blitz, even though the photograph was that of a train station. It is important therefore to have a brief understanding of every section on the history course – but *brief* is the important word there. This section is only worth 15 marks, so it won't cost you a grade if you don't know everything. Nonetheless, I would spend at least 1 of the periods in which you study history over the course of third year to look at Question 1s alone – just to get used to what they're looking for. You can have the marking scheme open too as this gives a really good idea as to what examiners are looking for when it comes to volume of detail.

2. Documents Questions - 15 marks (8%)

Similar to the pictures section; as much detail as you can in as little time as you can. I read through each of the documents once before I read the questions, then I read them again when I had to find the answers to the questions. In total, I'd say I spent a measly **15 minutes** (at the most) **on sections 1 & 2** – for the simple reason that they are very easy, short-winded sections that aren't worth much in the overall scheme of things. You can, of course, spend up to **24 minutes** on these sections combined, as mathematically, 16% of 150 minutes is that exactly; but History is not a mathematical subject! In my mocks, I found that many people ran out of time from following this formula too exactly; you're better off pooling this time into question 5 or 6 or pruning your answers at the end. It really only takes a few minutes to do these sections – they're just a warm up for what's yet to come!

3. Short Questions - 20 marks (11%)

This section is universally regarded by teachers as 'the wolf in sheep's clothing.' It's an easy 20 marks, yes, but remember, that you'll only be marked for **10** of your short question answers. Time ends up catching those who spend more than **15 minutes** on this section. You can have this section done in 3 minutes flat if you play your cards right. My best mate messed up in her mocks by



deciding to do every-single-one of the short questions during the exam, spending 20 minutes at least on section 3. She then ended up not getting a People in History essay done, which was worth the same as 10 of the short questions she'd completed! My history teacher then told us to only do about 13 of the short questions – the ones we knew for sure – and to come back later to fill in a few more if we weren't confident. Although, if you practise enough past papers, you'll really only need to do the 13. The short questions are quite repetitive, and they are interchanged from year to year. I recognised a few from years before and was therefore able to breeze through them no bother whatsoever.

I actually finished my papers in March, then went on to Studyclix and the Examinations Archives and printed off all of the Section 3 pages from all the way back as far as 2001, stapled them together, and re-did them over time! This really helped as I was eventually able to answer the first ten, on any exam paper, without a moment's hesitation! I would also recommend looking at the marking schemes to see a) what answers have been used in the past and b) to get an idea of length. The same questions could appear again so this is actually a good strategy. Use the amount of lines given on the exam as an indication for answer length – that is, unless you have massive or microscopic handwriting!

4. People in History Questions – 40 marks (22%)

Everyone and their mother have heard about **People in History** essays – my mum knew a couple off by heart from quizzing me throughout the years! And don't doubt that the discussion forums here on Studyclix won't be *brimming* with predictions for the coming year's exam. They are everyone's waking nightmare in third year, but you can easily get 40/40 if you are sensible. First off, quick disclaimer:

I do not in any way believe in making 'predictions' for what will come up in exams. 'Patterns' are mere coincidences, and by following them you are putting yourself at a huge risk. If you do not cover yourself for all eventualities, then you could be left very disheartened if what you hoped would come up fails to appear. There are of course, ways of limiting the amount of



essays you have to learn, but not to the extent where you only learn one or two. Don't use the mocks as an indication of possible questions either – the mock-paper making companies, Examcraft and DEB, are not at all related to the State Examinations Commission, and therefore there is no point basing opinions off of those either. Making predictions is taking a huge risk – do not be the fool left stuck on the day of the exam.

▶ There are, as I have said, ways of lessening your work load by a small amount, if you're clever about it. For example, there were lots of tables of past exam questions trending online in May before the exams, which you could probably still find online if you looked. They had a grid-like structure, with the years 2001-2016 on one axis and the name of the essay title on the other, where a tick was placed whenever that essay came up, e.g. in 2015 an archaeologist came up in Section A of Question 4 on the higher level paper. I downloaded and printed these off and stuck them inside my history copy so I could eliminate the essays that were highly unlikely to come up in the year of my exam, 2017. Obviously, it is *unlikely* that the SEC will re-use a title from last year's exam in this year's exam, nor is it likely that they will ask you to write about

something they haven't asked before, and figures from Irish history or social change don't come up often due to them appearing in Section 6, and it's *less common* (but still possible!) to find topics from second year here as they can be reserved for section 5 alone – but other than that, it's up to you on what you decide to get rid of when it comes to studying. Obviously, I would recommend you learn **at least 10** for section A and 10 or 11 for section B; no less. If you do make predictions, though, do so carefully, and **don't base it off patterns**; base it off what hasn't come up in a while but tends to come up a lot.

▶ When it came to studying, I spent a lot of time on PIHs. I wrote every essay since first year into my refill pad and then put them into a sleeve folder that filled up over time. By Christmas of first year, I had 3, and by Christmas of third year, I had



about 43! My mum, my sister or my mates at school would quiz me on them before tests, and my teacher often tested us on the PIH from the chapter we had finished in class that week, so I was constantly refreshing my brain on the information and this made it very easy to revise them after Christmas of third year before my mocks. I'm a really visual learner – I can only remember something if I can remember what colour it was in my notes. This may sound stupid, but I used to highlight the keywords with various colours and highlighters so that it would literally only take my study partner to prompt me with one word from each point to get me back on track if I lost my place! For the audio learners out there, I think recording yourself telling the PIH as a story might help; and if you don't fit either of those categories, there's nothing wrong with the old-fashioned writing, re-writing technique. Teaching others is great, too: if you can tell a friend about a child in Rome, then you'll be able to tell an examiner!

- ▶ You'll need 8 Significant Relevant Statements (SRS) to get 16/16 for content

here. SRS include facts, explanations of a term or concept, interpretations, comments, opinions, judgments, causes / effects; illustrations, and the introduction to your PIH essay. SRS generally have to be developed, detailed sentences, containing a piece of historically accurate information relevant to the title. For example: *In Rome, we senatorial families often have large feasts at dinner-time. Last Tuesday evening, we all sat on the floor around the table in the triclinium and had lamb stuffed with sausages accompanied by glasses of the best wine. I ate so much that afterwards, I had to visit the vomitorium to make myself sick so that I could eat dessert! (2)*

- ▶ The point above contained the historically accurate fact that rich Roman families often ate feasts. Then, I developed it by going into further detail, and by mentioning the vomitorium. This means I get the 2 marks. If you make 8 of these points and make your essay as long and as interesting (but don't waffle – historically interesting!) as possible, you will get up to 4 marks for overall appeal. Then, you'll have full marks! Easy!



- ▶ Note: You only have to do **one essay** from a choice of three in both section A

and B of this Question, do not pick 2 from A or B, or go trying to write out all 3! Pick your favourite one and do it well!

5. Source Questions – 30 marks (17%)

The **Source Question** is quite easy if you know the topic at hand. They're primarily short questions with a choice of accounts to write at the end. The topics are all from second year in this section, and if you didn't do the course in order that means:

- Age of Exploration
- Agricultural & Industrial Revolution (inc. The Great Famine)
- Plantations
- Political Revolutions
- Reformation & Counter Reformation

They will literally only ask you on these topics, trust me. They've stated that in the syllabus. It's true.

- ▶ Here, you get snippets of newspaper articles or something similar from the time being studied, or an account relating to it (not unlike Q2.) which you must answer on. It's generally divided into Section A, B, and C. I would again, skim through the sources before reading the questions just to get a general gist of the pieces, and to underline any key points would be no harm. Just come back to double

check you're right when answering the questions.

- ▶ In A and B, the first few questions relate to the text given, and the last one could be asking for a definition of a term or a trivial piece of information like *What is the name of the man who brought Presbyterianism to Scotland?* If you were to quickly skim these chapters the night before the exam, you would be fine - they're all worth about 2 marks or so, 4 at the most. It's



Section C you have to be really prepared for...

- ▶ Section C is where you'll be asked for accounts relating to the topic. They'll be worth between 8 -12 marks, so you'll have to write between 3-5 SRS, respectively. There are 2 marks going for overall appeal. This section is almost always on the causes or effects of the above shifts in history. (You'll notice that the common theme

between these topics are that they are "Studies of Change") Write what they ask you to write in this section, don't write anything unrelated. You simply don't have the time and it's not worth it for the marks. If they ask you about the achievements of the Ulster plantation, don't write about the Munster Plantation! Keep it to 5 strong SRS at the very most and you should be fine!

6. Long Questions – 60 marks (33%)

The **Long Questions** can go one of three ways: you don't get them done completely, you do them poorly because you didn't time-manage, or they go really well because you did! Funnily enough, failings to achieve the A grade in History more often come from improper time management rather than poor knowledge of the course. Question 6 is worth $\frac{1}{3}$ of the entire paper but is actually much easier than Question 4 in terms of knowing what's coming up and it's not all essay based.

- ▶ First off, with Question 6 – you have a massive choice. There are **4 topics** from which to choose **2 to answer on**. Not only is this a great advantage, but, on top of that, sections B-D are constant; meaning they are the same every year! While **A can be any topic from the first or second year course**, **B is almost always social change**, **C is Irish History**, and **D is Politics in Europe in the 20th century**! You could pretty much go into that exam having only *revised* two of those constant topics, and skimmed through the rest, and still come out with an A grade!



- ▶ The best thing about this section is that it lists the amount of marks going for each question! This gives you an indication as to how much to write in terms of SRS. For example, in 2017, section A was on The Renaissance:

- (i) *Why were patrons so important during the Renaissance?* (2)
- (ii) *Give two reasons why there were so few female scientists or artists.* (2 x 2)
- (iii) *Explain two of the following terms related to art in the Renaissance:* (2 x 2)
- Perspective Fresco Sfumato*
- (iv) *Write an account of the main developments in two of the following areas during the Renaissance:* (10 x 2)
- (a) Science and medicine.*
- (b) Literature.*
- (c) Sculpture.*

This was really handy for me, personally, as sometimes I tend to write *too* much for short questions! In case you don't know, one SRS for every 2 marks, with the exception of (iv) where only 4 are necessary because you get 2 marks for overall.

So, in terms of preparation:

A. Study the first and second year topics briefly. You'll have to study the second year portion of the course for the Source Question anyway – but if you can, try to leave section A as a last resort on Question 6. It's literally the only one you can't practice for. The topic that's coming up that year may not even have appeared on past papers! And you really do need past exam questions to study for the long

questions. A lot of my mates didn't bother with political developments and Irish history because they were up to their neck in third year, but as a result they were left with umpteen chapters, each of which they had to study in excruciating detail, from which only 1 would come up. Although, if it is your strong suit, then go for it – just be mindful of the large amount of topics you'll have to cover.



B. This is usually a social change question. It has been back as far as 2000 anyway. Social change is the one all teachers will tell you to steer clear of. 'It's too hard! No one gets marks!' Well, in my mocks I got 60/60 in social change and only 52/60 in Irish history, the alleged 'straightforward' section! None of the sections are marked easier or harder than the other – you're probably just answering them wrong. Social change has a very specific formula to it, but it's

not by any means a secret formula – the SEC are kind enough to put the word 'changes' into every question and in the title, meaning that's what they're looking for! In the case of Social Change, the only thing that counts as SRS are changes. You must state the before and after in order to get the marks. Below is an example of a right and wrong answer to a social change question:

(iv) Write about changes in two of the following areas since 1945:

(a) Communications.

- ✘ In the first half of the 20th century, people communicated almost exclusively by means of letters. Handwritten and posted through the local postbox, this was how the common Irish person communicated with those living in different towns, countries, or with loved ones at war. There were also occasional telegrams for very important messages.

- ✔ In the first half of the 20th century, people communicated almost exclusively by means of letters. There were also occasional telegrams for very important messages. However, after the arrival of the telephone in the 1950s, letters decreased in popularity. Nowadays, people communicate almost exclusively my smartphone, through the social media, and landlines seem to be a thing of the past.



The second point would not only get you the 2 marks, but additionally, if you wrote like that for the next few SRS, you would get the full marks for the overall appeal, too. You just have to state the before and after within the point to make it a SRS.

C. Irish History is what features most often here. This stretches as far back as the Home Rule Crisis all the way up to the present day in Ireland and includes the Troubles and the Rising. The questions here are really straightforward, and because there is so little that you can actually be asked about, there is lots of repetition. Just make sure you have prepared accounts on various landmarks such as the Rising, the Lockout, the Home Rule Crisis, Fianna Fail's rise, etc. I would highly recommend this section to anyone as it is usually done in third year and so is very fresh in your memory for exams and isn't that difficult of a section compared to the rest of third year.

D. This section is quite broad but is by far the most interesting – politics in Europe in the 20th century! Hitler, the

Berlin Wall, and the Cold War – it's all the really recent political activity that has shaped Europe to this day! You also usually cover this in third year – in fact, it takes up most of third year! There is quite a lot in this portion of the course. It's diverse, but long. The questions don't repeat as often as you'd like because of the volume of information available. There is a choice within African/Asian Nationalism, the Cold War, and the European Union – and often your choice topic appears on the paper, but other than that you just have to know the chapters really well in order to respond well to them. I think that this section can be a great combo with either B or C because you'll find there is overlapping information.



My final verdict on Question 6 is that you need to practice; you need to know how to answer the questions, and more importantly, know the information required! You need to remember also that you can spend no more than an hour on this section, and that's pushing it. Prioritize 2 sections, e.g. I prioritized B and C, over the other 2, so as to have them practised well, and then have a backup section (mine was A) in case you find that your chosen two contain really difficult questions or chapters you'd skimmed over.

All in all, there is very little of the course that you can avoid if you really want to cover yourself. Although, it is possible. I only quickly revised certain sections so I could answer them in short questions because I planned to avoid them if they came up on long ones. This does give you very little wiggle room on the day, but if you're willing to take the risk then you'll have to be prepared to deal with the fall!

Helpful Hints

- ▶ You're going to be sick of me saying this but **T I M I N G!** It's crucial if you want to do well. Here is a rough time guide you could follow during your exams:
 - Q1-** 12 minutes
 - Q2-** 12 minutes
 - Q3-** 16 minutes
 - Q4-** 32 minutes
 - Q5-** 24 minutes
 - Q6-** 48 minutesThat leaves you with about 6 minutes as a safety net or for checking your answers, or indeed, improving them. If you spend too long on one section, come back to it later.
- ▶ Also, I would strongly recommend doing the exam in the order that it's formatted. Get yourself warmed up and leave most of your time for the end to do your long questions. The only exception I have to this is the short questions - I liked to do some to give myself a break from the rest of the paper. Half way through a PIH, I would flip back and do some just to calm my nerves and rest my hand!
- ▶ I'm also a big believer in actually reading through the paper before I do it. I always



sat back (usually finishing off my lunch!) flicked through the paper for about 3 minutes, read the essay titles, and set to work on the first question! It's good to read the essay titles before beginning an exam because you'll subconsciously start thinking about it and recalling all the info.

- ▶ Mid-exam mind maps – big yes. You'll have the time, trust me. It takes about 30 seconds and will shave a couple of seconds off in the long run. Just plan out your points roughly and refer back to it so you don't go off topic or get stumped.
- ▶ Don't waste time on Q1-3. You could still get a B if you never even looked at these questions. You don't even need as much time as I have listed in the rough guide – they're just an outline. I spent about 20 minutes on them altogether, and an hour on Question 6!
- ▶ When it comes to studying – exam papers are your friend. So are marking schemes. Use them often. The marking schemes can shed some light as to how to answer lots of the questions – they are, after all, compiled by history teachers!
- ▶ Practice the short question portion of the test every so often. It's repetitive so you're not wasting a second if you spend an hour doing them in after-school study. It's great to look at the marking scheme for these too.
- ▶ Have a PIH folder, or copy, for just the People in History essays. Highlight the key points within them and get people to prompt you based off of these.
- ▶ The key to success in History is to know a lot so that you can write a lot. It's very much a memory game, but if you watch enough videos online then it soon becomes part of your general knowledge! Crash Course runs a great History segment, and there's umpteen really funny blogs online relating to history – not to mention Horrible Histories!





*Best of luck in your
History exam!*

You'll do great!

