

History – Higher and Ordinary

History – The Research Topic

History in the Leaving Certificate is a daunting essay writing challenge. However, the examination itself is worth 80% of your grade – before you set pen to paper in June 20% of your History grade will have already been decided. This 20% is the History Research Project which is due to be submitted on April 27th. All History students, both Higher and Ordinary level, would be wise to focus their attention on the Research Topic. It is possible to score very well on the Research Topic and many students score full marks on this section. Consequently the Research Topic is vital to your overall grade in Leaving Certificate History.

What is the Research Topic?

The Research Topic in History is an extended essay of 1,500 words for higher level and 800 words for Ordinary level on a topic of your choice so long as it takes place before 1992. The Research Topic offers students the chance to research whatever topic they choose – you have to pick three sources for higher level, two for ordinary level, for your historical enquiry. Sources can be primary or secondary (or a combination of both). Topics that I have examined contained a variety of sources – diaries, official documents, letters, recorded interviews, books, DVD's, radio broadcasts, archaeological reports – depending on the nature of the research topic. You must take the information from the courses to produce your extended essay.

Using Sources

Your choice of sources is important – some sources can be more time consuming than others but the work using these sources will be more original and rewarding. For example, a visit to the National Archives or examining historical newspaper articles can be time consuming, but, by doing this research you are developing your skills as a historian.

Finding appropriate sources can be difficult also. The internet can be helpful here – the bibliographies provided by articles on sites such as Wikipedia can point you in the right direction. Also, I would suggest that you work closely with your History teacher – ask advice on the authenticity of your chosen sources and whether they are suitable to your topic.

Choosing your topic

Again, I would suggest that you consult your teacher on this. Make sure that your topic is narrow and includes date parameters in your title. The History syllabus stipulates that you should pick a topic that is not covered on your course so it is wise to avoid the Key Personalities and the Case Studies that you are studying this year. Local history, family history and fringe topics are all acceptable as the History syllabus encourages the student to use the full range of historical skills. I have read Research topics on many themes – here are some examples:

- The Persian Invasion of Greece 480-490BC
- The *Lebensborn* Program in Nazi Germany
- The GAA in Co. Cavan – the glory years of the 1940's
- The Diaries of an Irishman in the RAF (a student's grandfather)
- Led Zeppelin's contribution to rock music

The Research Topic is made up of four parts:

1. The Outline Plan **(15 marks)**
2. Evaluation of Sources **(25 marks)**
3. Extended Essay **(50 marks)**
4. Review of Research Topic **(10 marks)**

1. Outline Plan (15 marks)

The title should have:

- Narrow focus
- Knowledge of historical context
- The topic ends before 1992/1993
- At least 3 sources (2 sources for ordinary)
- Very clear title – include dates, scope for debate, a conclusion which allows you to assess your aims
- Don't cheat – plagiarise

9 marks of the 15 are for:

- Define (what you are doing) and justify (why you are doing it) **3 marks**
- Identify Aims – include 3 aims **3 marks**
- Identify approach (how you intend to go about doing your study) **3 marks**

6 marks of the 15 marks are for your three sources

- Author
- Title
- Publisher
- Date
- Place

Example:

Robert Kee: *The Green Flag – A History of Irish Nationalism* Penguin Books London 1972

2. Evaluation of Sources (25 marks)

- At least 3 sources for Higher
- At least 2 sources for Ordinary
- Record all sources used and keep notes as evidence
- In the Research topic booklet you have just one page for this section – give each source equal treatment and assess the source critically highlighting its usefulness and weakness. You must assess all the sources you have used or else the full range of marks will not be available to you as shown below:
 - Evaluation of 3 sources = 25 marks max
 - Evaluation of 2 sources = 17 marks max
 - Evaluation of 1 source = 9 marks max

3. The Extended Essay (50 marks)

1200 – 1500 words for higher level

600 – 800 words for ordinary level

This is the essay itself. You should write several drafts of this essay and consult you're your teacher before you write it into your booklet and submit it for assessment. Many students word process their essays as it is easier to watch the word count and edit the essay. The marks for the essay are broken up in the following manner:

- Historical knowledge (relevance to the title) – **25 marks**
- Research skills (use of sources – depth) – **15 marks**
- Presentation (literacy, structure) – **10 marks**

Sources can, and should, be referred to in the essay.

4. Review of the Research Process (10 marks)

This is the process of what you did. It should be about 1 ½ pages in length at the end of the Research booklist. Below is a rough guide of some of the material that should be included in the Review:

- **Defining the subject:** how did you choose your title?
- **Location of Information:** How and where did you find your sources?
- **Interrogating the sources:** How did you use your sources? How easy/difficult was it to find information?
- **Recording Information:** note making? Highlighting?
- **Collation of data:** how did you put your info in order? Computer or hand written notes? Storing information?
- **Aims of the study:** Did you achieve your aims? Any difficulties? Did you make any new revelations? What would you do differently if you had to do it again?
- **Writing:** How did you go about writing the essay? Did you make a plan? Did you do a draft? Did you edit the draft? What judgements did you make about selecting evidence?
- **What has writing this essay taught you about the skills of the historian?** Did you learn any new skills? Information gathering/research?

A Word about Plagiarism – four reasons not to take short cuts

Plagiarism (copying, cutting and pasting) is one of the greatest problems in educational assessment today. 3rd level colleges are spending considerable amounts of money on software to detect this unfortunate practice. It is also a big problem in 2nd level education – it can be an inviting temptation to the unprepared student struggling for time as the April deadline looms. I would advise students to resist the temptation of copying a little seen essay from the internet – for a start if you are caught your

grade is gone and, secondly, you will not score well even if the examiner cannot 'prove' you copied as the essay will not be a personal inquiry. Thirdly, your teacher does not have to sign off on work that they suspect may not be students own and, lastly, as students of history you will miss out on the essential research of the historian which makes the subject such an enjoyable pursuit.

Download – the Research Topic Booklet at
<http://www.examinations.ie/exam/HistoryCourseworkJournal.pdf>

Official guidelines (see pages 14 and 15)
http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Senior-Cycle-/Syllabuses-and-Guidelines/lc_history_guide.pdf

History – The Leaving Cert Exam

The Research Topic usually scores well and your attention should now be focused on the written exam worth the remaining **80% of your grade**. The History exam is difficult – it is a **broad course** and the demands of the examination itself are challenging. In this guide I hope to give you some good advice to maximise your chances of success in this year's exam.

What to revise?

History is a broad subject - so your first step is decide what you are going to study. Some students take ludicrous risks and just cover the case studies and hope for the best. This is not enough. You must have covered enough material in order to answer the required amount of questions in the exam. Make a **revision plan** deciding on what topics you intend covering for the exam (make sure to include case studies, key concepts and key individuals). A simple test to see if you have covered enough is to look at **the past papers** and see if you have covered enough topics to complete the paper. The more topics that you cover the more options you have in the exam – this way you can avoid difficult or ambiguous questions.
<http://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=en&sc=ep>

How to revise?

Revision for the exam is essential and time consuming. When covering a topic take your text book, your notes and any other sources you are using (there are a lot of good books beyond your text books and there are good websites like <http://multitext.ucc.ie>) and make **your own set of notes** from these sources. Then test yourself by doing a question on that topic from the **exam papers** and if you have a friendly and approachable teacher ask him/her to grade the question. This gives you a good idea of how you are performing and what you need to address in the future.

Timing

The first step to a good result in Leaving Certificate history is outlined above. The second part is **timing and technique**. History is a very technical exam so you have to have a plan before you go in. Students often fall down on timing in the exam – for example I have marked papers where students are performing at A grade level all the way through the exam until the final question when they score 20% or 25% reducing their grade from what was an A to a C. The main reason for this is timing in the exam.

Timing at Higher Level:

Documents Study (100 marks):	Q1 – 4 mins Q2 – 8 mins Q3 – 8 mins Q4 – 20 mins
Essay 1 (100 marks):	42 mins

Essay 2 (100 marks): 42 mins
Essay 3 (100 marks): 42 mins

Timing at Ordinary Level:

Documents Study (100 marks): Q1 – 8 mins
Q2 – 8 mins
Q3 – 8 mins
Q4 – 16 mins

Question 1 (100 marks): Part A – 10 mins
Part B – 12 mins
Part C – 20 mins

Question 2 (100 marks): Part A – 10 mins
Part B – 12 mins
Part C – 20 mins

Question 3 (100 marks): Part A – 10 mins
Part B – 12 mins
Part C – 20 mins

(At O Level make sure that you complete ALL parts of each question)

I would recommend students practice their timing by doing questions under timed conditions. As you get closer to the exam you should sit an entire exam paper - using the full 2 hours and 50 minutes – so that you are well prepared for what you will experience on the day.

How to achieve good marks:

All exams are marked according to a **Mark Scheme**. The secret to scoring well in exam questions is to hit the criteria on the Mark Scheme. Students themselves can look at previous years Mark Schemes at www.examinations.ie

Documents Questions:

Students generally **score well** in this section of the paper. You should be very careful when reading the question. Q1, Q2 and Q3 are focused on the documents themselves and assess the skills of **Comprehension, Comparison and Criticism** – make sure when answering these that you refer to the documents (for example – if the Question asks to refer to Documents A and B – then make sure you refer to both Documents). Q4 is like a **mini essay** and is marked according to **CM and OE** (see below)

Essay Writing:

All essays on the Higher Level paper are marked out of 100.

60 marks are for the Cumulative mark – that is that **every paragraph is marked out of 12**. So, for example, if you write two paragraphs the max mark you can get is 24/60. This means that you have to write several paragraphs and that your essay must be a certain length. A good guide is an introduction, 6 paragraphs of ½ page each and a conclusion. If you can write more and feel confident of doing this then do another paragraph.

Be careful not to write too much. It is possible to **score more than 60** – so, for example, if you write 10 paragraphs then you may score 85/60 but you will only get 60 marks for this. Many candidates do this in the Leaving Cert exam – they go wild on the first question and write 10 pages, when they get to the last

question they don't have enough time and so they write two pages - they lose marks overall. This is a very common mistake **and the main reason why students underachieve in the exam.**

The other **40 marks are for Overall Evaluation** – this is how you address the question. Of course you should always **make a plan for a history essay** and make sure that each paragraph links back to what the question is asking. You are not expected to include a lengthy introduction giving background and so on – in fact **there are no marks for this** – if the question gives you a date range of 1910-1918 **do not go outside that date range.**

(*I have a sample essay for here but dunno if there is room to include it)

Ordinary Level Questions:

Ordinary Level questions are broken up into parts.

Part A will be **five short questions** on a particular source – these require short answers. Q 4 and 5 of these questions frequently requires the student to answer **from their own knowledge.**

In **Part B** you will be asked to write a **short paragraph** on a topic on your course – try to write a **least a page on this topic.**

In **Part C** you will be asked a question – try to **write 1½ pages on this section.**

Part B and Part C questions very often ask about **Case Studies and Key Personalities** – so make sure that you have revised these well.

DO's and DON'T's

- **DO** write with a nice pen and try to keep your work as neat as possible
- **DO** leave space at the end of the answer so that you can revisit it if you have time to spare
- **DO** read the question VERY carefully – you will get good marks for answers that are addressing the question.
- **DO** make the length of your paragraphs and your essays consistent
- **DO** make a short plan before you answer your questions

- **DON'T** leave early
- **DON'T** memorise essays and try to rewrite these in the exam
- **DON'T** spend too much time on one question and too little on another
- **DON'T** leave any blanks
- **DON'T** panic – stick to your pre prepared plan and everything will go well.