

Improving your GCSE coursework: geography

Did you know?

- Coursework in geography is usually worth between 20 and 25% of the GCSE examination marks.
- Coursework gives you an opportunity to show the examiner what you can do in areas of geography that cannot always be assessed in the final papers.
- Coursework is often based on fieldwork.
- Depending on the syllabus/specification, there may be other tasks which assess your ability to use a variety of data to show your understanding of a geographical issue.
- Marks are awarded for geographical skills, data collection, knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, explanation and conclusions.

Before you start, make sure you understand the hypothesis / key question / focus of the study/investigation.

Data collection, skills	
Have you:	For example:
Collected enough data to make them significant?	<i>In a questionnaire sample, a minimum of 30 replies is needed to make any conclusions valid.</i>
Collected the right (relevant and reliable) sort of data which can easily be collated and compared, or designed your questionnaire so it can easily be analysed?	<i>Give people you interview choices about answers they could give you. In a shopping survey, you need to survey a range of age groups.</i>
Located where you have carried out your surveys?	<i>Produce a map to show where you interviewed shoppers / did your pedestrian count / sampled pebbles on a beach profile / did your velocity or cross-section measurements.</i>
Made sure you have used all the information you and other students have collected?	<i>Talk to other students about the data you have collected.</i>
Made use of relevant secondary data, including ICT resources?	<i>You can quite easily find census data on the Internet for a social and economic profile of different areas in cities.</i>

Analysis, explanation and conclusions	
Have you:	For example:
Made sure you have linked your writing/text to the illustrations/diagrams?	<i>Make links clear, e.g. the terraced housing (on Map 5, page 7) is concentrated in a narrow band around the city centre.</i>
Labelled/annotated your maps and diagrams? Labelled/annotated for a purpose?	<i>Use labelling and annotation to help the reader understand what you are explaining. The words should not just be descriptive, but have some explanation.</i>
Used a range of graphical illustrations? Made sure that all the axes of the graphs are labelled correctly?	<i>Use bar charts, cumulative bar charts, pie charts, line graphs, scatter graphs.</i>
Used the correct type of graph to show what you want to show?	<i>A scatter graph is used to show the relationship between two variables: e.g. as the height increased, the temperature decreased.</i>
Kept descriptions to a minimum? Explanations are worth more than descriptions.	<i>Irrelevant background details and lengthy descriptions of how you did your measurements in the river / collected your questionnaire data, do not always add to your marks.</i>
Given clear and full explanations, making good use of the word 'because'?	<i>Erosion is greatest on the outside of the meander because the velocity is greatest; therefore abrasion is greater there.</i>
Related your findings to the data collected?	<i>The table of distance travelled to work by different groups of people (see table 3, page 12) shows that ...</i>
Made sure your conclusions are clear and refer back to the central hypothesis, key question or focus of the study?	<i>The conclusions drawn are based on the data (evidence) you have collected.</i>
Used geographical terminology correctly?	<i>Words and terms such as: channel cross-section, velocity, wetted perimeter, river cliff and lateral erosion in relation to river features.</i>
Evaluated your work to show how improvements could be made?	<i>Use a wider age range in sampling use of the country park. Have a complete set of river channel measurements so that the data are reliable and can easily be compared.</i>

General points

- Plan your use of time.
- Prepare and organise yourself.
- Make yourself familiar with the mark scheme for your syllabus/specification.
- Make sure you use all the resources available to you. This includes your teacher who may have lots of experience of what makes a satisfactory piece of coursework.
- Plan your work carefully. If you are given a structure for your work, stick to it - you can be sure this has proved successful for others in the past, so it should work for you as well.
- Check your work. Remember that marks are awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Get someone else to read what you have written to see if it makes sense to them.
- Let them ask you questions about what you have written. Your reply may encourage you to change what you have written.
- Remember, though, the work must be entirely your own.