

Improving your GCSE coursework: history

Did you know?

- Coursework is worth 25% of the final mark in most GCSE history courses.
- Coursework assignments test one or more of the objectives on pages 2 and 3.

Getting started

- **Understand the question** - Ask your teacher if you are unsure what the words in the question actually mean. The key words section at the end of these notes may help. Ask your teacher which objectives apply to your work.
- **Collect information** - Before you start writing you should collect information (where possible) from books, television and video, other people, the Internet, computer software and, most importantly, your lessons. Find out about the main issues and events, the place you are studying, the people who were involved and what life was like at the time.
- **Collate (sort) information** - Information only becomes evidence when you use it for a purpose. You must consider which items of information are **focused** on your question and which items are irrelevant. Try to form 'Big Headings' as you carry out your research and place your information under the headings according to where it can be used as evidence. Never copy and paste information into your answer.
- **Use a computer if you can** - It helps when you start to answer the question because it is much easier to make changes as you re-draft and add new ideas. Always keep a back-up copy.

If you visit a historical site as part of your coursework

- Study the visible remains; what evidence can you see to make judgements about the local area and the period of history you are studying?
- Learn about the lives and purposes of people associated with the site. Use written sources, visual images and official records as evidence.
- Understand why there have been different **interpretations** of the site and of the lives of people associated with it. Compare and **analyse** the interpretations. You will not get high marks for producing a guidebook describing what you have seen.
- Understand how local, national and international events have influenced the way the site changed and developed over time. Were these changes rapid or gradual? Why did the changes take place? Were some reasons more important than others?
- Compare your site with other sites. Did the site you are studying develop in the same or a different way as other sites? Why was this?

Objective 1 (Knowledge) requires you to *describe, explain and analyse events, changes, people, issues and key features of the time and place* you are studying

Have you:	For example:
Explained different causes, or consequences, or changes?	<p><i>Always explain a number of causes or consequences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>show that some were more important than others</i> • <i>consider grouping them together as long-term/short-term or intended/unintended</i> • <i>show that causes and/or consequences were sometimes connected or related to each other</i> • <i>explain that some changes were big while others were small; some were fast, others slow.</i>
Explained why an individual was important?	<i>How important was the individual? Was he or she more important than other individuals or other factors?</i>
Explained how the current situation has arisen as a result of past events?	<i>Explain that some events were more important than others.</i>
Explained reasons why people's ideas and attitudes differed?	<i>Consider how attitudes and ideas differ according to factors such as status, religion, location, bias and the situation at the time.</i>

Objective 2 (Sources) requires you to *understand, analyse, evaluate and interpret historical sources according to the time, place and circumstances* in which they were produced

Have you:	For example:
Identified the purposes of the author in producing the source?	<i>Is the author trying to persuade the audience to take a certain viewpoint about a person or an event? Explain this as a reason why a source may be considered to be unreliable or to be giving a different interpretation.</i>
Identified the intended audience?	<i>Many sources are produced to appeal to people of a certain nationality, culture, age, status, race, gender or political persuasion. This may explain differences between sources.</i>
Identified the origin of the source?	<i>Where does it come from? What was happening at the time the source was produced? How was the author connected to the events? Is it factual or an impression of the events?</i>
Explained the usefulness or limitations of the source?	<i>All sources are useful to a degree but none is perfect. Explain the significance but identify aspects that are missing, lacking in detail or unreliable.</i>
Explained the meaning of the source?	<i>What does the source prove?</i>
Explained the conclusion to be drawn about the past, using the sources and your own knowledge?	<i>Combine your own knowledge with the evidence provided in the source to produce a balanced answer. Be aware that sources are not always typical examples of the event, person or place you are studying.</i>

Objective 3 (Interpretation and representation) requires you to <i>understand, analyse</i> and <i>evaluate</i> how and why historical events, people, situations and changes have been shown and viewed in different ways by different people	
Have you:	For example:
Supported inferences?	<i>Use evidence from the source and your own knowledge to make judgements about the meaning and the interpretation given in a source.</i>
Identified the purposes or the motives of the author?	<i>Does the author have a reason for describing the past from a certain viewpoint? Is the author attempting to justify an action or influence the audience? Is the author, at the time the source was produced, hoping to make a connection between the past and the present?</i>
Made clear the process by which the author came to an interpretation or representation?	<i>What evidence is the source based on? Different interpretations often arise when the evidence is incomplete. Have things that have happened since the original event introduced new evidence or changed people's perceptions?</i>
Described the conclusion to be drawn about the validity of an interpretation or representation?	<i>Is the interpretation accurate? Can it be trusted?</i>
Explained the usefulness or limitations of particular interpretations or representations?	<i>Is the interpretation typical? Does the source represent a clear and complete understanding of events?</i>
Explained the conclusions to be drawn about the past, using the interpretation or representation and your own knowledge?	<i>What does the interpretation or representation tell us about the past?</i>

Key words

analyse - examine in detail to explain meaning, significance, connections, key features etc.

evaluate - to judge the worth of a source: can you trust it? Is it useful?

interpretation - an explanation of the meaning (viewpoint) taken from a source; two people may interpret the same thing in entirely different ways

representation - the way something is presented or explained