

Improving Performance in Higher Modern Studies

Essay Questions:

The Higher Modern Studies Paper 1 essay questions demand that candidates describe and analyse political and international issues. The candidate's answer should have 5 essential features:

- **Knowledge** & understanding and analysis - (comes largely from revision)
- appropriate terminology - (words / vocabulary which connect with the topic)
- up-to-date examples - (from last 10 years)
- balanced and informed argument (e.g. on the other hand, in contrast, however ..)
- a clear structure (short intro – 3 or 4 sections with mini conclusions – overall conclusion)

Questions are asked in a style designed to generate the above with stems (**in bold**) such as ...

To what extent can Parliament control the powers of the Prime Minister?

Assess the importance of party unity in achieving electoral success.

Critically evaluate the effects of social and economic reform in China.

Foreign aid is no guarantee of development. **Discuss**.

Examine the effectiveness of international responses to threats to global security.

These phrases may seem unfamiliar. However if you know a lot about your topics the essays become much, much easier. This is why it is so helpful to watch current affairs on TV or read newspapers – it builds up your background knowledge and vocabulary. For example, if we swap the following for the above, you would probably be able to answer much more easily.

To what extent can having a big garden help sell a house?

Assess the importance of iPod compatibility in buying MP3 speakers.

Critically examine the effects of music downloads on the music industry.

Mobile phones are offensive weapons. **Discuss**.

Examine the effectiveness of school uniform.

Each stem asks candidates to do broadly similar things including using evidence and analysis to reach a balanced conclusion. No matter what question is asked, there is a key requirement for balance. Candidates should signal this balance through the use of: phrases such as “however there is evidence to suggest”; “to some extent this is the case but”; “on the other hand”.

The other essential of a good essay requirement for developed and exemplified knowledge and understanding. Consider the following example:

Question A4 (2007)

The Additional Member System gives voters more choice and better representation than does First Past The Post. Discuss.

The additional member system gives voters more choice and better representation than First Past The Post (FPTP), because it is a Proportional Representation (PR) system. FPTP is very simple to use and it produces a quick clear result, but party choice is very limited* and minority parties lose out. AMS is proportional so every voter counts which benefits smaller parties* and encourages higher turnout with the better representation* of these parties in parliament. This means that a rainbow parliament with many different views* can be created like Holyrood.*

However, FPTP allows voters to select candidates whilst AMS only allows people to select parties. Therefore people could be electing a candidate that they dislike under AMS. This goes against the view that AMS gives more choice than FPT.*

AMS also often requires a “kingmaker”, such as the Lib Dems, to create a majority parliament. This means that a party who little amount of people voted for could be put in a position of power. This could also include unwanted policies* by these kingmaker parties. FPTP, however, produces a quick result often with a one party majority, which better represents the public’s political views. To conclude, AMS is more proportional* than FPTP and includes a wider range of opinions and greater party choice. However FPTP creates a strong government and greater candidate choice where no “king maker” is required.**

Use the asterisks to help you consider any factual errors and also where explanation and/or examples could have been included.

Then give the essay a mark out of 15.

SQA Marker's Comment:

Although a neatly structured, balanced response, the above is a very limited answer with lots of missed opportunities (*) for further development and exemplification. There are errors, and inaccurate assumptions (which have deliberately not been highlighted), as well as some confusion as to the extent of party/candidate choice afforded by FPTP.

Mark: 7/15