

Doing better in GCSE history

This guidance is for teachers working with students who are predicted to be grade D/C on the GCSE exams. It is intended to support teachers in helping these students to achieve a grade C. The advice offered may also be useful to other teachers and in turn to many other students.

By the time students come to revise for their GCSEs they have covered most of the syllabus in lessons. Revision is not about doing those lessons again but about reminding students of what they have covered and learned and revisiting any aspects which remain unclear in their minds.

An important element of subject revision lessons is to provide students with the opportunity to learn, practise and refine revision techniques. In this way individual students will discover for themselves those techniques which are personally most effective. In addition, you can provide focused feedback, not just on the subject material, but also on the techniques. Using lessons just to complete or review past test papers is unlikely to be an effective strategy for helping D/C students to improve. Neither is giving students unstructured lesson time 'to revise' since many of these students are not very good at revising although they may well give the impression of industriously getting on with their work.

Remember to link your planned history revision with any whole-school programme and with advice that students may be receiving in their other subjects.

Further information and advice on helping these students revise and prepare for their exams can be found towards the beginning of the *GCSE booster pack* in the section 'GCSE booster: guidance for teachers and school leaders on using the materials'.

Using the subject guidance leaflets

There are two leaflets for history. One is for you, the teacher; the other is for students.

It is envisaged that you will use these flexibly to suit your own circumstances. The student's leaflet can be photocopied and given to targeted students. Go through the leaflet with them. Encourage them to annotate it, and explain how your subject revision programme will fit with and support the students' own revision programmes and the advice on their leaflet.

Use the teacher's leaflet to plan your revision programme, covering those topics and aspects which you have identified as most relevant to the students. Encourage the students, at intervals during the revision programme, to use the traffic light system on their leaflet to assess their confidence in each aspect and to check with you those which remain difficult.

A number of revision activities are suggested in the teacher's leaflet, but plan your revision programme to suit your own students. Using specific revision activities is less important than planning to use a range to ensure that your lessons retain variety and that you offer students opportunities to work in their preferred ways.

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To achieve a grade C in GCSE history your students need to be able to show that they can do all of the following, not just by chance, but because they understand and are confident in what they are doing.

Make sure that your students have a complete set of notes, either their own or from a published revision guide, to revise from.

| What students need to be able to do | What this means to them | How you can help them improve |
|---|--|--|
| <p>1 Remember historical knowledge, concepts and ideas from across the course</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisiting all their topics and not just the ones they like or found easy • Understanding the important concepts and ideas for each topic and not being distracted by too much detail (long lists of dates, etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model how to translate written notes into a different visual form (e.g. mind mapping, living graph) and provide structured opportunities for students to practise in pairs or groups • Provide opportunities for students to teach others about a topic • Demonstrate the distinction between big points and little points for a topic; get students to practise this |
| <p>2 Use knowledge accurately and relevantly to support descriptions and explanations</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and answering the question • Understanding the difference between describe and explain • Being able to weave supportive evidence into an argument | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model techniques to unpick a question • Provide sources of evidence for students to write questions for each other • Use card sorts to identify and link evidence and argument • Use two highlighters to identify argument and evidence in activities for peer and self-assessment |
| <p>3 Write structured descriptions and explanations</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to write coherently beginning with big points and then smaller points as required • Writing paragraphs to pursue an argument logically | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model effective starter sentences (as in the Key Stage 3 video – <i>Literacy in ...</i>) • Practise labelling paragraphs (from any historical source) to identify in a couple of words the key point in each paragraph • Model and practise constructing individual and sequential paragraphs • Highlight paragraphs to identify big and small points • Share mark schemes with students and write an example for each level of response |
| <p>4 Understand the characteristics of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • periods • societies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing what features distinguish different important periods and societies • Understanding the big picture of each of the relevant PESC themes – political, economic, social and cultural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use four highlighters to identify the PESC themes in students' own notes • Draw concept maps for a period showing the links between the four themes • Use pairs to fours to large groups (snowballing) to identify key words leading to a statement which describes the big picture |

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|--|---|---|
| <p>5 Know about the variety of ideas, beliefs and attitudes within particular periods and societies</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging stereotypes and avoiding over-generalising | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and analyse a fictional film to identify variety in and development of views, opinions etc. • Provide the opportunity for a group of students to write the script for a scene in a play or film |
| <p>6 Explain the reasons for actions and the causes of events, changes and developments; and their consequences</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being clear about what they are trying to explain • Providing a range of reasons why people acted in the way they did • Showing how causes interact and lead to events, changes and developments • Identifying intended and unintended consequences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use diamond nines to prioritise items, e.g. causes, reasons, consequences • Provide opportunities for students to draw concept maps to show factors interacting • Provide opportunities for students to debate ‘what if?’ questions |
| <p>7 Understand how and why events, people and issues have been interpreted differently</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining the reasons for the different interpretations and not just describing them • Understanding that arguments in history are part of studying the subject | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide lists of possible reasons for students to select the most significant for any particular interpretation • Provide a range of relevant material to illustrate how different interpretations stem from the ambiguity of some historical sources • Get students to sort sources into propaganda and interpretation and justify their decisions |
| <p>8 Use sources critically to draw conclusions</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to treat sources beyond their face value • Understanding and using provenance in evaluating and making use of sources • Avoiding stereotypical treatment of sources, e.g. that an author who was not a witness cannot be trusted • Using sources together to draw conclusions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practise making judgements about a person, event or change using a range of sources • Role play in pairs (taking sides), debating the pros and cons of a source’s reliability • Use a matching card sort exercise to pair up a source and a description of its provenance • Model testing the validity of statements about the past by using a Venn diagram to sort sources that support or discredit the statements |

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To achieve a grade C in GCSE history you need to be confident in all of these aspects.

(Use the code in the second column to say how well you think are doing: G - green, very confident; O - orange, not fully sure; and R - red, not very confident. Ask your teacher about anything you colour red.)

| Can I? | | What can I do to improve? |
|--|---|--|
| Recall the people, events and changes I have studied. | <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn my notes into pictures which describe the main features of a topic. • Work with a friend to sort out the big ideas from the small ones in a topic. |
| Use what I know to describe events and changes and shape my descriptions and explanations to answer a question. | <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go through some past exam questions and highlight the key words which explain what the question is looking for. Check my ideas with a friend or teacher. • Rephrase the question so that the meaning of key words is teased out. • Make a list of arguments, and against each one write down the sources of evidence that would be useful for supporting or contradicting it. • Use two highlighters to identify argument and evidence in notes or past essays. |
| Write a paragraph or a series of paragraphs that develop an argument. | <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find some paragraphs from any historical source (my GCSE coursebook or a topic book I have used for research) and write a couple of words only to describe the main point in each paragraph. Check my ideas with a friend. • Practise writing some short paragraphs which develop an argument using evidence. Ask my teacher to check what I have done. • Work with a friend to highlight and agree the big and little points in paragraphs. |
| Remember the most important features of the periods and societies I have studied. Describe the big picture for the PESC themes (Political, Economic, Social, Cultural). | <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For any period I have studied, make a list of the key words which describe the most important features - words such as <i>democracy, totalitarian, civil liberties, war, suffragettes, universal suffrage, pluralism, free press, independent judiciary.</i> • Use four highlighters to identify the PESC themes in my notes. • Work with a friend to draw some concept maps for a period/society showing the links between the four PESC themes. Take two periods/societies and compare them using the PESC themes. What was similar? What different? |

| Can I? | | What can I do to improve? |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Explain that different people even in the same circumstances held different views and values, and suggest why this might have been.</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> R O G </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read about a couple of my favourite periods in my notes or in a textbook. Find out what attitudes or views people held and why. Use a three-word format to summarise what I have read: <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;"> <pre> graph LR A[person] --- B[attitude or view] B --- C[reason] </pre> </div> |
| <p>Give a range of reasons why people acted in the way they did.</p> <p>Show how causes interact and how they lead to events, changes and developments.</p> <p>Identify intended and unintended consequences.</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> R O G </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw a concept map of a period I know quite well using key events and changes that took place. Draw lines that connect these and identify the interactions. Use words and phrases like: <i>and this led to</i>, <i>made the situation worse because</i>, <i>attitudes towards the president changed as a result of</i>. Now draw a similar map for a period I don't know so well. Explain my concept maps to a friend and see if the friend agrees. Reread any answers I write to Why questions to check I have answered the question. Have I explained the reasons why people acted as they did? Have I explained how causes interacted in such a way as to lead to a change or event taking place? |
| <p>Recognise that arguments about the past are all part of learning history.</p> <p>Explain why people hold different views about the past.</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> R O G </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With a friend study two or three different interpretations of an event (like the battle of the Somme). Carefully pick out the main differences between the interpretations and consider why they occur. Review my notes: does my knowledge of the event suggest one interpretation is more acceptable than another? Justify my decision. Look through my textbook and find some sources about an event or person. With a partner, can I decide which are interpretations and which are examples of propaganda? |
| <p>Judge how useful and reliable a source is in relation to a question or enquiry.</p> <p>Go beyond the face value of sources and use them as evidence to draw conclusions about the past.</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> R O G </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect a range of sources about an event or person. Make up some questions which will show that the value or the reliability of the source depends on what the source is being used to provide evidence for. Take the provenance of a few sources and with a partner consider what I know about the time and context in which they were produced. How does this affect the way I treat the sources? |