

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Government and Politics

Other Guidance:

- Answering AS and A2 Questions



Answering AS Questions

TOP TIP

Make sure that you scan through all three parts of the question **before** you start writing. Candidates often spend too much time answering the shorter part-(a) questions (worth 5 marks) because they become side-tracked discussing material that is more relevant to the longer 10 mark part (b) questions or 25 mark part-(c) questions. Wasting time in this way can mean that you do not have time to include this material again in your part-(b) and (c) answers, where examiners **can** credit it more fully.

Part (a) answers (5 marks)

- Offer a clear and accurate **DEFINITION** of the term or phrase chosen, in the context in which it is being used in the extract.
- The term is likely to be part of the political vocabulary of government and politics. This may **NOT** simply be a dictionary definition.
- Candidates **may** develop their explanation by referring to the extract. It may help to use phrases such as ‘... according to the extract ...’ and ‘the extract argues that’
- **ALL** of the marks available on the part (a) question are awarded on the basis of AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding). In addition to explaining the term, therefore, try to give one or two pieces of additional information – such as examples or evidence – from your own knowledge.

Part (b) answers (10 marks)

- **FOCUS ON THE QUESTION** from the outset. You do not have time for lengthy and generalised introductions.
- **DEFINE** any terms clearly and concisely early on in your answer.
- Make sure that you make use of the information in the **EXTRACT** as well as making explicit reference to your own **KNOWLEDGE** (including knowledge of concepts and theories)
- Give your answer structure by **IDENTIFYING** and **EXAMINING** significant aspects relevant to the issue in question. Unless the question asks otherwise perhaps look for **at least two** significant aspects.
- Make sure that you **refer** to any **debate** that is relevant to the issue in question.
- Remember that on part (b) questions marks for AO2 (Analysis and Evaluation) are equal to those for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding).

Part (c) answers (25 marks)

- **FOCUS** on the precise terms of the question from the outset.
- **IDENTIFY** and **DEFINE** any key terms that appear in the title.
- Impose a **CLEAR ANALYTICAL STRUCTURE** on your discussion, ie identify three or four areas that you intend to address and deal with them **SYSTEMATICALLY** in a **LOGICAL ORDER**. **AVOID** being too **SUBJECTIVE**. Try to put **BOTH** sides of the argument; be **BALANCED AND AUTHORITATIVE** whatever your personal views or bias. Refer, where possible, to authors or other authorities to support your arguments.
- Be **CAREFUL** in your use of **LANGUAGE**. **AVOID** a written style that is too **'CHATTY'**.
- Make sure that you **INTEGRATE AND APPLY APPROPRIATE POLITICAL THEORY, CONCEPTS AND EXAMPLES** within your answers, rather than favouring one at the expense of the other.
- Remember that there are more marks available for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) with the c) questions than with the (a) and (b) questions combined. Recall, select and deploy your own knowledge to develop answers. Include knowledge and understanding of political concepts, theories, institutions and processes and the relationship between them. Examples and evidence, as well as contextual knowledge should be given to illustrate points.

TOP TIP

Try to incorporate words from the question into your answer as a means of keeping your discussion focused. Each time you make a new point ask yourself whether or not you have related it back to the terms of the question set.

Answering A2 Questions

A2 units 3 and 4 contain **optional units** and there are **NO** prescribed routes through, allowing for more flexibility of study and choice of units. These are:

GOVP3

A choice of **one** from:

- The Politics of the USA (3A)
- Ideologies (3B)
- Politics and Power (3C)

GOVP4

A choice of **one** from:

- The Government of the USA (4A)
 - Political Issues: Ideologies in Action (4B)
 - Perspectives on Modern Politics (4C)
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- Whichever units are chosen from GOVP3 and GOVP4 candidates must choose **two** areas out of four to answer questions on in the examination.
 - Questions will have **NO** compulsory stimulus attached to them as in the old specification and they must answer **both** part (a) and (b) from **both** of the areas chosen.
 - The (a) question will be a term or a phrase, or will call for an explanation of a political phenomenon
 - The (b) question will be an extended essay.
 - The time available to answer both questions is 1 hour and 30 minutes.
 - Key words:
 - Timing
 - Focus
 - Contextual awareness

THE NEW QUESTION (a)

- These are **worth more** than the old (a) questions (8 marks) and less than the old (b) questions (12 marks). They are worth **10 marks** (AO1=4 AO2=4 AO3=2).
- Timing: 10-12 minutes. Any more time and you will eat into the time available for the more challenging essay response.
- Keep a clear focus on the term or phrase asked or the need for some precise explanation of political phenomenon.
- Try and put the term, phrase or explanation into its wider **context** for clearer understanding. Explain clearly what the term or phrase **relates to**.
- Give at least 1 but preferably more pieces of relevant **evidence**, and try to give at least 1 or 2 relevant **examples**.
- Be aware of the generic mark schemes '**levels of response**' and the requirements of the different levels of marks available:

AO1 marks are for knowledge and understanding of political concepts, institutions and processes:

- Level 4:** Comprehensive K and U. Fully addresses the requirements of the question. Clear and accurate evidence. Good to excellent examples. (4 marks)
- Level 3:** Good K and U. Clearly addresses the requirements of the question. Good examples (3 marks)
- Level 2:** Limited K and U. Limited attempt to address requirements of question. Limited evidence and few or inaccurate examples. (2 marks)
- Level 1:** Little K and U. Little attempt to address the question. Little evidence or examples given. (1 mark)

AO2 marks are for analysis and evaluation and follow the same pattern and the same language:

- Level 4:** Excellent range of developed concepts/theories. Clear and cogent explanation/argument
- Level 3:** Good range of developed concepts/theories
- Level 2:** Limited range of concepts/theories.
- Level 1:** Applies few concepts. Little use of theory.

AO3 marks are for communication:

Level 3-4: Clear and effective communication. Use of political vocabulary. Few English errors. Legible. Clear focus, direction and conclusion.

Level 1-2: Limited clarity and political vocabulary. Lack of focus/direction. Frequent errors of English. Lacks any conclusion.

THE A2 ESSAY QUESTION. THE (b) RESPONSE.

The essay question is marked using the same **4 levels of response assessment** as used to mark the (a) questions and with the same key words:

- **Level 4** response = Comprehensive. Excellent. Sustained focus/Clear aims
- **Level 3** response = Sound. Well developed. Clear focus/Clear aims
- **Level 2** response = Limited. Attempt at. Restricted focus/Clear aims
- **Level 1** response = Slight. Incomplete. Superficial. Lacking focus/Clear aims

They are marked out of **30** and the breakdown of the marks will be:

- AO1 (12 marks) AO2 (12 marks) AO3 (6 marks)

Candidates must choose **two** essays from four. Note the importance of the **REQUIREMENT** for **SYNOPTIC ASSESSMENT** in this unit, and that candidates must **draw upon** and **extend** their political:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Conceptual understanding

Gained at **A/S** and also to make the **necessary connections** between all the areas previously studied.

It is also made explicit that candidates will gain **credit** for making reference to **contemporary**:

- Developments
- Issues
- Debates

in all the areas covered by the A2 specification.

It is also important to note that there are now no explicitly comparative questions **BUT** questions at A2 **REQUIRE** candidates to demonstrate **holistic** understanding using:

- Concepts
- Knowledge
- Skills

Holistic understanding is developed **throughout the course**. Candidates should aim to show the ability to **apply them to new areas of study, new contexts** and also to

recognise **connections** between **ALL** the specification topics at A2 through **EXTENDED ESSAY WRITING**.

This means that candidates should be encouraged to develop some **comparative analytical skills** in order to demonstrate similarities and differences within the specification topics and also, where possible, to integrate this knowledge and understanding in their answers when responding to the set question.

In response to the new 30 mark essay questions on each of the A2 units candidates should be aware of the need for:

- **TIMING** - 30-35 minutes should be allowed for a full response to each of the essay questions.
- **FOCUS** - Keep a clear focus on the actual question asked and do not stray from its key demands.
- **PLANNING** of the answer to provide a coherent structure, and to avoid losing sight of the key arguments.
- **EVIDENCE** and **EXAMPLES** selected to back up the analysis and evaluation.
- **CONTEXTUAL AWARENESS** to locate the answer within a “bigger picture”.
- **NO REPETITION** of points already made. No extra marks will be gained.
- **POLITICAL VOCABULARY** used throughout the essay
- **AVOIDANCE** of polemic and “my opinions”.
- **CORRECT SPELLING** of names, terms.
- **GOOD ENGLISH** to ensure clarity of argument and to avoid incoherence.
- **A GOOD INTRODUCTION**
- **A CONCLUSION**

The New A2 Topics

Teaching Constitutions & Judiciary Handout

- 1) The British Constitution section of the new GOVP2 has been included:
 - a) To meet the QCA criteria requirement to address ‘the essential characteristics and interrelationships of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary’ at AS Level.
 - b) To provide an understanding of the British constitution for all students. The Constitutional Framework and the Judicial Branch appeared in the old GOV4 Unit which was compulsory. The new GOVP4a is not compulsory and does not require comparative study of USA with UK. The new specification, therefore, now includes study of the British constitution and the judiciary at AS which contains the only compulsory units of the new specification.
- 2) Two issues appear in the first section of new Unit 2: the constitution and the judiciary. Whereas in the past these were taught at A2 both are now taught at AS and should be studied at the level appropriate.
- 3) Unlike the old Gov 4 the new AS treatment of the British constitution and the judiciary does not require comparison between the UK with USA. However, QCA criteria do require candidates at AS ‘to [include] some comparisons with other political systems’. This section of Unit 2 provides an excellent opportunity to meet this requirement.
- 4) With regard to the subsection ‘The nature and sources of the British Constitution’:
 - a) This section essentially contains no material not taught in the old GOV4, so existing resources, appropriately updated, will continue to be relevant.
 - b) Although not explicit in the old AS specification, many centres taught it anyway to underpin teaching of other elements taught at AS, especially in GOV3.
 - c) Key concepts are: written/unwritten; codified/uncodified; unitary/federal; rigid/flexible.
 - d) The content is *main* sources of the British constitution (statute law, conventions, treaties, etc plus constitutional change (e.g. how is the UK constitution changed – a debate which feeds into concepts such as entrenchment, flexibility and rigidity and draws on content such as sources).
 - e) How far the British constitution influences and limits the powers of government is explicit in the specification, reflecting the requirement in the QCA criteria ‘to see relationships between different aspects of government’. The focus of this will be debate about the extent to which the absence in the UK of a codified constitution with ‘entrenched’ components does or does not limit the power of government. This debate will also draw on issues contained within ‘the judiciary and its relationship to other powers of government’ and a number of other issues covered in the old GOV2 (eg parliamentary sovereignty, executive dominance).

5) With the subsection “the judiciary and its relationship to other ‘powers’ of government” the following should be noted:

- a) This subsection also essentially covers material already taught in the old GOV4, but again requires no specific comparative focus.
- b) This section focuses on the *judiciary and its relationship with other powers of government*, ie the study of the judiciary within the context of the government and politics of modern Britain.
- c) It should not be taught or studied from a legal perspective (eg the distinction between civil and criminal law, contract and tort, the division of the legal profession into solicitors and barristers, etc are not relevant) or even from a citizenship perspective (eg opportunities for citizens to participate in the administration of justice; citizenship implications of jury trial, why citizens should obey the law etc are also not relevant).
- d) Key concepts are judicial independence, separation of powers, and judicial review. With the latter detailed knowledge of legal procedures and cases is not required. It will be sufficient for candidates to be familiar with the main developments giving rise to judicial activism in the UK (eg Courts being called on to adjudicate when UK statutes appear to violate EU law or are deemed incompatible with the ECHR as incorporated under the Human Rights Act).
- e) With content ‘the relationship of the judiciary to the executive and legislature’ is explicit. This reflects the QCA requirement at AS to cover ‘the essential characteristics and interrelationships of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary’. This feeds into the issue of judicial appointments which is also explicit in the specification’. In this regard the 2005 Constitutional Reform Act and developments flowing from this (eg the reformed role of the Lord Chancellor, Judicial Appointments Commission, formation of a new, independent Supreme Court) is particularly relevant.
- f) The impact of the Human Rights Act and European Court of Human Rights are explicit on the specification but only with regard to *their impact upon the British political system* (ie impact upon other countries or systems of government is not relevant). Some of the issues likely to be examined are: the status of the European Convention and Court of Human Rights on UK law; reasons for introducing the Human Rights Act; *main* rights included in the Act; the implications of the Act for parliamentary sovereignty; differences between the Human Rights Act and entrenchment of rights in a codified constitution; *main* examples of executive action limited or inhibited as a result of the HRA (eg the indefinite detention of terrorist suspects) and resultant clashes between the executive and the judiciary.
- g) The debate about the constitution and related issues is ongoing, and important developments, notably publication of the White paper, *The Governance of Britain* (July 2007). Which speculated about the possibility of a Bill of Rights and Duties, have occurred since publication of the specification.

- h) The Freedom of Information Act (2000) is not referred to in the specification. It will not be the subject of specific examination questions. However, candidates may wish to refer to the Act and its provisions when illustrating and developing answers on the accountability of government, the powers of the judiciary, and the rights of individuals.
- i) There are obvious links between this and other parts of the Unit 2 content (eg Parliament and executive dominance). There are also obvious links with the section on the European Union, for example the fact that EU law is superior to Westminster statute. However, it should be noted that the European Court of Justice, unlike the European Court of Human Rights, is not referred to specifically in the specification in Unit 2.

[NB the 2008 Annual Survey (Philip Allan Updates) which comes out in January 2008 will have individual chapters on the new UK Supreme Court and The Governance of Britain Green Paper (2007).]