

Writing quality exam responses in HSC Ancient History

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Tips for writing successful HSC responses

Be aware of

- the types of questions asked and the types of responses required – and the rubrics

1. Deconstruct/interpret each question

- understand exactly what each question is asking you to do

2. Plan before you write your response

- to provide structure for your response and to include relevant sources

3. Use topic-specific terms and concepts

- to move your response from general to 'historical' writing

4. Use sources purposefully

- refer to/integrate/critically use sources as required by the question

5. Communicate clearly

- expression, sentences, paragraphs, essay structure, judgement, argument

Be
aware

Section I – Core: Cities of Vesuvius – Pompeii and Herculaneum (25 marks)

Three or four questions that will require candidates to analyse and interpret sources and apply their own knowledge. One question will be worth 10 to 15 marks.

Section II – Ancient Societies (25 marks)

One question for each society - will contain three or four parts. One part will be worth 10 to 15 marks.

Section III – Personalities in their Times (25 marks)

One question for each personality - will contain two or three parts. One part will be worth 10 to 15 marks.

Section IV – Historical Periods (25 marks)

One extended-response question for each historical period – two alternatives – answer one. Expected length of response around 8 pages of examination writing booklet (approx. 1000 words).

<https://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/assets/global/files/assessment-and-reporting-in-ancient-history-stage-6.pdf>



What type of questions are asked?



Questions with single content point focus

Mark range 2019, 4 - 10

Describe the role of the vizier. (4)

Describe the impact of Pericles' death. (10)



Questions that synthesise different content points

Mark range 2019, 5 - 25

How did Julius Caesar's military campaigns contribute to his political career? (7)

Discuss the impact of the principate of Nero on Rome and the empire. (25)

Questions that require integration of source(s)

Mark range 2019, 5 - 25

Can focus on a single content point or require synthesis from different content points.

How useful are the private buildings in Pompeii and Herculaneum in providing evidence about the economy? Support your response using evidence from Source A and other relevant sources. (5)

2019 HSC Spartan Society questions

- (a) Outline the roles of the *helots* in this period. **4**
- (b) What does the *ephorate* reveal about Spartan political organisation in this period? **6**

Answer part (c) of the question on pages 5–8 of the Writing Booklet.

- (c) Explain how religious festivals help us to understand Spartan society in this period. Support your response using evidence from Source *K* and other relevant sources. **15**

[T]he Karneia at Sparta is a representation of their military discipline. There are, namely, places numbering nine, which they call 'sunshades' because they bear some likeness to tents; and nine men eat in each, and a herald proclaims everything by order. Each 'shade', moreover, holds three brotherhoods, and the festival of the Karneia is held for nine days.

Source *K*: Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 4.141F

'The Deipnosophistae of Athenaeus'
Published in Vol 2 of the *Loeb Classical Library* edition, 1928

NESA HSC Examination
Ancient History 2019



What types of responses are required? Look to the examination rubrics!

SECTIONS I CORE, II SOCIETIES AND III PERSONALITIES

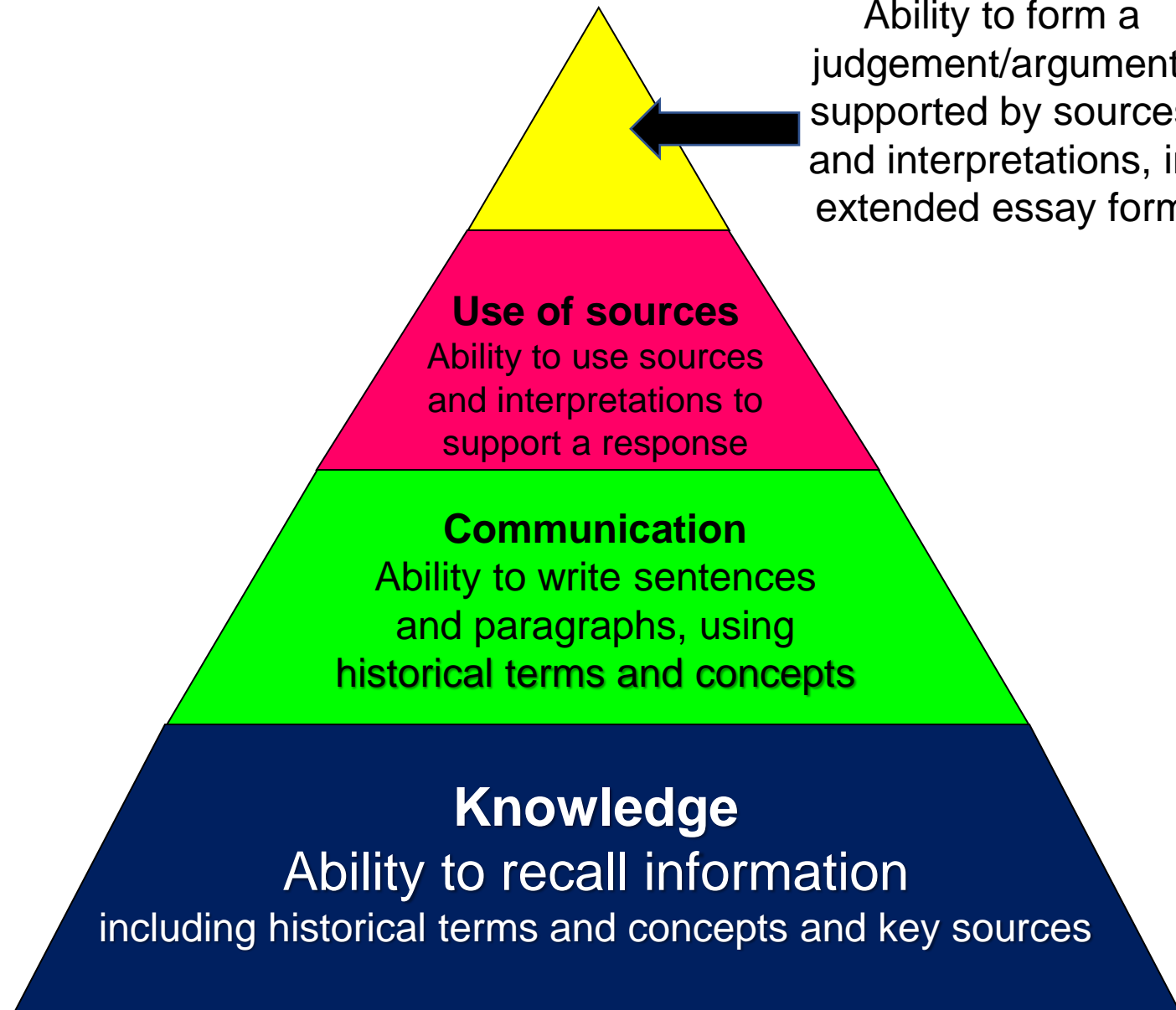
Your answer will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate **historical knowledge and understanding** relevant to the question
- **communicate ideas and information logically**
- use **historical terms and concepts** appropriately

SECTION IV HISTORICAL PERIODS

Your answer will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate **historical knowledge and understanding** relevant to the question
- **use relevant sources and interpretation to support your response**
- communicate ideas and information using **historical terms and concepts** appropriately
- present a **sustained, logical and cohesive response**



What are markers looking for?

NESA 2019 HSC Ancient History Marking Guidelines Qs 22-31	
Criteria	Marks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrates perceptive judgement relevant to the question• Demonstrates extensive and accurate historical knowledge and understanding relevant to the question• Supports the response with interpretation and well-selected evidence from relevant sources; may analyse and evaluate sources• Communicates ideas and information in a sustained, logical and cohesive response using appropriate historical terms and concepts	21-25
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrates judgement relevant to the question• Demonstrates accurate historical knowledge and understanding relevant to the question• Supports the response with interpretation and/or evidence from relevant sources• Communicates ideas and information in a logical and cohesive response using appropriate historical terms and concepts	16 -20

Use topic specific terms and concepts

Explain how art and architecture help us understand Persian society in this period.

palace complexes	Ahura-Mazda
bas-reliefs	apadana
monumental gateways	treasury
rock-cut tombs	glazed-brick
ceremonial stairways	Pasargadae
trilingual inscriptions	Susa
kingship	Persepolis
syncretism	Diodorus Siculus

What was the role of helots in Spartan society in this period?

subjugated	krypteia
syssition	neodamodes
Laconia	kleros/kleroi
Messenia	Spartiates
majority of population	agrarian economy
state-owned	Tyrtaeus
own communities	Herodotus
revolts	Thucydides

A very rough guide to length of responses

Response type	Mark value	Estimated length
Single paragraph, source/no source	3-6	Approx. 2 lines per mark + 2 or 3 (based on Core answer booklet)
Linked paragraphs, source/no source	8-12	1-2 pages
Longer response e.g. Personality	12-15	3-4 pages
Extended response e.g. Historical period	25	6-8 pages (around 1000 words)

- Follow instructions about starting responses to question parts on separate pages.
- Remember to ask for more writing booklets if you need them.

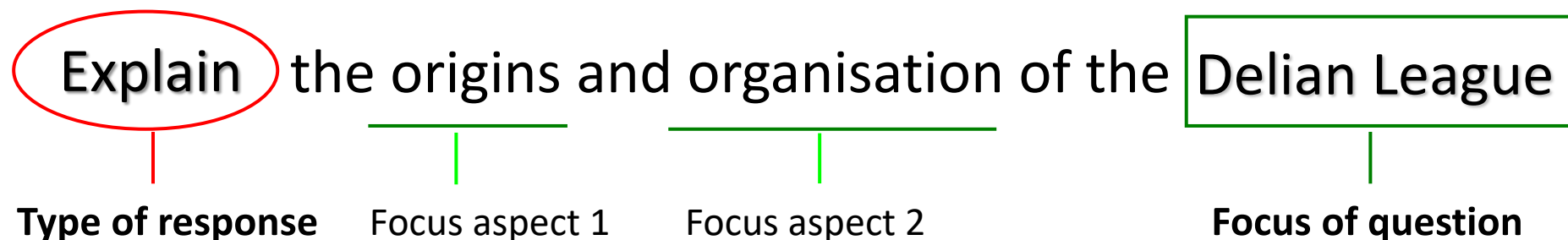


HSC questions and the *Glossary of key words*

- This glossary contains key words that appear frequently in NESA syllabuses, performance descriptions and examinations. (Eg. OUTLINE, EXPLAIN, ASSESS)
- The purpose behind the glossary is to show students that certain key words are used similarly in examination questions across the different subjects ...
- It is important to note that examination questions for the HSC will continue to use self-explanatory terms such as 'how', or 'why' or 'to what extent'.

<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/hsc-student-guide/glossary-keywords>

Deconstruct/analyse the question



RUBRIC FOR SECTION IV HISTORICAL PERIODS

Your answer will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate historical knowledge and understanding relevant to the question
- use relevant sources and interpretation to support your response
- communicate ideas and information using historical terms and concepts appropriately
- present a sustained, logical and cohesive response

Deconstruct/analyse the question

We shall probably never know what event precipitated [led] Hatchepsut into proclaiming herself king. It is, of course, possible that she had always intended to seize power, and that following the death of Thutmose II she had merely been biding her time, waiting for the politically opportune moment to strike.

Joyce Tyldesley, *Hatchepsut the Female Pharaoh*, 1998 © Dr Joyce Tyldesley

Requires a judgement

Question focus

How effectively did Hatshepsut justify her claim to the throne?

In your answer, refer to the above quotation and other sources.

Engage with source provided

Use other sources

Questions that require a judgement/argument don't always begin with 'assess' or 'evaluate'

- How successful was . . .
- How effectively did . . .
- What was the significance of . . .
- To what extent was X the main cause of . . .
- A statement or quotation followed by
 - How accurate is this statement?
 - How useful is this quotation in assessing the legacy of . . .
 - To what extent can this statement be justified?

Answering 'to what extent' questions

You need to state clearly your judgement about the nature, scope, degree or extent

- to a *great* extent; to a *significant* extent
- was *highly* influential; was of *maximum* importance
- was the *most significant* consequence
- the source is *extremely* valuable

- was a *contributing* reason, *others were more important*
- *partially, other aspects need to be considered*
- to *some* extent, however . . .

- to a *limited* extent because
- to a *minimal/negligible* extent; had *very little* influence

Providing a 'sustained' judgement/argument

Clearly state your judgement/argument in your introduction and the main points on which it is based.

A 'sustained' judgement/argument, is one that is integrated throughout the response and not just referred to in the introduction and the conclusion.

The judgement statement you made at the beginning of your response needs to be developed and supported throughout the response – not merely repeated at the beginning of each paragraph.

Your conclusion should:

- follow naturally from the main points of your judgement/argument
- express your position (signalled in the introduction) in a new way
- persuade the reader to accept your argument as well-reasoned and convincing.

Exposition

putting a particular position
on a question or issue

Position on the topic/issue

Argument 1 + supporting evidence

Argument 2 + supporting evidence

Argument 3 + supporting evidence

Summing up/reinforcement

Discussion

providing two or more positions
on a question or issue

Statement about the topic/issue
+ preview of the main arguments

Arguments for
Each point a separate paragraph
+ supporting evidence
2 or 3 separate paragraphs

Arguments against
Each point a separate paragraph
+ supporting evidence
2 or 3 separate paragraphs

Summing up/recommendation



Different types
of arguments
have different
structures
(‘skeletons’).

A question
could be
answered
either way,
depending on
the position
taken.

Integrating sources into responses

- You are expected to be familiar with a range of relevant written and archaeological, ancient and modern sources.
- In extended responses, you should refer to **ancient sources** if they provide specific detail for a response or if they help develop an argument or judgement.
- When referring to an ancient written source, you do not need to quote the document or inscription word for word. It is OK to quote a relevant phrase and provide a paraphrase for the rest.
- **Modern sources** should only be mentioned if they provide information that is not available in ancient sources, or if they offer a perspective or interpretation that supports your argument or judgement.
- It is better to use fewer sources integrated into a response, than to simply 'name-drop' modern or ancient historians - or the names of text-book writers.

Using sources to support an account or argument

Agrippina's role in Nero's rule

Agrippina played a key role in Nero's early principate. The ancient sources state that she exercised power and control. Cassius Dio refers to Agrippina managing 'the business of empire' and Suetonius refers to Nero giving her control of 'public and private affairs'. By contrast, Tacitus, a source hostile to Agrippina, credits the running of the empire to Seneca, however he does acknowledge that Agrippina was given 'unprecedented honours and privileges'.

Clear statement of position

Brief quotations from identified ancient sources to support position

Comment on the reliability of Tacitus

Different view about Agrippina's power, but corroboration of her high status

Using sources to develop an account or argument

To what extent do Sources X, Y and Z provide a comprehensive picture of the status and roles of women in Pompeii? Use evidence from these and other sources to support your response. (Eumachia, Naevoleia Tyche, Asellina)

(First two-thirds of response deals with sources provided.)

Sources X, Y and Z provide a picture of the status and roles of certain women in Pompeii. However, it is not a comprehensive picture because it does not reflect the important and varied roles of women in the domestic sphere – as wives, mothers and household managers or as household workers, slave and free. To address this gap we need to look to other sources such as portraits of couples painted on the walls of private houses, scenes from the house of Julia Felix which show women shopping in the forum, and loom weights found in houses, indicating the domestic production of textiles.

Acknowledges the value of sources provided

Indicates a challenge to this, i.e. develop an argument, make a judgement

Turning point of argument

Supported by relevant information, detail from archaeological sources

Planning a response that provides a judgement

Take a few minutes to plan a response – it will save time in the long run.

1. Circle the directive term (e.g. evaluate, to what extent, how significant) so you are clear about the type of response required.
2. Underline the key elements of the question so you are clear about what you have to cover in your response – both topic and timeframe.
3. Take a position - provide a clear judgement or line of argument in answer to the question.
4. Note in your plan 3 - 5 main points to support your judgement or argument. This will lead to a 'sustained, logical and cohesive' response.
5. Beside each point, note relevant sources you will use to support your judgement.

E.g. Assess the role of Agrippina II during the reign of Gaius (Caligula)

type of response

focus of question

period to cover

Before

Useful to promote his reign / family links
enjoyed status — honours, V.V.
— coin

Useful to further her own influence
— no power, but prestige as sister of E.

Gaius illness & Drusilla's death.

After

Threat

Conspiracy of Lepidus — Tacitus on motives
— accused of adultery & treason
— Lepidus executed

Powerlessness

Banished, property confiscated

Writing a response that provides a judgement

6. Write an introduction that responds directly to the question with a clear judgement or line of argument and mentions the main points of your response.

7. The main points become the paragraphs of your response. Each paragraph should begin with the main idea expressed in a clear topic sentence, followed by an explanation or elaboration of the main idea, supported by evidence from relevant sources.

The main points of each paragraph should flow to form a coherent response that supports your judgement/argument about the question. Remember to indent the beginning of each paragraph or leave a line between paragraphs.

8. Write a conclusion. Your conclusion should persuade the marker of the strength of your argument, based on the evidence you have presented. Do not simply repeat your introduction as this reduces the impact of the argument you have developed in your response.

Communicate clearly

- Punctuation – capitals, full stops, commas, quotation marks
- Consistent use of tense, generally past tense for events, present tense for referring to sources: *Herodotus states that, Ginsberg argues that*
- Conjunctions /connectives to link and/or sequence ideas: *therefore, as a consequence, however, moreover, finally*
- Pronouns create cohesion: *it, he, she, they* rather than always repeating the topic
- Agreement of subject and verb in a sentence – *both* should be singular *or* plural
- Paragraph construction, PEEL, BLT, hamburger paragraphs ...
- Indent or leave a line between paragraphs
- Write legibly in a black or dark blue pen

Best wishes for your preparation

- Read and analyse quality HSC responses
- Read the HSC Marking Feedback for your topics
- Practise, practise, practise writing timed responses from past HSCs
- Team up with a buddy and mark each-other's responses
- Use marking guidelines provided by NESA as part of the Exam pack

- Apart from revising and writing timed responses ...
try to sleep and eat well and do some exercise in the sunshine. X

