

Grade 12 History: Essay Writing & Source Analysis Guide

Grade 12 | History | Study Guide | 2024

Free Study Resources for South African Matric Learners

1. History Exam Structure

- Section A: Source-based questions (interpret primary/secondary sources)
- Section B: Essay questions (two essays from different time periods)
- Section C: Extended paragraph / contextualisation question
- Total: 150 marks in 2.5 hours
- Compulsory questions in some sections; choice in others (read instructions)

2. Source-Based Questions: OPCVL

Framework for evaluating historical sources:

- O - Origin: Who created it? When? Where? What type of source?
- P - Purpose: Why was it created? For what audience? What was the intention?
- C - Content: What does it say? What information does it provide? (summarise)
- V - Value: Why is this source useful to a historian? What does it reveal?
- L - Limitations: What are its weaknesses? What does it NOT tell us? Is it biased?

Types of Sources

- Primary: created at the time of the event (speeches, photographs, treaties, diaries)
- Secondary: created after the event, based on primary sources (textbooks, biographies)
- Quantitative: numerical data (statistics, graphs)
- Qualitative: descriptive/narrative (letters, speeches, oral testimonies)

3. Writing History Essays

Structure

- Introduction: context; thesis statement; brief outline of argument
- Body paragraphs: each begins with topic sentence; evidence; analysis; link to question
- Counter-argument: acknowledge and refute opposing view (shows critical thinking)
- Conclusion: restate thesis; synthesis; final judgment

Essay Writing Tips

- Answer the QUESTION ASKED; do not just "tell the story"
- Use historical evidence: names, dates, events, quotes
- Analyse causes and effects; do not just describe
- Use linking words: consequently, as a result, however, despite, whereas
- Reach a clear, substantiated conclusion
- Avoid presentism: judge past events by standards of the time

4. Key Historical Concepts

- Causation: why did an event happen? (immediate vs underlying causes)
- Change and continuity: what changed? what stayed the same?
- Significance: why does this event matter? what were its long-term effects?
- Perspective: how did different groups experience the same event?
- Empathy: understanding views of people in historical context (NOT agreeing)

TIP The highest-scoring History essays have a clear argument, use SPECIFIC evidence, and reach a substantiated

conclusion. Vague statements like "this had many effects" score poorly. Name the effects and explain them.