



2003

History Revolutions GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2003 there was an overall improvement in the way students adhered to timeframes in the questions and used only the space provided for answers. When students acknowledge the given space as a guideline for the length of their expected answer they do better. There were few bullet point answers, which was an improvement from previous years.

The misspelling of names of key individuals such as Louis XVI, Lenin and Cixi should not occur given the number of times that students must have written them before presenting for the examination and, in general, poor spelling of terminology needs to be addressed.

Illegible writing means that no matter how brilliant the argument might be, if it is very difficult to read then the meaning is not conveyed and this, after all, is the purpose of constructing the response.

Section A

Question 1

Students should read the question as a whole to achieve the correct focus for their answer and be aware that terms such as 'how' and 'why' imply the need for them to construct a point of view. An example is the question on the American Revolution that asked *how the taxation policies of Great Britain created a crisis for the British Government in its relationship with the American colonists in the 1760s*. The question in this case was looking for a response that recognised that when the British government enacted tax policies to which the colonists objected and with which they refused to comply, this caused problems for the British government. It was the refusal of the British government to repeal the legislation or change the policy of virtual representation that led ultimately to the revolution. The more successful answers recognised this but most students chose to focus on the colonists' response to the legislation and this was not the intention of the question.

More successful responses on the French Revolution identified the role of the Philosophes in challenging the established order. There was a difficulty with the grasp of 'ideology' and students tended to list other crises that were not connected with the concept of Absolute Monarchy or Divine Right.

In response to the question on Russia, students seemed to be unable to specify ways that 'unwillingness' to change was demonstrated by the Tsar. Some more successful answers linked the behaviour in 1905 to a crisis but students needed to demonstrate more factual knowledge up to 1917.

The responses to China were successful although students did not pay sufficient attention to timeframes and included information on the Opium Wars and their resultant treaties.

Samples of very successful answers for France and Russia:

The introduction of the Enlightenment based ideologies of 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' caused crisis for Louis XVI as people questioned the system of absolute monarchy. Following the 1786 financial crisis and failure of the plans of Necker, Calonne and Brienne the Aristocratic Revolt (1787) and activism for change by the Parlement of Paris indicates the modern desire for some level of representation in decision making. These ideologies of philosophers like Rousseau contributed to the calls for an estates-general that met in May 1789. However the monarchy was unwilling to compromise their ideologies of absolute autocracy and this unwillingness to place power in the hands of the people is illustrated by the deadlock over whether or not the 3rd Estate could vote by head. Such ideological conflict caused the formation of the National Assembly (17.6.89) and momentous Tennis Court Oath (20.6.89). The modern ideology of the power of the people caused additional crisis when the Bastille was stormed on July 14th 1789 – a day that has marked the beginning of revolution and the end of an old ideological order.

Tsar Nicholas II's desire to protect his absolute autocracy and only compromise when there was little alternative is illustrated by the events of Bloody Sunday (20.1.05) when Father Gapon led a crowd of 200,000 in protest for civil liberties, a minimum wage and a representative assembly and they were shot by the Tsar's forces. This resulted in the loss of image of the Tsar as a divine 'father of all Russians' and contributed to a general strike that would paralyse the country in October 1905. Even when forced to concede to the October Manifesto & consequent creation of a Duma, the Tsar refused to take the Duma seriously and dissolved the first two dumas in 72 & 105 days respectively. This in conjunction with the Fundamental Laws (1906) angered the population who realized that the Tsar was unwilling to promote any real change. Tsar Nicholas II's rigid condemnation of opposition resulted in a more radicalised opposition who was increasingly existent and would prove itself to be lethal in the future.

Question 2

This year the question asked students to name three main changes and explain the significance of one of them. The structure of the question gave students better opportunity to perform well, compared to other years when this section of the examination has been very poorly answered. Students also were provided with a framework for their answer. Despite this provision, many students explained four or five changes as in Question 1 and there were mistakes made by not adhering to timeframes. It is clear that students need practice in reading and interpreting instructions.

Many students seemed unaware of what constituted a main change and wrote very vague answers such as:

- 'Lenin introduced Communism'
- 'Politeness was a revolutionary action'
- 'equality'
- 'womens' rights'.

What they should do with this type of question is to accurately name policies, and explain how they affected social or economic conditions, religious practices or political ideology.

A typical feature of a middle- range answer was to describe or explain what the change was but not really address why it was '*significant*'. The best method used by students to structure their answer to this question was to note two main changes and then develop the third one in an extended sentence or two.

Students should not subdivide their selected change into related points. For example, Collectivisation and Industrialisation were part of the Five Year Plan not three separate changes. Successful answers identified policies such as War Communism, The New Economic Policy, The Hundred Flowers Campaign, The Great Leap Forward, The Cultural Revolution, The Law of Suspects, The Law of Maximum, The Levee en Masse.

Section B

Part 1

The first part of this section is simply assessing students' comprehension of the document. They should select the main ideas from the material and explain what is revolutionary compared to the established traditional order. However, students often lapse into paraphrasing the document. More emphasis is needed in making connections to the notion of change. In terms of thinking skills, students benefit from the opportunity to identify key ideas before they proceed to discuss the significance in greater depth.

Students responded confidently to the documents and it was evident, particularly for the contexts of America and France, that they were familiar with them and the ideas that drove the revolution. Students seemed less competent in isolating the key revolutionary ideas for the contexts of Russia and China. In the proclamation made to the Russian Congress in October 1917, the key theme was that power was going to be transferred to the Soviets and they would now be responsible for initiating wide-ranging reforms; it was revolutionary because the Soviets were to act in the name of the people. In the extract from Snow, the key idea was that the revolutionary power of the peasantry was being recognised and the Red Army was being directed to acknowledge the importance of the peasantry. This is the key tenet of Maoism and one with which students should have been familiar; for students who selected this option the problem was in articulating these points and in utilising appropriate terminology.

An example of a very competent answer where the ideas are teased out from the document was:

Revolutions are the locomotive of history; drive them at full speed and keep them on the rails'. Lenin. The Proclamation calls for the revolution to be driven 'at full speed' and 'kept on the rails' by the adoption of many of the ideas of German Philosopher Karl Marx and Bolshevik leader, V. Lenin. From the introductory declaration of the end of the Provisional Government we are made aware that Marx's predictions of a 'proletariat revolution' have occurred. The document then echoes ideas from Lenin's April Thesis that opposed War with Germany as an 'imperialist war'. It goes on to reflect many ideals from Lenin's 1902 pamphlet What is to be Done? such as Lenin's envisagement of workers taking over the 'means of production' and this being an essential stage of the revolution. In the last paragraph there is a definite reference to the Marxist notion that 'We have nothing to lose but our chains. We have everything to gain. Workers of the world, unite'. The proclamation calls all 'soldiers, workers, employees' in this struggle of the 'proletarian dictatorship'. A Marxist-Leninist image of the strong 'muscular fist of the proletariat' is ignited as the author declares that the 'fate of the revolution and democratic peace is in your hands.

Part 2

Students performed better on this question than in the past and the use of evidence in answers showed improvement. Students seemed better prepared in linking ideas to the events and developments over the revolutionary period and were able to qualify their judgments when the revolution seemed to change course. The provision of the dates for answers should have indicated to students that they needed to interpret the revolution as an evolutionary process as the dates were beyond the fall of the old regime. There was a strong effort to address the notion of '*success*'. Some students attempted to combine an answer for part (i) and part (ii) which did not allow them the best opportunity to frame their answer.

More successful answers often used phrases such as: *'these ideas were important in shaping the Revolution'* to set a framework for their answer. The skill in using evidence was better where the document was quoted as evidence and students could then elaborate; this provided a relevant and organised answer. The advice from the examiners is to use the document more and show the development and changing nature of ideas, leaders or movements. Students need to be shown how to place the document in context; for example they could ask themselves: how is it connected to the revolution? Answers contained quotes from historians to justify their points; however, it was rare to find students using other primary sources. Students seemed at a loss to cite relevant evidence in their response to the question on the Chinese Revolution but events such as Mao's Triumph at the Zunyi Conference, the Yenan period and the development of the massline were used as evidence of the increasingly important role ideas about the peasantry played in the period to 1949.

The quality of analysis in answers was good. In the context of France the more successful answers identified *'to what extent'* ideas were achieved and they acknowledged that it depends on *'when'* in the revolution. For example, answers referred to ideas changing following the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. However, there is a need to analyse the motives of individuals, for example Robespierre. Students are good at saying *'what'* happened but not *'why'*, other than *'to save the revolution'*. Answers on Colonial America were sophisticated in the analysis of what drove the revolution. Students questioned whether the revolution was driven by a desire for liberty and equality or issues relating to financial gain. A few students were able to identify instances where the rhetoric of the revolution was not matched by actions, as in the Boston Tea Party. Similarly there were some excellent answers to the question on the French Revolution. Answers showed analysis that the ideals of the revolution were abandoned by actions such as the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the Revolutionary Tribunals and the part played by the Sans Culottes. In the context of Russia, students analysed that the ideals which drove the revolution did not survive because of the harsh policies of War Communism and the creation of the Cheka but students seemed less clear about what the key revolutionary ideas were. Answers on China were not very detailed on how the ideas of Maoism drove the revolution up to 1949; however, there was improved precision in discussion comparing the CCP and the Nationalists in 2003.

Section C

The essays showed that students are increasingly confident in discussing the challenges facing the new regime and balance their essays adequately with comparisons to the old regime. There were fewer narratives and the discussion of historians' perspectives was better integrated, with more extended commentary throughout the essay, than in other years.

There was a tendency for students to offer simplistic viewpoints of leaders of the new regime. For example, Stalin was frequently portrayed as being a good leader because he introduced the Five Year Plan. Occasionally there was acknowledgement that his policies of forced *Collectivization* and the *dekulakization* program actually mirrored practices of the old regime which subjugated the peasantry. More generally students simplified the period of 1928–32 as being good years because people were fed. Fitzpatrick's section on the Five Year Plan is readily available and provides detailed information of life under Stalin which she equates with a *'second serfdom'*. Likewise, Mao was viewed sympathetically and seen as trying to fix the problems of China when he introduced the Great Leap Forward and Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. However, there were few students who investigated the motivations for his launching these. Those who did presented very good analysis by referring to contrasting theories of different historians.

The integration of evidence into essays is improving. It is apparent from the essay plans that students who plan their essays using the blank pages in the script books are adopting an excellent strategy for thinking about the evidence they will cite. Some answers displayed a good range of statistical data such as: the percentage of land redistributed to Russian peasants, the number of intellectuals labelled *'rightists'* in China's political campaigns, the revenue derived from the sale of territory in post-colonial America and the sale of land after the French Revolution. This indicates that stronger students know they must substantiate their arguments.

Continuity and change is better analysed than in the past. Students are addressing this aspect thematically and comparing the similarities and differences between the regimes. The essays that adopt this approach are more competent, interesting and engage with the topic in a thorough manner.

A pleasing aspect of the essays was that students seem to be moving away from glib references to *'liberal'*, *'revisionist'* and *'western historians'*. Rather there is a trend towards commentary on the views advanced by historians, relating to certain instances or policies. Instead of memorising long quotes students are paraphrasing the ideas of key historians. This is a more manageable approach and offers opportunity to use the excellent debates which are obviously occurring in classrooms.

Sections of an essay on France in response to Question 4 are given below. Notice how the essay commences with historians' perspectives which set a good framework. (There is no editing of spelling or sentence structure.)

Extensive historical debates have raged between conservative, liberal, Marxist, Revisionist and cultural historians as to the extent to which the Enlightenment based ideals that inspired revolutionaries were achieved by the 1789 French Revolution. The French Revolution, a great turning point of modern history, smashed the traditions of the 'ancient regime' in an attempt to use ideas of 'liberte, egalite, fraternite' into society. One cannot generalize that such ideas were 'rarely achieved' as the extent to which these expectations were fulfilled differs greatly according to the different eras of the revolution that for the purpose of this essay will be classified as; The Constitutional Monarchy(1789-91), the Jacobin – led Republic(1792-94), the Bourgeoise Directory of the Republic(9Thermidor-1799) and post 1799 Napoleonic France. However by Napoleonic France of 1804, it is evident that despite the failure of some revolutionary ideals, many expectations that had inspired the French Revolution were fulfilled.

Pre-revolutionary French society was divided by practice and by law into three estates, each with unique privileges and responsibilities. The First Estate comprised the Church, the Second the Nobility, and the third encompassed all who were left, including the bourgeoisie, peasantry and urban workers. As the 'Social Contract' broke so did the traditions of the old regime and France was swung into revolution as power was taken away from King LouisXVI and placed in the hands of the people.

However the Jacobins had little choice but to put revolutionary ideals on hold at a time when the revolution faced serious threat due to external war and internal counter revolutionary activity such as revolts in the Vendee (March-Dec, 1793). Harsh dictatorial measures such as the execution of leading Girondins (June and Oct, 1793), the Summary execution decree, The Law of Suspects (Sep 1793) and emergency powers given to the Committee of Public Safety (Oct, 1793) could be viewed as a necessary step to save 'la patrie en danger'. This being said, it is undeniable that this oppression was contrary to the Enlightenment ideas of 'liberte, egalite, fraternite' that had inspired the revolution.

One such example of the contradiction of the terror to the original ideals is evident in a comparison of the effects of the Law of 22 Prairial(1794) with article one of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 'all men are born and shall remain free and equal. Social distinctions may only be made for general usefulness'. The Law of 22 Prairial aimed to speed up the executions of counter-revolutionaries by declaring that verdicts would be made by the 'conscience of jurors' and witnesses were no longer called to trials. In effect, the law of 22 Prairial resulted in the death of many who had pertained to the privileged orders of the old regime due to their social status, rather than actions. In other words, the ideal of 1789 to end 'social distinctions' had not been a success by 1794.

Such evidence cannot, however, be used to justify the over-simplification that the 'ideals that inspired the revolutionaries to break with the traditions of the old regime were rarely achieved'. By Napoleonic France of 1804 French society had successfully adopted an array of the expectations of the 1789 revolutionaries from the 3rd Estate. The Civil Code of 1804(to later become Code Napoleon 1817) ensured that all citizens were equal before the law. This contrasts greatly with the old order during which nobles were tried in seigneurial courts, whilst peasants were often judged before their masters. In addition careers were now open to merit, rather than birth. There had been a successful detachment from the Church and the State, yet in 1801 Napoleon reached an agreement with Pope Pius XVI to form a friendship between the state and the Catholic Church. Whilst the new position of the Church had been a hope of the philosophes like Voltaire and many members of the 3rd Estate, Roman Catholic Historian Hillaire Belloc reminds us that the treatment of the Catholic Church during the French Revolution was an area in which the ideas that inspired the second Estate to protest against LouisXVI were not achieved. Revisionist historian, Sutherland claims that 'centralization under Napoleonic France represents the failure of an ideal that so many had promoted at the Estates General'. Thus it is a generalisation to claim that revolution rarely achieves the original ideals from which they were inspired. It is true that due to the numerous crisis that impeded revolutionary governments from immediately achieving their Enlightenment goals of the adoption of reason, rationality and 'liberty, equality and fraternity into French society. However, by Napoleonic France of 1804 it is evident that despite certain failures, the French revolution did successfully fulfil many ideological expectations.