

Advanced Higher History

Dissertation

Assessment guide and support pack



Introduction

The new Advanced Higher requires candidates to research and produce a high quality dissertation that is worth 50 marks out of the overall 140 available.

The new qualification also requires candidates to carefully record their progress in stages over the session. The teacher is required to check that they have met the historical research assessment standards. It is important to note that in Advanced Higher, a very high degree of independent learning and research is required. Teachers should be primarily consulted for advice and not for the more direct intervention you may have relied upon in S4 or even S5 History.

The purpose of this guide is to show you how to approach your dissertation. ***There are some parts of this guide which will need filled in, this is MANDATORY*** and you should keep a hold of this as evidence of your dissertation work.

Your teacher must keep a record of each of your responses to the dissertation outcomes, in order for you to pass these.

It is very important therefore, that every candidate begins work on their dissertation as soon as they can, in order to avoid rushing their research and compromising the quality of their work. General advice on choosing a question, structure, footnotes, resources, using both Primary and Secondary sources, recording your findings and bibliographies are included in this guide.

Finally, remember your teacher is here to help and support you in your study of Advanced Higher History. The course requires a very high standard of commitment and self-reliance. However, make sure you ask for advice and help with your dissertation when you need it. Do not leave your first enquiries until March as it may already be too late to improve your work significantly.

Choosing an issue

In Advanced Higher at the Gordon Schools, we study *the House Divided* topic. Each year, the SQA posts a list of dissertation titles on their website. You should choose a title from this list that you are most comfortable doing.

If you would like to write about an issue outside of the list, we need to fill in a form and request permission from the SQA to do this. This should only be considered if you are very interested in a particular area and have thought about it carefully.

You should start thinking about your choice of issue at the very beginning of the Advanced Higher course. Your teacher will give you a list produced by SQA of possible dissertation issues from which you can choose one that interests you. Alternatively, you may wish to research an issue that is not included on the SQA list. It may be that you have already done some background reading that has raised significant questions about an aspect of your chosen field of study, or your teacher may be aware of interesting resources, available locally, that would facilitate the study of a particular, worthwhile issue.

If you do choose an issue that is not included on the SQA list, it is very important that your alternative choice of issue should be submitted to the SQA for approval by 1 October of the academic year in which you are completing the Historical Research unit. This is to ensure that your choice of topic is realistic and that it is in accordance with the requirements of the Advanced Higher course.

Recording your progress

You should use this booklet either on paper or electronically, to record each stage of your progress on the dissertation. Remember, this is a requirement of the Advanced Higher history course.

Here is a set of deadlines for each stage of your research. These are designed to help you manage your research progress. Each part will be explained more carefully later in this booklet.

Assessment Standard	Date
1.1 Justifying an appropriate, complex historical issue for research	June
1.2 Planning a programme of research	September
1.3 Researching, collecting and recording information in an organised way	November
1.4 Explaining approaches to organising, presenting and referencing findings	December
1.5 Correctly referencing a source using an appropriate referencing system	December
Deadline for the first draft of your dissertation	December

Planning your project

There is quite a lot of advice on planning your historical research project (dissertation) in the SQA course and unit support notes for Advanced Higher History, which can be accessed through the SQA website (<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/48466.html>). The purpose of this section is to give advice on the expected time frame for you to complete each section well.

Your project is worth 50 marks. This equates to 35% of your final grade. Time is crucial for your dissertation. This is supposed to be the best piece of work that you can possibly produce. You will have around 6 months to work on your dissertation if you plan it well. This may sound like an unnecessary amount of time but you must remember to factor in all the research, reading, note taking and making that this will entail, plus a couple of drafts. This will need to be done alongside the rest of the course, which also entails all of the above. When it comes to your dissertation you must be disciplined.

Word Count

The dissertation has a maximum word count of **4000** words. You should aim to get as close to this limit as you can without going over it.

If the 4000 word rule is infringed, even by a small amount, there is an automatic penalty of 5 marks that is very difficult to claw back in the examination paper. There is no leeway on this.

You should note that:

- a. The 4000 word count is for **TEXT of the dissertation only**. This does **not** include the contents page, chapter headings, footnotes or bibliography or appendices.
- b. You should not attempt to gain an unfair advantage by heavily loading the footnotes or providing lengthy appendices.
- c. The criteria for an 'A' in the dissertation require that a response is 'well organised'. A piece of work that is 2,000 words over the limit is clearly not.
- d. Putting the word count on the bottom of each page of body text is very helpful, but if it then all adds up to **more** than the declared and signed for 'under 4,000' total on the front, then the 5 mark penalty is applied.
- e. Writing "around 4,000" is almost guaranteed to get the markers counting.
- f. **Markers do check the word count.**

At the other end of the spectrum, highly abbreviated dissertations that barely reach 3,000 words will not condemn you to an automatic fail, but you penalize yourself by doing this. It is difficult to see how there can be the appropriate depth and development of the chosen topic if you have chosen to write only three quarters of the possible amount.

Structure

The overall structure of your dissertation should be **very organised** and include **a clear line of argument**. Dissertations should have;

- A clear introduction.
- Chapter or section headings.
- Make use of footnotes – these should not be used as a part of your argument, but to reference a resource you've used.
- A clear line of argument incorporating a historical debate on your chosen issue.
- Primary and Secondary sources included in the argument. References to both historians' views and those of contemporaries are essential in Advanced Higher.
- A clear conclusion.
- A bibliography showing a *wide range* of reading.

Further advice on structuring your work

Historiography

Dissertations require historiography to pass.

Best practice is to support points with evidence and with views of attributed authors/schools of thought where appropriate, as paragraphs develop. Contrasted views are excellent in illustrating historical debate.

Many markers comment on the difficulty some candidates have in integrating historiography into the development of the issues. It is poor practice in a dissertation to hand in a piece which is 75% narrative, with a historiographical section tacked onto the back as the last chapter/or conclusion. This is clumsy to say the least, but by the time the marker gets to the historians' analysis at the end, the dissertation may have already been consigned to failure by the sheer quantity of 'story' that has already been looked at.

Referencing

Here is an example of how a footnote might be used and referenced, using the Harvard referencing system;

Fogel and Engermann comment on the tendency of writers to leap to conclusions about the morality of slave plantation owners and slave overseers; "*On large slaveholdings (over fifty slaves) only one out of every four owners used white overseers.*" (1)

At the bottom of the page, using the footnotes option on your computer, the reference would be recorded like this;

(1) Fogel, R.W. and Engermann, S.L.; *Time on the Cross*; Boston, 1974; p. 200.

i.e. Surname and first name or initials of the author; Title of book or article; place and date of publication; page number(s), i.e. p. or pp (if more than one page).

Consecutive references - *ibid.* and the page number (*ibid.* is short for the Latin *ibidem*, meaning "the same source").

Non-consecutive references to the same book and author – surname *op cit.* and the page number.

(*op. cit.* is short for *opere citato*, meaning "in the work cited, or previously quoted.")

Websites, video clips and documentaries are also viable sources of information and should be footnoted, also.

Primary Sources

It is essential to use **at least one** Primary Source in your dissertation. Increasing emphasis has been placed, in recent times, on using speeches, letters, memoirs and even photographs on the *House Divided* course.

Bibliography

Markers will look at the bibliography to judge whether you have read more widely than the core texts provided by the school. Include in your bibliography all the texts you have used, whether you have directly quoted them or not.

Further points about footnotes and bibliographies

Excessive footnotes are ignored when reading the dissertation, and in arriving at a mark.

The bibliography is helpful to markers; it lets them see the width and quality of the reading that has been done; and the markers can then see for themselves whether any of that reading has shown itself in the ideas that are expressed in the dissertation itself. Be warned against the dangers of 'binge-sourcing'; there is no point filling the bibliography with an array of titles which show no sign of their authors' ideas ever been used.

Using Farmer and McPherson is ok but you should go beyond these and read some of the actual books by the authors themselves. This indicates that you have really engaged with the debate. A dissertation with too many footnote references to class text books tends to suggest the 'worthy trier' rather than the 'higher-flyer'.

A note on addressing the question you have chosen

Markers in Advanced Higher History are looking for detailed, factually precise debates and discussions on the issue you have chosen. Remember, markers are experts in these fields and any inconsistencies or factual errors will be spotted.

Markers are looking for a clear and reasoned line of argument which directly addresses, in detail, the isolated factor of the issue (if there is one). Avoid at all costs a simple narrative approach and make judgements throughout. Mini conclusions are still useful at Advanced Higher level.

Make sure you get a friend or family member to proof read your dissertation. You may need to make two or three redrafts to get it right.

Finally, remember that the Dissertation is a chance to really show what you can do after years of studying History and writing about it. A good dissertation can make all the difference to your final mark.

Points about plagiarism

You should use quotes sparingly but effectively. You should attribute them in references/footnotes. This applies to both books and internet sites.

You should avoid incorporating other writers' work into your own words, without attribution. Markers are experienced teachers/lecturers who will almost certainly spot this contrast.

Good luck in this tough but (hopefully) rewarding task.

Research skills

Advanced Higher History requires a lot of independent research. You will have been developing your research skills throughout secondary school and this course will give you the opportunity to develop them further. However, many learners find this extremely difficult and don't understand what good research involves. The following pages give some advice and tips on what constitutes good research and how to go about researching a topic, theme or issue.

As an Advanced Higher student you will probably find yourself in a situation where staff introduce a topic of study during class and then ask you to find out the answer to an issue or to create an essay through research. Do not panic! This is an achievable task once you know what to do and look for.

1. Using the internet and electronic resources

As we live in a digital age it is more than likely that you will be most comfortable carrying out research using the internet. The internet is more than useful for research but due to the staggering amount of information out there it can be an overwhelming experience.

The trick is to first of all understand what it is that you are looking for. Many learners type a topic title into their search engine and when they don't find anything they give up. It is imperative that you are very specific and focused on what you are trying to find out. It's a good idea to jot down four or five specific questions that you want answers to before embarking on your research. If your search brings back a huge number of sources then you will need to make a decision and use only two or three of the best sources. There are two types of search that you can do: a simple search or an advanced search.

2. Simple search

In a simple search you type a key word or question into the search field. You can also add phrases to narrow your search but these must be encased in inverted commas. A list of hits (websites) will appear.

3. Advanced search

In an advanced search you restrict the search to get more appropriate hits.

AND means that both terms must appear

eg 'Lincoln' AND 'Douglas'

OR means that only one of the items must appear

eg 'Virginia' OR 'Lee'

NOT means no items must appear

eg 'Grant' NOT 'Sherman'

The next step is to be aware of what a good source of information will look like. As a keen historian you should already be aware of why the provenance of a source is important. It is the same idea when selecting relevant websites. You want to make sure that the information you select is useful and reliable. Look at the address of the website.

Address of website	Type of website
.co or .com	Generally commercial sites trying to sell something, be wary.
.gov	Government agency that represents government views. Potentially useful, depending on your research.
.org	An organisation that represents a particular group or view, eg anti-smoking. These websites are biased towards their view.
.edu or .ac or .sch	Schools, colleges or universities. May be useful depending on research.
.uk	Look at the very end of the address for the country that the website is based in. This may affect its usefulness, eg law is different depending on country.
Date	Have a look to see if the pages you are using are dated and when the last update was. It's important to assess how current the links are for objectivity.

Whatever you do, do not base your research on something that you have read on Wikipedia. Although Wikipedia has its uses, it is not a reliable source and should be avoided at this level of study.

4. Useful websites for researching

<http://www.bl.dss.bl.uk>

The British Library Document Supply Service is an excellent starting point for research. Simply enter a key topic of study into the search field and it will give you an extensive bibliography of e-journals, articles and books. It is an excellent tool for finding relevant materials and reading.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

The CIA's World Factbook has a wealth of historical information on it and is easy to use.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk>

Newspapers often have related articles that you may not know about. Enter your topic into the search box and a list of articles will appear.

For our topic, there are a huge amount of websites available. Part of your task will be to differentiate between a useful web source and that produced by an enthusiastic amateur.

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/>

The above website has great wealth of Primary Sources that are easily accessible.

<http://www.archives.gov/>

The US National Archives also has an exhaustive range of sources available for viewing.

<http://www.loc.gov/>

The US library of Congress is also a vast store of information of all kinds.

5. Using the library and books for research

Many learners are put off using the library for research because they are unsure of how to use it. My advice is to visit your school, college, local and/or national library and ask for a quick tour of how to use the facilities.

- Like using the internet, it is important to understand what exactly it is you are looking for. If you don't understand or have difficulty conveying to someone what you are looking for then the chances are you won't find relevant information. A good starting point is to talk to staff at the beginning of the academic session. Ask for a full bibliography. If this is cannot be supplied then ask for a couple of recommended texts and articles.
- Pay a visit to the library that you are going to be using to collect the recommended reading. It may be that they do not have what you need on site and will have to order the books. For this reason, it is important to visit the library during the first week of the course to avoid disappointment.
- Use the index of books and journals. An alarming number of learners tend to flick through a book and if they do not immediately see what they are looking for they reject it. Take the time to look through the index for specific themes, words or people. The index will guide you to page numbers and therefore relevant information.
- When taking notes from books and journals make sure that your information is referenced with author, title and publication so that you can use quotes if you need to.

Note taking

1. Aims of notes

- Recording information (key themes, dates, people etc).
- Recording different historians' viewpoints.
- Planning for your project (dissertation) and essays.
- Revision work for assessments and the final exam.
- Helping you to avoid plagiarism as your quotes will be well referenced throughout.
- Interacting with the prescribed materials so that you can engage in discussion and debate with staff and other learners.

To succeed at Advanced Higher History you will have to become accomplished at taking and making notes. Your notes should demonstrate a thorough knowledge of your field of study and a wide range of reading. One of the major leaps from Higher to Advanced Higher is the expectation that you will do a lot of independent reading from a wide range of sources and you will be required to exhibit your learning through notes. Note taking and making can be difficult and are skills that you will develop throughout the year. The first step is to understand the difference between taking notes and making notes.

2. Note taking and making

When you take notes, you are writing down other people's ideas. This could be from a wide range of sources, such as class, lecture, seminar, book, website, newspaper article or journal.

When you make notes, you are changing other people's ideas into your own words. You are also forming your own judgments and organising all of the information you have learned about a topic into something that makes sense to you. There is no hard and fast rule for how your notes should be displayed and this will be unique to you. Some common ways of making notes are:

- bullet points
- lists with headings and sub-headings
- key words and phrases
- large margins so that you can add relevant information later
- mind maps
- flow charts
- Venn diagrams
- audio notes.

3. How to make effective notes from a piece of text

Skim

The first thing to do is skim the piece of text. Do not read word for word. The idea is that you let your eyes skim over the text so that you can establish what the text is about. Pay particular attention to headings, titles and pictures.

Scan

Now that you have an idea of what the text is about, you should go back over it in a similar fashion to the first time but this time you are looking for key phrases, ideas or arguments. It is at this point that you should take notes. In other words jot down these key points. Do not copy huge amounts of text as this will only increase your workload. Use abbreviations and only use the main ideas. If you think you have read something important and you want to use the idea or argument in an essay or dissertation you must write down the quote. Remember to include the author, name of book, page number, publication etc at this point so that you do not have to waste time in the future looking back through a pile of books, articles or websites.

Paraphrase

Once you have taken the notes, you need to put them into your own words. This can sometimes be tricky. Make sure you have a thesaurus to hand.

Summarise

Again, this can be quite tricky. The idea is to fit all of the main points, in your own words, into as concise a piece of work as possible. You may have to read several chapters of a book but this does not mean that you should create several chapters' worth of notes. You should only be looking at a few pages.

4. Choosing your note style

This is often the most difficult part, as many learners don't know what the best style is for them. Your note style will be unique to you and you should think about what kind of learner you are. Do you prefer to learn visually (pictures, PowerPoints, clips), auditory (lectures, audio books), kinaesthetically (making and doing) or a mixture of more than one? Think about what works best for you and make a decision. There are some ideas below to help you make that decision.

Visual learners

Mind maps: Mind mapping is a popular and useful tool for making notes, learning key information and planning for assignments. Mind maps are mainly pictorial and have been proven to mirror how the brain works. Your topic or title goes in the centre of the page and the ideas flow outwards through curved lines, colour and associated pictures and words. It is important to limit the use of text in a mind map to get the full impact. Type 'mind mapping' into Google images to see some examples.

Colour coding and highlighting: Colour coding your work by topic, theme or argument is a useful tool for retaining information.

Diagrams: Diagrams, drawings, arrows and text boxes can be visually pleasing and show links between themes or historiography.

Auditory learners

Recording: Recording your notes and listening to them at suitable times during the day or as you fall asleep is a good way to retain and process information.

Kinaesthetic learners

Create notes using the Cornell system: Create two columns on a sheet of paper. The right-hand column should be twice as large as the left-hand column. The idea is that you take notes on the right-hand side then make shorter notes on the left-hand side using key phrases and words after taking the notes. This means that you don't have to write out two sets of notes and can clearly summarise the notes you have taken.

Prepare for a debate: Write down two sets of arguments for a popular issue within your field of study.

Create a set of flashcards: Allocate one topic, theme or argument per card. Your cards should be colourful and include both text and pictures/diagrams. Your cards should be quite small so the information must be concise and you can get someone to test your knowledge with them. If you laminate them and put them on a keyring, they will be easily accessible and hard to destroy or lose!

5. Organising your notes

Once you have chosen how you are going to make your notes it is important to keep them well organised. You may be surprised at how quickly they multiply! You don't want to have waste time in the future looking through a huge pile of notes for something in particular and you don't want to be wasting time re-reading something and duplicating notes because you have lost them.

At the beginning of the year invest in a couple of good quality ring binders, a set of coloured dividers and some plastic wallets or a hole punch. Organise your notes neatly by topic and put a divider between each topic with a clear label so that everything is accessible. Make sure that any articles or hand-outs given to you by staff are filed in the correct topic area. Also, ensure that you have sections for source work and essays. You should use a separate folder for all of your dissertation work. Again, you can organise your notes under chapter headings and historiography.

Make sure that everything is clearly labelled with headings and titles so that you don't become confused further down the line. It may seem like a lot of work initially but once you get into the habit of labelling, organising and filing you will find that it takes no time and you will not have to waste time in the future.

If you are storing notes electronically make sure everything is in clearly labelled folders and back everything up on to a pen drive or two if you do not have access to a cloud.

Taking, making and organising notes form a highly developed skill set that you will have to learn quickly as your notes will form the basis of all of your work. You will use your notes for planning essays, planning debates, preparing for tutorials and class discussion, planning and writing your dissertation, source work and revision for the final exam. It is crucial that you spend time at the beginning of the year mastering these skills because once you have; Advanced Higher History will become a whole lot easier.

Layout

Although the initial 'brainstorming' should have given you some ideas about what you hope to consider in your dissertation, as you read around the topic you will have a clearer idea of the issues that are involved. You must be willing to amend your initial plan in the light of your research. You should also be prepared to discuss your ideas with your teacher who might suggest other aspects of the topic that could be important. You might realise that your initial plan covers too much and decide to focus on those aspects of the issue which emerge from your reading as being the most significant.

Once you have done sufficient reading to be able to make a confident start on your dissertation, you should draw up a clear plan, outlining how you intend to approach your chosen issue.

- You will need to have a clear introduction that sets the issue in its historical context and identifies the approach that you intend to take.
- It is recommended that you **divide your work into chapters, or sections**, with each chapter/section examining one aspect of the topic.
- Obviously you will also need a conclusion that draws together your findings and provides your researched, analytical answer to the issue you have been considering.

It is suggested that your plan should be about **150–200** words in length. Where appropriate, it should include references to the views of different historians. It is also important that you analyse the evidence available to you and reach an informed judgement about the issue.

Planning your dissertation in this way will ensure that you produce a structured, well argued dissertation. It will also help your teacher to provide you with advice at this stage since the approach that you intend to take should be clearly identifiable from your plan.

A brief example of how a plan might look

Issue: Military defeat or a failure of southern nationalism? An examination of the reasons why the South lost the Civil War. (Field of Study 7: The House Divided: The USA 1850–1865)

A good plan might include the following:

Introduction: Early Civil War historians considered Northern victory inevitable; more recently historians have questioned why Lee's surrender at Appomattox ended all Southern resistance. Outline of the range of possible explanations.

Section 1: Southern nationalism; initial support in the South for secession; the traditional emphasis on states' rights and the extent to which this undermined a sense of Southern nationalism; the contribution of individual Southern politicians who put state rights ahead of centralised power and the war effort.

Section 2: Military defeat: military turning points in the war; the impact of the Union campaigns of 1864; the reasons why the South was not able to continue traditional warfare by 1865.

Section 3: Economic factors: an evaluation of the economic consequences of the war for the South.

Section 4: Why was the South fighting? The lack of a single, unifying war aim in the South.

Section 5: The loss of the will to fight; the extent to which loss of will may have been the critical factor in the failure of the Southern war effort.

Conclusion: The historical debate regarding the reasons for Southern defeat in the Civil War. Military defeat led to a loss of will to fight; Southern nationalism was not sufficiently strong to revive flagging support for military resistance.

Dissertation log book

Assessment Standard	Minimum standard required to pass.
1.1 Justifying an appropriate, complex historical issue for research.	<p>Answer the following questions making at least one clear, developed point for each question;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What is the proposed issue about or what hypothesis do you want to prove? ◆ What is the purpose of researching the issue? ◆ Why it is worth learning about the issue or what is the importance of the issue in the context of the subject? ◆ What sub issues, questions, analysis or evaluation is the research likely to involve?
1.2 Planning a programme of research.	<p>Provide a clear plan with;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least one Primary and one secondary source. • A paragraph explaining how you will research your question and why you have chosen this method. • A timetable of deadlines (specific dates) for research, the first draft, the final draft completion etc.
1.3 Researching, collecting and recording information in an organised way.	<p>Provide clear, organised notes on a minimum of three different sources.</p>
1.4 Explaining approaches to organising, presenting and referencing findings.	<p>You need to make at least one developed point about the use of one academic convention and one developed point about the importance of referencing.</p>
1.5 Correctly referencing a source using an appropriate referencing system.	<p>You must provide evidence of at least one properly referenced source.</p>

Please fill this in and keep safe!

Candidate Name _____

Dissertation Title

Teacher signature _____

and date signed off _____

Note taking templates

These can be sent electronically so you can print out/adapt them as you need/wish.

Title and author	
Key Words/ themes / arguments	Notes:

Summary:

Dissertation checklist

What you have done	Evidence of being met (e.g draft, discussion, bibliography etc.) You will be asked to produce this evidence by your teacher.	Signature of teacher and date
Chosen an appropriate title (1.1)		
Composed a plan including possible chapters and with a clear line or argument (1.2)		
My plan includes a run-down of the resources that I intend to use, timescales and justification of my research methodology (1.3)		
I have shown evidence of collecting information from AT LEAST three different sources/texts (1.3)		
Taken and organised my notes in a way which makes sense (1.4)		
I can explain why I have used specific resources, I have developed a rationale for my dissertation layout (1.4)		
I have added a bibliography and full footnotes; my dissertation is free from plagiarism I have used a standard referencing system (1.5)		

