HSIE- Ancient History
Exam preparation transcript
(Duration 27 minutes 18 seconds)

Welcome to a short video to support you in your preparation for the ancient history HSC exam. This video will include an introductory look at the layout and structure of the exam. Some tips on preparing for the exam before the big day and a deeper look at the exam section by section with some discussion of specific past paper questions and feedback from the marking centre. The key message that we can send to you before the exam is that to prepare well, you need to have a strong grasp of key content and concepts that you need to spend a lot of time practicing the different ways to respond to different types of questions. Cramming or studying just before the exam will not be as effective as long-term study approach. And at the end of the day you need to know a lot about the Ancient history topics that you have studied to be able to write about them in an exam setting. So wide reading and engaging with the content deeply is key to success.

Before the exam day, the first thing to do is download your HSC timetable and highlight all of your exams. The 2020 examination timetable has already been released and can be found on the NESA website. The ancient history examination will be held on day three, which is Thursday the 22nd of October 2020 at 9:25 AM. Make sure you manage your time and travel so that you can arrive with plenty of time to be seated before your exam begins. Plan your revision schedule to match up with your exams. You should have a regular study routine that you were following to keep up with your coursework. Continue to study and revise each of your subjects. However, in the days before the exams, you need to give a little bit more emphasis to the exams you will complete first. As you complete the exam, the time that you would have spent on those subjects can now be allocated to the exams yet to come.

Ensure that you get a good night’s sleep for each exam. Late nights will harm your performance. Last minute cramming is OK, but not at the expense of sleep. Your brain needs time to rest and you'll be able to engage better with the questions if you were not physically and mentally exhausted. Eat your breakfast studies have shown that adding a healthy high protein breakfast, and remaining hydrated will help improve your examination results on days where you may have an afternoon exam and healthy lunch will also help your concentration. And finally, make sure you have all of your equipment ready. Pack it up in a clear pencil case or a plastic sleeve the night before so you're not rushing and forget something the morning of the exam.

What can I bring to the exam? NESA allows the following items in all HSC examinations. First of all, black pens make sure you bring spares. They always run out of the worst possible time and black easy important as exam papers scanned to allow thought onscreen marking lighter colour pens may make you reading of your response quite difficult. A ruler is allowed in all of exams, but is especially necessary for measurement and completion of some questions. Highlighters, really helpful in identifying directive verbs or key terms in a question. We're going to talk about that a little bit later. Pencils, 2B, for completing any diagrams can also be useful for your planning, and allows you to easily correct your mistakes. Obviously, a sharpener is useful in case your pencil breaks and water in a clear bottle. Help keep you hydrated during your exam. All of these items can be found relatively cheaply at a stationary store or even a newsagent. But don't wait till the last minute to find these items. You should be using them throughout your course.

The exam itself, the ancient history exam consists of four sections. Section one is our core study cities of Vesuvius, Pompeii and Herculaneum This section contains three or four short and long answer questions ranging from three marks to 15 marks. There will be a source booklet to accompany this section as well. Section two, ancient societies. This requires you to answer one question with multiple parts about your chosen Ancient society option. There will be three or four parts to this question. The parts will vary in weighting, with one part being worth between 10 and 15 marks. Section three is our Personalities in their times, and this section requires you to answer one question about your chosen personality. There will be multiple parts to the question and you will need to answer both. And finally, Section four, historical periods. This section requires you to write an essay on your chosen historical period from a possible two questions options. The response is worth 25 marks.

You’ll be given five minutes to read the paper and during this time you will not be able to write, so use this time to ensure that you have each of the sections and no pages are missing. You should ensure you have a copy of the source booklet and writing booklets that you would use for each of the sections. A source booklet is provided which contains multiple sources that will be referred to specifically in section one. The three hours of writing time. During this time, you are to complete the paper to the best of your ability. You will remain in the examination room for a minimum of one hour and you'll not be permitted to leave in the last 30 minutes. This is to minimise disruption at the end of the exam period and once you leave the exam room, you will not be permitted to re-enter, so it is strongly advised that you remain for the duration of the examination period. And maybe you'll even think of something extra to say.

So, let's get to work on unpacking the exam. Section one is our core study cities of Vesuvius, Pompeii, and Herculaneum and is worth 25 marks. Instructions are given at the start of the section and include an indicative time of 45 minutes to spend on the section. The section will range in marks from three to 15 and will ask you to refer to the sources in a separate source booklet. There will be one question with 10 to 15 marks. Remember you have just under two minutes to allocate to each mark assigned. So, a ten mark question you should allow about 20 minutes to answer. This really is a significant amount of time to get the details right, so don't rush.

This section requires students to analyse and interpret sources and apply their knowledge. Notes from the marking centre give us some hints here too. You can plan your extended responses on the lined section of the answer book with the heading 'plan'. Use your reading time to consider the questions and think about responses. Ensure that you understand the keywords in the question and the appropriate terminology to use in your response.

Let's look at these notions a little more closely. Question four of the 2019 HSC paper was worth 12 marks and asked students to "assess the value and limitations of sources as evidence about religion in Pompeii and Herculaneum. Support your response using sources C and D and other relevant sources". This section expects you to demonstrate historical knowledge and understanding relevant to the question. So always start by taking the time to consider the question properly, no matter how many marks it is worth taking a moment to breakdown what it is that you're actually being asked to do will help you ensure high quality of response. This is where being familiar with your glossary of terms is important. Both NESA glossary and your historical terms. Flashcard glossaries are really great way to revise terms and helped you to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the topic you discuss.

You need to be precise in your response, clearly addressing the question, using keywords and terms from the question to help demonstrate this. For ancient history, as well as all of your other subjects, a key part of the preparation is making yourself familiar with a variety of verbs that are regularly used in questions you should be confident using the terminology from the NESA page and able to apply it. In this question, the keyword is assess. Assess: to make a judgment of value, so you were being asked to form a conclusion based on evidence. In this case, you need to make a judgment about what conclusions we can make about religion from the sources given to you and others that you may be familiar with. Once you've identified this, you can map out your ideas to help you ensure a logical sequence. This will help you to check that you have enough explicit examples and evidence to support your argument.

Let's look at the use of sources. In your preparation for the exam, it is valuable to be familiar with a variety of sources, even if you haven't seen the provided source, there is an opportunity to apply your knowledge to decode them. Consider annotating the resource. For images one approach that you could try using is 'CATS' 'C' caption. What clues does it give you about the source? We can see in this question? One source is from Herculaneum and the other Pompeii. Is there a significance or a clue here? 'A' arrangement what is happening in the image? There is often important information in the foreground or the background beyond the central image. 'T' text is there any writing on the image, like a descriptive image of the town layout? And finally, 'S' symbols. For example, in this image you can see in ibis and palm trees in the background. What might this suggest?

 It will be critical for you to have a range of sources available to discuss. Range means primary and secondary, written and physical and resources that are complementary and contradictory. In your study, you could create yourself a collection of VIP sources who are you are familiar with and understand the complexities of, and draw them out as needed to support your discussion. The marking centre noted that being familiar with the range of sources was a key area for student improvement. This highlights how having prepared knowledge of sources on a range of topics, in this case, religion can really enhance your response. The marking centre were clear that better responses were able to incorporate a range of explicit examples as evidence and integrate them into the argument instead of merely describing them.

A really significant feature of this question, is the term 'value and limitations of sources' In this case, for understanding religion. You need to effectively discuss the factors that influence what we learn from a source. By the very nature of the subject, ancient artefacts are extremely old, even damaged or incomplete. So, what is the intention of the source in the first place? Coins, for example, often served as a type of propaganda and historians own background and intentions can bias their description.  A source might not apply to Pompeii and Herculaneum. These towns were not the same and they had their own distinctive features. Do the written and physical sources compliment or contradict each other? Does contemporary research and excavations support or contradict out thinking about the topic? These are all things that you should be discussing when you are trying to assess the value and limitations of our sources.

Moving on this section two of the paper which addresses ancient societies. It is important from this point forward that you were familiar with the topics that you have studied and ensure that you answer the question that corresponds with what you have been studying in class. Have a look at the options on the screen and identify which society you were studying. Whilst it may seem tempting to answer an alternative question for a topic that you might find interesting, this is never advisable. Be careful to ensure that you answer in the appropriate section of the writing booklet, and if you need more writing booklets, just ask. When you're reviewing your paper, make sure you take time to review the details at the top of each section. That will give you critical information that will help guide you. Read each instruction carefully. They are there to help you to focus on the important elements to remember. Again, with your ancient societies response, you want to assign 45 minutes. Look at the clock in the exam room and note the finish time for the section to help you. The real gem in this section is the rubric. This tells you exactly what the examiner's marking criteria is based on. You will notice here that it's the key principles of ancient history success that involve demonstrating your knowledge relevant to the question. Communicating your ideas clearly and with a logical progression of those ideas and using your historical terms regularly and accurately. Marking criteria are based on these points. So use them to help you focus on what's really important, as you begin each new section.

Let us now try and breakdown a question from section two of the paper. Not all of you will be addressing new kingdom Egypt option a. However, the important principles will apply to all sections. These are essentially the same principles applied to breaking down the questions in the core study, Pompeii and Herculaneum. First of all, identify what is required of you. In 2019 each option had three parts. Each of the questions last year started with the same key verbs and had the same marks allocated. Part A asked students to ‘outline’ worth four marks. So we know we need to indicate the main features of the topic. In this particular case, crafts and industry. Part b, ‘what’, worth six marks. 'What' is not in the glossary. So, the marks are useful to help us understand how much detail is required, but the real clue is the rubric printed at the top of the examination section. The markers criteria matched this. Never forget the rubric is there to give you a clear direction on what you're expected to do. Part C was ‘explain’ and was worth 15 marks. Explain asks us to relate cause and effect to make the relationships between things evident and provide why and or how. The remaining part of the question is the relevant part of the society the question wants you to focus on again, whilst this example refers to option a, the principles remain the same, so recapping one identify the key verb to recognize the element of society that you're being asked to respond on an three use the amount of marks and the verb to determine the level of depth required.

The marking centre told us that better responses continued to discuss a range of relevant issues, providing detailed examples to support their response. They directly addressed the question and provided strong links between their information and the question. Addressing keywords rather than providing a general narrative was noted as being important, and the integration of relevant historical sources continues to be critical. Being explicit in the links between these texts and other specific aspects of society finalised the advice given from the marking centre.

Section three is about personalities in their times. As you know, this section is about demonstrating your understanding, the role a key historical figure played in shaping the past. Who was your personality? You should be able to evaluate how written an archaeological source influence our perspective of their life, their achievements and their legacy. The question will once again be 25 marks and they will be separate questions for each personality option. There maybe two or three parts to this question. However, at least one of those will be worth 10 to 15 marks. As he can see, the amount of questions being asked is reducing and consequently their worth increasing. As such, your ability to develop well sustained reason judgments increases. It can be greatly improved by planning as it helps to ensure a logical progression of your ideas. As mentioned earlier, you can plan your extended responses on the lined section of the answer book with the heading 'plan'. Take a few minutes to map out your argument and what sources you plan to utilise, because contrary to some beliefs, it is an excellent investment of your time.

The markers centre regularly mention well selected and appropriate use of evidence. So what does this mean? We've already established that using a variety of sources helps you to assess a perspective. However, be careful not to use a 'salt and pepper' type approach where you just drop lots of small pieces of evidence in. The sources should be integrated and detailed to support your points and your overall argument. In this question on Julius Caesar, part a asks about 'paths to power'. The first thing to notice is the plural paths. Look for these small, subtleties in a question. They give you a hint as to what the marker is looking for in this case, more than one path. They are looking for you to talk about, marriages priesthoods, political alliances, and then comprehensively discuss them. Additionally, what the best answers did was clearly illustrate how they served as a tool to gain power. Remember from part one assess means to make a judgment. The marking centres notes for part b again highlight the importance of making a clear and coherent judgment about Caesar and his impacts rather than just recounting achievements.

You should use the source provided. And these can often be at a point of inspiration for your thesis. Weave it into your assessment of him. The goal then is to choose and refer to additional modern and ancient sources to build a sustained reasoned series of points that are going to support your argument. The specific feedback on all options in this question all contain a clear message that students need to demonstrate broad, comprehensive and specific knowledge of the topic they are discussing. It is essential that you make sure that you know a lot about your chosen topics, because to write a logical, sustained and high quality of response, you need a lot.

Finally, section four, historical periods. Here you will be required to answer one extended response question. For each of the ten options, they will have two alternatives to choose from. Remember, you are only choosing one of them, and only on the topic you have studied. Which option here applied to you. Once again, using our information at the top of the section, we can see that a 25 mark allocation remains the same and therefore you should allocate the same duration of 45 minutes to answer. In this time frame is expected, you should be able to write approximately 1000 words, which looks like about eight pages of the examination booklet. This is a long exam and demands a lot of writing. Completing practice papers under exam conditions will help you to feel more comfortable with organizing your time and ensuring you can apply as much energy and focus to the last section as you did your first.

In your historical periods section, the first thing you will need to do is decide on which question choice you are going to focus on. You should do this during the reading time if possible, as you want to make the most of your writing time. Most students find the choices will give them a clear preference, but take a moment to think through what you would include in your essay for each option. What would your thesis be and what examples and evidence have you got at first glance to support that thesis? This section will allow you to showcase the depth of your knowledge and how you can connect what you know to the question being asked. Continue to use the key verb as your guide and ensure you engage closely with the question. In this section you will need to form an argument on the question topic. To achieve this necessitates the creation of a thesis to showcase your perspective. This is where pre prepared responses are not a good idea. They will not allow you to showcase your understanding in a way that is truly relevant to the question. When you have a perspective, you can move on to selecting your evidence.

Note the words 'relevant sources' are in the marking criteria for each section of the exam. It is essential that your response to each question takes into account. Select sources that assist you in responding with consistent assessment. Your source choices should always be deliberate, varied, and sustained. Now. Plan out your ideas. It does not have to be detailed, however it will allow your argument to develop logically.

This video has been a short introduction to the ancient history HSC examination and should be used as a starting point only. Your teacher is best place to support you in your preparation for the exam and is an expert in both the specific topics that you have been learning about and how to teach them in your class. If you have any questions about the exam, your topics in ancient history, or where to next, have a chat with your teacher about the websites that you can use to help you study. And how to access a range of past papers that are available. Please note that the ancient history syllabus is quite new, so any exams on the NESA website that have dates prior to 2019 will be for the old syllabus. So, you should take the advice of your teacher on how to use those papers.

Wishing you the best of luck in your preparation.

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