

GCE A2 LEVEL

Student Guide

Answering A2 Geography
Questions

geography

Student Guide: Geography



Answering A2 Geography Questions

There is a significant change in the style and demands of questions set at A2 level compared with AS level. On both Assessment Unit A2 1 Human Interactions and Global Issues and A2 2 Physical Geography and Decision Making (Section A) you will be faced with essay style questions worth [15] or [20] marks. To maximise your potential on these exam papers it is important that you have an effective strategy for answering such questions.

Let's start by looking at what the examiners are looking for when they mark your work. Each examination paper has an accompanying mark scheme which provides a uniform basis for the marking process so that all markers are following exactly the same instructions and making the same judgements. Questions that carry [6] marks or above are marked using levels of response. In Geography there are three levels of response. The general descriptions for marking criteria (see below) set out the knowledge and understanding, skills and quality of written communication expected at each level.

General Descriptions for Marking Criteria

Level 3

The candidate will show a wide-ranging and accurate knowledge and a clear understanding of the concepts/ideas relevant to the question. All or most of the knowledge and understanding that can be expected is given.

The candidate will display a high level of ability through insightful analysis and interpretation of the resource material with little or no gaps, errors or misapprehensions. All that is significant is extracted from the resource material.

The candidate will express complex subject matter using an appropriate form and style of writing. Material included in the answers will be relevant and clearly organised. It will involve the use of specialist vocabulary and be written legibly and with few, if any, errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Level 2

The candidate will display an accurate to good knowledge and understanding of many of the relevant concepts/ideas. Much of the body of knowledge that can be expected is given.

The candidate will display evidence of the ability to analyse and interpret the resource material but gaps, errors or misapprehensions may be in evidence.

The candidate will express ideas using an appropriate form and style of writing. Material included will be relevant and organised but arguments may stray from the main point. Some specialist terms will be used and there may be occasional errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Legibility is satisfactory.

Level 1

The candidate will display some accurate knowledge and understanding but alongside errors and significant gaps. The relevance of the information to the question may be tenuous.

The candidate will be able to show only limited ability to analyse and interpret the resource material and gaps, errors or misapprehensions may be clearly evidenced.

The candidate will have a form and style of writing which is not fluent. Only relatively simple ideas can be dealt with competently. Material included may have dubious relevance. There will be noticeable errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Writing may be illegible in places.

Study the general description for a Level 3 answer; underline the key words in relation to knowledge and understanding, skills and quality of written communication.

Establishing the demands/scope of the question

The key to accessing Level 3 marks essentially rests with you understanding the question as set and responding fully to its demands. After each exam series the Chief Examiner prepares a report which provides valuable guidance to teachers and students alike. Chief Examiner's reports are available to download from www.ccea.org.uk/geography.

In the Summer 2012 report the Chief Examiner wrote: *'they must answer the question set, not the one they wish had been set; we are still reading 'prepared' answers which address the general topic but not the specific question.'*

In order to establish the demand/scope of the question you should carefully read the question, take note of the command word(s) and focus on the key words or phrases within the question as set.

Example: Assessment Unit A2/1 Human Interactions and Global Issues, January 2013

Q.10 (c) Discuss whether ecotourism can truly exist. You must make reference to places in your answer. [20]

Before you start answering a question you need to identify key elements to the question; in this question which focuses on ecotourism you will need to:

- Discuss the advantages/ positive views of ecotourism
- Discuss the disadvantages/ negative views of ecotourism
- Make reference to places
- Reach a decision.

All elements need to be addressed to access Level 3 marks; if one key element is missing the answer will be confined to a mark in Level 2 and where two or more elements are missing the answer will be confined to a mark in Level 1.

In January 2013 the Chief Examiner stated *'there remains an issue with some candidates not answering the question set. They need to understand that marks are only awarded for relevant material and additional unnecessary padding is discounted.'*

You should ensure that you understand the meaning of command words used in A2 level questions; in this respect the **Chief Examiner** (January 2013) stated that *'Greater attention should also be paid to the meaning of the command words. 'Evaluate' requires an assessment of the success/failure, good/bad points of something. 'Explain' requires candidates to give a reason for something. Too often, candidates fail to address these commands properly and lose marks as a result. In the Global Issues section they are usually required to discuss the extent to which they agree/disagree with a statement so an answer which just baldly states their position without explanation is not sufficient.*

Using resource material

Questions in A2 exam papers typically include resource materials presented in an accompanying resource booklet. The resource material provided may include photographs, maps, diagrams, text, graphs and data. You should take the time to study the resource material in detail.

The Chief Examiner commented in January 2013 that candidates *'need to examine the resource material carefully in order to avoid misinterpretation.'*

Sometimes there is no need to go beyond the resource material provided.

Example: Assessment Unit A2 2 Physical Geography and Decision Making, Summer 2012

Q. 6(a) Study Resource 6 (page 7 of the Resource Booklet) which describes two earthquakes which took place in 2010. Discuss what the resource suggests about the management of the earthquake event in Chile in February 2010. [9]

Note: Resource 6 is include as Appendix 1.

The command word 'discuss' suggests that there is more than one view of the management of the

geography

Example: Assessment Unit A2/1 Human Interactions and Global Issues, January 2013

Q. 4(a) Study Resource 4A (page 6 of the Resource Booklet) which shows a pedestrianised street in Central Santiago, Chile and use it **to help you** describe the benefits and problems of pedestrianisation. [6]

Note: Resource 4A is included as Appendix 2.

The resource shows a busy street lined with shops and full of people. They seem relaxed; some have obviously been shopping, some people are taking the opportunity to provide services such as shoe shining. There are trees, nice paving, it is a pleasant place to be. But what about people who need to drive through the centre of towns; what about deliveries; what about the people with mobility problems?

A response that draws on the candidate's knowledge only and makes no use of the resource will be confined to maximum Level 2. If the candidate answers using only information contained in the resource use then the response is confined to a Level 1 mark. The question clearly requires benefits and problems so if either problems or benefits are entirely missing the response will be confined to a mark in Level 1.

Mark Scheme

Level 3 (5-6 marks)

The Resource is added to their own material; the answer has balance in that benefits and problems are both present and well-handled. The candidate displays command of the material.

Level 2 (3-4 marks)

There is a worthwhile answer here but maybe there are problems with balance although both positive and negative issues are mentioned. Depth may be an issue.

Level 1 (1-2 marks)

Some ways of being here are given above; otherwise the candidate displays a lack of understanding of pedestrianisation.

earthquake event in Chile in February 2010. However, you are not required to have any knowledge of this event.

A common pitfall is to simply rewrite the resource material as the answer. As the mark scheme (below) for this question shows, answers which simply regurgitate the resource or make next to no use of the resource are confined to Level 1. It is the full and detailed use of the resource that lifts an answer to Level 3.

Mark Scheme

Level 3 (7-9 marks)

A number of aspects of the Chilean management are identified and full use is made of the detail provided in the resource.

Level 2 (4-6 marks)

Clear use is made of the resource but the response is limited by a lack of development of the facts provided. Although the good and bad aspects are both present, one or both is underdeveloped.

Level 1 (1-3 marks)

Little more than an unstructured regurgitation is given or, alternatively, there is inadequate use of the resource.

Use a resource '**to help you**' is a common instruction. Here you are expected to make use of the resource material provided **and** to bring in your own material. The Chief Examiner stated in January 2013 '*most seem to be aware of the need for extra material when the question includes the phrase 'use the resource **to help you**'. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising the penalty that applies to those who fail to include extra material in such cases*'.

A Balanced Answer

In many questions, you are required to provide a balanced answer; e.g. the balance between advantages/ disadvantages; or between benefits/ drawbacks.

Example: Assessment Unit A2/2 Physical Geography and Decision Making, Summer 2011

Q.1 (c) With reference to a regional scale case study of a river basin, discuss the ways in which implementation of the basin management scheme brought beneficial outcomes as well as conflicts of interest. [15]

In this question, you are asked to discuss the ways in which the implementation of a basin management scheme brought beneficial outcomes and conflicts of interest to a relevant and valid case study of a river basin at a regional scale. As the mark scheme shows, a balanced response covering both beneficial outcomes and conflicts of interest is required for Level 3 marks.

Mark Scheme

Level 3 ([11]–[15])

The answer refers to a relevant case study example of an appropriate scale. Both the beneficial outcomes and the conflicts of interest of a valid and relevant implemented scheme are discussed in a balanced manner. A high level of appropriate detail is given. Terminology is good.

Level 2 ([6]–[10])

The answer refers to a relevant case study example of an appropriate scale. Both the beneficial outcomes and the conflicts of interest of a valid and relevant implemented scheme are discussed although, perhaps, in an unbalanced manner. Case study detail is restricted. Terminology may be restricted.

Level 1 ([1]–[5])

The answer may refer to a case study of an inappropriate scale or nature. One or more elements of the question (beneficial outcomes, conflicts of interest) may be neglected. Case study detail may be very restricted. Terminology may be poor. [15]

Structured Answers

You should plan your answer as this will help to give structure to your response. Whilst the standard essay structure of an introduction, development and conclusion does not apply to questions worth only a few marks, nevertheless the structure can help you to provide a balanced, complete answer to an essay-length question.

Example: Assessment Unit A2/1 Human Interactions and Global Issues, Summer 2011

Q.9 (c) Discuss whether the benefits of GM crops outweigh potential damage to the environment from their use. You must make reference to places in your answer. [20]

An appropriate structure might include:

- Introduction: definition of GM crops;
- Discussion of the benefits of GM crops;
- Discussion of the potential environmental damage from GM crops; and
- Conclusion: reaching a decision in relation to the question.

Case Study detail

Geography is not simply a theoretical subject; it is the application of theory to real life case studies that brings the subject alive. Students, and indeed their teachers, often ask how much case study detail is required.

Example: Assessment Unit A2/2 Physical Geography and Decision Making, Summer 2012

Q.3 (c) with reference to a regional scale case study of a tropical forest ecosystem, describe its biomass and explain the characteristics of its oxisol (latosol) soil. [15]

It may seem obvious but – the regional scale case study should be named. Detail relevant to the named case study will be expected throughout the answer. You will need to describe the biomass and productivity of your chosen tropical forest ecosystem providing detailed figures along with the nature of its flora and fauna including named species of both. You should then go on to explain the characteristics of its soil in relation to climate and nutrient cycling

processes in the region. The mark scheme for Level 3 is:

Mark Scheme

Level 3 (11-15 marks)

A relevant regional study is used and each aspect is related to the study. The nature of biomass and productivity are described with accuracy and several characteristics of the oxisol are clearly explained.

The Chief Examiner reported that *'responses were often impeded by a lack of specific detail; descriptions of biomass and productivity were, too frequently, general and basic.'*

Then there is the need for depth and detail. Factual information is always important; however, candidates must select from the information they have, only those facts which are relevant in the context of the question. Following the Summer 2012 exams, the Chief Examiner commented that *'there is no expectation that a candidate will present copious amounts of information, rather they must select and present pertinent details, discussion, explanation, evaluations, whatever the demands are, in a succinct manner.'*

Let's look another example this time drawn from Human Geography.

Example: Assessment Unit A2/1 Human Interactions and Global Issues, January 2013

Q.6 (b) With reference to your case study of an ethnically diverse city, evaluate the role of any **three** of the following processes in maintaining its ethnic diversity:

- segregation;
- pluralism;
- multiculturalism;
- discrimination.

[15]

As before – it may seem obvious but – the urban case study being used must be named. In your answer you will need to start by describing the ethnic diversity in your chosen city. You should then go on to evaluate the role of any three of the processes listed

in maintaining its ethnic diversity. The mark scheme states *'as always there must be detail of place.'*

This question is useful to illustrate a number of common errors made by candidates.

- You might be tempted to answer using all four processes but this is beyond the demands of the question and to ensure fairness to all candidates the examiner is instructed to mark all four processes but award the three highest scoring processes.
- You might decide, for whatever reason, to answer the question using two processes only in your answer, in this case the answer will be confined to a mark in Level 2
- Some candidates might provide a detailed discussion of three processes in relation to a chosen urban case study with no evaluation; such answers will also be confined to a mark in Level 2
- If only one process is discussed and evaluated the answer will be confined to a mark in Level 1.
- Sometimes candidates use an incorrect case study, e.g. an ethnically diverse country rather than city. Where there is no case study used or the case study is at the wrong scale, the answer will be confined to Level 1.

You should now have some practical strategies for answering the essay style questions on A2 Geography exam papers. However, a strategy is no replacement for thorough revision – and a good night's sleep before taking the exam.

A final word from the Chief Examiner: candidates *'need to understand that marks are only awarded for relevant material.'*

Good Luck!

Appendix 1

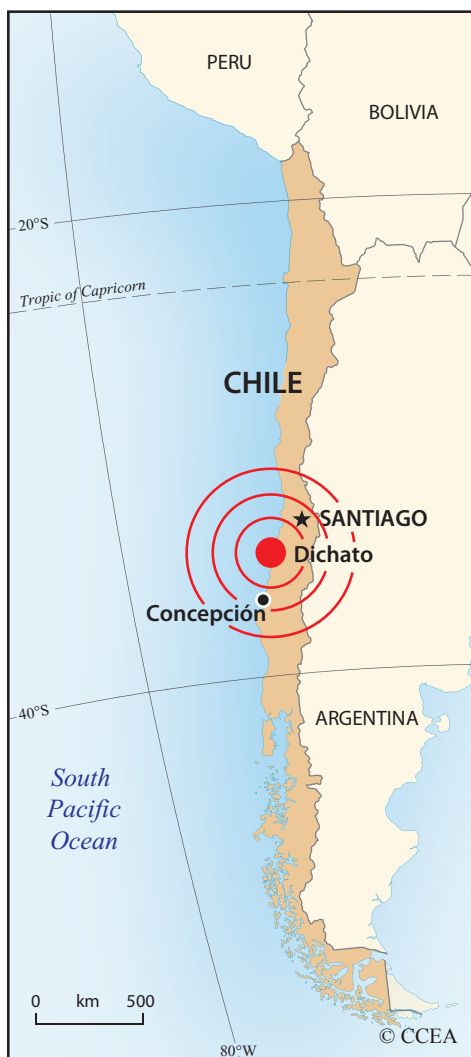
Resource 6: A2/2 Summer 2012 The Aftermath of the Chilean Earthquake of February 2010

AG221 Physical Geography and Decision Making, Summer 2012

RESOURCE 6

THE AFTERMATH OF THE CHILEAN EARTHQUAKE OF FEBRUARY 2010

In 2009 seismologists warned of a mature seismic gap in the Concepción area of south central Chile. In simple terms, this region was ripe for an earthquake. However, even the scientists underestimated the risk; the 8.8-magnitude earthquake that struck on 27th February 2010 was stronger than their worst-case scenario, and the fifth-strongest recorded anywhere in over a century.



Chile's capital, Santiago, escaped with minor damage, a few collapsed roads and roofs. This contrasted with the devastation seen further south, where toppled apartment buildings, flattened houses and fallen bridges were the most visible signs of the event. In the coastal town of Dichato houses were crushed by a tsunami triggered by the earthquake. Despite this, the most remarkable fact about this overwhelming force of nature was not how much damage it caused but how little.

While over 700 people died, this was much fewer than the 270 000 death toll of Haiti's magnitude 7.0 earthquake six weeks earlier. Chile boasts exceptional preparedness for earthquakes; its authorities have developed and adhere strictly to a best-practice building code. Since the February earthquake, specialists from across the world have flocked here to see what they could learn. Chileans themselves are cautious about this admiration. Even as outsiders congratulate the planners, they focus on how they could have done better.

At first, Chile's president had insisted that the country did not need international aid, but within days a string of setbacks forced him to change his mind. Initially no tsunami warning had been issued, supposedly to avoid panic. This decision was quickly reversed as a significant tsunami wave travelled from the Chilean

coast across the ocean, threatening Pacific islands. In Chile, damaged infrastructure had cut off large parts of the country and was delaying aid. Worst of all, looting occurred in and around Concepción, Chile's second city. A day after the mayor pleaded for food and water, scenes of desperate parents and not-so-desperate opportunists breaking into supermarkets and of riot police lobbing tear gas, flashed across television screens. A state of emergency was declared, the armed forces were deployed and a curfew imposed.

© Adapted from article "Chile six months since the earthquake" by Martin Sandbu, *Financial Times*, 28 August 2010.

Appendix 2

Resource 4A: Santiago, Chile

AG211 Human Interactions and Global Issues, January 2013

RESOURCE 4A

SANTIAGO, CHILE



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