
A-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 1E Russia in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment,
1682–1796
Report on the Examination

7042
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General

All students followed the rubric and attempted three questions. Most were able to demonstrate some level of understanding and knowledge of the period though some students were less secure in their knowledge.

Question 01

Students demonstrated a much better technique in answering the extract question this year. Most students made some attempt to identify the overall argument in the extract at the beginning of their answer. Students who did not do this were much more susceptible to summarising the content of the extract, or quoting large chunks of it wholesale.

Students tended to find Extract A the most difficult to understand. This was particularly the case if they employed a line-by-line approach because this strategy did not lend itself well to the nuanced argument in the extract. Students sometimes contradicted themselves, interpreting the first half of the extract as an argument that Elizabeth's reign was successful and then interpreting the second half of the extract as arguing that it was unsuccessful. Better answers were able to link these two strands together, but this was usually more successfully done if an overall argument that incorporated both elements was identified at the beginning. Other students ignored either the argument about success or the criticisms and tended to only show a partial understanding. Very few students offered explicit comment on the comparison with Peter.

Students found Extracts B and C more accessible and most students were able to identify that Extract B was very critical of Elizabeth and Extract C was much more supportive of her actions. The main problem in understanding these extracts was students not recognising that the beginning of Extract B was summarising Elizabeth's thinking and criticising it as naïve, which resulted in lengthy arguments that the Extract was unconvincing for the naivety of its argument.

Finally, even where students did demonstrate a secure understanding of the arguments in the extracts, a line-by-line approach was not helpful; they sometimes ended up discussing, at length, issues that were peripheral to the overall argument — for example, for Extract C, how many years of peace there were in Elizabeth's reign. It is again emphasised that students do not need to discuss every sentence in the extract, particularly to just fact-check points. Part of the skill that this question is testing is the ability of students to recognise the most relevant elements of the extract that support the overall argument and to evaluate these arguments in the context of their relevant knowledge and understanding.

Good answers did have sufficient knowledge to be able to challenge and support these interpretations; weaker answers tended to either very general or used the references to Peter and Catherine in the extracts to write extensively about their reigns. Whilst credit could be given if the material was made relevant to the question, students did need to write with some accuracy about Elizabeth's reign to evaluate the extracts in the context of the question. Weaker students tended to concentrate on serf hardship, often only with a general understanding of the context of Elizabeth's reign. Better answers were able to use examples of Elizabeth's involvement, i.e. in foreign policy, or in her attempts to reform governance, i.e. the use of the Senate, or the attempted codification of law to challenge ideas of her laziness or unsuitability to rule. Equally, examples of her extravagance and frivolity and her treatment of the serfs were used to criticise her rule. The use of ministers was used credibly to exemplify both Elizabeth's limits and her success. The best answers

showed an ability to select precise evidence that was most relevant to the arguments in the extracts to support their evaluation.

Question 02

This was probably the least popular of the three essays. Most students were able to show an awareness of the Streltsy revolt in 1698, although some students did get confused between 1682, 1689 and 1698. Weaker students tended to describe events, sometimes starting with long sections on the Great Embassy, but most were able to recount Peter's reaction to the revolt and link this to the strengthening of his authority. What differentiated the better answers was the ability of students to balance this against other factors which also strengthened Peter's authority. Some did not seem clear about the early years of Peter's reign and could either only make very general comments, refer to events after 1703 such as the Ecclesiastical Regulation, or come to unconvincing conclusions such as the defeat at Narva led to a strengthening of authority. Better students were able to recognise that success in foreign policy such as at Azov, especially in the context of the failure of Golitsyn, or on the Baltic coast, were more important in strengthening Peter's position. Weaker students tended to lack range. Better answers demonstrated a deep understanding of the context of the regency including the relevance of Ivan, Natalia and Sophia, and the impact of some of Peter's early actions such as in Church affairs in order to discuss the consolidation of Peter's authority.

Question 03

This was the most popular question on the paper and most students showed some understanding of Peter's foreign policy and its aims and successes. Many students used a narrative structure — commenting on Azov, 1695/96, Narva, Poltava and, less frequently, Cape Hango and the Treaty of Nystadt — where they ended up making a series of mini observations about success or failure which tended to hinder their ability to come to an overall assessment. It was helpful if students identified clear aims, and most students recognised the need for a warm-water port and the desire to increase Russia's international status. Weaker students tended to describe foreign policy events and then assert the impact they had on these objectives. This was particularly true when commenting on Russia's international position; better answers referred to the growth in embassies, marriage alliances and involvement in international diplomacy including the growing influence on Poland. There was a significant minority of students who were confused between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea; credit was given for valid points notwithstanding this but sometimes this did mean that their understanding of events was not clear. There were also some very narrow answers where students seemed wholly unaware of the course of the Great Northern War outside of Narva and Poltava; whilst it is not expected that students will show any detailed knowledge of 1701-8 and 1710-21, they should be aware of the ongoing war in these periods. The best answers deployed precise, relevant knowledge to analyse whether aims were met and demonstrated judgement by recognising the extent of change and sometimes by commenting on the relative importance of the different aims.

Question 04

This was a fairly popular question and most students were able to demonstrate some understanding of Catherine's reforms. There was a tendency for some students to turn this into a question about how enlightened Catherine was. Where this material was relevant it was credited, but explicit reference to the ideas in the Nakaz and the extent to which these were implemented was needed at the higher levels. Weaker students tended to be limited to discussions of serfdom but many students were able to comment on education and religion and sometimes economics,

governance (including absolutism) and the law. Some answers demonstrated obvious understanding but were only able to make general argument with limited support. The best answers were able to give precise evidence to exemplify their arguments such as the impact of the Boards of Social Welfare, the Statute of Local Administration 1775, educational reforms such as the establishment of the Smolny Institute and the Edict of Toleration 1773. The best students were able to put the changes into the context of Catherine's reign and made some insightful comments about the purpose of the Instruction and the reality of ruling Russia.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.