Hints to help you handle History

Barbara Johannesson

FUN & GAMES: "You have to take your teaching seriously, but you can't take yourself too seriously," says our History expert, Barbara Johannesson

Barbara believes that teaching teenagers is the toughest work you get. "It's demanding but it's also more invigorating than any other job. Teaching is a wonderful way to learn," she says. "Teaching History is complex as it can be understood in many different ways. There are so many interpretations and biases, contradictions and ambiguities."

"The study of History prepares you for a very complicated and confusing world. We are bombarded with information all day long. History gives you the opportunity to learn and think about the society we live in."

"History is in my bones and I enjoy firing learners up too – those who enjoy the subject are the ones who tend to get better results," says Barbara. "The more learners know about the world they live in, and the more widely they read, the better their results as well."

Barbara has edited, written and published many textbooks in her time. She currently works as a freelance materials developer and teaches History part-time at Wynberg Girls' High School in Cape Town.

Additional advice provided by SIMON HAW

After qualifying as a teacher, Simon taught for 20 years, the last 10 as head of History at Maritzburg College. He then spent 18 years at the Department of Education, first as a researcher and later as a History subject advisor. He is the author of a number of History textbooks.

11 DONT'S

1. Do not use slang.
2. Do not use chatty or colloquial terms. In History, you must use plain formal language.
3. Do not write your essays in point form. Write full sentences in paragraphs.
4. Do not use the personal pronoun 'I'. Instead of saying 'I think that …' say 'It can be argued that …'
5. Do not call historical figures by their first names. For example, don't refer to Martin Luther King as Martin (not as) Nelson Mandela as Nelson!
6. Do not write personal notes for the person marking your paper, you will just irritate him or her.
7. Do not colour in, highlight or draw little smileys in your work.
8. Do not make comments or value judgements that are not directly asked for in the question.
9. Do not use 'etc'. 'Etc' usually indicates that you can't think of anymore examples. If you said 'Peas, carrots and potatoes, etc …' the reader knows that you know many other examples of vegetables. But, in a history essay, if you say "Those who were tried at the Rivonia Trial were Mandela, Sisulu, etc." it usually means that you do not know anymore names!
10. Do not make up your own abbreviations. Only use recognised abbreviations. You can use USA for United States of America or BC for Black Consciousness.
11. Do not use words that you do not understand, even if they sound 'cool'.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING: Amy Wilkinson and Awonke Zidele, matric learners at Wynberg Girls High in Cape Town, have found that studying SA History has helped them understand their backgrounds better (Amy's father was in MK and Awonke's grandfather was a political prisoner on Robben Island)

Do the exemplars!

Example question papers and memoranda for History are available on the Department of Education's website: http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/grade12examplers.asp

As you are the first learners to write the new Grade 12 exam there are no 'past papers' .These exemplar papers are therefore absolutely essential for revision purposes. Remember that this is a skills-based curriculum and you need to practise those skills thoroughly if you want to do well in the examination.

What and when?

You will be writing **two** exam papers for History. Make sure you prepare the correct work for the correct day! History Paper 1 is on **Thursday 5 November at 9am.** It is worth 150 marks and is three hours long. History Paper 2 is on **Tuesday 24 November at 9am.** It is also worth 150 marks and is three hours long. (The papers are identical in format, the only difference being that they cover different areas of work.)

What's in Paper 1?

Paper 1 consists of four questions based on the prescribed content framework. Each question has source-based questions for 45 marks plus an extended writing question for 30 marks. You are required to answer **TWO** questions. This means you have a choice. You can choose to answer your two questions from the following four topics:

1. **What was the impact of the Cold War in forming the world as it was in the 1960s?**
2. **How was uhuru realised in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s?**
3. **What forms of civil society protest emerged from the 1960s up to 1990? (Focus 1960s: Civil Rights movement and Black Power movement in the USA)**
4. **What forms of civil society protest emerged from the 1960s up to 1990? (Focus 1970s: Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa) (Focus 1980s: Apartheid South Africa in the 1980s)**

What's in Paper 2?

Paper 2 also consists of four questions based on the prescribed content framework. Each question has source-based questions for 45 marks as well as an extended writing question for 30 marks. You are required to answer TWO questions (i.e. you have a choice). You can choose to answer your two questions from the following four topics:

1. What was the impact of the collapse of the USSR in 1989?
   - On ending Apartheid in South Africa
   - On the dominance of the USA
2. What was the impact of the collapse of the USSR in 1989?
   - On Africa: reflection and re-imagining the nation in the 1990s – a case study from Central, West or North Africa
3. How did South Africa emerge as a democracy from the crises of the 1990s?
4. Dealing with the past and facing the future: the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Big Picture

It is useful to understand the Big Picture for the Grade 12 History content framework. The following sums it up concisely:

The Cold War was the period of conflict and competition between the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union and their respective allies.

From the end of the Second World War (1945) until the late 1980s, world politics was dominated by the rivalry between these two Superpowers.

The Cold War spread outside Europe to every region of the world and drew to a close in the late 1980s. The Soviet Union gave up its power over Eastern Europe and the USSR was dissolved in 1991.

The Cold War and the end of the Cold War had consequences for SA.

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has been dominated by only one Superpower – the United States of America.

Starting blocks

Make a **timeline** so that you understand the sequence of events. For example, you should know that the Soweto Uprising (1976) was after the independence of Angola and Mozambique (1975). Start your timeline in 1960 and end in 1996. Skim through all your work for the year and fill in the timeline with key events. Take your time to get it right. Your completed timeline will help you to contextualise each event.

Keep a **world map** on your desk or pin one up on your wall. Make sure you know where all the places are that you are learning about.

Read your **textbook** and do the activities in it to test yourself.

Keep a **dictionary** on your desk to look up words you do not understand. Make sure you understand concepts like capitalism, communism, nationalism, etc.

Specialise

You have to read a lot during the exam so make your choices beforehand. Specialise in two questions per paper. Choose a third question that you could answer if you get stuck on one of your first two choices. When you get into the exam room, go straight to your chosen specialisation questions and get moving. Only if you get seriously stuck, should you try your third choice. Make sure you have a sound knowledge of each of the sections you are going to answer. Try to study for understanding rather than simply cramming information into your head.

Tackling source-based questions

The source-based work requires a fair amount of reading. A good tip is to first read the questions based on the sources. Then read the sources so you know what you are looking for. (The sources you are given in the exam will be varied – e.g. written sources; statistical sources such as tables and graphs; cartoons and photographs, etc.) Only after you have done this should you go back and answer the questions.

Remember that although the sources may prove useful in answering the questions, the focus will be on **your own knowledge** and your ability to reach an **independent conclusion.**

For instance, you might get a source-based exercise on the Berlin Wall. The extended writing question might well require you to write an essay explaining what factors led to the Wall being built. To answer this question successfully, you need to go right back to 1945. You will be expected to give a clear explanation of what the Cold War was and what factors contributed to it (e.g. the Iron Curtain, Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan). You will be expected to present your knowledge on why Berlin was a focal point in the Cold War and to give an outline of the Berlin Blockade. Mention of NATO, the Cominform, and the Warsaw Pact would be a plus.

Always look at the **contextualisation** of the source carefully – it will help you decide on its reliability, accuracy and usefulness. Remember that most sources are **biased** to some degree as they reflect the perspective and purpose of the people who produced them (cartoons are always biased). The more you practise, the better you will become at your source work.

Make sure you number your questions exactly as they are numbered in the exam paper. Look at the mark allocation for each source-based question. If a question is only worth two marks, write a short answer. If the question is out of eight, write an answer of about eight to ten lines.

Tips for essays or extended writing

Each question requires you to write an essay or extended piece of writing on a particular question. You have to write two essays per paper. Your essays should be about two pages in length. Make sure that you answer the question set: read it very carefully. Don't stuff your extended writing with irrelevant detail.

Plan your essay quickly in rough first, using a few key words and phrases. Start your essay with a short **introductory paragraph** which explains your argument briefly. The **body of your essay** should contain all the details needed to support your argument. Make sure you link each paragraph to the topic. At the end of the essay write a short concluding paragraph which refers directly to the question.

While subheadings and lists are appropriate in official reports and memos, etc, do not use them in essays.

Read your work when you have finished, making sure you have not made any silly errors.

Here's hoping that all your hard work pays off and you enjoy both your History papers!

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