

GOBBETS GUIDELINES

The exam

Your exam will consist of two parts:

Section A: Gobbets (answer three)

Section B: Essays (answer one)

In the exam, you will have 20 minutes for each gobbet, and, to help you, each one will have a question that is specific to that source.

What is a gobbet?

It is a short commentary relating to a piece of primary evidence, either a passage of literature, an ancient image, an artefact etc.

What is its purpose?

Studying history is not just about learning facts, it is about acquiring the skills of an historian. Historians critically analyse source material in order to arrive at information that is as accurate as possible.

The idea of a gobbet is for you to show that you know something about a piece of source material, its context, its importance, where it comes from, when it dates, what it says etc.

It is a chance for you to show the examiner you can work critically with that source material by using your knowledge to evaluate a source's usefulness: that you know how historical information is acquired from sources, what types of sources there are and how historians use background information on those sources in order to assess the value of what they tell us. No source will be without bias of some kind, and none will give you the complete picture, so it is the job of the historian to identify that bias, establish the limits of the picture it gives us, and to extract information from that source accordingly. Gobbets are there to help you practice and show you understand this process.

How do you write them?

Approach a gobbet like an upturned pyramid

Start with the more general information and work toward the more specific

This will lead you to a **THREE STEP PROCESS:**

1. What is the general historical background to the piece?

- When was it created?
 - You don't necessarily need to give a specific date, but the period is important
 - How specific you need to be with the dating will depend on how important that is for assessing the value of the source
- What was going on at the time?
 - if directly relevant, give a brief historical background

2. What are the more specific features of the piece?

- Who created it? What was their background? Their sources? Their opinions? Is it an official document? Or private?
- Why did they create it? What was their purpose in creating it? Is there a message?
- Who was the audience? How important was that audience to the creator of the piece?

3. What does the piece tell us?

- What does it say or "say"?
 - What issue(s) does the piece raise?

- What information does it tell us? About the subject matter? About the author?
- If pictorial: What is happening in the picture? What can and cannot be learnt from the picture?
- If written, what is the significance of the language used?
- If pictorial, what is the significance of the style of depiction?
- How reliable is that information?
 - Based on what we know about who created the piece and when etc.
 - Are there any contradictions in the piece?
 - Does it deliberately leave anything out that you know it should have included?
- How significant is that information with regard to the study of the period?
 - Is it the only account of this information?
 - What is unique/not so unique about it?
 - Can it tell us things that other sources can't? Why?
 - Is there any discussion among historians pertaining to it?

Not all of these questions will apply equally to each gobbet, some may not apply at all in some cases, but it is important to have them in mind so that you give all the information the examiner wants

DON'TS:

1. **DON'T** write an essay about the subject the piece relates to. If you are shown a picture of bust of Pericles, don't write an essay about who Pericles was but WHEN the bust was created, WHERE it stood, and WHY it was created.

2. **DON'T** just paraphrase what is already in the piece. You need to evaluate that information as well, that is the point of a gobbet.
3. **DON'T** get carried away writing a short biography of the author: only include information on the author that is relevant to assessing the value of this particular piece. I.e. it is not of much relevance to a piece of Pericles' speech in Thucydides that the author was a strategos in Thrace, but it IS relevant whether or not the speech was written before or after his exile from Athens.
4. **DON'T** write an introduction and conclusion like with an essay

DOS:

1. **DO** include cross-references to any other primary sources, written or otherwise, that you are aware of that contrast or corroborate with what is said in this piece
2. **DO** feel free to answer in bullet-point form
3. **DO** be PRECISE, CONCISE and STRICT about only sticking to relevant information: you've only got 20 minutes