







Practical strategies for succeeding in geography exams

Mark Jones
Geography Tutor
UWE, Bristol.

Geographical Association Bristol Branch
Wednesday 26 March 2014 4.30 - 6.30pm

 <p>GCE Examinations from 2009 First A1 Award Summer 2009 First A Level Award Summer 2010 Geography</p>	 <p>GCE All and A Level Specifications Geography</p>	 <p>Specification GCE Geography</p>	 <p>ASIA Level GCE GCE Geography 2010 revised January 1st in Geography 1001 2010 revised GCE in Geography 1001</p>
<p>G1 : Changing Physical Environments (1. climate change, 2. tectonic and hydrological change)</p> <p>G2 : Changing Human Environments (1. population change, 2. settlement change)</p> <p>G3 : Contemporary Themes and Research in Geography (A)1 from Desert and Tundra; Glacial or Coastal; or Climatic hazards. 1 from Development; Globalisation; either India or China (B) Individual research (10 themes)</p> <p>G4 : Sustainability Pre-release on one of Food , Water, Energy Cities,</p>	<p>Unit 1 Physical and Human Geography Rivers plus 1 of (Cold env. ; Coasts; Hot desert)</p> <p>Population plus 1 of (Food supply issues; Energy issues Health issues)</p> <p>Unit 2 Geographical Skills</p> <p>Unit 3 Contemporary Geographical Issues Plate tectonics; Weather and climate; Ecosystems World cities; Development and globalisation Contemporary conflicts</p> <p>Unit 4 Fieldwork or Issue Evaluation</p>	<p>Unit 1: Global Challenges 1: World at Risk 2: Going Global</p> <p>Unit 2: Geographical Investigations 1: Extreme Weather 2: Crowded Coasts 3: Unequal Spaces 4: Rebranding Places</p> <p>Unit 3: Contested Planet 1: Energy Security; 2: Water Conflicts; 3: Biodiversity Under Threat; 4: Superpower Geographies; 5: Bridging the Development Gap; 6: The Technological Fix?</p> <p>Unit 4: Geographical Research</p>	<p>A5 Managing Physical Environments (Rivers, Coasts, Cold env.; Hot/semi-arid)</p> <p>A5 Managing Change in Human Environments (urban change, rural change, energy, tourism).</p> <p>A2 Global Issues A. Environmental Issues (earth hazards, ecosystems, climatic hazards) B. Economic Issues (population, globalization, development)</p> <p>A2 Geographical Skills</p>

4:30 Introduction and big picture

This slide is to remind us that at A level geography there are basically just four versions of geography available to teach and learn there is also the Cambridge PreU and IB qualifications but essentially the majority of students in England and Wales study either Edexcel, AQA . WJEC or OCR. There is much in common across these Awarding Body specifications but also there are differences in approach, assessment and choice of topics.

Geography
Content specified by awarding body
Learning about (what)
Learning through (how)
Learning for (why)

Revision strategies
(knowledge, skills))
Revision checklist
Acronyms, Mnemonics
Flash cards and loop activities
Hexagons, Drawing, Diagrams, Taboo.

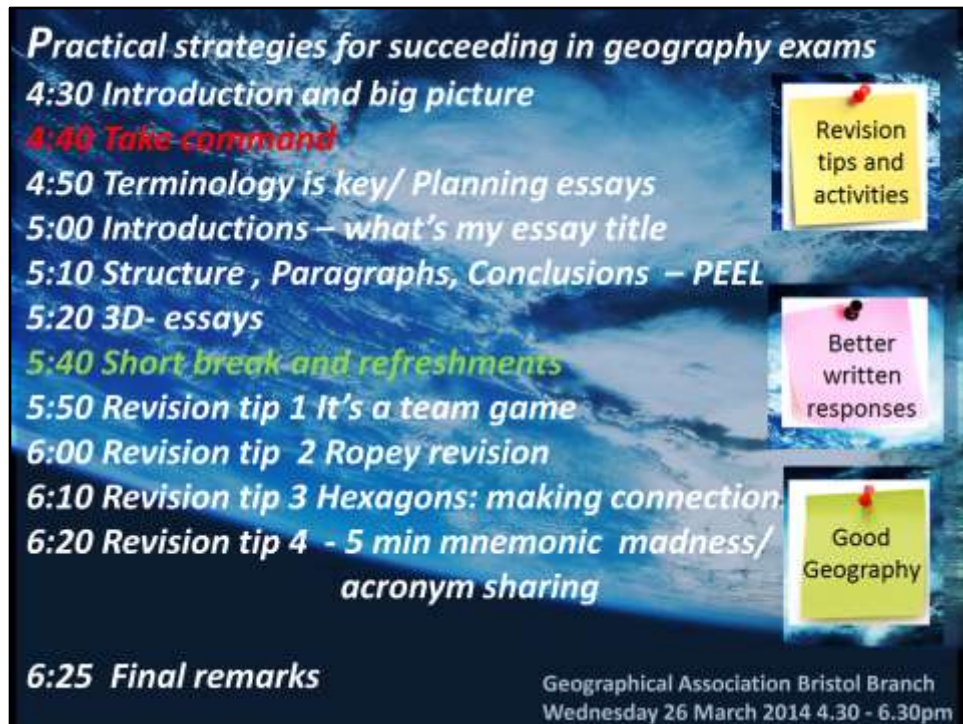
Examination strategies
(knowledge, understanding skills,)
Familiarity with content/past papers
Practice: short structured questions and essays
Assessment Self/peer/teacher assessment
Practice: essay plans; Structure; Making an argument; Conclusions not summaries

What the examiners say
Practical strategies for succeeding in geography exams
4:30 Introduction and big picture

As well as selecting the Awarding Body specification (**What**) teachers make choices about which optional topics are taught and **how** these are taught e.g. through fieldwork, enquiry, textbooks, events in the news, peer teaching, individual research etc... *(and in some cases teachers and students working collaboratively make decisions about which options to take – see Jones, M. 2013 What is personalised learning in Geography in Lambert, D. and Jones, M. eds. (2103) Debates in Geography Education. Abingdon: Routledge.*

But we should not forget the **why** we are learning geography, I often get the response “to pass examinations” ... “to get a good grade” ... “to go to university” and yes that is what quire rightly preoccupies teachers and students in the months leading up to the exams but I would encourage students to offer responses which also focus on the **Why** of geography; that is what the subject can uniquely offer to the curriculum, to learning and to society– issues of environmental consideration and sustainability; awareness of global inequalities and ethical dilemmas, issues of moral purpose when studying particular issues through a geographical lens.

So this evening we are going to look at two aspects of your preparation for A Level examinations – these are firstly Examination strategies for extended writing (essays) and then after the break a number of revision approaches.



Practical strategies for succeeding in geography exams

4:30 Introduction and big picture

4:40 **Take command**

4:50 Terminology is key/ Planning essays

5:00 Introductions – what's my essay title

5:10 Structure , Paragraphs, Conclusions – PEEL

5:20 3D- essays

5:40 **Short break and refreshments**

5:50 Revision tip 1 It's a team game

6:00 Revision tip 2 Roepy revision

6:10 Revision tip 3 Hexagons: making connections

6:20 Revision tip 4 - 5 min mnemonic madness/
acronym sharing

6:25 Final remarks

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As you can see from the big picture this will be a mainly hands-on, interactive and collaborative afternoon with short inputs from myself speaking to you. When you are working you will have support from a number of facilitators: two experienced teachers of geography and six PGCE geography students from the University of the West of England nearing the end of their school placements.



Take command

describe , analyse, explain, account for..
state, identify, to what extent, discuss,
compare, contrast, examine, explain in detail,
using a named example, distinguish between,
outline the reasons for, assess, evaluate,
annotate, illustrate, comment on, give reasons
for..

This first activity looks at the essay title and breaks it down into its constituent parts – one of which is the command word or words being used. The activity involved using cut up command words and definitions from AQA support material see

<http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-W-2030-COMMWDS.PDF>

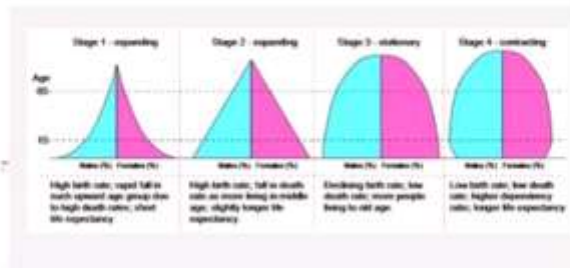
Once student had matched they were then encouraged to make a hierarchy of command words.

Knowing what type of response is required to answer questions using the higher order commands words such as 'Discuss' and 'Evaluate' is vital for A2 success.

Better
written
responses

Terminology is key

With reference to named examples, **discuss** the geographical issues arising from **changing** population structure (15 marks)



Within an exam question, as well as the command word/s there will be key terminology that will need to be correctly interpreted. Here **population structure** is important as it helps us to think about which aspects of our revision we need to access – population pyramids, Birth rates, deaths rate, fertility levels, aging populations, natural increase, migration etc.. BUT the key word here is **CHANGING** so adding a temporal dimension to then link to how a population changes can lead to different particular issues (SCEEP or Social Cultural Economic, Environmental, Political) Case studies are required in this answer.

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Revision
tips and
activities

Better
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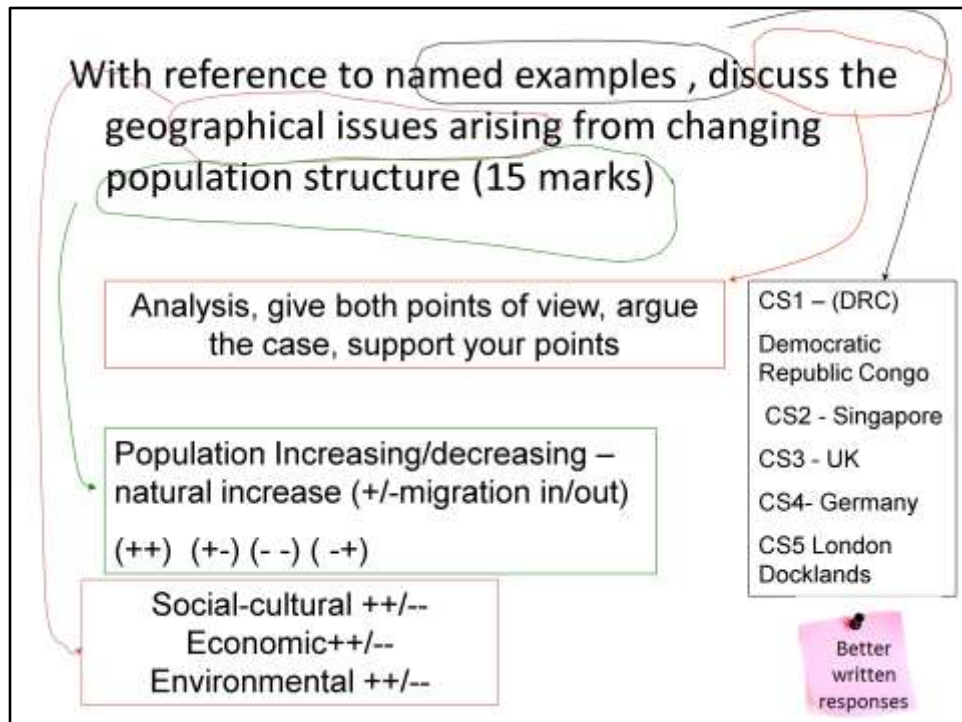
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Plan don't over plan

With reference to named examples , discuss the geographical issues arising from changing population structure (15 marks)



This shows one approach to planning for this question. In terms of Population increasing or decreasing this is the result of both natural increase and the balance of emigration./immigration in a country so this candidate has used symbols to remind them e.g. (-+) = falling natural population increase and immigration exceeding emigration.



Another example of a candidate's planning around an essay question.

What the examiners say

Candidates need to carefully read the full question or key terms in the question, especially at A2. Not doing this is the single biggest cause of under-achievement. Too many candidates offer pre-learnt answers that do not fit exactly the demands of the wording of the question

(OCR, June 2013)

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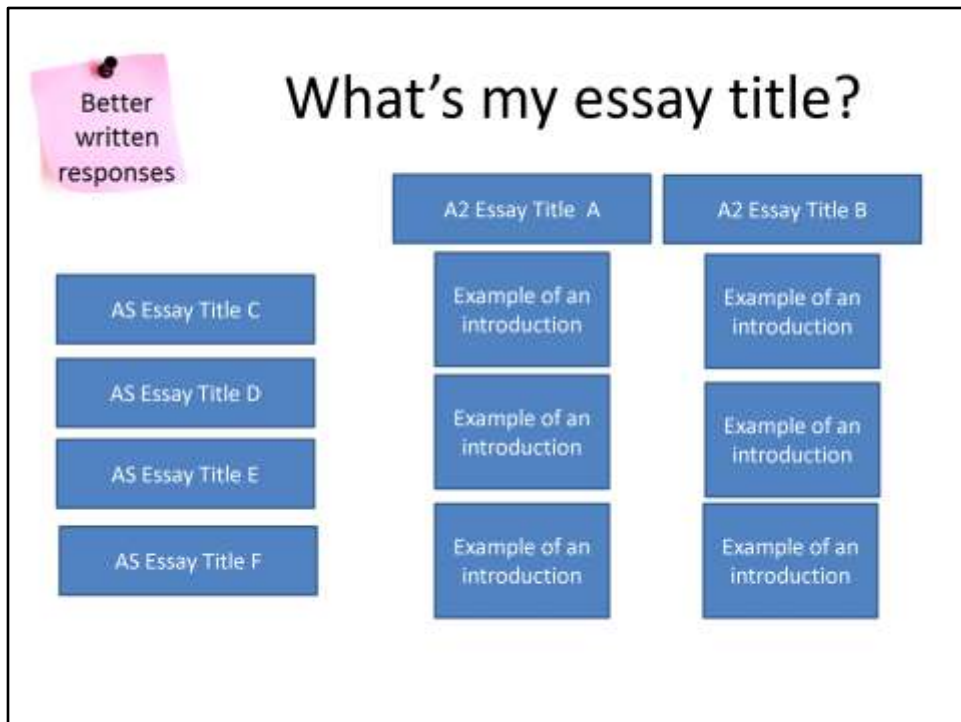
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This activity involves students having to read the introductions to essay and then deciding what the essay title would have been.

In the A2 examples the students had 3 version of introductions for the same essay and had to discuss which were the better introductions and why.

Essay A Evaluate how plate tectonics theory helps our understanding of the distribution of seismic and volcanic events.

Essay B 'The decentralisation of retailing and other services has had a major impact on urban areas.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?



What's my essay title?

Essay A Evaluate how plate tectonics theory helps our understanding of the distribution of seismic and volcanic events.

Essay B 'The decentralisation of retailing and other services has had a major impact on urban areas.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Essay C Examine the effects of greying population on health and welfare services?

Essay D Choose one named area of the world and explain why it is considered a disaster hotspot?

Essay E Using a case study, assess the causes and consequences of coastal flooding?

Essay F Using a case study; assess how successful one country has been in managing population change?

What the examiners say

Introductions

'Don't include irrelevant 'chat' or introductions that repeat the question.

(OCR Examiners' report June , 2013)

Clear
Unambiguous
Context overview

An introduction needs to be clear and unambiguous and provide the overall context of the theme of the essay but clearly leave the examiner reading the introduction with a sense that the student knows exactly what the question is asking

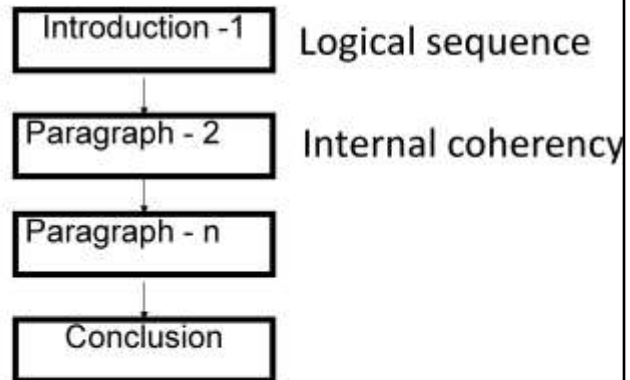
'The decentralisation of retailing and other services has had a major impact on urban areas.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Decentralisation of retailing such as Cribbs Causeway north of Bristol is one factor that has contributed to urban decline. With the outward movement of retailing and companies such as finance and insurance to the urban rural fringes, the Central Business Districts (CBD) of many UK urban areas have experienced significant negative economic, social and environmental impacts. However as, will be seen, the CBD and central areas of cities are now experiencing a wave of regeneration designed to counter such negative impacts

Better
written
responses

Structure -1

- Clear structure to response



An introduction then leads into a number of separate paragraphs which approach different aspects of the essay – these need to be in a logical sequence (the structure is therefore important). As well as this each paragraph needs 'internal consistency' that means it must make sense on its own if read separately away from the rest of the essay.

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responses

Paragraphs

‘Free standing, self-supporting unit of text’

- A core statement of information or opinion
- A **context** to establish the significance of this statement to the point of the essay
- **Evidence** to support the statement
- **Examples** to illustrate the sources
- References for sources

PEEL

(**P**oint, **E**xplanation, **E**xample , **L**ink back to question)

The acronym PEEL is a useful one for short answer response at both AS and A2 but equally it can be useful for thinking about paragraphs in essays , although you would want to avoid an overly – mechanistic approach so that every paragraph followed this rule.

- Discuss whether positive economic impacts for countries from developing tourism outweigh the negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts?

(-) ive
SC

Local people may adapt existing practices e.g. repeating religious ceremonies a number of times instead of just once on a significant day, in response to the needs of tourists wanting entertainment.

Spain's Alarde festival is an example of such staged authenticity which eventually led to its demise so undermining local people's traditions and creating a form of cultural commodification.

PEEL
(Point, Explanation, Example, Link back to question)

Using the earlier example of the question on tourism's impacts here is one paragraph exploring negative socio-cultural impacts. Let's use PEEL (Point, Explanation, Example, Link back to question)

Socio-cultural Impacts

POINT Local people may adapt existing practices

Explanation e.g. repeating religious ceremonies a number of times instead of just once on a significant day, in response to the needs of tourists wanting entertainment.

Example Spain's Alarde festival is an example of such staged authenticity which eventually led to its demise (*perhaps a bit more description about festival for those unfamiliar with it*)

Link back to question so undermining local people's traditions and creating a form of cultural commodification (i.e. negative socio-cultural impact

Some context: The Alarde was a festival that took place each year within the historic walled city of Fuenterrabia, Spain when the local people carried out a ritual reenactment of their victory in a siege in 1638 (see Greenwood, 1977). The festival had a symbolic meaning for the local people representing a time during the siege when they forgot their differences (e.g. class, internal quarrels and grievances). However, the Ministry of Information and Tourism publicized it as an event and it quickly became a tourist attraction but limited space within the city walls resulted in the Ministry requiring a second 'showing' so more visitors could watch the spectacle could see it. This repeat show lost the original meaning for the local people and it quickly lost the authenticity and local appeal of the Alarde.

What the examiners say

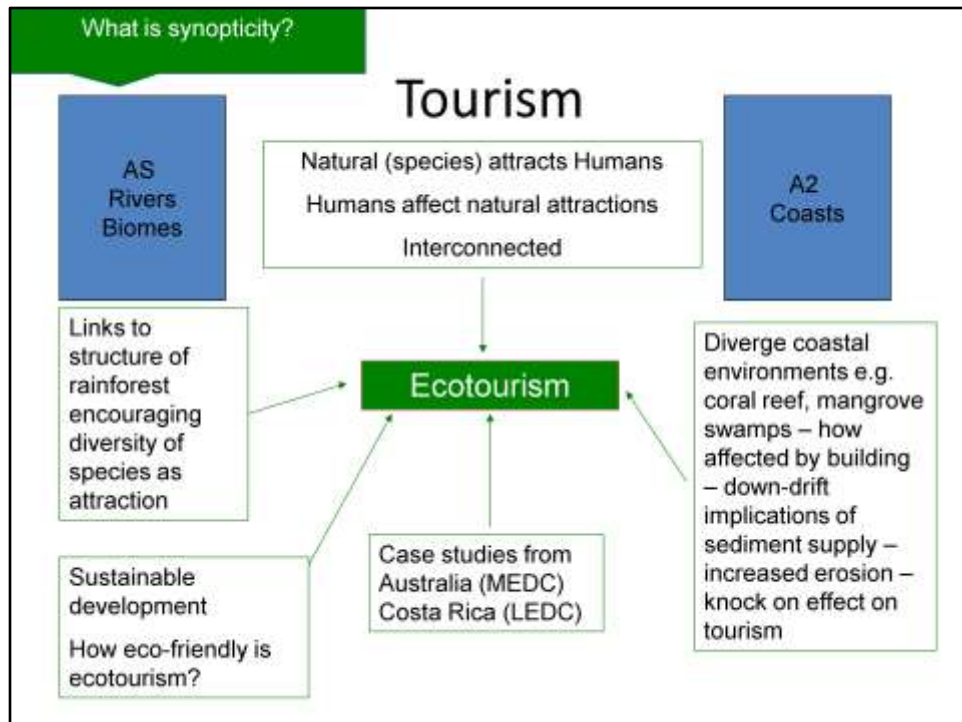
Extended writing

Structure clear introduction, with one major aspect per paragraph and a conclusion. Evaluation

With the emphasis on suggesting that the viewpoint may vary over time, location and depending on who you are within the community.

a number of case studies at different scales and/or locations.

(OCR teacher support materials , 2013)



Q) What is synopticity? Students requires to show synoptic capacity for highest levels.

A) Ability to make connections, to join up different parts of the specification and use in an informed way in an answer. The slide show some of the ways of demonstrating synopticity (see individual Awarding Body advice and teacher/student support materails) .

What the examiners say

Poor responses result where candidates:

- Provide answers based on pre-learnt case studies – 'answering the question they wanted to come up'
- Make uncritical use of case studies
- Poor use and spelling of terminology
- Identify synoptic elements 'Like I did...'
- Are more descriptive than analytical
- Offer no conclusion



What the examiners say

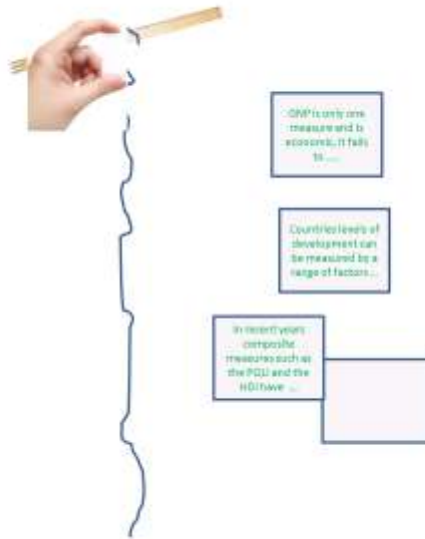
Conclusions

Advice from Principal Examiners from different awarding bodies

'Show some attempt at a conclusion as the mark scheme rewards clear or effective conclusions'
(OCR Examiners' report June , 2013)

'Longer conclusions often simply repeat information already presented'

3D essays



This captivity involved students having:

1. Wooden spatula 2. string. 3. paper clips. 4. sections of an essay cut up and not in order (no introduction or essay title).
2. The students had to discuss the essay and work out the essay title as earlier then write an introduction and sequence the essay (some of the sections were not geographically accurate) Also the students to draw one diagram and put it in an appropriate place in the essay.

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activities

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4:30 Introduction and big picture

Revision
tips and
activities



Example of Revision checklist for AQA A2 topic

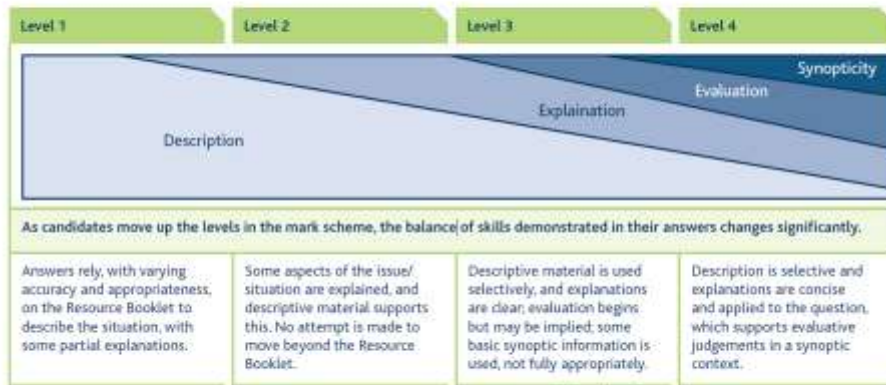
Plate tectonics and associated hazards	How well I understand			
Content	Poor	OK	Good	Excellent
The structure of the Earth in cross-section, and the theory of and evidence for plate tectonics and continental drift. <small>Key Terminology/case studies: Wegner, Sea floor spreading, Mid Atlantic Ridge</small>				
The tectonic processes operating at plate margins and hotspots, and the causes and nature of <u>vulcanicity</u> , seismicity and associated landforms. <small>Key Terminology/case studies: Hawaiian islands; Nazca's American</small>				
The relationship between types of plate margins and the type and frequency of volcanic activity <small>Key Terminology/case studies:</small>				

Practical strategies for succeeding in geography exams

4:30 Introduction and big picture

Example of making a checklist from eth specification to help individual revision .
 Note this student has misspelt Alfred Wegener's surname.

Reference: **Getting Started GCE Geography** (Edexcel , 2013)



Example of an Awarding Body representation of how to reach higher level responses.

Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) is well known in schools (and the updated version which emphasises the levels as verbs not nouns and has a higher level of creating. See <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/bloomtax.htm>

Some schools are using SOLO taxonomy see video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDXXV-mCLPg>

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acronym sharing*

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responses

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Geography

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Thinking through a topic as names on palter's shirts (can be adapted to different sports) This is team 'Primary Succession'

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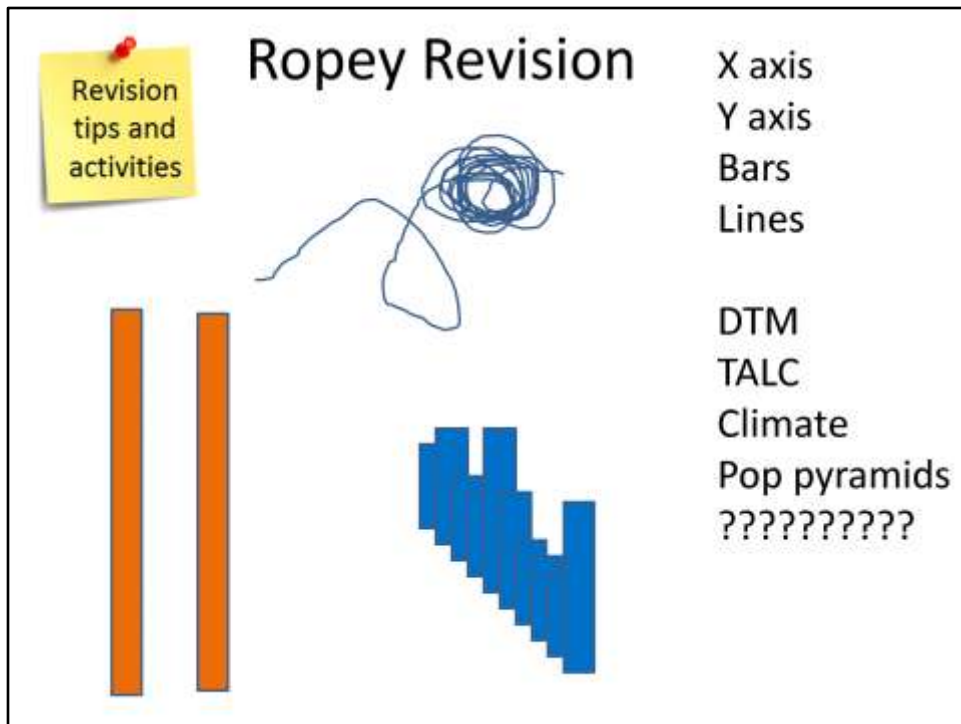
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Using materials students are encouraged to discuss and make their own graphs for revision with sugar paper strip, string and add their own labels. The graph can be of any size from A4 for individual/pair work or 50 cms to 1 m , or even using rope (not string) and doing this outside or in a hall on a very large scale for whole groups.

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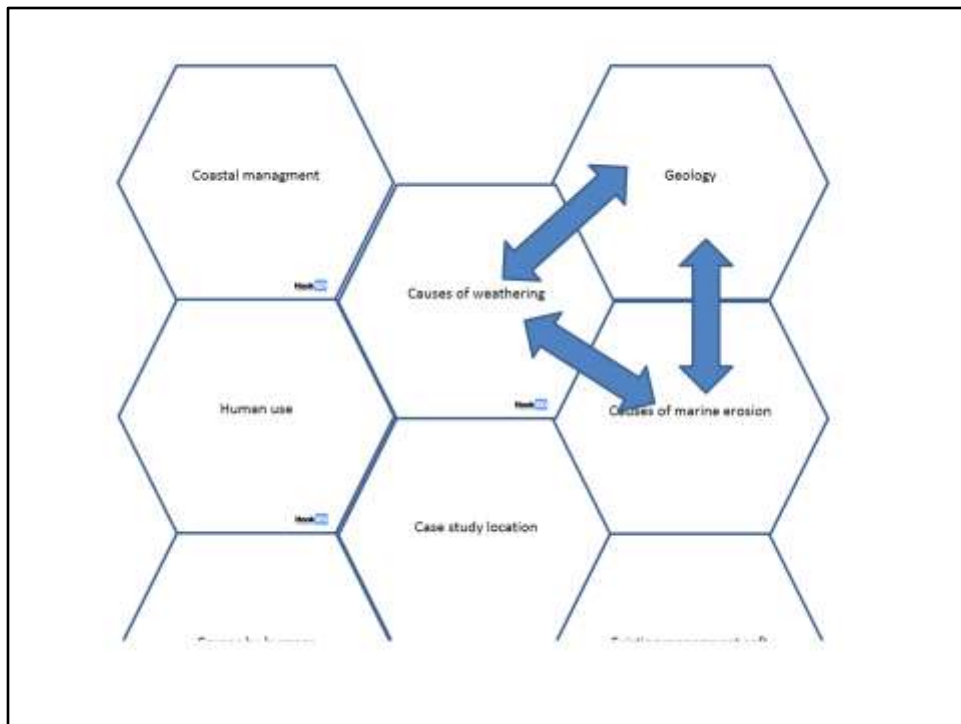
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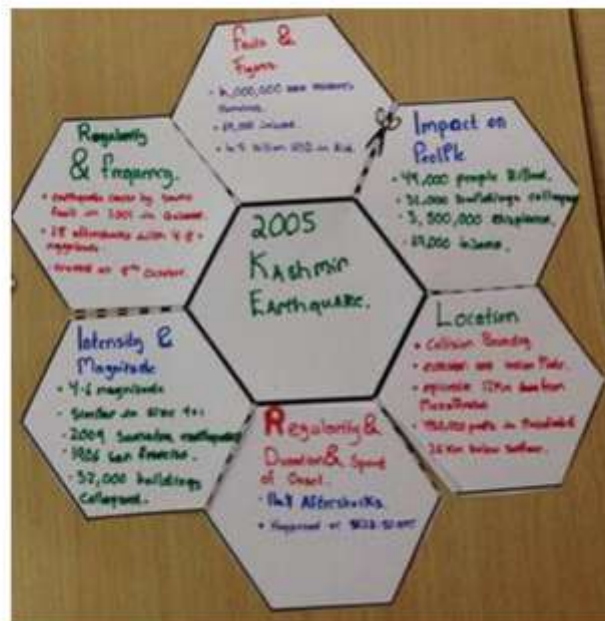
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This is part of the SOLO taxonomy and some teachers and students find it a helpful approach to making connections. If a hexagon's side touches another you must be able to justify this by making a connection or arguing a point . Students and teachers can generate their own sets of hexagons at <http://pamhook.com/solo-apps/hexagon-generator/>



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Acronyms

- C L O R P T



Last 5 minutes the students and teachers shred their favourite acronyms and mnemonics

Acronyms

- CLORPT
- Climate
- Organisms
- Relief
- P_____
- Time
- Types of volcanic eruption



Mnemonics



- Please Come On Sunday, Do Come Please.
Then John Clease Elope
On My Prize Pony.....

It's the geological time scale

Pre-Cambrian

Cambrian

Ordovician

Silurian

Devonian

Carboniferous

Etc..

Well done you have survived 2 hours and 5 minutes of geography revision and examination preparation.



Image of Singapore's Mr Lee: "Have a couple of children, three if you can" encouraging larger families after the campaigns to reduce family size in the late 1960s/ 1970s/1980s were so successful. Do you study Singapore as a case study for population policies?