

Writing  
the Earth

*Practical strategies for succeeding  
in geography exams*

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UWE, Bristol.

Geographical Association Bristol Branch  
Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017 6:00-8:00pm

# *Practical strategies for succeeding in geography exams*

*6:00 Introduction and big picture*

*Take command*

*Let's Describe*

*Planning answers*

*What's my essay title?*

*Introductions to essays*



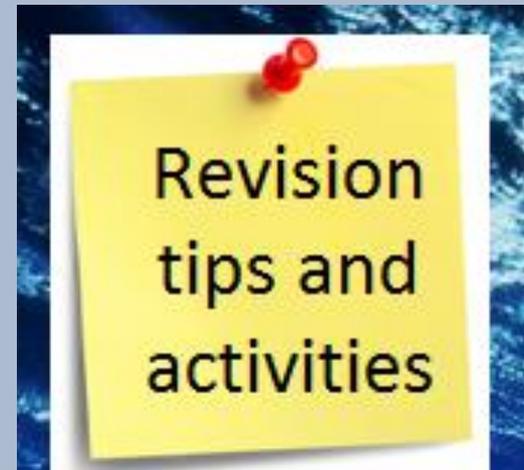
*7:00 Short break and refreshments*

*7:08 Revision strategies and activities*

*Hexagons*

*Ropey revision*

*7:55 Final remarks and close*





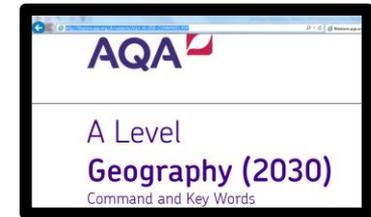
Better  
written  
responses

# 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..

## Command words

	State the precise meaning of an idea or concept. There is usually a low tariff of marks for this.
	Add to a diagram, image or graphic a number of words that describe and/or explain features, rather than just identify them (which is labelling).
	Give an account in words of a phenomenon which may be an entity, an event, a feature, a pattern, a distribution or a process. For example, if describing a landform say what it looks like, give some indication of size or scale, what it is made of, and where it is in relation to something else (field relationship).
	Describe the similarities and differences of at least two phenomena.
	Point out the differences between at least two phenomena.
	Make a statement that arises from a factual point made – add a view, or an opinion, or an interpretation. In data/stimulus response questions, examine the stimulus material provided and then make statements about the material and its content that are relevant, appropriate and geographical, but not directly evident. Candidates are being invited to ‘think like a geographer’.
	Set out the causes of a phenomenon and/or the factors which influence its form/nature. This usually requires an understanding of processes. Explanation is a higher-level skill than description and this is often reflected in its greater mark weighting.
	Consider carefully and provide a detailed account of the indicated topic.



## Take command

Break down the content of a topic, or issue, into its constituent elements in order to provide an in-depth account and convey an understanding of it.

Consider several options or arguments and weigh them up so as to come to a conclusion about their effectiveness or validity.

Consider several options or arguments and come to a conclusion about their importance/success/worth.

Often occurs before 'Assess' or 'Evaluate' and invites an examination of an issue from the point of view of a critic with a particular focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the points of view being expressed.

Set out both sides of an argument (for and against), and come to a conclusion. There should be some evidence of balance, though not necessarily of equal weighting.

Give reasons for the validity of a view or idea or why some action should be undertaken. This might reasonably involve discussing and discounting alternative views or actions.

Give reasons for the validity of a view or idea or why some action should be undertaken. This might reasonably involve discussing and discounting alternative views or actions. At A2 level each of the views present or options available will have positives and negatives. For the outcome(s) chosen, the positives outweigh the negatives. Candidates should be able to explain all of this review process.

Form and express a view as to the merit or validity of a view or statement after examining the evidence available and/or different sides of an argument.

Better  
written  
responses

# Take command

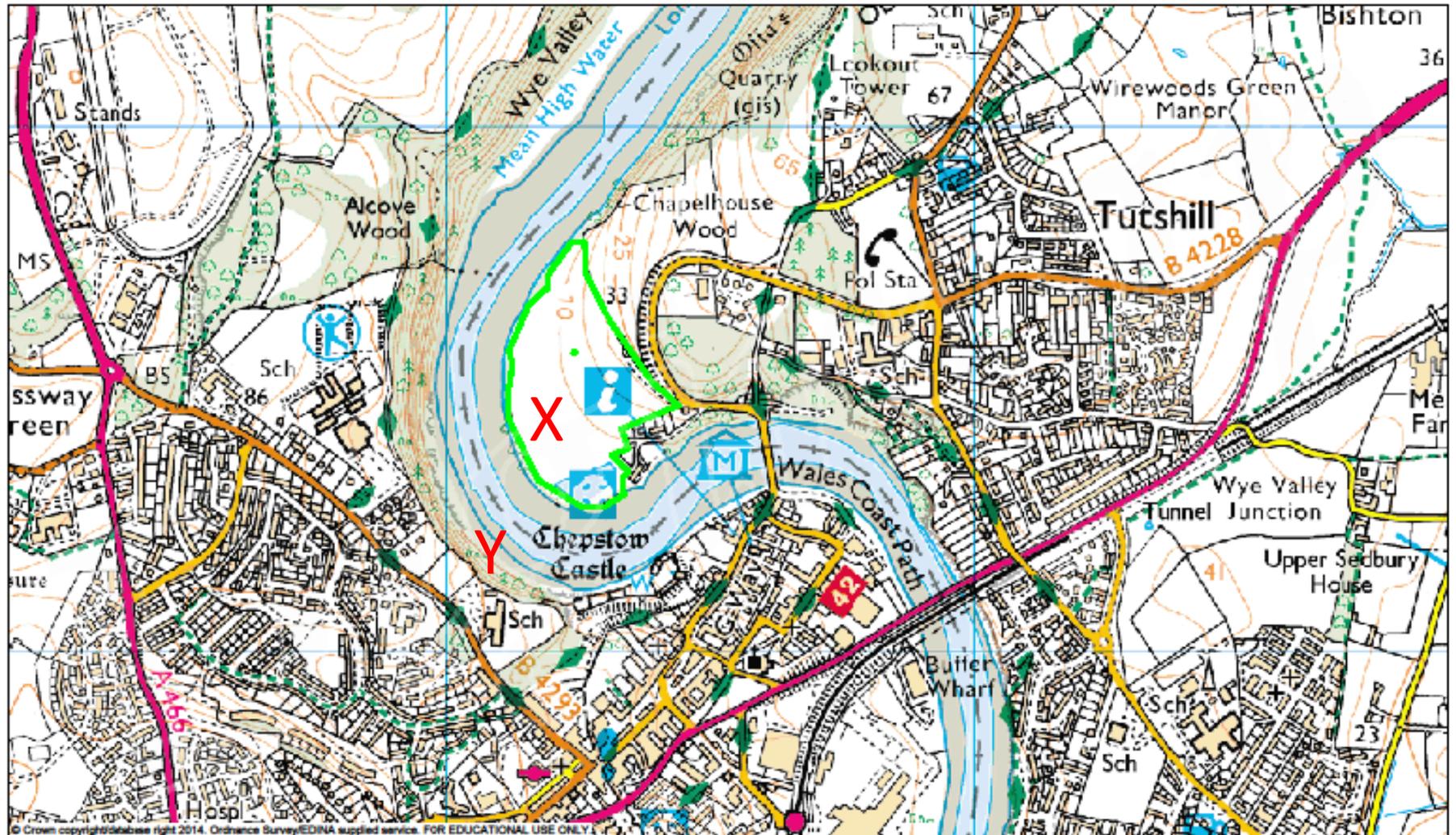
Low to Mid Order Command Words

....state, identify, annotate, describe,  
distinguish between, explain, outline, a name, using

**Always check with your  
teacher and the Examination  
Specification and advice from  
your Awarding Body**

Higher Order Command Words

....analyse, assess, evaluate, discuss, to what  
extent do you agree.....



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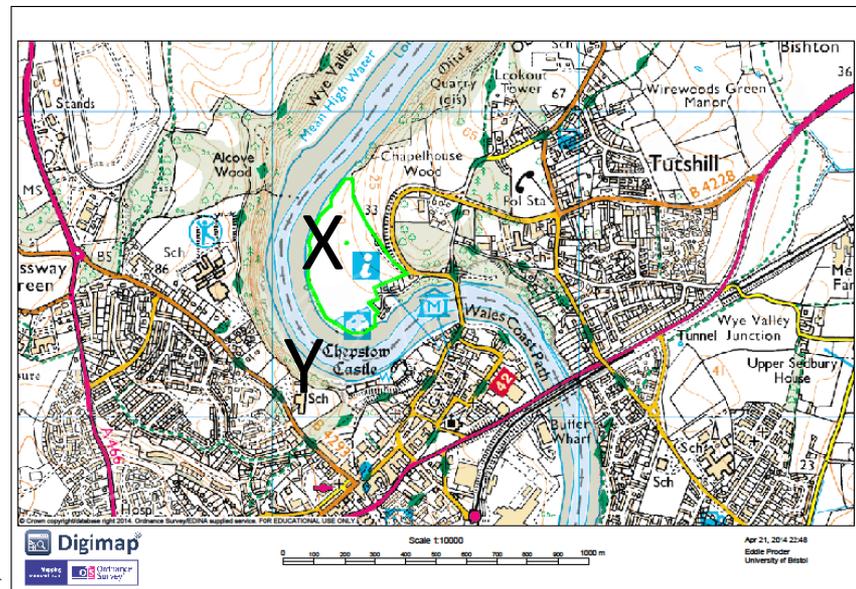
Apr 21, 2014 22:48  
Eddie Proder  
University of Bristol

Task 2.1 What's the question?

**Discuss**  
**Justify To what extent ....**  
**(Critically) Evaluate**  
**(Critically) Assess**  
**Analyse**

Comment on  
Explain  
Compare and Contrast  
Annotate  
Examine  
Outline

Describe  
Label  
Define..,  
What is meant by..



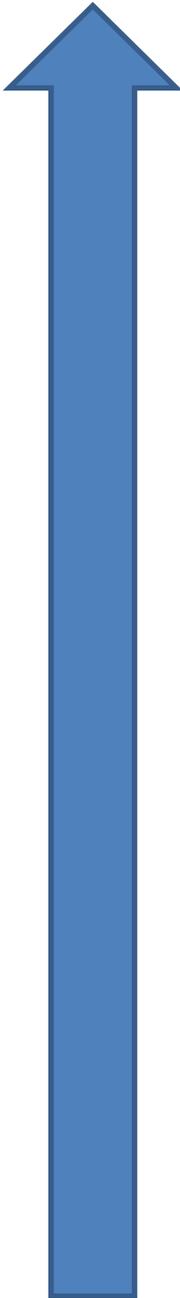
Explain how a meander forms?

Compare and contrast the formation of the river features at X and Y?

Describe a meander?

Label a meander on the map?

**Discuss**  
**Justify To what extent ....**  
**(Critically) Evaluate**  
**(Critically) Assess**  
**Analyse**

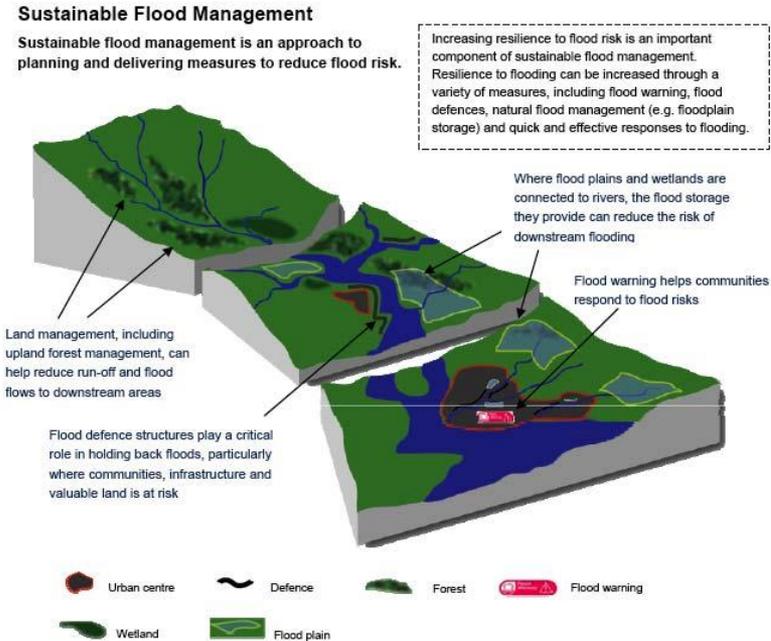


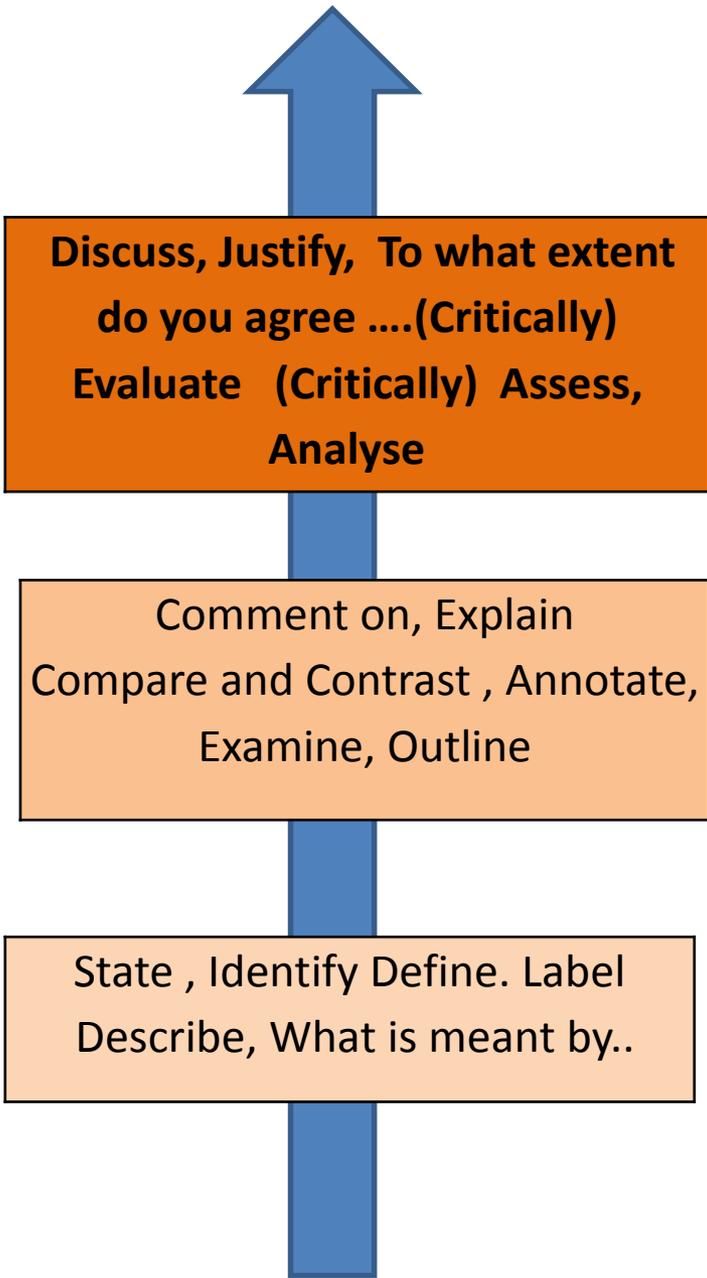
Discuss how rivers can be managed in a sustainable way?

Evaluate a river management strategy using a named example

Assess the effectiveness of dams as a flood control measure?

Explain how a river floods?





To what extent do you agree that soft engineering approaches should be the main priority in Shoreline Management Plans (25 marks)

For a named area of coastline you have studied evaluate how effective the coastal management strategies have been (15 marks)

Explain two different approaches which would protect this stretch of coastline from further erosion ( 8 marks)

Compare the processes which affect the shoreline and the cliff face in Figure 1 (6 marks)

Describe feature Y (4 marks)

Identify the feature X shown in the photograph ( 1 mark)

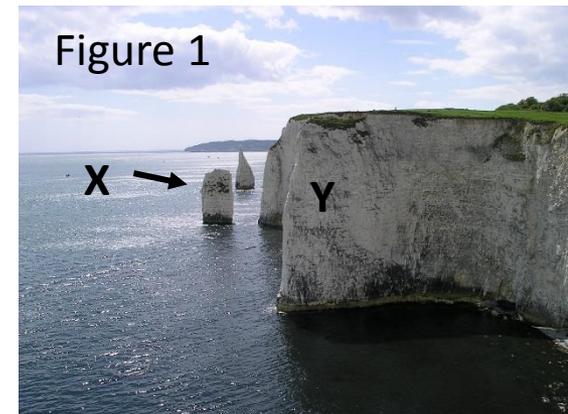


Figure 5.



*Take command*

**Describe** the vegetation shown in **Figure 5**.

(4 marks)

**Explain** how vegetation in hot deserts is adapted to the climate.

(7 marks)

‘The Sahel can be used sustainably, if carefully managed.’ **Discuss** this statement. (15 marks)

AS Geography AQA 2013

**Examiner comment:**

One of the major pitfalls that face candidates in any examination is their difficulty in interpreting the demands of the questions asked of them.

Examiners always try to set questions which are clear in what they ask for and which can be answered by everyone who has followed the course and has prepared adequately for the examination.

**Correct interpretation of the Command Words of a question is, therefore, very important.**

Better  
written  
responses

# Let's Describe



Las Vegas, south-western USA



**Describe** the development that has taken place in Las Vegas, shown in **Figure 7**. [4 marks]

Source: AQA AS June 2104

Las Vegas, south-western USA



This answer gains how many marks out of 4?

0

**Describe** the development that has taken place in Las Vegas, shown in **Figure 7**  
*Las Vegas is the gambling capital of the world situated in the Mojave Desert in Nevada in south-western USA. It is famous for the 24 hour casinos many of which are also hotels so tourists can stay in Las Vegas for a few days or a week. The buildings are often based on famous features in other countries like the [Luxor](#) which is pyramid shaped. The city in the picture also is increasingly becoming home to wealthy Americans who retire there so changing its social demographic. Being in a desert also means that water is scarce so you can only sue water for landscaping on certain days.*

# Las Vegas, south-western USA



**Describe** the development that has taken place in Las Vegas, shown in **Figure 7**. [4 marks]

Source: AQA AS June 2104

Beyond the built-up area the land is empty and seems dry and barren

The settlement seems to sprawl in the distance towards the mountains



B



M



F

There are a lot of trees dotted about the area, with wide roads apparent – especially going from top to bottom of the photograph, as well as from left to right.

Better written responses

Within the built-up area there is a line of very tall buildings that stand out in the landscape and cluster together with variable designs.

Beyond the built-up area the land is empty and seems dry and barren

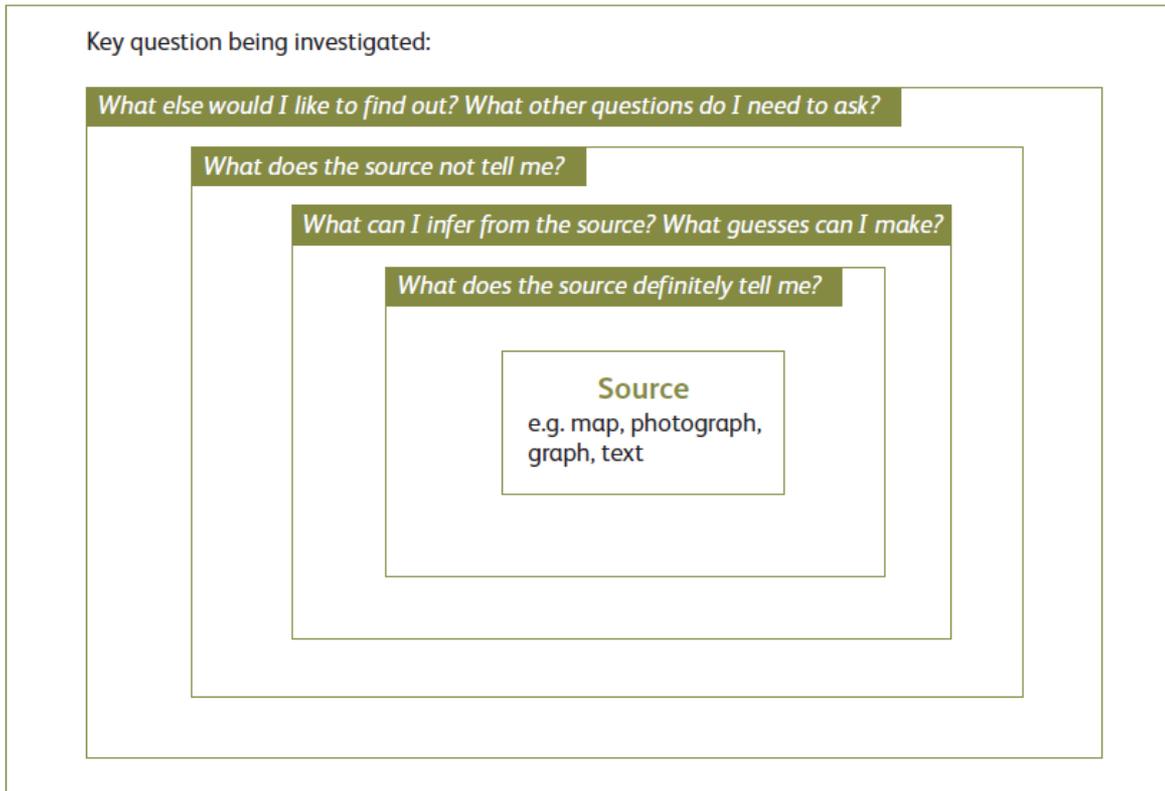
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There are a lot of trees dotted about the area, with wide roads apparent – especially going from top to bottom of the photograph, as well as from left to right.

Better written responses

Within the built-up area there is a line of very tall buildings that stand out in the landscape and cluster together with variable designs.



**Figure 5:**  
Layers of inference.  
**Source:** Roberts,  
2013.

Roberts, M. ( 2017) Planning for enquiry in Jones, M ed. ( 2017) *The Handbook of Secondary Geography*. Sheffield: Geographical Association.

# Practising higher order skills - layers of inference

What else would I like to find out? / What other questions do I have?

What does the source **not** tell me?

What can I infer from the source / what guesses can I make ?

What does the source definitely tell me ?





Better  
written  
responses

# Let's describe and ...

## Stimulus response questions

**Examiner comment:** need to study and **use** a stimulus on your answers. The command '**comment on**' requires [you] to make a geographical inference based ... on something evident in the Figure. In direct terms, the Figure that is being provided should be referred to repeatedly in the answers to the questions set on that stimulus; and in simple terms evidence from the Figure should be given to support a point being made.

AQA Geog 3 (2013, p.3)

# Examiner comment from AQA Examiner Report 2014

“Rehearsing how to **respond to photographs,** statistical data and maps is really important prior to taking the exam allowing candidates to deal with patterns, trends and anomalies.”



Figure 8

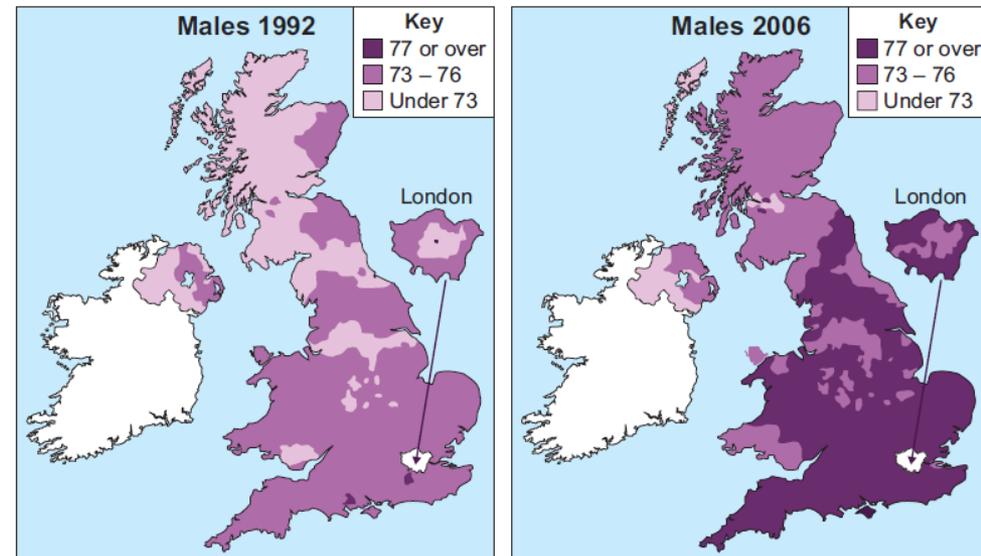
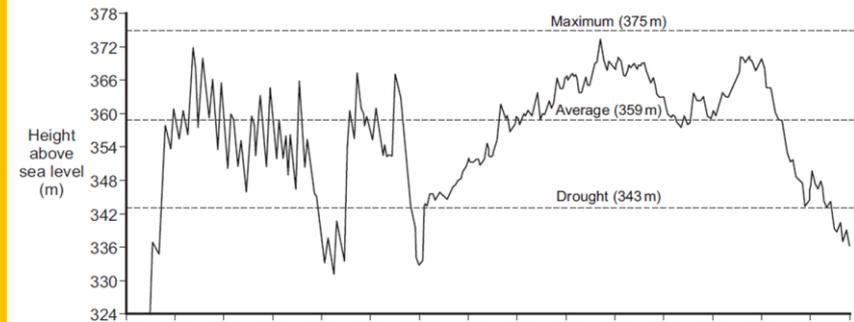
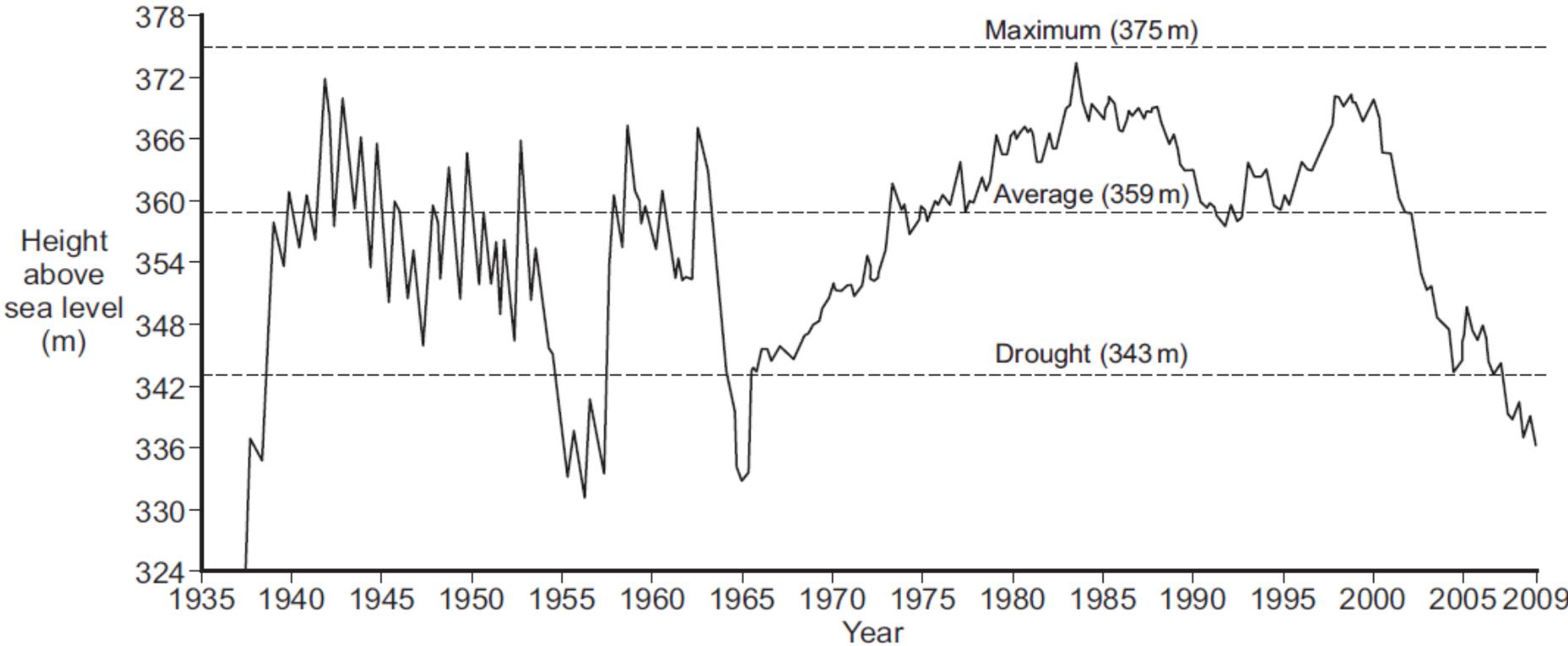


Figure 8 shows the water levels of Lake Mead at the Hoover Dam, near Las Vegas. The Hoover Dam was built in the 1930s.

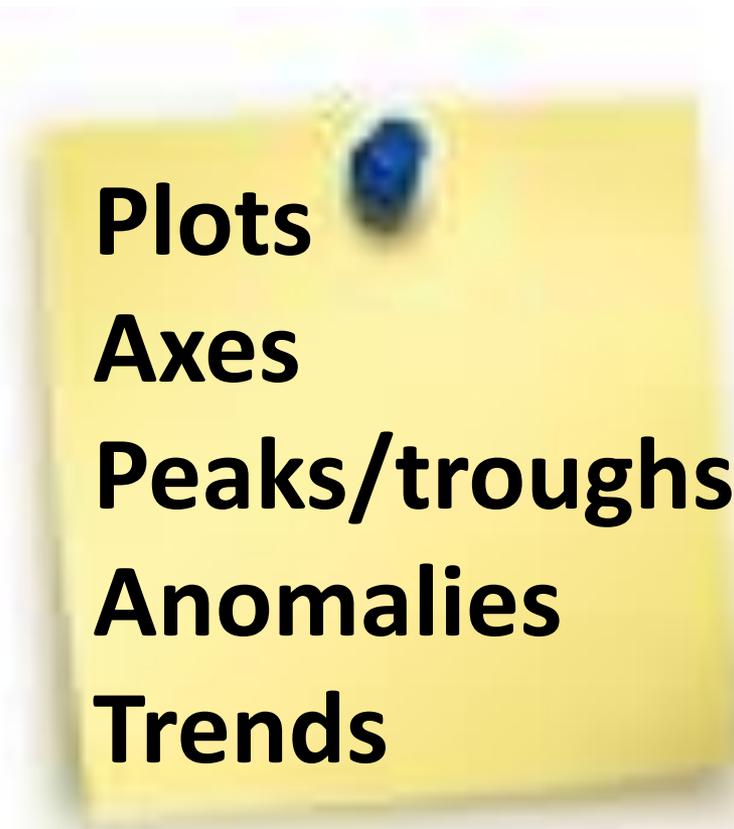
**Figure 8**



Describe the changing water levels of Lake Mead shown in **Figure 8**. [4 marks]  
Source AQA AS June 2014.

# Reading Tables, Charts and Graphs

- **reading the data:** what does the data tell us? e.g. highest, lowest, specific values or plots
- **reading between the data:** what relationships are there within and between the data? e.g. groups, trends, peaks, troughs, anomalies
- **reading beyond the data:** what can we extrapolate or infer from the data? e.g. future trends, for a different context.



**Plots**

**Axes**

**Peaks/troughs**

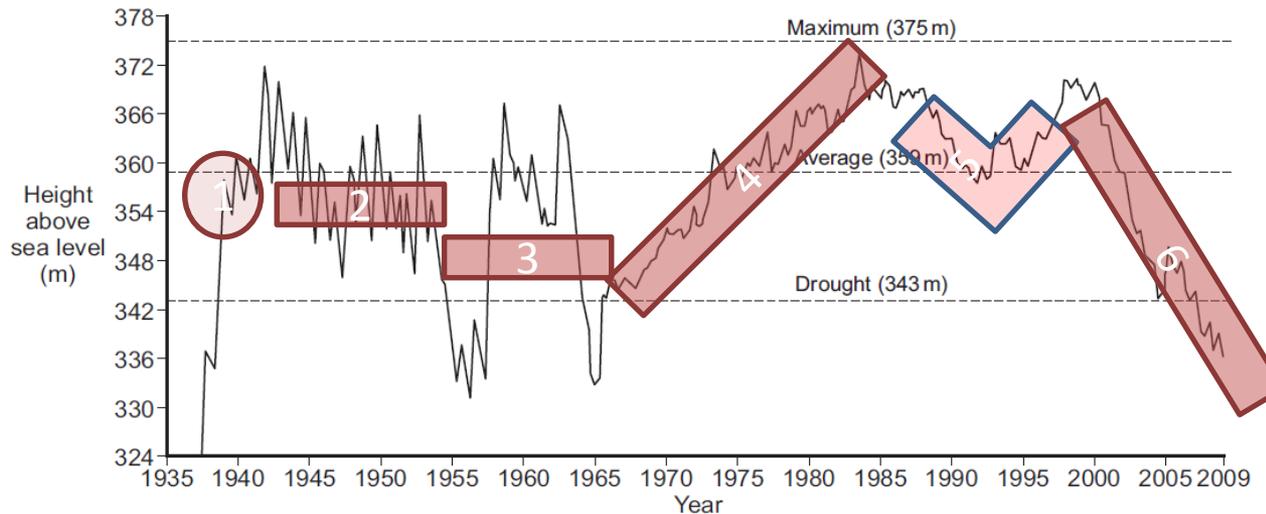
**Anomalies**

**Trends**

## The amount of water in lake Mead has **fluctuated**

1. It rose quickly following the construction of the Hoover Dam reaching its average depth in about two years at about 357m
2. Despite fluctuating, it remained in a steady band until the mid-1950s, when its level varied much more – from 360m to 331m.
3. This continued during the 1960s with highs of about 365m and lows of 345m.

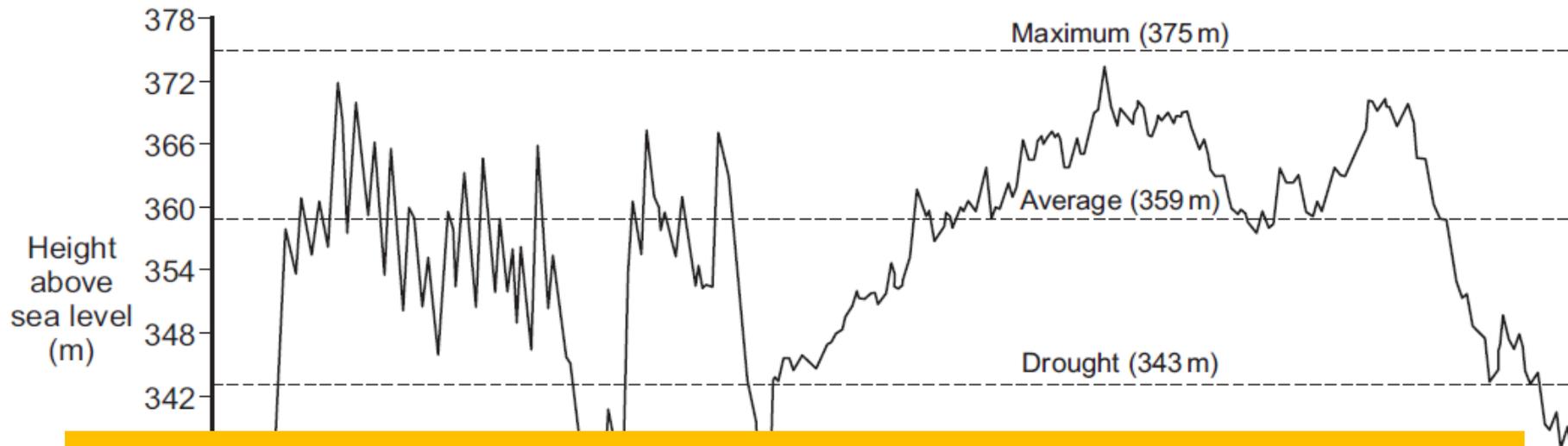
Figure 8



4. The late 1960s saw an overall increasing trend in the water level – as did the 1970s/80s, .....
5. with some reduction in the early 1990s. However, this was short lived and stores were replenished in the later years of the decade.
6. Since 2000, there has been a decline in water levels – this has been steadier and more sustained than previously – with 2009 levels at 336m below the drought level

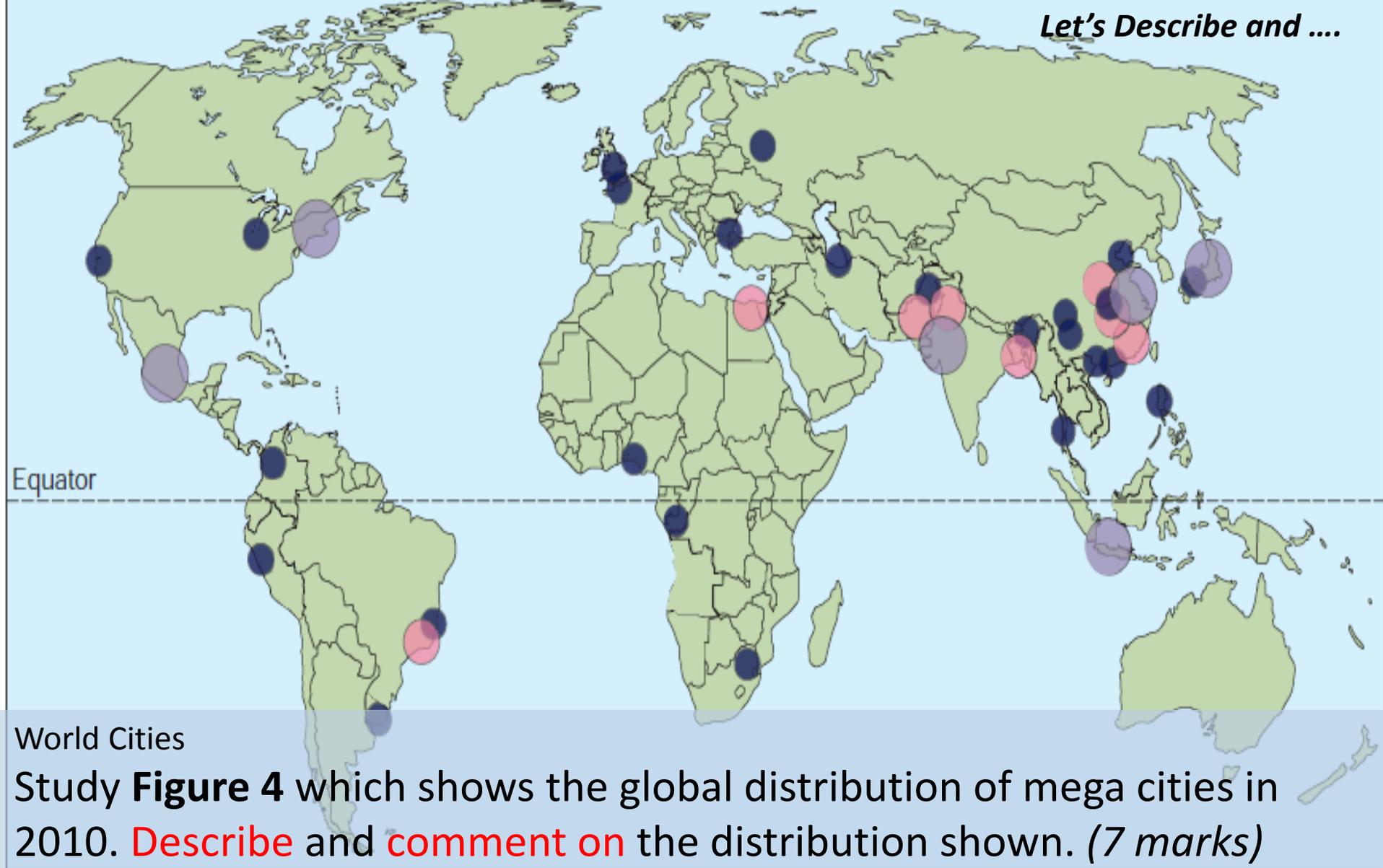
Figure 8 shows the water levels of Lake Mead at the Hoover Dam, near Las Vegas. The Hoover Dam was built in the 1930s.

Figure 8



## Examiner Comment from AQA Report

“Weaker responses noted single years, rather than changes and laboured points made over short time periods where change was limited.” (AQA, 2014, p.6)



Key

Mega city size: ● 10 – 14.99 million    ● 15 – 20 million    ● Over 20 million



Better  
written  
responses

# *Planning answers*

'The positive impacts of population change on the character of rural and urban areas outweigh the negative impacts.' To what extent do you agree with this view?  
(15)

### **Level 3 (Detailed) 13-15 marks**

Description is specific and targeted to the question.

There is reference to both urban and rural in a more balanced account.

Points are supported/developed.

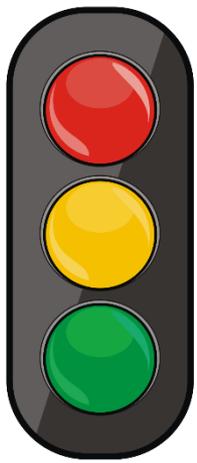
Discussion is to the fore and a clear, supported view is reached as to whether positive impacts outweigh negative impacts.

Explicit conclusion needed.

(Source AQA Geography Paper 1 June 2014 Mark Scheme, p.18)

## **Examiner Comment from AQA Report 2014**

The question demanded some careful planning, focusing on a limited number of ideas in the time available. Too many just launched into an answer without real thought or sense of direction. This resulted in disappointing responses with only a small proportion of candidates accessing Level 3.



Command word/s

Content

Crucial (key) words

# 3Cs

Housing, employment,  
socio-economic  
characteristics of  
population

Villages (remote,  
nr. urban areas)

Increase or  
decreasing  
(migration)

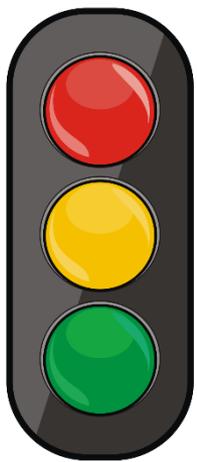
'The positive impacts of population change on the character of rural and urban areas outweigh the negative impacts. To what extent do you agree with this view? (15)

Urban -  
sprawl

Rural - Changing socio-economic – unable to  
buy first home

Remote rural - Decline in population out  
migration , elderly population remain

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Command word/s

Content and context

Crucial key words

# 3Cs

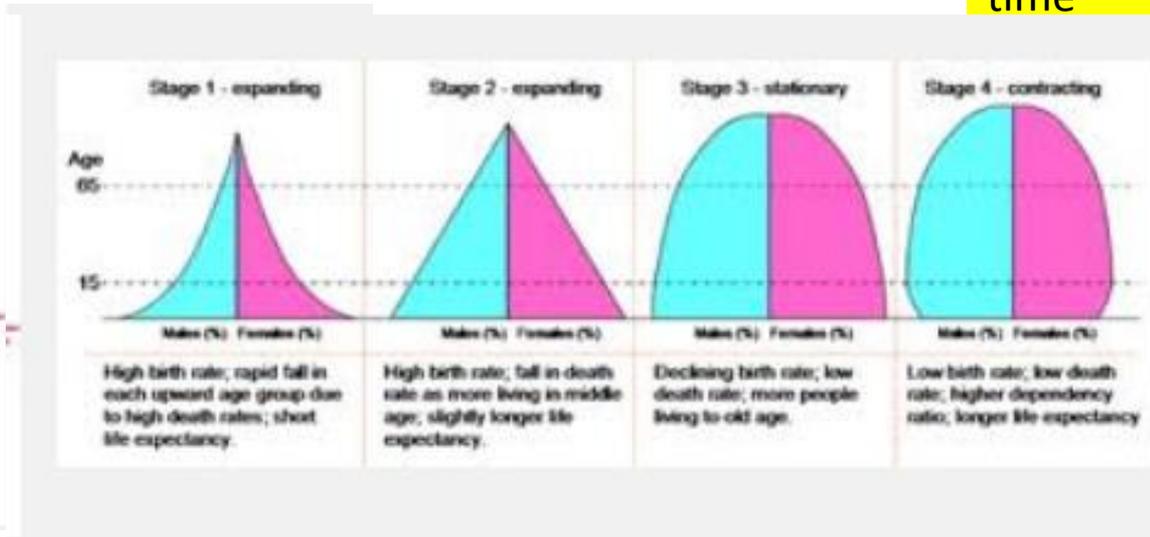
Case studies

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

Social  
Economic  
Environmental  
Political

Variations within a country or region over time

Better written responses



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

Analysis, give different points of view, argue the case, support your points

Population Increasing/decreasing – natural increase (+/-migration in/out)

(++) (+-) (- -) (- +)

Social-cultural ++/--

Economic ++/--

Environmental ++/--

CS1 – (DRC)

Democratic Republic Congo

CS2 - Singapore

CS3 - UK

CS4- Germany

CS5 London Docklands

Better written responses

# Plan don't over plan

Better  
written  
responses

Evaluation, both  
perspectives, to  
what extent do you  
agree ?

EC +1  
Ec +2  
Ec +3  
Ec +4

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

Env-1  
Env-2  
Env-3  
Env-4

Content - access  
parts of mind map

SC -1  
SC -2  
SC -3  
SC -4

# What the examiners say

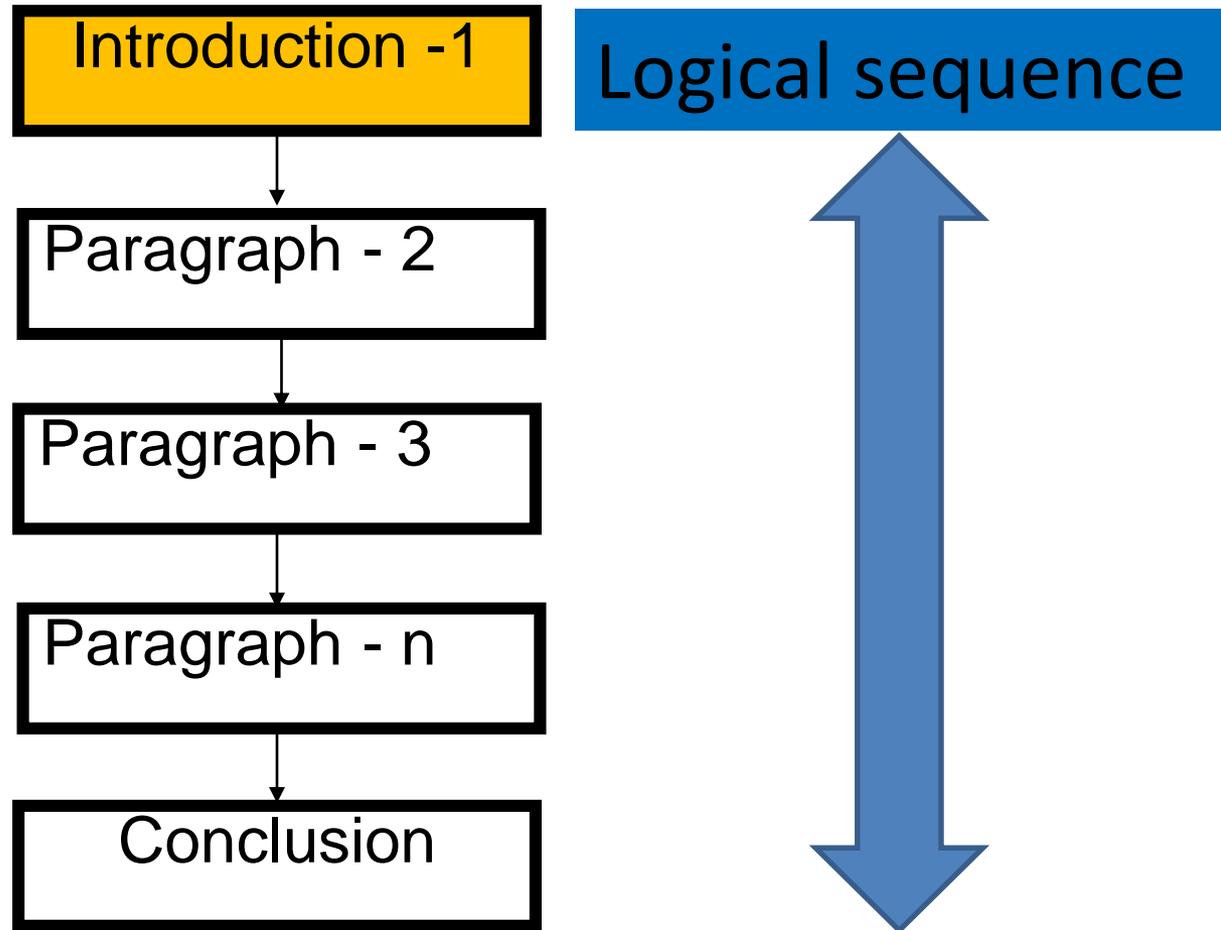
“Candidates need to carefully read the full question or key terms in the question, especially at A2. Not doing this is the single biggest cause of under-achievement. Too many candidates offer pre-learnt answers that do not fit exactly the demands of the wording of the question.”

(OCR, June 2013)



# Structure

- Clear structure to response



# 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



# What's my essay title?

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responses

Essay Title A

Example of an  
introduction

Example of an  
introduction

Example of an  
introduction

Essay Title B

Example of an  
introduction

Example of an  
introduction

Example of an  
introduction

Essay Title C

Example of an  
introduction

Example of an  
introduction

Example of an  
introduction



Better  
written  
responses

# 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

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.

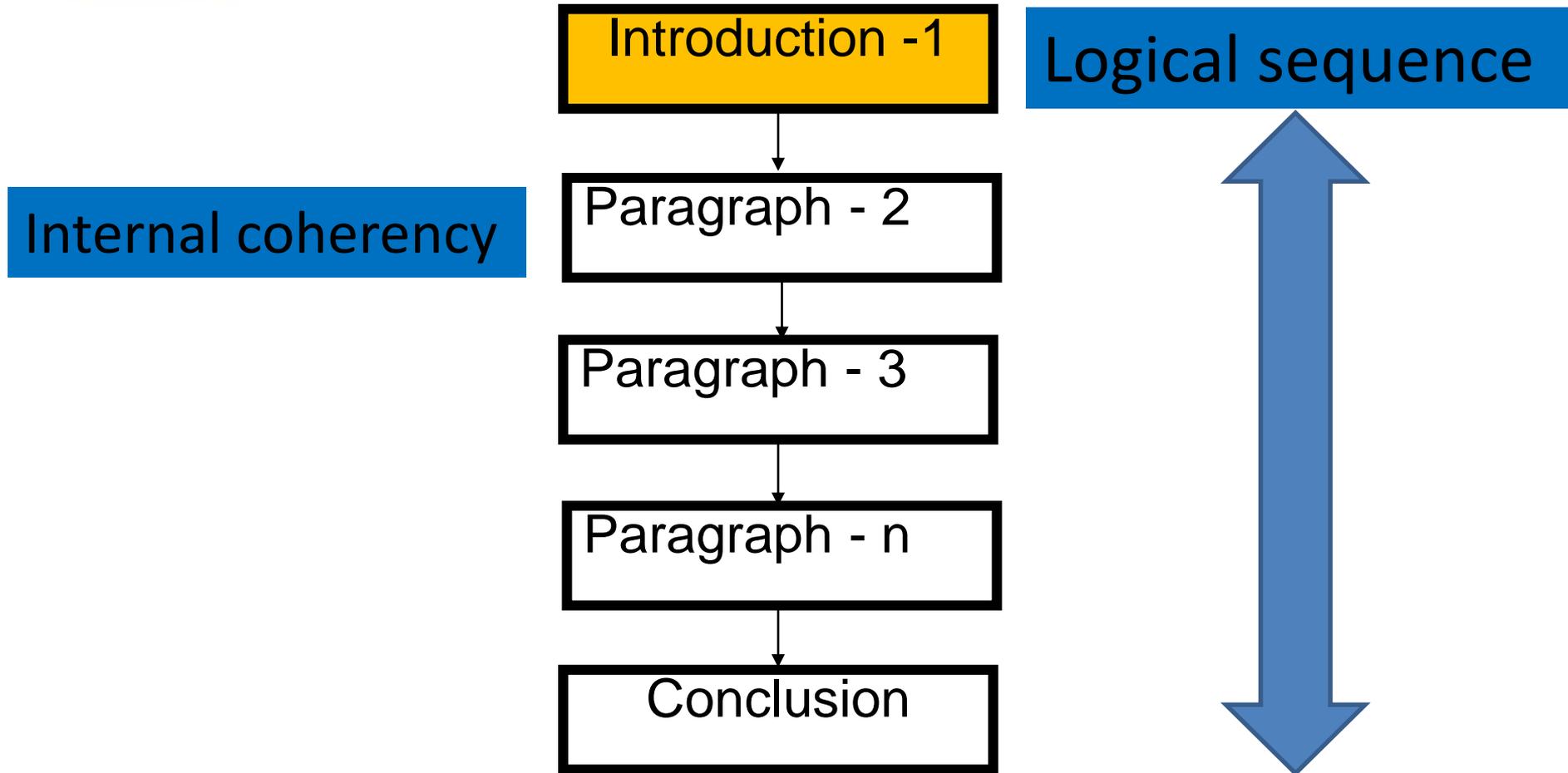
a number of case studies at different scales and/or locations.

(OCR teacher support materials , 2013)



# Structure

- Clear structure to response



# 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)



Better  
written  
responses

# Paragraphs

‘Free standing, self-supporting unit of text’

- A core statement (point) 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

**PEEL**

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

(-) ive  
SC

- To what extent do you agree that tourism often brings mainly negative socio-cultural impacts?

**Local people may adapt existing cultural practices in response to the needs of tourists wanting entertainment**

**Such as repeating religious ceremonies a number of times instead of just once on a significant day and in a particular location.**

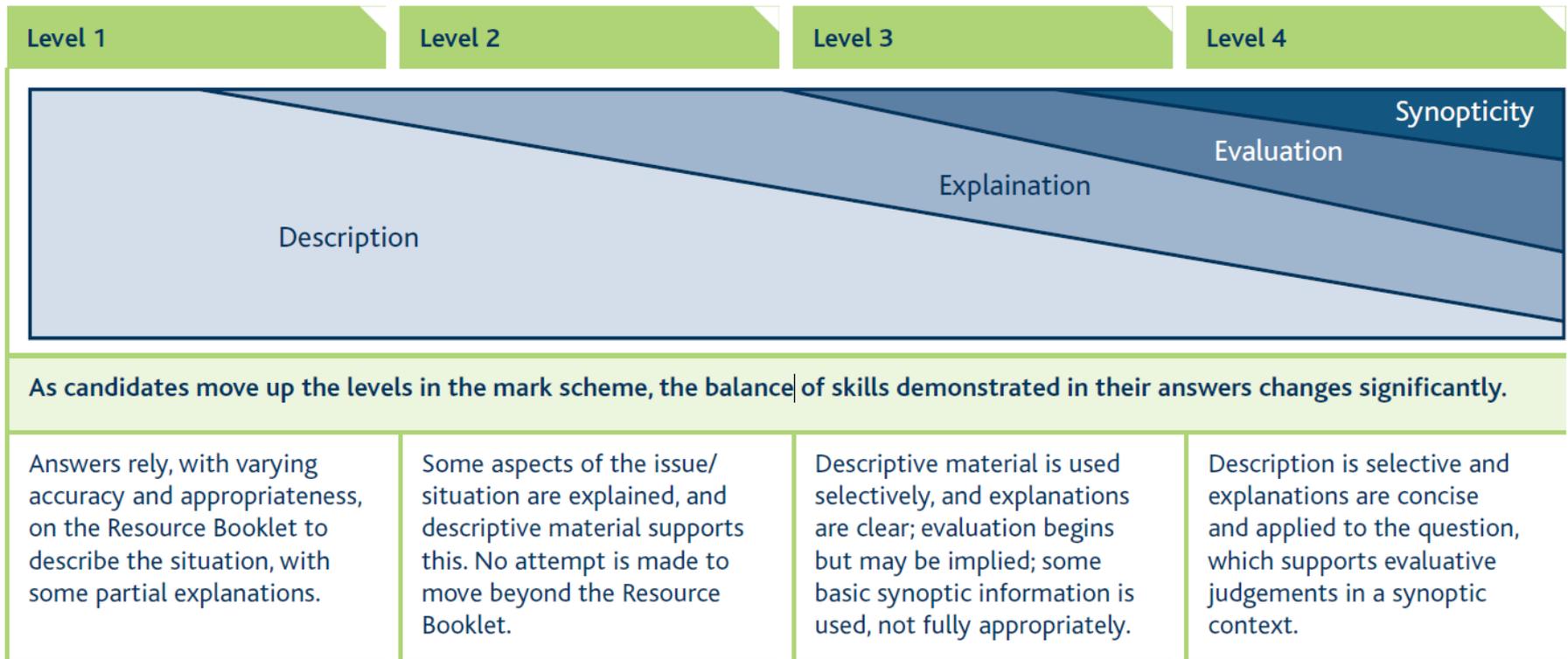
**Spain's Alarde festival used to occur once a year for the local community but the Tourism Ministry ordered for it to occur twice so tourists could also see it .**

**This staging of the event or what has been called 'Staged Authenticity' eventually led to negative consequences with the ceremony's demise and undermined local people's traditions**

**PEEL**

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

# What the examiners say



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

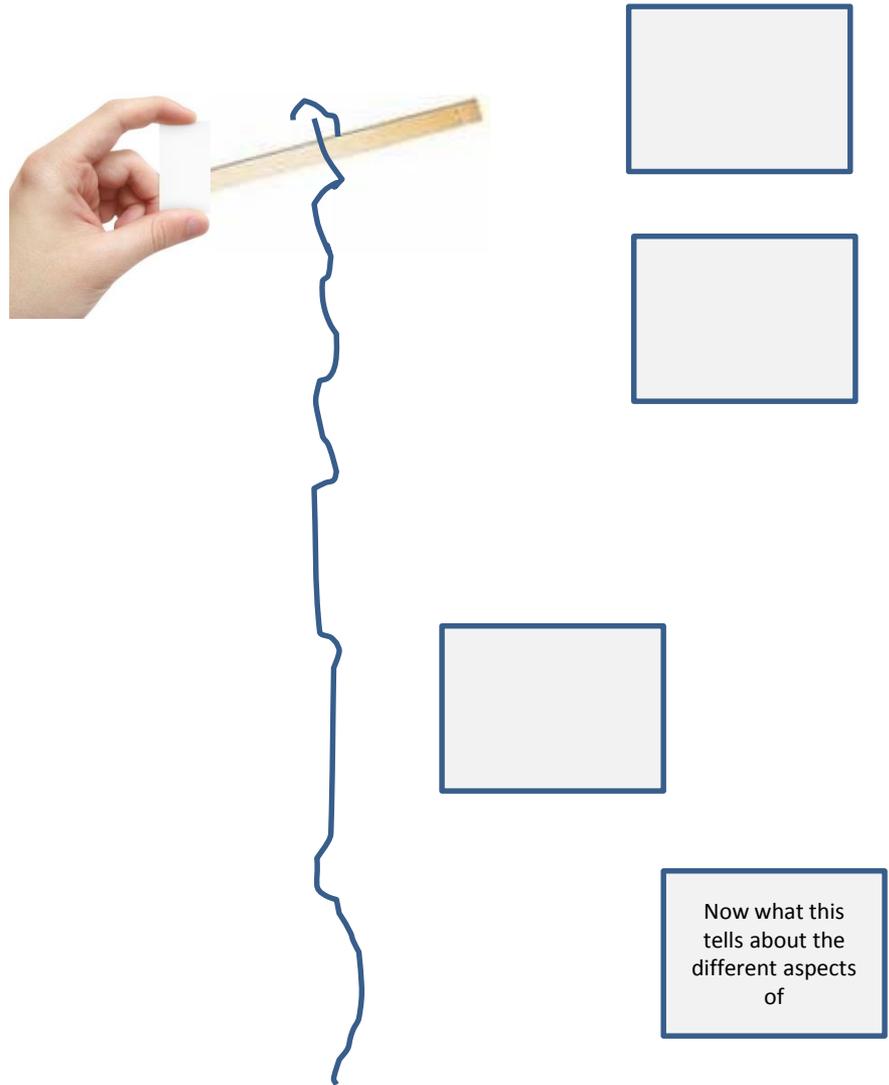
# What the examiners say

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



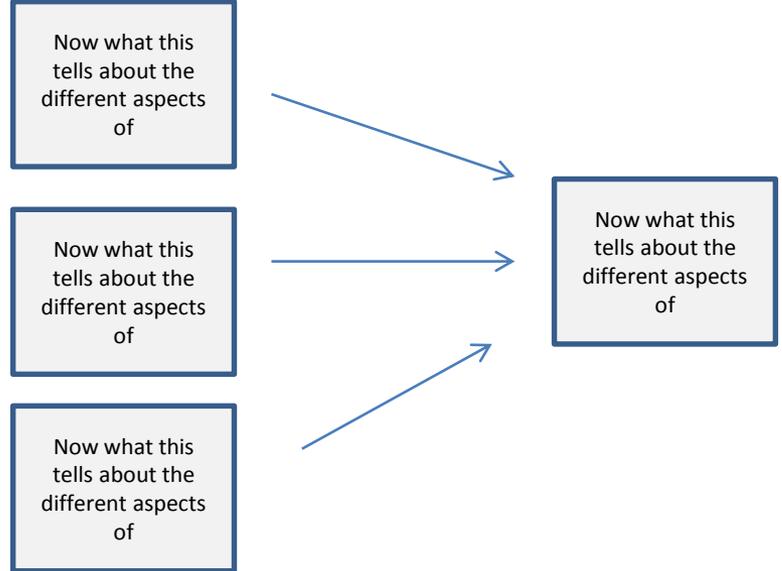
# 3D essays



# Speaking essay



# Joint conclusions



**Figure 8:**  
The process  
of working with  
students to produce  
a talking essay.

### Talking essay: What is being done to solve the problems of shanty towns in Rio de Janeiro?

- Write the title on the board and explain the task, then arrange the students in groups. (Some groups will have more information to deal with than others, so place students appropriately.)
- Discuss the potential structure of the essay as a class – what are the big points? (If they have written the structure for the essay as homework, refer to this.)
- Give each student one of a set of cards describing the problems of *favelas* in Rio and potential solutions.
- Display a set of big points, matching those decided in class, on larger cards.
- Students move around the classroom and allocate their cards to one of the 'big point' categories.
- Each group now adopts one 'big point' and its associated cards. They decide what is the most important point on their cards and why – this nudges them towards a discussion of the significance of one fact *vis-à-vis* another. Any prior knowledge can be incorporated here.
- Discuss as a class what should go in the introduction (signposts for the audience) and pick representatives from each group to write it. Do the same for the conclusion. Writing an introduction or conclusion can be quite challenging, so this is a good opportunity to build in differentiation. Ask another representative from each group to say why their 'big point' is important and record their responses.
- Each group is given time to write their 'big point' paragraph. Everybody in the class should have a part to play, so make sure every group member writes at least a couple of sentences and reads them out.
- Perform the essay as a class, recording it if possible.
- Finally, the class discusses the key points arising from the activity, in terms of both their geographical understanding and the process of putting together the essay. This plenary element is particularly effective if you can watch a recording of the essay performance: it is an opportunity for more extended engagement with the essay (such as students assessing the essay with pre-determined success criteria).

Walshe , N. (2017) Literacy in Jones, M ed. ( 2017) *The Handbook of Secondary Geography*. Sheffield: Geographical Association.

# What's my essay title?

*How useful is GNP as a measure of a country's development?*

*Discuss the effectiveness of GNP as a measure of a country's level of development?*

*Using case studies, evaluate how effective GNP is as an indicator of development and people's quality of life ?*

# ***Introduction***

Development is a complex geographical concept which geographers have tried to measure to show that countries are at different stages of 'development'. There are many different ways to measure how developed a country is including single indicators e.g. Life expectancy or GNP per capita and composite indicators e.g. HDI . Gross National Product (GNP) is a single indicator which measures the total value (in US \$) of all the products and services produced in a year by a country's nationals. Using GNP is one way of measuring how developed a county is from an economic perspective compared to others but how reliable is it as a measure of development?

The GNP is given as an average of the whole country and does not take into account disparities which arise within a country. For example Russia.....

Another disparity the GNP does not take into account is the difference between incomes of people from different racial and religious backgrounds.....

This results from the racial segregation or apartheid that gripped the country from 1948 to 1994. ....

GNP doesn't take into account money made through black markets. The data from these is difficult to obtain and is not included within a country's GNP.. ....

Determining how developed a country is on its economic wealth is a dated method which does not take into the quality of life and human development.....

Another problem with using GNP to measure economic development is that it is given in US dollars. This means

Finally it fails to take into account the social and environmental cost of economic development.....

# ***Conclusion***

Overall, a better measure of development than taking a single indicator such as GNP is to use a number of measures that contribute to a country's development such as economic growth, health and education. The composite indicator, the Human Development Index which measures GNP per capita, number of years schooling and the life expectancy of a country's population is a good example but increasingly development needs to also consider issues relating to sustainable development, human rights and democracy.

# What the examiners say

For the 15 mark '(b)' sub-questions in Section A, the most common command words used are 'assess' and 'evaluate'. A conclusion can be a useful tool to come to a final judgement having weighed-up both sides of the argument. Conclusions do not need to be long, but they show the examiner that having considered the question from several angles you are now prepared to provide an overview

Why lack of supplies may cause worries, however with new reserves, and innovative extraction methods, these uncertainties imply lead to exploitation of further oil energy supplies



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This conclusion makes reference to several key uncertainties in terms of energy futures, such as peak oil, political and environmental concerns. Notice how at the very end, the candidate recognises that there are some forces at work to reduce energy uncertainty.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

The example on a conclusion shown here is about the length you should aim for.

# 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”

Checklists personal planners, flash cards,   
 mnemonics, acronyms , speaking essays, model  
 essays, peer assessment, self assessment, student  
 use of examiner reports, podcasts,

Example of Revision checklist for AQA A2 topic

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

Revision tips and activities



**Centre forward**

**Centre forward**



**Left midfield**

**Centre midfield**

**Centre midfield**

**Right midfield**



Halo  
salt  
marsh

Litho  
Volcanic

Psammo  
sand

Hydro  
Fresh  
water

**Left-back**

**Centre-back**

**Centre-back**

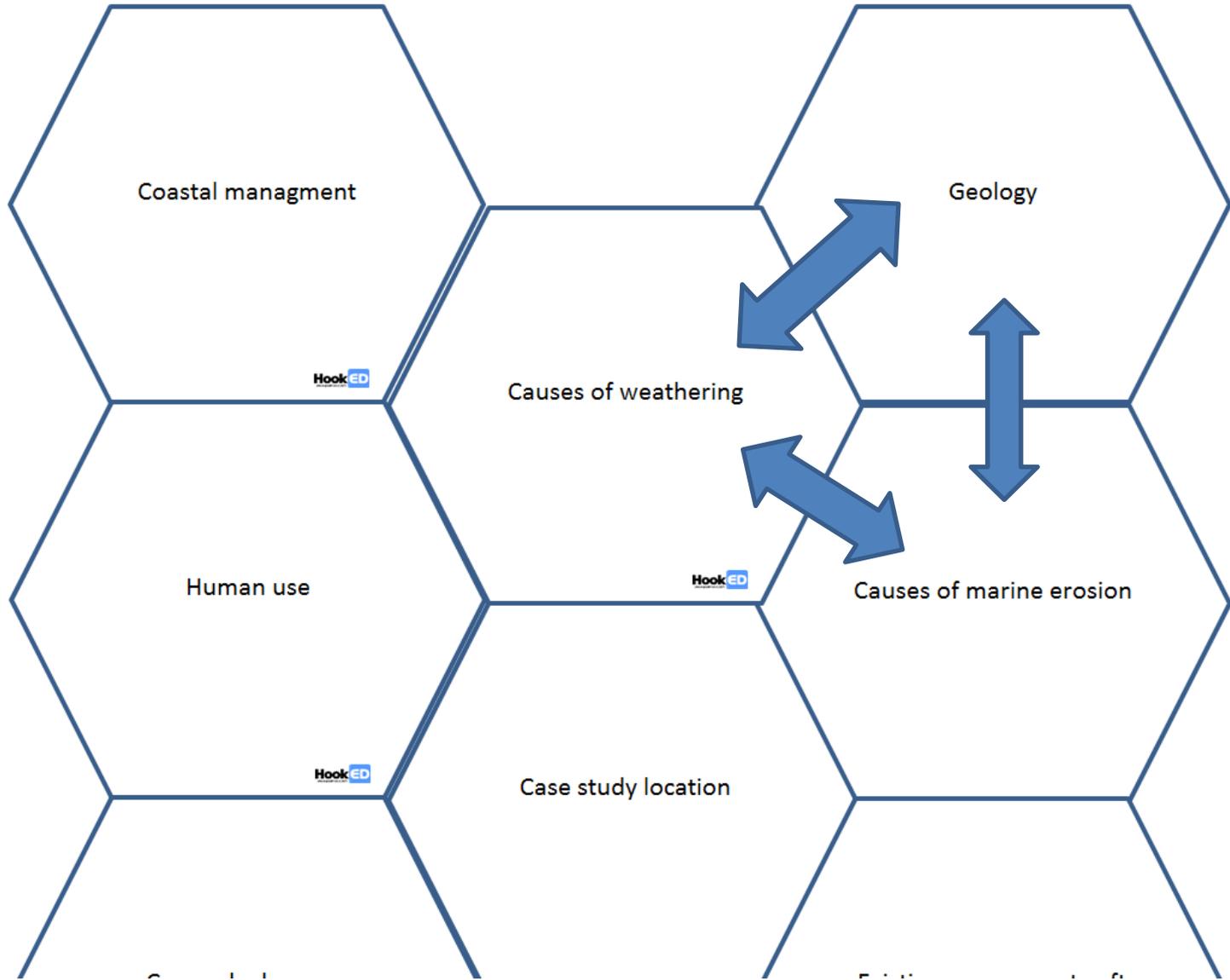
**Right-back**

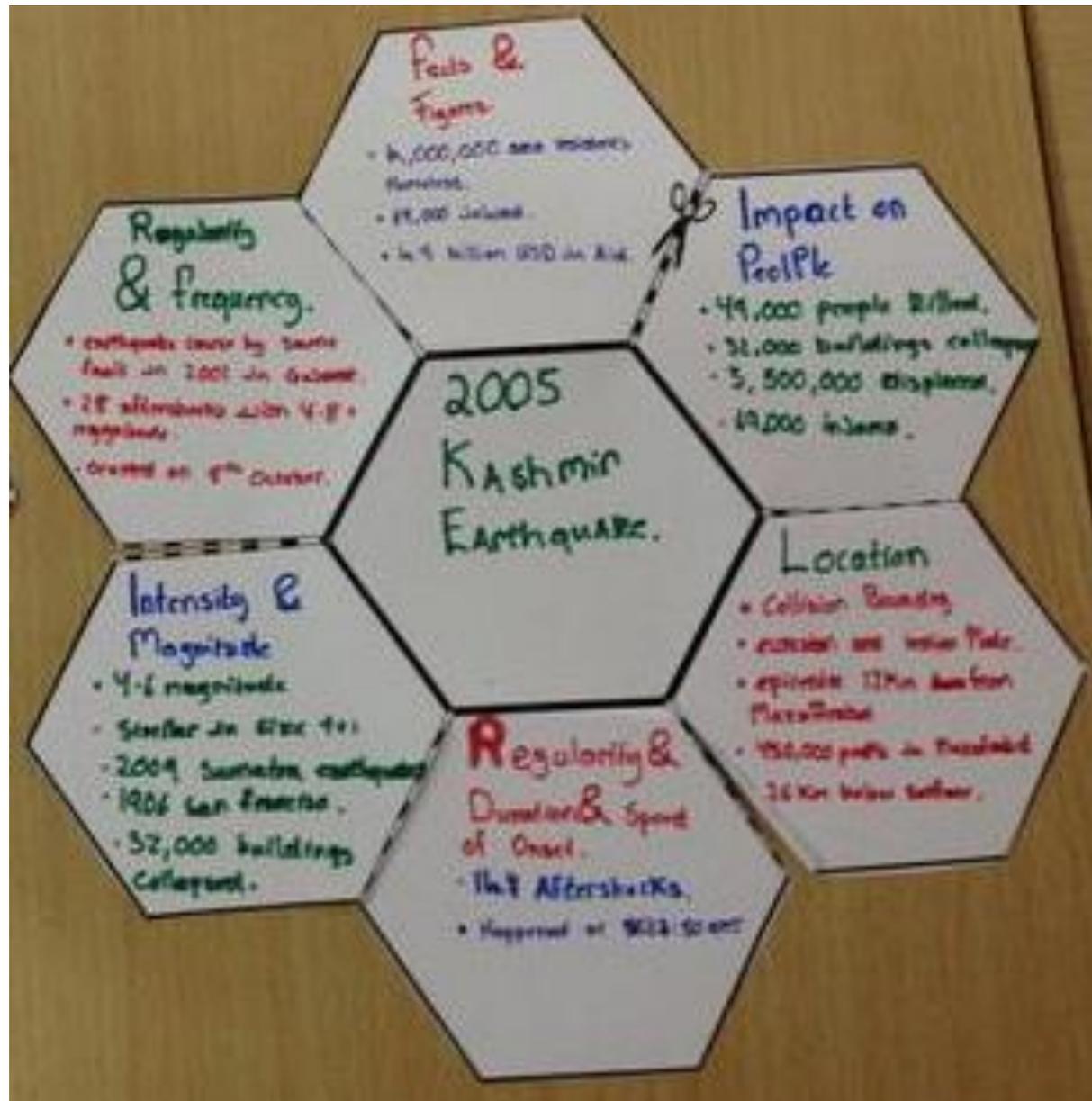


**Goalkeeper**

It's a team game

# Hexagons







- Home
- News
- About
- SOLO Taxonomy

## HookED SOLO Hexagon Generator

This HookED app populates a **SOLO Hexagon Template**.  
Brainstorm content ideas and enter them in the fields below.  
Click "Generate Document" to populate the template.

10 Small Hexagons per page

2 Large Hexagons per page

Hexagon 1.

Hexagon 2.

Hexagon 3.

Hexagon 4.

Hexagon 5.

Hexagon 6.

Hexagon 7.

Hexagon 8.

Hexagon 9.

Hexagon 10.

### Apps

Learning  
Intention  
Generator

SOLO Symbol  
Generator

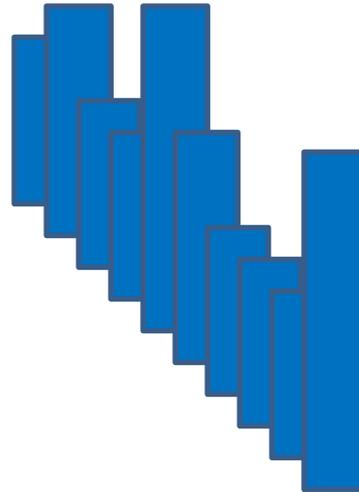
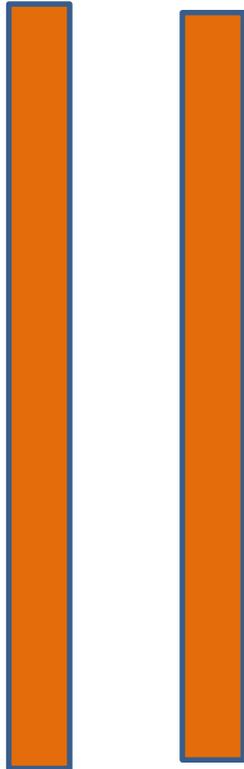
SOLO Self  
Assessment  
Tool

Functioning  
Knowledge  
Rubric  
Generator

Declarative  
Knowledge  
Rubric  
Generator

SOLO

# 1. Ropey Revision



X axis

Y axis

Bars

Lines

DTM

TALC

Climate

Pop pyramids

??????????

# *Practical strategies for succeeding in geography exams*

*6:00 Introduction and big picture*

*Take command*

*Let's Describe*

*Planning answers*

*What's my essay title?*

*Introductions to essays*



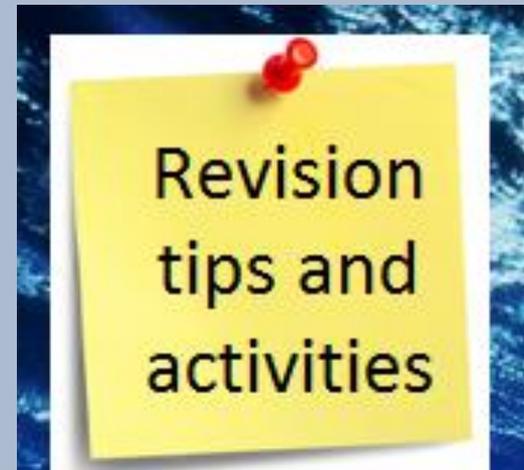
*7:00 Short break and refreshments*

*7:08 Revision strategies and activities*

*Hexagons*

*Ropey revision*

*7:55 Final remarks and close*





Writing  
the Earth

*Thank you for coming this evening*

Mark Jones  
PGCE Geography Tutor  
UWE, Bristol.

Geographical Association Bristol Branch  
Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017 6:00-8:00pm