Advanced Higher Coursework Assessment Task

Advanced Higher Modern Studies

Project—dissertation

Assessment task

This document provides information for teachers and lecturers about the coursework component of this course in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed. It **must** be read in conjunction with the course specification.

Valid from session 2024-25 and until further notice.

This edition: September 2024 (version 1.1)

Contents

Introduction

This document contains marking instructions and instructions for candidates for the Advanced Higher Modern Studies project—dissertation. You must read it in conjunction with the course specification.

This project—dissertation is worth 50 marks. This is 36% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

This is one of two course assessment components. The other component is a question paper.

Marking instructions

In line with SQA's normal practice, the following marking instructions for the Advanced Higher Modern Studies project—dissertation are addressed to the marker. They are also helpful for those preparing candidates for course assessment.

Candidates' evidence is submitted to SQA for external marking.

General marking principles

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

a Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.

b If a candidate response does not seem to be covered by either the principles or detailed marking instructions, and you are uncertain how to assess it, you must seek guidance from your team leader.

c The word count for the project—dissertation is 5,000 words, including evaluation of research methods, but excluding references, bibliography, contents page, footnotes and appendices. Candidates must submit the word count with the completed project—dissertation.

d If the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty is applied. If you believe that the project—dissertation is more than 10% over the word limit, mark the candidate's work as normal then refer it to the principal assessor. You must state clearly that the candidate's work is being referred for being over the word limit.

Detailed marking instructions

Justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)

Candidates should justify their choice of an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research. Candidates should explain the complex nature of the issue, and present aims or sub-issues which link to the overall issue.

Candidates' justification of their choice of issue should include a detailed explanation of its relevance to the contemporary world; the importance of the issue; and theoretical aspects, perspectives or viewpoints, if relevant. Candidates should use knowledge and understanding of the complex issue to provide detailed reasons for their choice.

0 marks	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks	7–8 marks
Candidate does not provide a clear justification, or points are not relevant.	Award up to 2 marks where candidate provides: ♦ a contemporary and relevant hypothesis or title ♦ aims or sub-issues which link to the stated hypothesis	Candidate meets the criteria for 2 marks **and**: ♦ explains the importance of the issue ♦ explains the relevance of the issue to the contemporary world, for example: — relevance to society — global significance — relevance to wider ongoing issues or events	Candidate meets the criteria for 4 marks **and**: ♦ considers and explains relevant theoretical aspects, perspectives or viewpoints related to the issue ♦ considers and explains alternative theoretical aspects, perspectives or viewpoints related to the issue	Candidate meets the criteria for 6 marks **and**: ♦ clearly outlines the aims or sub-issues and links them to the complex issue as well as to each other ♦ evaluates the extent to which the issue is relevant in a wider context

Evaluating research methodology (6 marks)

Candidates should apply their knowledge of social science research to evaluate the suitability of the chosen research method(s) and focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the research method(s) in relation to the issue, as well as the relative success of how the research was conducted. They should also consider an ethical issue(s) related to the research method. Evaluation should include consideration of changes that the candidates would make to future practice. A strong evaluation makes a judgement about the effect that candidates' research methodology had on the findings of their research.

0 marks	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks
♦ candidate provides no evidence of evaluation (purely descriptive response) **or** ♦ evaluative points are not relevant	Candidate makes points of evaluation about the suitability of the research method(s) **but**: ♦ their evidence doesn't clearly support the evaluation **or** ♦ there is lack of development in reasoning **or** ♦ they make only one developed, relevant point of evaluation, which has supporting evidence	Candidate makes developed points of evaluation about the effectiveness of the research method(s) in relation to the chosen issue **and**: ♦ addresses the validity and reliability of the research methodology in relation to the chosen issue ♦ makes evaluative comment(s) on the effectiveness of the research method on the findings from their research	Candidate meets the requirements for 4 marks **and**: ♦ addresses a relevant ethical issue(s) in relation to the chosen research methodology ♦ clearly evaluates potential changes and approaches they would make to the research method to improve any of the following: — validity — reliability — ethical soundness

Using a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)

Candidates should show evidence that they have chosen and used a wide range of relevant and contemporary sources of information. Candidates should clearly present their evidence from sources and use them effectively to support their line of argument.

0 marks	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks
♦ candidate provides no evidence of sources ♦ candidate does not link the sources used with their line of argument ♦ sources are clearly out of date or factually incorrect	♦ candidate uses evidence from relevant, contemporary sources ♦ sources clearly support their line of argument	Candidate uses a range and variety of relevant, contemporary sources that support: ♦ a coherent line of argument ♦ concluding remarks	Candidate meets the criteria for 4 marks **and**: ♦ convincingly uses key evidence from the sources throughout the project—dissertation ♦ presents evidence from the sources accurately and follows academic conventions consistently throughout the project—dissertation

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

Analysis involves identifying various aspects, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole. It can also involve drawing out and relating implications.

Award analysis marks where a candidate uses their knowledge and understanding, or evidence from a source, to identify relevant aspects (for example of an idea, theory or argument), and clearly shows at least one of the following:

- links between different aspects
- links between aspect(s) and the whole
- links between aspect(s) and related concepts
- similarities and contradictions
- consistencies and inconsistencies
- different views or interpretations
- possible consequences or implications
- understanding of underlying order or structure

0 marks	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks	7–8 marks
♦ candidate provides no evidence of analysis (purely descriptive response) **or** ♦ analysis is not relevant to the issue	Candidate makes relevant analytical comments **but**: ♦ in the context of their answer, these may not be the key, or most relevant, aspects	Candidate makes developed, relevant analytical comments **and**: ♦ includes relevant, contemporary supporting evidence ♦ in the context of their answer, these are the key, or most relevant, aspects	Candidate meets the criteria for 4 marks **and**: ♦ links analytical comments to evaluative comments ♦ makes at least one analytical comment on an alternative argument	Candidate meets the criteria for 6 marks **and**: ♦ makes analytical and evaluative comments in relation to all key aspects ♦ overall analysis shows an in-depth understanding of the issue and supports a convincing line of argument

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

Evaluation involves making a judgement(s) based on criteria.

Candidates should make reasoned evaluative comments on factors such as evidence that supports their line of argument, and evaluate alternative arguments. Evaluative comments must relate to, for example:

- the extent to which a viewpoint or argument is valid
- the extent to which a viewpoint or argument is supported by evidence
- the relative importance of factors in relation to the issue
- the impact or significance of factors when taken together
- the relative value of alternative arguments

0 marks	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks	7–8 marks
♦ candidate provides no evidence of evaluation (purely descriptive response) **or** ♦ candidate's evaluation is not relevant to the issue	♦ candidate makes points of evaluation that are relevant to the issue but are not developed **or** ♦ candidate makes a basic evaluation that is developed and relevant	Candidate meets the criteria for 2 marks **and**: ♦ makes reasoned points of evaluation ♦ relates points to their line of argument and uses them to make an overall judgement(s) on the issue	Candidate meets the criteria for 4 marks **and**: ♦ shows reasoned consideration of alternative arguments and evidence ♦ provides reasoned evaluation and judgement of an alternative argument(s) or evidence	Candidate meets the criteria for 6 marks **and**: ♦ integrates points of evaluation throughout their line of argument ♦ uses reasons for discounting or accepting alternatives to clearly support their overall conclusion

Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)

Synthesis involves drawing two or more pieces of information — knowledge, evidence or viewpoints — together to support a structured line of argument. Candidates should include at least two pieces of synthesis in their project—dissertation.

A line of argument involves bringing together or linking points in a coherent manner, building towards a conclusion. Candidates' conclusions should go beyond a summary of key issues, and their reasoning and evidence should build to a relevant overall judgement that addresses the specific question or issue. A relevant conclusion with detailed supporting reasons should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the complex issue and the sub-issues, which should include alternative viewpoints. Candidates may include conclusions throughout an extended response, and/or within one separate concluding section.

A well-reasoned conclusion:

- relates directly to the issue being researched
- develops from points of analysis and evaluation
- considers alternative viewpoints
- includes detailed reasons to justify the conclusion

0 marks	1–2 marks	3–4 marks	5–6 marks	7–8 marks	9–10 marks
Candidate provides no evidence of: ♦ a line of argument ♦ a clear conclusion	Candidate draws together pieces of information to summarise key points **but**: ♦ there is a lack of sufficient synthesis to support the conclusion ♦ the line of argument in support of the conclusion is unclear	Candidate shows evidence of: ♦ two pieces of synthesis to support their line of argument ♦ a clear conclusion following from a line of argument and supported by reasons or evidence	Candidate meets the criteria for 4 marks **and** shows evidence of: ♦ several pieces of synthesis to support their line of argument ♦ a clear conclusion following from a line of argument, showing understanding of the complex issue, and supported by detailed reasons or evidence	Candidate meets the criteria for 6 marks **and** their line of argument: ♦ builds on points of analysis and evaluation throughout the project—dissertation ♦ is structured, with well-reasoned conclusion(s) linking to aims or sub-issues	Candidate meets the criteria for 8 marks **and**: ♦ provides well-reasoned conclusions, drawn throughout the line of argument, which convincingly build to develop the overall conclusion ♦ their line of argument synthesises points of analysis and evaluation which build to a judgement about an alternative viewpoint

Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions (4 marks)

Award **1 mark** for each of the following:

- references — clear, consistent and accurate throughout the project—dissertation
- bibliography — organised using appropriate academic conventions to present sources used in the project—dissertation
- appendices — clearly structured and organised using appropriate academic conventions
- presentation — data from primary and/or secondary research is integrated within the main body of the dissertation to support analysis, evaluation and/or conclusions

Instructions for candidates

This assessment applies to the project—dissertation for Advanced Higher Modern Studies.

This project—dissertation is worth 50 marks. This is 36% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

It assesses the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research
- evaluating research methodology
- using a wide range of sources of information
- analysing the issue
- evaluating arguments and evidence
- synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence
- organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions

The project—dissertation gives you an opportunity to develop your depth of knowledge at Advanced Higher level and to apply this knowledge to researching an appropriate question or issue.

The project—dissertation encourages you to develop as an independent learner and to develop skills which will be useful to you in future study or work.

You can research a complex, contemporary political or social issue of your choice. This may relate to topics you have studied in class, or you may choose to research any appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue. A successful project—dissertation is likely to be about a topic that you have a genuine interest in.

Throughout your project—dissertation, you should show that you have read around the issue. You should demonstrate both knowledge of the details of the issue you are studying (depth), and understanding of the wider context (breadth).

Word count
The word count for the project—dissertation is 5,000 words. This includes the main body of the dissertation and evaluation of research methods, but does not include the references, bibliography, contents page, footnotes or appendices. Part of the discipline of writing a dissertation is the ability to edit your work to meet the required word count. You must submit the word count with your completed project—dissertation.

If the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty is applied.

As your evaluation of research methods is part of your 5,000 word limit, you should aim to include your evaluation of research methodology within the main body of your dissertation and include it as part of your overall word count.

At the end of your project—dissertation you must include a bibliography and appendices of relevant sources or data you have researched and used in the main body of your dissertation.

You must use a form of academic referencing to cite where you have used the works of others. As a general rule you should reference quotations and statistics, and if a paragraph you have written is based solely on one source, you should acknowledge the source even if there is no direct quotation.

Your teacher or lecturer will let you know if there are any specific conditions for doing this assessment.

Working with others
While you should choose your own question or issue to research, others in your class may have chosen a similar one. It might be helpful to work part of the time with others when you are researching your question or issue.

If you choose to do this, it is important that you make individual use of the evidence gathered during group work. This means, for example, that you draw your own conclusions, that you analyse and evaluate the research by yourself, and that the findings you present in your project—dissertation are your own.

The following information helps you understand the requirements of the Advanced Higher Modern Studies project—dissertation.

In this assessment you have to:	How you can do this
♦ **justify an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)**	You should choose a modern studies issue that allows you to meet the requirements of the project—dissertation. The issue must be contemporary, which means that it is important in today's society, or that it has great significance in relation to other events or issues. You must justify your choice. You should explain the complex nature of the issue, and present aims or sub-issues that link to the overall issue. In justifying your choice of issue you should make developed points of explanation about, for example: ♦ the purpose of researching the issue ♦ the relevance of the issue in the context of the subject, for example: — relevance to society — global significance — relevance to wider ongoing issues or events — theoretical aspects, perspectives or viewpoints, if relevant

In this assessment you have to:	How you can do this
	Developed points include, for example: ♦ evidence ♦ reasons ♦ background information, support or reinforcement Your teacher or lecturer may support you by commenting on the suitability of the question or issue you have chosen and providing advice on the likely availability of resources. Viewpoints or arguments should represent the most relevant, or currently accepted, thinking. For example, while viewpoints on Scottish independence could change relatively quickly, contemporary thinking about the effects of inequality may include theorists who wrote decades ago. Evidence should be up to date. For example, referring to HM Chief Inspector of Prisons' Annual Report for 2007–08 would be considered out of date unless you are making a specific, relevant point from that year, or you are establishing a trend, pattern or comparison.
♦ **evaluate research methodology (6 marks)**	You should apply your knowledge of social science research to judge the suitability of your chosen research method(s). You should focus on the effectiveness of the research method(s) in relation to the issue. You can evaluate whether your choice of research was valid, and whether the research produced reliable results. You should address ethical issues that arose, or might have arisen, when using your chosen research method(s). You should include consideration of changes you would make if you repeated the research in future.

In this assessment you have to:	How you can do this
♦ **use a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)**	You should collect evidence, relevant to your complex issue, from a wide range of sources of information. You should use both primary and secondary sources, where appropriate. Sources should be contemporary. You should choose evidence from the sources that best support your line of argument. You should also use evidence from sources to evaluate other views or theories. Your conclusion should feature the evidence you feel best supports your argument. You should clearly present evidence from your sources so that the marker can easily identify them. You can present evidence from your sources in a number of ways, for example: ♦ direct quotes ♦ summarising information ♦ paraphrasing ideas or arguments ♦ any other relevant method You should reference when evidence from your sources is used by using an accepted academic convention, for example, footnotes or parenthetical references.
♦ **analyse the issue (8 marks)**	You should identify key aspects of the issue. Your analysis may relate to the overall project—dissertation question, aims or sub-issues, arguments, or evidence used to support your line of argument. You should then clearly show at least one of the following: ♦ links between different aspects ♦ links between aspect(s) and the whole ♦ links between aspect(s) and related concepts ♦ similarities and contradictions ♦ consistencies and inconsistencies ♦ different views or interpretations ♦ possible consequences or implications

In this assessment you have to:	How you can do this
♦ **evaluate arguments and evidence (8 marks)**	You should make reasoned judgements about, for example: ♦ the extent to which a viewpoint or argument is valid — is it fully objective or does it selectively use only some facts? ♦ the extent to which evidence supports a viewpoint or argument — is the evidence complete proof of your line of argument, or can it be challenged in some way? ♦ the relative importance of factors in relation to the issue ♦ the impact or significance of factors when taken together — two pieces of evidence that support or negate each other ♦ the strength of alternative arguments You should evaluate your line of argument. Your evaluation should support your conclusion. You should evaluate any evidence that you have analysed.
♦ **synthesise information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)**	Synthesis involves drawing two or more pieces of information, viewpoints or evidence together to support your response to the question or issue. In the project—dissertation, you should show at least two pieces of synthesis. Your response to the question or issue should be a structured line of argument which can be followed throughout the project—dissertation. A line of argument involves bringing together or linking factors, evidence, and viewpoints or arguments, building towards a conclusion. Therefore, you should know what you want to say about the overall complex issue and the sub-issues or aims, and make a line of argument that communicates your viewpoint and is supported by evidence. Your conclusion should demonstrate that you have in-depth knowledge and understanding about the complex issue. Conclusions should go beyond a summary of key issues to make a relevant overall judgement that addresses the specific question or issue. A high-quality conclusion addresses alternative viewpoints, based on evidence. You can make conclusions throughout your project—dissertation, within one separate concluding section, or a combination of both. A well-reasoned conclusion: ♦ relates directly to the issue being researched ♦ develops from points of analysis and evaluation ♦ considers alternative viewpoints ♦ includes detailed reasons to justify the conclusion

In this assessment you have to:	How you can do this
♦ **organise, present and reference findings using appropriate conventions (4 marks)**	When writing your project—dissertation you should make clear, accurate and direct reference to the sources of information so that the marker knows where your information comes from. To help you do this, you should: ♦ use one referencing style consistently throughout your project—dissertation. This does not need to be an official style; just make sure you follow the same layout and style every time you reference something ♦ provide enough information about your sources for someone else to easily identify them, including presenting sources clearly such as primary research which you refer to in the main body of your dissertation. References to primary research should link to your appendices, where appropriate ♦ present your bibliography appropriately. Follow academic conventions to divide your bibliography into sections, for example journals, books, websites and newspaper articles ♦ link appendices to the main body of your dissertation. Sources used in your line of argument should be included. Make sure that data from primary research is clearly presented in your appendices, for example, create a table or graph of numerical data. Markers will follow up references to primary research in your appendices The word count for your project—dissertation is 5,000 words, excluding references, bibliography, contents page, footnotes and appendices. Other than your evaluation of research methodology, you will not gain marks for content within your references, bibliography, contents page, footnotes and appendices. Therefore your analysis, evaluation, line of argument and conclusions should sit within the main body of your dissertation and the word limit. If the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty is applied. Remember that plagiarism (passing off other people's work and ideas as your own) is cheating. This includes copying passages from the internet and not acknowledging the source. It is also plagiarism if: ♦ all or some of your project—dissertation has been produced by someone else ♦ you've copied any part of your project—dissertation from a book, an internet site or an essay bank, without referencing it Markers can spot plagiarism. If plagiarism is detected, you will lose marks and it may result in your qualification being cancelled.

Administrative information

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History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
1.1	Minor amendments to Marking Instructions to clarify wording. Changes to tables for accessibility reasons.	September 2024

Note: you are advised to check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.

Security and confidentiality

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