



Pearson

Pearson Edexcel A and AS level Politics

Guidance for the Source Based Questions on the A Level Paper 9PLO/01 and 9PLO/02

Sources and the questions relating to them can be very different so there is no ONE universal or ONLY way of answering Source based questions on the new A level Politics paper. This guidance seeks to point out good practice and to fully illustrate how candidates can gain confidence as they approach such questions. Furthermore the scope and remit of the Source does differ significantly from that of the legacy specification.

Key facts about sources

- On 9PLO1 and 9PLO2 the source can be based on any section or sections of the specification.
- The Source can be text or data (such as graphs tables and charts).
- It may be a combination of text and data.
- The Source will be accessible and make key points surrounding a contested political topic.
- The Source may be an extract taken from the contemporary political environment. It will be adapted to suit the contested debate and thus edited to provide a suitable vehicle for assessment.
- It may be taken from the news media, academic texts, political publications and the internet from relevant websites. It may also be original material produced by the Principal Examiner.
- It will be most likely that candidates will not have seen the Source (extract or data) before. However it will be accessible and the topic ~~is~~ will be clear.
- The topic on the Source will have a short introduction – to put the Source in context. It is not the aim to make this introduction key or pivotal to the candidates' response.
- Politics papers use sources so candidates can balance evidence and arguments to reach justified conclusions. We are not concerned with the significance of the authors or the circumstances in which a document was written (as some History papers sometimes are). Where a source has come from or why it was produced is not part of the Politics agenda.
- Overall the Source ~~is~~ acts as a 'pointer' or 'signpost' – it draws to candidates' attention the issues which need to be expanded on (AO1) analysed (AO2) and then a verdict on their merit has to be made (AO3).

Good Practice to Adopt

- ✓ The first thing a candidate needs to do is to look at the question which follows the source and the main issue on which it focuses.
- ✓ Then in the source highlight or underline or use ticks and crosses to recognise points which do or do not support the proposition in the question and try to ensure that all of these are commented on in the answer.
- ✓ Make sure that each point raised in the Source has depth added in terms of knowledge and understanding so if the source refers to *Parliament's scrutiny of the executive* an answer could 'unpack' this term and make points about matters such as question time, or the work of select committees or the purpose of adjournment debates which (depending on the requirements of the question) can then be compared and contrasted and finally a verdict or judgement is reached on the issue.
- ✓ When developing analysis and reaching conclusions candidates **must** ensure that it is based on the (material) presented in the Source. As indicated above, it is desirable to explain a key term from the source such as *scrutiny* but it would be a mistake to start introducing other topics not explicitly mentioned in the source.

What to avoid when answering the Source question

- Avoid writing out a large scale repeat of the Source. Key extracts and short quotes are fine but large scale copying out of the material presented is not advised.
- Avoid simply developing AO1 and AO2 and not presenting what side the candidate feels is the strongest and most persuasive argument. The source is a contested view – we expect the candidate to come down on one side and importantly say why one side is better and one inferior.
- Candidates should come down on one side or the other of ~~in~~ the contested topic of the Source – but due consideration must be given to the alternative point of view. Candidates must make it clear why they believe one judgement is stronger than another.
- Avoid moving away from the concerns of the Source – always ensure what you raise is directly connected and maintains a connection to the core argument.

The demands and commands of the rubric which appear for the Source questions.

The Source questions will contain the command:

'Using the source, evaluate the view that.....'

In essence this is the command to use the Source as the primary guide to answer a contested view.

The rubric then continues with three further common bullet points:

In your response you must:

- compare and contrast the different opinions in the source
- examine and debate these views in a balanced way
- analyse and evaluate **only** the information presented in the source

These bullet points in turn mean the following:

- **compare and contrast the different opinions in the source**

The Source will have differing or competing opinions; it will not be 'one sided'.

Example – The 2017 General Election saw a turnout of 68.7% up from 66.1% in 2015. Some may draw the opinion that this is good – however at the same time others may view this as damaging to democracy as we still have nearly one third of voters who did not vote.

- **examine and debate these views in a balanced way**

This command explicitly informs a candidate that they have to address and give equal credence and thus equal investigation to both sides of the contested argument. This does not demand an identical word count for both sides, but that due consideration is given to both viewpoints it means that the case they disagree with has not to be dismissed out of hand. An academic debate has to be undertaken based on reasoned consideration of both sides.

Example – Thus we can say that a growing turnout and levels of trust in our democracy may mean that the case for electoral reform has not been fully established – however at the same time a balanced one may infer that when we see the percentage of voters who voted for the Government may only reach 25% of the electorate or of all votes cast.

- **analyse and evaluate *only* the information presented in the source**

Only the AO1 knowledge and understanding content presented in the Source material can be carried through or be converted into AO2 and AO3 points. Two thirds of the marks go for the AO2 analysis and AO3 evaluation/conclusion and examiners want to see candidates' analysis and conclusion relating to the passage provided not different material the candidates may have written for themselves. It is essential that candidates stick with the points raised in the Source as the basis for analysis and reaching a judgment or conclusion.

Example – If we continue the theme of elections, imagine that the Source was about general elections but did not refer to safe seats or marginal seats or frequency of general elections or by-elections. If a candidate then brilliantly analysed safe seats, marginal seats in general elections and by-elections and reached a conclusion/evaluation on this basis – no credit at all could be awarded at AO2 or AO3 – it is only on AO1 where the candidate could possibly be credited. Hence the command says only apply AO2 and AO3 to the AO1 (or material) that appears in the Source. The examiners want to see each candidate's analysis and evaluation of their source, not someone else's!

Connecting with the Assessment Objectives (AOs)

The AOs for both the Source and the Essays are the same in 9PL0/01 and 9PL0/02 – and equally important in terms of allocation and total percentage of marks and in their application and meaning.

AO1 - Knowledge and understanding. The factual information coupled with an - appreciation of how it works. The clearer and more precise the detail the higher up the levels can the response advance.

AO2 - Analysis. This requires candidates to show in-depth examination of the evidence and establish linkages and connections, highlighting similarities and differences. By showing critical insight, this helps to provide a basis for the verdict a student will reach on a contested topic. The more expansive and informed the analysis the easier it becomes to progress up the mark levels.

AO3 - Evaluate. Here candidates draw together the competing arguments and reach a reasoned conclusion as to which approach is most appropriate. This involves putting together a reasoned case in a scholarly argument, which favours one side – but respects the alternative possibilities. It is important that AO3 is developed throughout the response and not left to a final brief conclusion. AO3 form a third of the marks – so they should receive a third of candidate's attention.

Frequently Asked Question concerning good practice on the Source question

Q. Can you clarify the rules why and where 'own knowledge' does and does not apply in handling the Source question?

A. If a source was written with conflicting views of the need for electoral reform and it contained references to 'proportional representation' (PR), a candidate could explain from 'own knowledge' that there are different forms of PR and that would legitimately be AO1. It would then be acceptable (for example) for a candidate to argue that while STV gives greater power to individual candidates, AMS gives more power to political parties; this is AO2 and it is acceptable because it is based on AO1 which simply exemplifies something already in the source.

However, if a candidate decided to discuss the timing of elections (not normally regarded as part of the electoral reform debate), they could possibly gain a mark or two for AO1 perhaps by referring to the Fixed Term Parliament Act but if they then built up a whole analysis (AO2) and evaluation (AO3) about reforming the timing of elections, this could gain no marks because it is not related to the arguments and evidence given in the source about electoral reform. Examiners want to see candidates analysing and evaluating the information in the source provided, not hi-jacking the source on the exam paper with different points of their own.

Q Why cannot new information in the shape of additional AO1 be converted into marks at AO2 and AO3?

A. The simplest explanation is that this is seen as 'question hijacking' by Ofqual. The task is to focus 100% on what is in the Source and develop analysis and evaluation on the points presented.

Q How many points have to be made when creating a response to a Source question?

A. We do not mark and count the number of points that are made - for many reasons. Firstly what may appear as three points to one person may be five points to another. Secondly we have to measure quality and not quantity. Exemplification or development of points raised of the source is encouraged. Marks depend largely on how well features of AO1, AO2 and AO3 are integrated together. See levels mark schemes.

Q Why are there limited officially produced Source questions?

A. The policy has been to produce two sets of question papers for Centres - the SAMS and the EAMS. There are further examples in text books but these are not 'officially approved' Source questions but may help. As the exam proceeds, further examples will be available in the form of past papers.

Q In sources used in History the provenance or origin/authorship of the source is crucially important – is this also the case with Politics?

A. No Politics differs in this respect in comparison to History. There is no requirement to probe and be overly concerned with the origins or authorship of the source. Comments may be relevant and this will vary from source to source – but success will not hinge on a huge debate about the provenance of the source. The response should concentrate on the binary debate which the source creates. Unlike in History where the sources are presented in their original format Politics source are almost always 'adapted' from their original format and older sources which are good source questions may have to be updated to remain contemporary and focused on the political world of when the exam is being set.