

EXAM TECHNIQUES FOR AS LEVEL

This **Geofile** provides an introduction into the content of and examination methods used in AS Geography courses, with a focus on those offered by the AQA, Edexcel and OCR examination boards. Whilst each specification is unique in both its coverage of geographical knowledge and examination methods, there are also many similarities and common approaches to both learning and assessment. It is these common approaches and how students can best prepare for them in AS examinations which will be examined here.

The AS examinations

Answering data response questions

Most AS examinations use assessment techniques known as data response questions. You will probably be used to these at GCSE level – a resource such as a graph, photograph, table or chart is used to introduce a topic, and questions are asked about the resource and its associated subject. Questions get progressively harder and often end with a short piece of extended writing. It is important that you understand how to tackle different parts of a question and practise doing so – especially for the longer sections, where more detailed, specific locational knowledge may be needed. As far as the coursework element is concerned, there is greater variation in the methods used, and these will be considered later.

Figure 1 shows some of the types of data response resources provided. In addition, maps and OS map extracts, newspaper headlines and cartoons may also be used. The key to success in these earlier sections is to make sufficient use of the information provided – easy marks can be gained in this way! To ensure you do this, spend a few minutes at the start making sure you understand the resources provided.

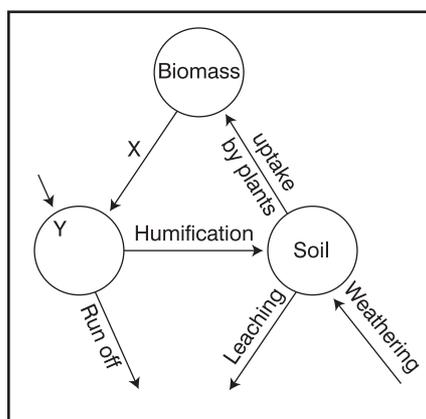
Below are some possible approaches to questions based on the resources in Figure 1:

1a) – You might be asked to describe and explain/account for the patterns of migration shown. In this case look

Figure 1: Some typical AS exam resources

1(a) Population change in South Molton Rural District, 1951–91 (Chafley, 1994)				
	1951–61	1961–71	1971–81	1981–91
Population change (no.)	-1041	-93	1790	1753
Population change (%)	-9	-1	16	13
No. of parishes with increasing population	2	9	24	23
No. of parishes with decreasing population	27	20	5	6

1(b) Model of nutrient recycling



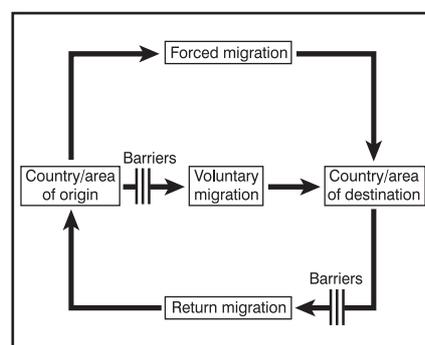
first for any overall trends (decline until 1971, then increase), state what they are and back up what you say with numbers from the table. Then try to think of reasons to explain each trend (causes of early rural depopulation, later process of counter-urbanisation).

1b) – For this type of resource you need to understand specific ecosystem terminology, e.g. biomass, humification, weathering and leaching.

1c) – Similar to 1b) but this time terminology relates to human geography. The diagrams may be familiar to you or they may be completely new; either way, the most important thing is to study them carefully and use them to support your answers wherever possible.

Many exams ask you to choose from a range of questions – if this is the case, try not to be too quickly encouraged by a resource which looks easy or familiar and, equally, don't be put off by unfamiliar or seemingly difficult resources. Study both the resource and the complete question carefully – sometimes questions which start well

1(c) Model of international migration



may have difficult case study requirements at the end. Remember, you can't change your mind halfway through a question!

Answering extended writing questions

Some typical questions of this nature might be:

- 'Using examples you have studied, show how the improvement of shanty towns may bring both positive and negative effects.'
- 'With references to examples, describe how both physical and human factors might influence the volume of migration.'
- Explain the formation of a landform of emergence you have studied.'
- 'Explain the formation of a located landform of coastal erosion that you have studied.'

Such questions are usually worth between 6 and 10 marks and require specific, detailed locational knowledge. (See Figure 2 for an example of a good answer to this type of question.)

In some cases two longer sections may be combined to form one part of a question e.g.:

‘With reference to a named urban settlement in an LEDC which has undergone rapid population growth:

- i) outline the causes for the rapid growth
- ii) describe and explain the environmental problems which have resulted from this rapid urban growth.’

As a general rule of thumb, providing that what you write is relevant and detailed, one mark for an answer equates to three lines of writing. If you use the extra writing pages provided at the back of the examination booklet, make sure each continuation sheet is clearly numbered.

Sometimes a diagram or sketch map may be required as part of the answer, e.g.:

‘Draw an annotated diagram to explain the physical and human characteristics of a floodplain you have studied.’

Exam boards can be quite strict about ‘annotations’ – these are really detailed labels which must be linked accurately to a map or diagram with

Figure 2: An example of a good extended writing answer

Major rivers carry large amounts of sediment. For one or more named drainage basins examine how this sediment can be both a benefit and a problem.

The Nile’s sediment was used to build its delta, make bricks and provide fertile alluvium to the farming lands on the floodplain. Without it the delta is being eroded, closing sardine fisheries which used to exist there. Jobs are lost as bricks cannot be made without sediment and crops are poor without the rich alluvium. This demonstrates how useful the sediment was. However with the building of the Aswan Dam, sediment is now building up in the reservoir behind the dam, reducing its efficiency. It takes up much space that should be occupied by water. The same thing has happened in Ghana where the Akosombo Dam is acting as a sediment trap, interfering with the HEP turbines. Down river land is being rapidly eroded along the coastline as the sediment which would have provided beach material is trapped behind the dam leaving the coast vulnerable to erosion.

lines or arrows. Text underneath or near a map is not considered to be annotation and will not be credited, even if it is correct. Figure 3 provides an example of a good, well-annotated sketch map.

Within the examinations being studied here, OCR Specification B is the only one with a different format – three-part extended writing questions. Really the only difference here is that you will need to work out a clear structure to each answer. See Figure 4 for an example.

Points for success in written as examinations

Figure 6 is a summary diagram illustrating the key aspects of success at AS level Geography. To ensure you are able to cover all of these, the following long-term strategies should be used:

- keep a glossary of words as your course progresses, and learn these regularly
- highlight your notes using colour to draw attention to definitions, processes and specific case study facts
- look at the examination board web-sites for student guides and

- specimen questions to practise
- plan a thorough programme of revision leading up to your exams
- write a list of all the topics studied and the case studies associated with each one
- make case study revision notes/cards from which you can learn key facts and figures.

Once in the examination, make sure you read each question through once before deciding which you intend to answer. As you do this, it is a good idea to:

- make brief, rough notes on any definitions, processes and key ideas you may need
- note down any possible case studies you could use
- underline or highlight the command words in each question and make sure you both understand and can answer them. (Figure 5 provides a list of the most common command words and their meanings.)

Coursework and fieldwork

Fieldwork is an integral part of AS Geography, as it supports many of the underlying concepts and theories you will be studying as well as providing

Figure 3: An example of an annotated sketch map

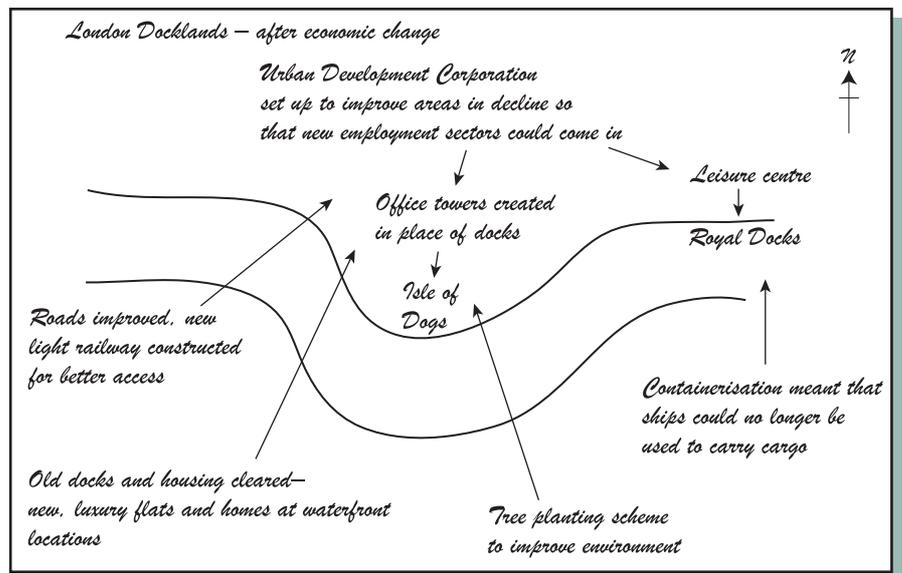


Figure 4: An example of a three-part, extended writing AS exam question (taken from OCR Specimen Materials Geography B)

- (a) Use the information in [Figure 1] to suggest reasons why the population of South Molton changed between 1951 and 1991. (9)
- (b) Explain why the edges of many urban areas in the UK are the locations of most new development. (9)
- (c) Name an inner-city redevelopment scheme that you have studied, outline its main objectives and evaluate whether or not it has been a success. (12)

Figure 5: Key command words used in AS examinations

Command Word	Explanation
describe	state, with evidence if possible, what something is like
explain	give reasons for...
define	give the exact meaning of
suggest	provide a possible idea, method, solution, reasons....
outline	state, possibly in a list
state	briefly say, give information
comment on	describe and explain/suggest reasons for
evaluate	look at evidence for and against, weigh up costs and benefits, decide how successful...
discuss	put forward different ideas, possible reasons, viewpoints etc...

you with detailed, relevant local and small-scale case studies which can be referred to in the exams. Between the main exam boards, coursework and fieldwork are assessed in three main ways:

- by a discrete coursework module, e.g. Edexcel B where you will undertake an Environmental Investigation based on group or individual data collection, followed by a written report of 2,500 words
- by carrying out fieldwork and writing a summarising 1,000 word report, combined with a written exam on techniques of collection and analysis. The report is submitted with the exam as for OCR A and B
- data collection and analytical techniques practised as appropriate throughout the course and assessed within any of the written examinations as in AQA B.

All three methods have elements in common and it is likely you will be asked to do some or all of the following:

- identify a geographical question or issue (e.g. 'What is the impact of tourism on the sand dunes at X?')
- select appropriate sources of information and methods (e.g. what primary and secondary data might be needed? Should any sampling techniques be employed?)
- identify, select and collect quantitative and qualitative evidence from primary sources and fieldwork (e.g. measurements of footpath erosion, questionnaires to visitors to establish use of area)
- identify, select and collect quantitative and qualitative data from secondary sources (e.g. theoretical dune transect, information from local conservation groups)
- organise, record and present such evidence in cartographic and diagrammatic form (e.g. kite diagrams, pie charts, opinion lines)
- describe, analyse, evaluate and interpret evidence and draw conclusions
- evaluate enquiry methods used

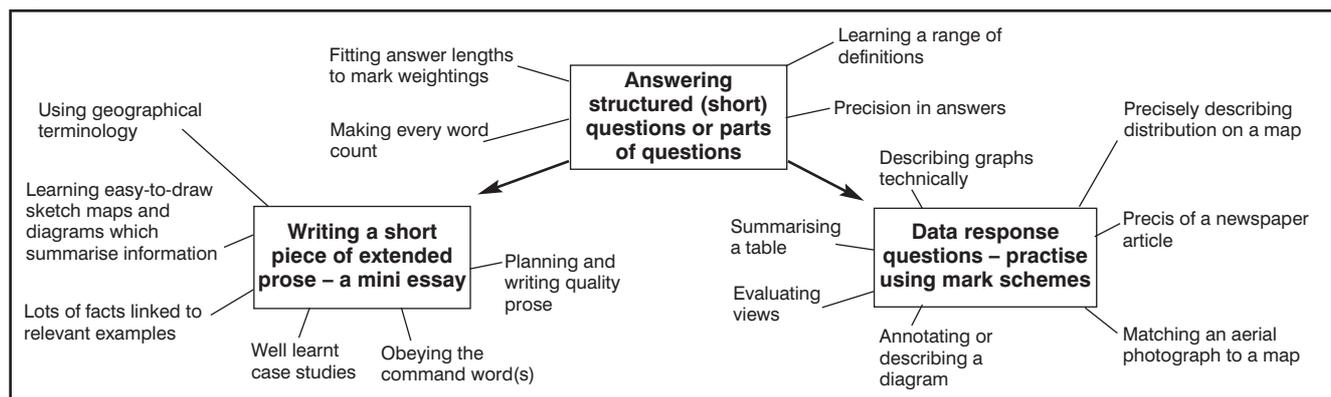
Figure 7: Geographical Skills

Reading and understanding sections of articles and text Using tabulated data
Interpreting 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 OS maps Interpreting land use maps Understanding and drawing choropleth and isopleth maps
Interpreting and annotating aerial and satellite photographs
Completing annotated sketches in the field or from photographs Drawing annotated sketch maps
Drawing and interpreting line graphs and cumulative line graphs, bar charts and histograms, pie graphs and divided bars, scatter graphs, best-fit lines
Constructing and reading flow line maps Drawing sections, cross sections and long sections Drawing and understanding proportional symbols

and the limitations of data and conclusions drawn.

It is vitally important that this element of the AS Course is completed to the very best of your ability. AS coursework is no longer than GCSE coursework, but involves greater individual choice of topic and techniques as well as a greater degree of sophistication in terms of data collection, analysis and techniques used. Good time management is needed, especially as you may well have coursework in other subjects as well. Stick to internal deadlines and allow plenty of time to draft and re-draft work, especially any concluding or evaluation sections, which are often rushed and poorly completed. Good coursework really does help final grades.

Figure 6: The Key to success at AS Level



Geographical skills

Throughout the AS course you will develop and use a variety of geographical skills, and many of these will be assessed in the examination or used in your fieldwork write up. Figure 7 summarises these.

Background reading

It is important that your geographical knowledge is kept as up-to-date as possible. This can be done by reading around subjects as they are taught and also be reading generally about geographical issues. Below are some useful ideas for reading:

Books

- Core texts produced for most AS specifications.
- General books which cover the full range of topics and are excellent for reference, e.g. David Waugh's *An Integrated Approach*.
- Study guides produced for most AS specifications.

Current events

- Quality newspapers.
- TV programmes, documentaries and news items.

Magazines/articles

- *Geofile/GeoActive*.
- *GeoPress/GeoFactsheet*.
- *Geography Review*.
- *Geographical Magazine*.
- *New Scientist*.
- *New Internationalist*.

Internet

- Exam board web-sites.
- Many sites to choose from – most core texts will give you some guidelines to start with as do many Geofiles.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

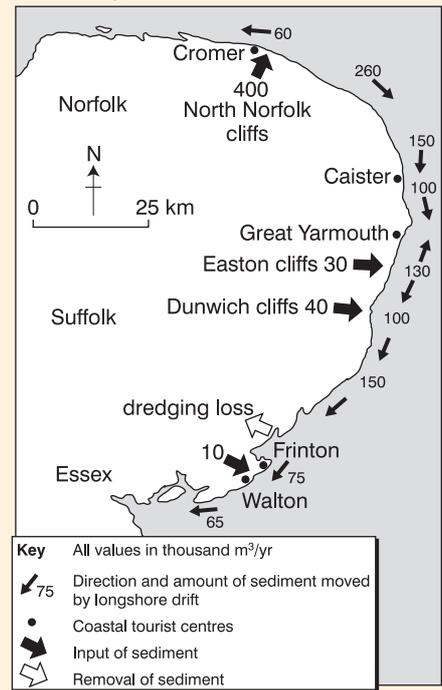
EXAM QUESTIONS

Physical geography

1. Study Figure 8, which shows the coastal sediment budget for East Anglia.

- Define the term longshore drift. (2 marks)
 - What is the dominant direction of longshore drift in Figure 8? (1 mark)
 - Along the East Anglian coast, how might physical factors have influenced longshore drift:
 - in different locations? (5 marks)
 - at different times of the year? (5 marks)
 - Outline how human factors have influenced the rate of longshore drift. (4 marks)
- (b) Explain the formation of a located landform of coastal erosion that you have studied. (6 marks)

Figure 8: Coastal sediment budget for East Anglia



Human geography

1. Study Figure 9(a). The graph shows the relationship between four groups of cities.

- Describe the relationship shown between each of the four groups of cities and fuel consumption. (4 marks)
- Suggest reasons for the relationships you have identified in (i). (4 marks)
- Identify two factors which might cause urban densities to vary between the four groups of cities. (2 marks)

Figure 9(a): The relationship between cities

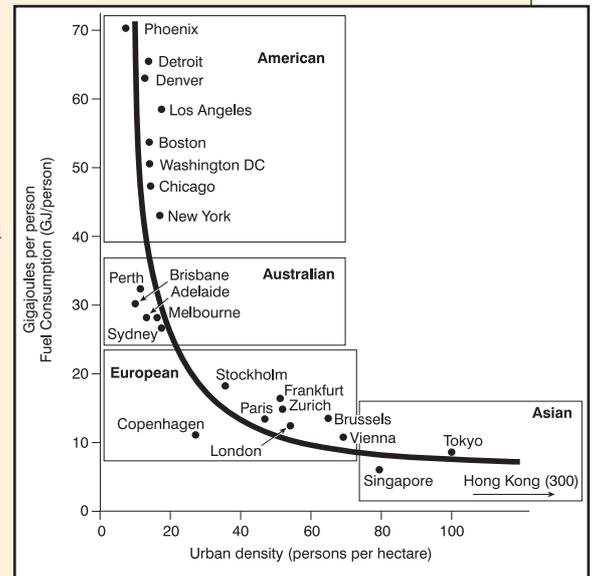
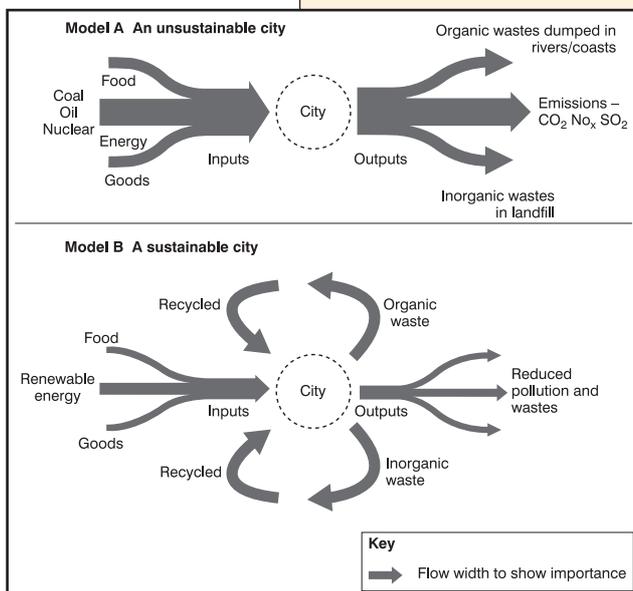


Figure 9(b): Two models for cities



2. Study Figure 9(b). It shows two models for cities.

- Use examples to explain some of the problems associated with Model A cities. (4 marks)
 - Use examples to suggest three ways in which city managers could move towards Model B. (6 marks)
3. For a named urban area or areas, Either
- Explain how decision makers are managing the problems created by urban sprawl. Or
 - Explain why some urban areas are more polluted than others. (10 marks)