



A-level HISTORY 7042/1H

Component 1H Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855–1964

Mark scheme

June 2025

Version:1.0 Final



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Mark schemes are prepared by the Lead Assessment Writer and considered, together with the relevant questions, by a panel of subject teachers. This mark scheme includes any amendments made at the standardisation events which all associates participate in and is the scheme which was used by them in this examination. The standardisation process ensures that the mark scheme covers the students' responses to questions and that every associate understands and applies it in the same correct way. As preparation for standardisation each associate analyses a number of students' scripts. Alternative answers not already covered by the mark scheme are discussed and legislated for. If, after the standardisation process, associates encounter unusual answers which have not been raised they are required to refer these to the Lead Examiner.

It must be stressed that a mark scheme is a working document, in many cases further developed and expanded on the basis of students' reactions to a particular paper. Assumptions about future mark schemes on the basis of one year's document should be avoided; whilst the guiding principles of assessment remain constant, details will change, depending on the content of a particular examination paper.

No student should be disadvantaged on the basis of their gender identity and/or how they refer to the gender identity of others in their exam responses.

A consistent use of 'they/them' as a singular and pronouns beyond 'she/her' or 'he/him' will be credited in exam responses in line with existing mark scheme criteria.

Further copies of this mark scheme are available from [aqa.org.uk](https://www.aqa.org.uk)

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Supporting Marking Guidance

A separate Supporting Marking Guidance document has been created for use in this series and any future series.

It has been written by the senior examining team. It applies to all A-level History options. The purpose of the guidance is to clarify key aspects of the mark scheme and further ensure consistency of approach across all options. The guidance does not reflect a change in the standard applied, but clarification and amplification of the standard. We hope that the guidance document will aid you in your understanding of how the standard should be applied and deepen your understanding of how the key aspects of the mark scheme work. The Supporting Marking Guidance should always be used in conjunction with the mark scheme, and any relevant examiner standardising and teacher training material.

Examiners can find the Supporting Marking Guidance on the associate extranet.

Teachers can find the Supporting Marking Guidance alongside the current mark scheme on Centre Services on results day. It will also be published with any future assessment materials on the public website.

Level of response marking instructions

Level of response mark schemes are broken down into levels, each of which has a descriptor. The descriptor for the level shows the average performance for the level. There are marks in each level.

Before you apply the mark scheme to a student's answer read through the answer and annotate it (as instructed) to show the qualities that are being looked for. You can then apply the mark scheme.

Step 1 Determine a level

Start at the lowest level of the mark scheme and use it as a ladder to see whether the answer meets the descriptor for that level. The descriptor for the level indicates the different qualities that might be seen in the student's answer for that level. If it meets the lowest level then go to the next one and decide if it meets this level, and so on, until you have a match between the level descriptor and the answer. With practice and familiarity, you will find that for better answers you will be able to quickly skip through the lower levels of the mark scheme.

When assigning a level, you should look at the overall quality of the answer and not look to pick holes in small and specific parts of the answer where the student has not performed quite as well as the rest. If the answer covers different aspects of different levels of the mark scheme you should use a best fit approach for defining the level and then use the variability of the response to help decide the mark within the level, ie if the response is predominantly Level 3 with a small amount of Level 4 material it would be placed in Level 3 but be awarded a mark near the top of the level because of the Level 4 content.

Step 2 Determine a mark

Once you have assigned a level you need to decide on the mark. The descriptors on how to allocate marks can help with this. The exemplar materials used during standardisation will help. There will be an answer in the standardising materials which will correspond with each level of the mark scheme. This answer will have been awarded a mark by the Lead Examiner. You can compare the student's answer with the example to determine if it is the same standard, better or worse than the example. You can then use this to allocate a mark for the answer based on the Lead Examiner's mark on the example.

You may well need to read back through the answer as you apply the mark scheme to clarify points and assure yourself that the level and the mark are appropriate.

Indicative content in the mark scheme is provided as a guide for examiners. It is not intended to be exhaustive and you must credit other valid points. Students do not have to cover all of the points mentioned in the Indicative content to reach the highest level of the mark scheme.

An answer which contains nothing of relevance to the question must be awarded no marks.

Section A

- 0 1** Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments in these three extracts are in relation to the reasons why Alexander II carried out a programme of domestic reforms.

[30 marks]

Target: AO3

Analyse and evaluate, in relation to the historical context, different ways in which aspects of the past have been interpreted.

Generic Mark Scheme

- L5:** Shows a very good understanding of the interpretations put forward in all three extracts and combines this with a strong awareness of the historical context to analyse and evaluate the interpretations given in the extracts. Evaluation of the arguments will be well-supported and convincing. The response demonstrates a very good understanding of context. **25–30**
- L4:** Shows a good understanding of the interpretations given in all three extracts and combines this with knowledge of the historical context to analyse and evaluate the interpretations given in the extracts. The evaluation of the arguments will be mostly well-supported, and convincing, but may have minor limitations of depth and breadth. The response demonstrates a good understanding of context. **19–24**
- L3:** Provides some supported comment on the interpretations given in all three extracts and comments on the strength of these arguments in relation to their historical context. There is some analysis and evaluation but there may be an imbalance in the degree and depth of comments offered on the strength of the arguments. The response demonstrates an understanding of context. **13–18**
- L2:** Provides some accurate comment on the interpretations given in at least two of the extracts, with reference to the historical context. The answer may contain some analysis, but there is little, if any, evaluation. Some of the comments on the strength of the arguments may contain some generalisation, inaccuracy or irrelevance. The response demonstrates some understanding of context. **7–12**
- L1:** **Either** shows an accurate understanding of the interpretation given in one extract only **or** addresses two/three extracts, but in a generalist way, showing limited accurate understanding of the arguments they contain, although there may be some general awareness of the historical context. Any comments on the strength of the arguments are likely to be generalist and contain some inaccuracy and/or irrelevance. The response demonstrates limited understanding of context. **1–6**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Students must assess the extent to which the interpretations are convincing by drawing on contextual knowledge to corroborate and challenge the interpretation/arguments/views.

In their identification of the argument in Extract A, students may refer to the following:

- the overall argument is that Alexander II's reforms were the result of pressure placed upon him from many different groups ranging from his own officials and bureaucrats to the socialists
- intellectuals, including Westernisers and Slavophiles, promoted ideas such as the end of serfdom, freedom of opinion, of the press, of education at all levels and open judicial sessions all of which were reflected in Alexander II's programme of domestic reforms
- reformist intellectuals and bureaucrats drew the discontent of the peasantry and city-dwellers to Alexander's attention, so impelling him to action; of particular concern was the poor condition of state-owned peasants and the high levels of peasant taxation
- Alexander was also under pressure from socialists, and in particular, Herzen, who published in London and was winning readership and support within Russia with his radical attacks on the existing regime; to combat such a challenge, Alexander was obliged to remodel the state.

In their assessment of the extent to which the arguments are convincing, students may refer to the following:

- Alexander depended on provincial governors, such as Valuev and the nobles who served in the bureaucracy, to maintain the Tsarist autocracy, so was bound to be sensitive to their views; he both trusted such men and could not afford to lose right-wing support. However, this argument may be challenged by reference to the larger number of officials who thrived in the existing system and were hostile to change
- intellectual pressure for reform had been growing well before 1855, and the accession of the new Tsar would have provided an opportunity for the gathering of reports. The reforms may be seen as a response to these. Nevertheless, this argument could be challenged by suggesting that the Tsar was under no obligation to take any notice of others' views
- having the Tsar's attention drawn to the peasant discontent is likely to have influenced decisions. Given Russia's 19th century population growth, which had put pressure on resources and had contributed to an increase in peasant uprisings, Alexander would have been alarmed by the threat to the social stability of the countryside. Despite his awareness of this, however, the Tsar could easily have continued his father's policies of vigilance, repression and reliance on the army
- the advent of socialism, with its demands for a more egalitarian society, would have been viewed at court as a major threat to Tsarist autocracy and the fear posed by uncensored publications exhorting radical change may have been enough to persuade Alexander II to undertake reforms. Nevertheless, socialism had a very small following in Russia in the 1850s – contrary to the impression given in Extract A.

In their identification of the argument in Extract B, students may refer to the following:

- it was Alexander II's own choice to carry through reforms; they were the product of his own character and upbringing and the influence of his family and associates
- Alexander came to the throne knowing what he wanted to do; he was 'well-prepared' and planned his moves carefully, for example touring the country for himself
- Alexander was influenced by his Aunt Elena, an intellectual with advanced ideas, for example on freeing serfs, his brother, Konstantin and young liberals such as Nikolai Milyutin
- Alexander II was 'smiling', liberal and 'humane' in character, while possessing an 'unshakeable firmness' which enabled him to carry through his plans and act decisively, regardless of opposition.

In their assessment of the extent to which the arguments are convincing, students may refer to the following:

- Alexander's enlightened views can be said to have been shaped by his background before 1855: he had a relatively forward-thinking education (liberal tutor – Zhukovsky); had travelled around the Empire observing 'ordinary' people; had participated in a committee on serfdom and had expressed a religious commitment to uphold his subjects' welfare. Nevertheless, this may be challenged with reference to Alexander's personal commitment to Tsarist autocracy
- Alexander's liberal character and humanitarianism could be confirmed by his first acts on becoming Tsar: pardoning the Decembrists, releasing political prisoners and relaxing controls on censorship. However, the degree of Alexander II's enlightenment may be challenged by reference to the limited nature of the reforms he introduced and his return to greater repression and control in his later years
- there is evidence that he was influenced by leading members of his family and enlightened bureaucrats such as Nikolai Milyutin (Minister for Internal affairs from 1859) and Nikolai's brother Dmitry at court. These liberal nobles and officials formed the loose pressure group, 'Party of St Petersburg Progress'. But how far they pushed Alexander II may be questioned. The greater number of his family and acquaintances were traditionalists and even the extract comments that Alexander was prepared to ignore his family when it suited him
- that Alexander II had a pre-conceived 'plan' to carry through reforms may be supported with reference to his early liberal actions, which also included cancelling tax arrears and restoring some Polish liberties, and his address to the nobility in 1856 when he spoke of the need for 'reform from above' to prevent 'reform from below'. However, the slow progress of the emancipation edict, not issued until 1861, and the delay in introducing other reforms might suggest the reforms were less a prepared 'programme' than a gradual and hesitant response to circumstances.

In their identification of the argument in Extract C, students may refer to the following:

- the overall argument is that it was the failures of the Crimean War that impelled Alexander II to embark on a series of reforms
- it had taken that war to bring Russia's backwardness, in comparison with the West, to light; Russian prestige had taken a blow and the Tsar and his officials saw the need for reform, which would strengthen the economy, as only way of explaining the disaster and defeat and preventing its recurrence
- before the Crimean War it had been thought that Russia's social structure was a strength, giving Empire 'stability and power'; the destruction of that belief opened the way to social reform
- it was not just Alexander II but the elite that recognised the need to end serfdom; the 'Crimean crisis' also created a climate in which more accepted the need to destroy the 'chains of state control'.

In their assessment of the extent to which the arguments are convincing, students may refer to the following:

- the Crimean War, which ended in the humiliating Treaty of Paris (making the Black Sea a neutral zone) had dented Russia's prestige and shown the country's military inadequacies; the army of serf conscripts, often suffering sickness and controlled by brutal discipline had proved no match for the West; reform had to be undertaken to restore Russia's 'Great Power' status. However, liberal reform was no guarantee of future military prowess and the army could have been reformed without the full 'programme of reforms' undertaken by Alexander II
- the Crimean War had thrown the backwardness of Russian industry into relief; Russian weaponry was out-dated and inferior to that of the West; supplies had not been able to keep pace with demand; the Russians suffered poor communications and lacked railways to bring goods and men to the front. However, such concerns might have been met by economic reforms and state investment, rather than a transformation of Russia's social structure
- some landowners may have recognised the need for economic modernisation in the wake of wartime defeat, accepting this meant an end to serfdom, which had already disappeared in the West; the view that only emancipation would incentivise peasants, allow for more modern methods in agriculture and permit workers to move to factories became more widespread. However, the opposition which Alexander II's emancipation measure met suggests that many landowners were far from convinced and that the reformers were actually in the minority
- wartime failure demanded military reform and a more efficient and less expensive army. Excessive state control had been shown harmful to the war effort, so reforms such as the establishment of Zemstva, and greater freedom for the courts and in education became a priority. However not all reforms were directly linked to the war; local government and judicial reform was more the result of the emancipation edict, and there is no direct link between, for example, the Crimean disaster and a reduction in censorship.

Section B

- 0 2** 'The collapse of the Tsarist state in 1917 was due to the personal inadequacies of Tsar Nicholas II in the years after 1894.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Target: AO1

Demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

Generic Mark Scheme

- L5:** Answers will display a very good understanding of the full demands of the question. They will be well-organised and effectively delivered. The supporting information will be well-selected, specific and precise. It will show a very good understanding of key features, issues and concepts. The answer will be fully analytical with a balanced argument and well-substantiated judgement. **21–25**
- L4:** Answers will display a good understanding of the demands of the question. It will be well-organised and effectively communicated. There will be a range of clear and specific supporting information showing a good understanding of key features and issues, together with some conceptual awareness. The answer will be analytical in style with a range of direct comment relating to the question. The answer will be well-balanced with some judgement, which may, however, be only partially substantiated. **16–20**
- L3:** Answers will show an understanding of the question and will supply a range of largely accurate information, which will show an awareness of some of the key issues and features, but may, however, be unspecific or lack precision of detail. The answer will be effectively organised and show adequate communication skills. There will be a good deal of comment in relation to the question and the answer will display some balance, but a number of statements may be inadequately supported and generalist. **11–15**
- L2:** The answer is descriptive or partial, showing some awareness of the question but a failure to grasp its full demands. There will be some attempt to convey material in an organised way, although communication skills may be limited. There will be some appropriate information showing understanding of some key features and/or issues, but the answer may be very limited in scope and/or contain inaccuracy and irrelevance. There will be some, but limited, comment in relation to the question and statements will, for the most part, be unsupported and generalist. **6–10**
- L1:** The question has not been properly understood and the response shows limited organisational and communication skills. The information conveyed is irrelevant or extremely limited. There may be some unsupported, vague or generalist comment. **1–5**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Arguments supporting the view that the collapse of the Tsarist state in 1917 was due to the personal inadequacies of Tsar Nicholas II in the years after 1894 might include:

- Nicholas II had deficiencies of character that ill-suited him for the role of tsar; he disliked politics, produced no programme of domestic reform and combined indecisiveness with a determination to uphold his 'divine' role – a fatal combination; he changed his ministers frequently, dismissed able men and tried to avoid calling his Council of Ministers; weak leadership meant no one stood by him in 1917
- Nicholas ignored disturbances, strikes, the 'years of the Red Cockerel' and relied on repression and martial law; he ignored the deathly stampede at his coronation in 1896, the St Petersburg student-killings of 1901 and the massacre of Bloody Sunday; he continued Russification and supported the Black Hundreds, so promoting social division
- Nicholas totally misread the situation in 1905. He only gave way and accepted a Duma when government was at breaking-point and he then tried to claw back power through the Fundamental Laws and by subverting the new Dumas; this left a legacy of anger and disappointment that opposition groups were able to exploit, particularly in the war years
- Nicholas' failure to appreciate the political situation was shown when he chose to go to the front in 1915, leaving a political vacuum in St Petersburg; he also seriously misunderstood the situation in February/March 1917, failing to act until it was too late
- Nicholas lacked personal judgement and was too ready to listen to his wife, Alexandra, who kept him away from the centre of government, interfered in politics, associated him with Rasputin and proved an inadequate regent when he was away at the front.

Arguments challenging the view that the collapse of the Tsarist state in 1917 was due to the personal inadequacies of Tsar Nicholas II in the years after 1894 might include:

- no tsar would have found it easy to maintain the flawed autocracy – particularly after Alexander II's reforms had begun to weaken it; Alexander III's reliance on reaction and repression meant Nicholas had a difficult inheritance; that Nicholas ruled for 23 years, suggests that he could not have been entirely incompetent
- the growth of industry since the 1890s and the concomitant urbanisation and growth of the working class created huge new problems for the Tsarist state which came to a head in the strikes and breakdown of February 1917; these changes were beyond his personal control
- opposition movements flourished in the changing economic circumstances and were able to exploit workers' discontent – as witnessed in the escalation of disturbances; Nicholas did his best to contain these, eg supporting Stolypin
- the war exacerbated the Tsar's political problems as the Zemstva and Progressive Bloc challenged Tsarist rule and military failure lowered morale, with requisitioning, inflation, blockades and problems of supplies at home; ultimately it was the disloyalty of the military that decided Nicholas' fate
- despite Nicholas' inadequacies there remained a good deal of underlying support for the Tsar, bolstered by Orthodox beliefs – particularly among the large peasant population – and shown in 1913 tercentenary celebrations and at the outbreak of war.

Many students will put forward a coherent argument to suggest that Nicholas II was just not 'up to the job', but others will argue equally effectively that no Tsar could have saved the regime. All students should be able to cite plenty of different reasons for the collapse of the Tsarist state and how much weight they give to each will be a matter for individual judgement. Responses must be assessed according to how convincing and well-supported the arguments are.

- 0 3** To what extent were the Leninist and Stalinist regimes, in the years 1917 to 1945, dependent on fear and terror?

[25 marks]

Target: AO1

Demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

Generic Mark Scheme

- L5:** Answers will display a very good understanding of the full demands of the question. They will be well-organised and effectively delivered. The supporting information will be well-selected, specific and precise. It will show a very good understanding of key features, issues and concepts. The answer will be fully analytical with a balanced argument and well-substantiated judgement. **21–25**
- L4:** Answers will display a good understanding of the demands of the question. It will be well-organised and effectively communicated. There will be a range of clear and specific supporting information showing a good understanding of key features and issues, together with some conceptual awareness. The answer will be analytical in style with a range of direct comment relating to the question. The answer will be well-balanced with some judgement, which may, however, be only partially substantiated. **16–20**
- L3:** Answers will show an understanding of the question and will supply a range of largely accurate information, which will show an awareness of some of the key issues and features, but may, however, be unspecific or lack precision of detail. The answer will be effectively organised and show adequate communication skills. There will be a good deal of comment in relation to the question and the answer will display some balance, but a number of statements may be inadequately supported and generalist. **11–15**
- L2:** The answer is descriptive or partial, showing some awareness of the question but a failure to grasp its full demands. There will be some attempt to convey material in an organised way, although communication skills may be limited. There will be some appropriate information showing understanding of some key features and/or issues, but the answer may be very limited in scope and/or contain inaccuracy and irrelevance. There will be some, but limited, comment in relation to the question and statements will, for the most part, be unsupported and generalist. **6–10**
- L1:** The question has not been properly understood and the response shows limited organisational and communication skills. The information conveyed is irrelevant or extremely limited. There may be some unsupported, vague or generalist comment. **1–5**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Arguments supporting the view that the Leninist and Stalinist regimes, in the years 1917 to 1945, were dependent on fear and terror might include:

- Lenin consolidated his regime by incarcerating or exiling his enemies; he introduced the cheka (Dec 1917); he brought the 'Red Terror' of the Civil War (1918–21), when 'class' enemies (bourgeois, kulaks, religious figures) suffered alongside political opponents; war communism also involved keeping the peasantry in a state of fear
- fear and terror grew under Stalin, with attacks on industrial managers (the Shakhty Trial) and kulaks (during collectivisation campaigns); these enabled Stalin to carry through his economic policies with unquestioned authority
- political opponents were ruthlessly dealt with (eg Kirov) and even party members were not safe, eg party purge of 1933–35; the Great Purges embraced party workers, the old elites (eg Zinoviev and Kamenev [1936] and Bukharin [1938]), military commanders (1937) and other officials; show trials were designed to maximise fear and terror and ensure obedience to Stalin alone
- the Yezhovschina brought the 'Great Terror' to ordinary citizens. Under the quota system, many were persecuted for scant reason – some after reports from vindictive neighbours; fear of arrests and the gulags ensured a docile population
- the Terror was extended into the war years to ensure disciplined fighting forces with use of the NKVD and the shooting of any who tried to retreat or desert.

Arguments challenging the view that the Leninist and Stalinist regimes, in the years 1917 to 1945, were dependent on fear and terror might include:

- there was a good deal of genuine ideological support for the Bolshevik/Communist regime; Lenin's seizure of power had the strong support of Petrograd workers and the success of the Red armies was at least partly based on support for the cause; the party retained a strong following under Stalin as ideological belief became more embedded
- pride and satisfaction in the achievements of the Communist regimes won loyalty; there were impressive agricultural programmes and industrial growth; shock brigades and Stakhanovites showed their commitment and loyalty; people came to accept that purges were necessary as an instrument of government, but this does not mean that government was dependent on fear
- propaganda reinforced Leninist and Stalinist control with cults of both leaders, but particularly that of Stalin, giving the government authority; indoctrination through education, youth movements, mass social organisations and culture all helped ensure loyalty
- fear of the West and the horrors of capitalism (as exaggerated by propaganda) created a patriotic populace; after 1938 Stalin could afford to wind down the purges; the war brought a surge of volunteers to fight, Stalin's reputation soared and society became more cohesive and committed.

There is no doubt that the Communist state used fear and terror as a means of keeping the country in check and assuring the power of the leader. However, the importance of such means relative to other forces binding the state, whether ideological or manufactured by propaganda and indoctrination, will need to be assessed in a good answer. Any view that is well supported and coherently argued should be rewarded.

- 0 4** 'Life was much easier for the Soviet people under Khrushchev, in the years 1953 to 1964, than it had been under Stalin, in the years 1945 to 1953.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Target: AO1

Demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

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- L1:** The question has not been properly understood and the response shows limited organisational and communication skills. The information conveyed is irrelevant or extremely limited. There may be some unsupported, vague or generalist comment. **1–5**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Arguments supporting the view that life was much easier for the Soviet people under Khrushchev, in the years 1953 to 1964, than it had been under Stalin, in the years 1945 to 1953, might include:

- the Soviet people had expected life to become easier with the end of the war, but the destruction of farmland, homes and facilities in formerly-occupied areas continued to be a problem (and 1946 famine) as Stalin prioritised industrial recovery; under Khrushchev there was greater rural investment and modernisation, eg the extension of the electric grid, and new agricultural initiatives, including the virgin lands scheme; these raised living standards, particularly in the countryside, after 1953
- the long hours and some of the appalling working conditions of the war years continued in the post-war drive to rebuild, under Stalin, and living standards in the towns and cities scarcely rose before 1953: there were shortages of food, housing, services and consumer goods; women had to replace war dead and the working week remained long; under Khrushchev's plans of 1959 and 1961, living standards received a huge boost; production/availability of consumer goods increased
- compared with the grim picture under Stalin, changes under Khrushchev seem impressive; there was fairer taxation, a reduction in hours of work, better and more widely available education; improvements in medicine and welfare services; better transport; greater democratisation and some decentralisation in aspects of politics and the economy
- Stalin continued to rely on terror, torture, arrests and executions after the war, eg returning prisoners of war sent to gulags; under Khrushchev, some of the coercive machinery was dismantled, the secret police were reduced in size, gulags were closed down with political amnesties and the judiciary gained more independence; the atmosphere seemed less repressive
- Stalin maintained a high level of censorship and social-cultural control in the years 1945 to 1953, with the Zhdanovshchina; Khrushchev brought about de-Stalinisation with some relaxation of censorship and the rehabilitation of artists and writers; there was more tolerance of the young and interaction with the West (eg Moscow's World Festival of Youth, 1957).

Arguments challenging the view that life was much easier for the Soviet people under Khrushchev, in the years 1953 to 1964, than it had been under Stalin, in the years 1945 to 1953, might include:

- Stalin had already begun to raise living standards from their wartime levels before 1953: his fifth Five-Year Plan saw investment in consumer goods, housing and services, so the contrast with Khrushchev may be questioned; Khrushchev's heavy spending on Cold War defence and space slowed economic growth from 1958 – particularly in consumer industries
- despite the improvements under Khrushchev, standards of living remained low for the majority of Soviet people (and certainly lower than in the West) and the quality of consumer goods remained poor; cars, were scarce and health-care and holidays were largely beyond the reach of ordinary citizens; in this respect there was little difference in the quality of life under the two leaders
- there was limited political freedom under both leaders and all opposition was crushed, even if punishments became less harsh under Khrushchev; cultural control was maintained throughout and Khrushchev attacked dissidents with little respect for human rights; he was also (like Stalin in the post-war years), intolerant of the Church, hostile to ethnic minorities and anti-Semitic in outlook
- the ideology of the state, reinforced by continuous propaganda, limitations on personal freedom, eg restrictions on travel, all perpetuated a repressive atmosphere in both regimes; for party members and the nomenklatura it might even be suggested that life was better under Stalin.

Whilst it would be fair to argue that life became easier in some respects under Khrushchev, students will need to be aware of the limitations and it would be possible to argue that there was more continuity than change in the years 1945 to 1964. Those arguing for greater freedom are likely to emphasise the effects of de-Stalinisation and the rise in living standards in the later 1950s, whilst those who take the view that little changed will be more inclined to see the limitations of political freedom and emphasise the remaining restrictions that impinged upon individuals' quality of life for people in the Soviet Union. Reward any well-substantiated, and convincingly-argued response.