CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Cambridge International AS & A Level

HISTORY **9489/31**

Paper 3 Interpretations question **May/June 2026**

MARK SCHEME

Maximum Mark: 40

Published

This mark scheme contains the instructions and marking guidance that our examiners used to mark candidate responses for this component.

Before they start marking, examiners complete a standardisation process. They review a range of candidate responses and discuss the mark scheme in detail to agree which answers can and cannot be accepted. Examiners award marks where it is clear that candidate responses have met the requirements of the mark scheme. These requirements may vary between different components or different versions of the same component, depending on the exact requirements of the question and the candidate responses seen during the standardisation process.

Sometimes, our mark schemes may allow marks to be awarded to responses which contain elements that are factually incorrect or for content not covered by the syllabus. We do this in response to the demands of a specific question to support candidates and make sure that our assessments are fair. However, these allowances should not be used as a guide for teaching and learning.

We cannot discuss the mark scheme with schools, and we recommend that schools read the mark scheme together with the assessment material and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

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General marking principles

All examiners must apply these marking principles when marking candidate responses.

1	Examiners must award marks for each response in line with: • the specific **content** defined in the mark scheme • the specific **skills** defined in the mark scheme or in the level descriptions • the **standard of response** required as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.
2	Examiners must award **whole marks** (not half marks, or other fractions).
3	Examiners must award marks **positively**. This means that: • marks are not deducted for errors or omissions • marks are awarded for correct/valid answers as defined in the mark scheme and also for **other valid answers** which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme referring to your team leader as appropriate • the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar are judged **only** when the mark scheme indicates that these features are **specifically assessed** in the question. However, the meaning of all responses must be unambiguous.
4	Examiners must **consistently** apply the requirements of the mark scheme and any rules for what to do when candidates have not followed instructions correctly.
5	Examiners must use the **full range of marks** defined in the mark scheme, unless limited by the quality of the candidate responses seen.
6	Examiners must award marks according to the mark scheme and **must not** award marks with grade thresholds or grade descriptions in mind.

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Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
ID	Valid point identified
EXP	Explanation (an explained valid point)
	Detail/evidence is used to support the point
	Balanced – considers the other view
	Unclear
AN	Analysis
^	Unsupported assertion
K	Knowledge
EVAL	Evaluation
NAR	Lengthy narrative that is not answering the question
	Use with other annotations to show extended issues or narrative
	Factual error
JU	Judgement
NAQ	Not answering the question
sim	Similarity identified
diff	Difference identified
L0	Level 0

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Annotation	Meaning
L1	Level 1
L2	Level 2
L3	Level 3
L4	Level 4
L5	Level 5
L6	Level 6

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General levels of response

Process for awarding marks:

- Markers review the answer against the AO4 marking criteria, and award a mark according to these criteria.
- Generally, the subsequent mark awarded for AO1 will be the same level. In exceptional cases, markers could award marks in different levels for the two AOs. This is because the ability to recall, select and deploy relevant historical material will be central to any effective analysis and evaluation of the interpretation.
- Responses that focus on contextual knowledge without reference to the interpretation cannot be rewarded.

Underlining is used in this mark scheme to indicate the main interpretation of the extracts.

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AO4	**Analyse and evaluate how aspects of the past have been interpreted and represented.**	**Marks**
Level 6	• Responses use the extract in a detailed and accurate manner and demonstrate a complete understanding of the interpretation and of the approach(es) used by the historian in reaching this interpretation. • These responses explain all elements of the historian's interpretation.	**18–20**
Level 5	• Responses use the extract in a detailed and accurate manner and demonstrate a sound understanding of the interpretation and of the approach(es) used by the historian in reaching this interpretation. • These responses engage with elements of the historian's interpretation, but without explaining it as a whole – they are consistent and accurate, but not complete and may cover less important sub-messages.	**15–17**
Level 4	• Responses use the extract, but only demonstrate partial understanding of the interpretation and approach(es) of the historian. • These answers identify elements of the historian's interpretation, but without adequately explaining them, typically explaining other less important message(s) as equally or more important.	**12–14**
Level 3	• Responses demonstrate understanding that the extract contains interpretations, but those explained are only sub-messages. • Responses may use a part of the extract to argue for an interpretation that is not supported by the whole of the extract, or may refer to multiple interpretations, often a different one in each paragraph.	**9–11**
Level 2	• Responses summarise the main points in the extract. • Responses focus on what the extract says, but explanations of the extract as an interpretation lack validity.	**5–8**
Level 1	• Responses include references to some aspects of the extract. • Responses may include fragments of material that are relevant to the historian's interpretation.	**1–4**
Level 0	No creditable content.	**0**

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AO1	**Recall, select and deploy historical knowledge appropriately and effectively.**	**Marks**
Level 6	Demonstrates detailed and accurate historical knowledge that is entirely relevant.	**18–20**
Level 5	Demonstrates detailed and mostly accurate historical knowledge that is mainly relevant.	**15–17**
Level 4	Demonstrates mostly relevant and accurate knowledge.	**12–14**
Level 3	Demonstrates generally accurate and relevant knowledge.	**9–11**
Level 2	Demonstrates some accurate and relevant knowledge.	**5–8**
Level 1	Demonstrates limited knowledge.	**1–4**
Level 0	Demonstrates no relevant historical knowledge.	**0**

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Question	Answer	Marks
1	**The origins of the First World War** **Interpretation/Approach** The main interpretation is that the historian blames Germany because (i) although European powers had managed to avoid war before 1914 (ii) German military preparations (the Schlieffen Plan) led to war after the July crisis. Showing complete understanding of the interpretation will involve discussion of both these aspects. This historian discusses various explanations for the outbreak of war, such as blaming the Kaiser and public opinion, but rejects these. Although Germany was seen as a threat, early crises had not resulted in war. However, by 1914 there was a genuinely important reason for dispute – the maintenance of Hapsburg power against the Serbian threat. Although a diplomatic solution would have been preferred by all nations, they were trapped by their military preparations and lost control of the situation. Although Germany did not want war, in 1914 its demand that France and Russia should not mobilise made it the instigator. The Schlieffen Plan, intended as a deterrent, failed to deter. Glossary: Early post-WW1 interpretations tended to blame Germany, but quickly a reaction against this occurred, with a variety of interpretations blaming other nations. This may be termed revisionism. The turning point in the historiography was Fischer's work of the early 1960s which went back to blaming Germany – sometimes known as anti-revisionism. Since then, there has been a vast variety of interpretations, looking at the importance of culture, individuals, contingent factors etc., with no clear consensus, though most historians would still place a significant burden of responsibility on Germany.	**40**

Question	Answer	Marks
2	**The Holocaust** **Interpretation/Approach** The main interpretation is that the historian blames the Holocaust on (i) the Nazis had a plan to impose a new social order on the whole of Europe and (ii) this was brought about from 1938 because of the development of a new technocratic class. Showing complete understanding of the Interpretation will involve discussion of both these aspects. This is an interpretation that views the murder of the Jews as part of a wider programme of social modernisation that required the extermination of all classes viewed as inferior. This programme was implemented by a technocratic class that became ever more important in driving the process forward. Whilst other causal factors are not dismissed, the historian argues that it was the plans for a new social order that brought the Holocaust about. War is part of the radical projects for reshaping Europe, so this extract is not a functionalist interpretation. Labelling this interpretation is not straightforward because standard intentionalist and structuralist arguments are not present. A synthesis of structuralism and intentionalism could also reach L6. There are obvious intentionalist aspects, and answers seeing the interpretation in this way can achieve L5/L6. Structuralism on its own could be L5. Glossary: Candidates may use some/all of the following terms: *Intentionalism* – interpretations which assume that Hitler/the Nazis planned to exterminate the Jews from the start. *Structuralism* – interpretations which argue that it was the nature of the Nazi state that produced genocide. There was no coherent plan but the chaotic competition for Hitler's approval between different elements of the leadership produced a situation in which genocide could occur. *Functionalism* sees the Holocaust as an unplanned, ad hoc response to wartime developments in Eastern Europe, when Germany conquered areas with large Jewish populations. Candidates may also refer to *synthesis* interpretations, i.e. interpretations which show characteristics of more than one of the above. What counts is how appropriate the use of this kind of terminology is in relation to the extract, and how effectively the extract can be used to support it.	**40**

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Question	Answer	Marks
3	**The origins and development of the Cold War** **Interpretation/Approach** The main interpretation is that the historian blames the United States for (i) for not wanting to reach an accommodation with the Soviets and (ii) for deliberately choosing to divide Germany. Showing complete understanding of the Interpretation will involve discussion of both these aspects. The historian indicates that policymakers in the US were willing to misrepresent events and hide the true situation from the American people because they had decided that reunifying Germany would be dangerous or a threat to their own interests. Stalin is portrayed as being possibly willing to make a deal over Germany, but the US were not interested. The historian's approach is clearly revisionist, which would be the only label rewardable at L5/L6. Glossary: *Traditional/Orthodox* interpretations of the Cold War were generally produced early after WW2. They blame the Soviet Union and Stalin's expansionism for the Cold War. *Revisionist* historians challenged this view and shifted more of the focus onto the United States, generally through an economic approach which stressed the alleged aim of the US to establish its economic dominance over Europe. *Post-revisionists* moved towards a more balanced view in which elements of blame were attached to both sides. Since the opening of the Soviet archives post-1990 there has been a shift to attributing prime responsibility to Stalin – a *post-post-revisionist* stance which often seems very close to the traditional view, but which often places great importance on ideology. What counts is how appropriate the use of this kind of terminology is in relation to the extract, and how effectively the extract can be used to support it.	**40**

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