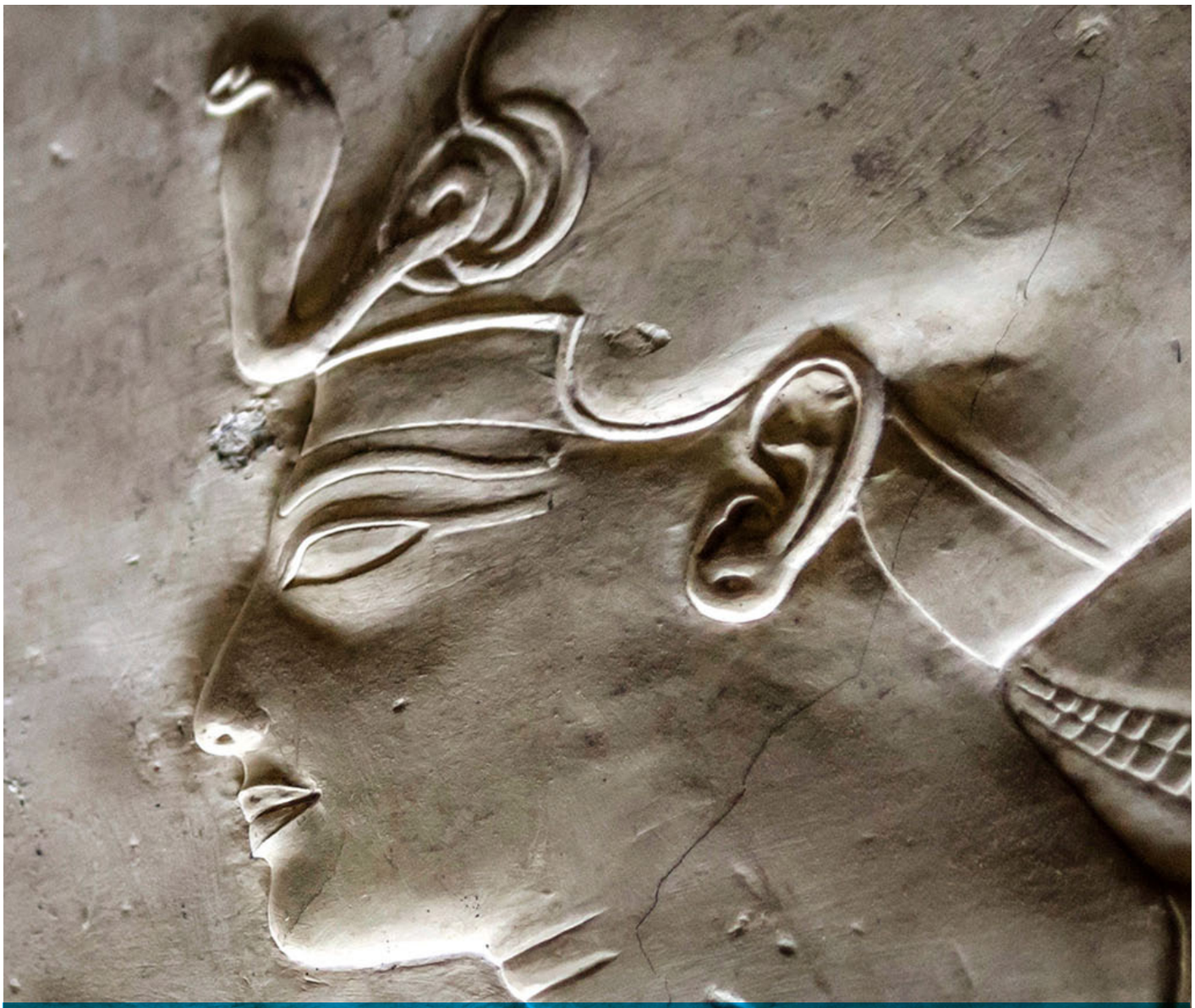

# History

## Leaving Certificate

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# Lesson 1: Introduction to Leaving Certificate History and the DBQ

## » Learning Intentions

By the end of this lesson, students will be familiar with the layout of both the Higher and Ordinary level papers, understand the Document-Based Question and the Research Topic, know what topics will be studied for the Leaving Certificate exam, know how to use a timeline, and learn how to plan an essay.

## » Historical Sources

Historical sources fall into two main categories: primary and secondary.

### Primary Sources

A primary source provides first-hand evidence, composed or made at the time an event took place — for example, diaries, photographs, letters, interviews or books written by eyewitnesses.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| • First-hand knowledge<br>• Captures the mood of the time<br>• Can express the views of ordinary people | • May be biased<br>• Not objective — tells only one side of the story<br>• May only record what the source wants remembered |

### Secondary Sources

A secondary source is compiled by someone who did not witness the events firsthand — a history textbook is the classic example. Secondary sources are normally based on a study of primary sources and may incorporate the interpretations of historians.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| • Less likely to be biased<br>• Takes account of different sides of the story<br>• Can judge an event or person by looking at their impact over a period of time | • Cannot fully capture the mood of the time<br>• Have less emotional impact than primary sources in shaping views on historical events and figures<br>• Modern historians may judge past people and events using today's moral standards, out of context |

*Note: A source being primary does not automatically make it more reliable than a secondary source.*

## » Historical Sources: To Trust or Not to Trust?

All sources of historical evidence must be analysed for reliability. Key concepts to check for include:

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Bias** | Giving preference to a particular viewpoint. |
| **Objectivity** | Presenting information in a way that does not favour one particular viewpoint. |
| **Selectivity** | Telling only part of the story. |
| **Balance** | Giving equal weight to the various interpretations of an event. |
| **Subjectivity** | An account in which the source gives their own personal opinion or point of view. |
| **Propaganda** | Official government communications designed to influence public opinion; may be true or false, but always carefully selected and possibly exaggerated for political effect. |

## » How to Answer a Leaving Certificate Essay Question

A five-step guide to structuring a History essay:

| Step | What to do |
|---|---|
| **1** | Underline the key words and phrases in the question. |
| **2** | Write "Plan" at the top of your paper with the question number beside it. |
| **3** | Draw a timeline across the page with the start and end dates of the question. Fill in details you remember off-hand — 1 minute maximum. |
| **4** | Divide the rest of the page into seven paragraphs: an introduction, five main content areas, and a conclusion (see structure below). |
| **5** | Time management: the exam is 2 hours 50 minutes. Allow 40 minutes per question (four questions), leaving 10 minutes at the end to finish off. |

### Essay Structure (within Step 4)

- Introduction — open with a quotation from a relevant historical figure (optional); refer directly to the question; state the central areas you will cover.
- Five body paragraphs, each given its own title — narrow the answer down to five key areas.
- Each paragraph should open by referring back to the essay title, to keep the answer focused on the question.
- Aim for at least 30 significant historical points — Cumulative Marks make up 60% of the total; the remaining 40% (Overall Impression) rewards a focused, logical response.
- Conclusion — refer back to the question; summarise the main areas covered; state the historical significance of the events studied for the country/person concerned.

## » The Research Study

The Research Study Report (Higher and Ordinary Level) is worth 100 marks, made up of an Outline Plan (15 marks), Evaluation of Sources, and an Extended Essay (60 marks). Students write a full title for their study, including relevant date parameters — for Irish history topics, the period must fall before 1993, and for European/wider world topics, before 1992.

### Final Checklist for the Research Study

### Title

- Full title of the research study written in the booklet
- Subject of research clearly and concisely stated
- Date parameters included (before 1993 for Irish history; before 1992 for Europe and the wider world)

### Outline Plan

- Defines and justifies the proposed subject of study
- Identifies the aims, focused on the subject
- Identifies the intended approach
- Cites at least two sources (Ordinary Level) or three sources (Higher Level), at least one written by a historian, all cited fully and accurately (including any websites)

### Evaluation of Sources

- Each cited source evaluated for relevance to the subject
- Strengths and weaknesses of each source commented on

## Extended Essay

- Findings and conclusions set out coherently, with a clear introduction, conclusion and logical development
- Addresses the aims set out in the Outline Plan and stays focused on the study's title
- Includes a review of the research process, specific to the study, explaining how useful it was in addressing the aims
- Word count: 1,200–1,500 words (HL) or 600–800 words (OL), including the review, recorded on the booklet cover

## Finally

- Notes and rough drafts kept, including any oral history tapes/transcripts
- Report submitted to the teacher with the appropriate form signed

# » Adjustments for the 2026 Examination (Higher Level)

The Research Study Report is unaffected — normal timelines apply, as briefs were issued in the 2024/25 school year. For the written exam, candidates may answer in the usual way, or use the following adjusted structure:

| Section | Pre-Adjusted Arrangements | 2026 Adjustment (optional) |
|---|---|---|
| **Section 1** | Documents-Based Question (100 marks) | Answered as normal. |
| **Sections 2 & 3** | One question from one Irish History topic (100m); one question from each of two Europe & Wider World topics (2 x 100m) | Answer three questions from two topics across Sections 2 (Ireland) and 3 (Europe & Wider World) — i.e. two questions from one chosen topic. |

Under the 2026 adjustment, candidates may combine their three answers in any of the following ways:

- Two answers from one Irish topic and one answer from a topic in Europe and the Wider World
- One answer from one Irish topic and two answers from one topic in Europe and the Wider World
- All three answers from two topics in Europe and the Wider World