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Edexcel

A2 Geography

Advice for students

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Contents

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Advice to students

Moving up to A2

There are significant differences between AS and A2 geography. At AS you developed a global overview of issues such as climate change, hazards, globalisation and migration. You also studied local areas and did fieldwork and research. This work has given you a firm foundation for the more in-depth approach that A2 takes.

The assessment for A2 is different from that of AS:

- There is more extended writing and there are no short answer questions.
- You will be expected to demonstrate depth of knowledge and understanding more often than at AS.
- Questions will focus on your ability to assess and evaluate.

However, there are also similarities:

- You will be given resources to refer to in the Unit 3 exam.
- You will always be given credit for using examples and case studies to support your answers.
- You will need to show knowledge and understanding of general concepts, models and ideas as well as knowledge of specific places.

The structure of the A2 exams is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The structure of the A2 examinations

	Unit 3 Contested planet		**Unit 4 Geographical research**
Exam length	2 hours 30 minutes		1 hour 30 minutes
% of A2 marks	60%		40%
Total mark	90		70
Pre-release resources	A resource booklet for Section B, the Issues Analysis, 4 working weeks before the exam		A 'research steer' to focus your ideas, 4 working weeks before the exam
Exam paper structure	Section A Five questions on six of the topics from Unit 3, each worth 25 marks You choose two questions Total 50 marks About 1 hour 15 minutes	Section B Three questions in a linked issues analysis sequence, based on one topic from Unit 3 You must do all three questions Total 40 marks About 1 hour 15 minutes	Six questions, each worth 70 marks There will be one question, on each of the six Unit 4 options topics You choose one question only
Question format	A 10-mark data stimulus question, followed by a 15-mark essay-style question	Questions will be open, allowing you to discuss and debate	Report style-essay, open questions

Exam question structure

Exam questions follow a standard structure which you need to understand. Here is an example:

> **Using examples, evaluate a range of sustainable strategies countries could use to increase their energy security.**
>
> **The question can be broken down into three types of words: instruction words, key words and command words.**

Instruction words

Instruction words tell you that you must:

- use examples (named, located)
- use a range of examples (two or more)
- use country examples (not individuals or businesses)
- use examples which might increase energy security

Instruction words form a 'box' which sets the boundaries for your answer. If you stray outside this box, you will not be answering the question.

Key words

Key words are instructions which tell you *what* to write your answer about. They provide you with the *focus* of the question.

In this example the focus is on sustainable strategies (not any old strategy) and energy security. In the context of this question the answer 'burning more fossil fuels' would not really work, as this approach is unlikely to be sustainable on its own. You should also avoid drifting into other resources such as food or water – stick to energy.

Table 2 lists some of the most commonly used key words and their meanings.

Table 2 Meanings of commonly used key words

Key word	Meaning
Action	Strategies and methods that might be used to manage a problem
Anomaly	A significant departure from an overall trend or pattern
Appropriate	Solutions which are fit for purpose; realistic and effective
Benefits	The advantages/positive impacts
Causes	The reasons why something happens
Challenges	Difficult, large-scale problems which require solutions
Changes	Transformations that take place over time
Characteristics	The key features of something
Concerns	Aspects of an issue or problem that are worrying
Conflicts	The issues over which two or more groups are arguing
Consequences	The results of a change or process; they can be positive or negative
Costs	The disadvantages/negative impacts
Decision makers	Individuals, groups and organisations with some influence over how a problem should be tackled
Distribution	The geographical pattern, for example on a map
Effects	The results of a process occurring (these follow causes)
Factors	The underlying causes of a problem or process
Futures	The range of pathways people could choose, for example sustainable or business-as-usual
Impacts	The results of a process or change affecting people and/or the environment. They can be positive and negative

Key word	Meaning
Implications	The consequences/impacts of a change or proposal
Interrelationships	Links between two or more features. Changing one feature leads to changes in others
Issues	Concerns; problems that are worrying
Management	Using policies and strategies to minimise or reduce problems
Message	Information designed to produce a reaction in the reader or viewer, often linked to a cartoon or image
Patterns	The distribution of something: where things are; most often on a map
Player	An individual, group or organisation involved in an issue (stakeholder)
Problems	Issues that worry people, the negative results of a process or change
Process	A sequence of events that causes a change to take place
Relationship	Usually used to mean the link between a cause and its effects
Responses	Ways in which people react to a problem or change
Role	The functions or activities of an individual, group or organisation
Scale	The size of a feature – global, regional, national, local
Spatial	Variation in space (across an area)
Strategy	A method used to manage a problem or issue
Structure	How parts of something are arranged in relation to each other, and the links between the parts
Temporal	Variation in time (change over time)
Threats	The causes of negative impacts
Variation	How far something differs from the norm or the average
Ways	Actions or strategies that might be used to deal with a problem or issue

Some of these words are very broad and do not give much away in terms of what you should be writing about. One tip is to remember that 'results' words such as *consequences* and *impacts* can be both positive and negative.

It is a good idea always to have a structure in your mind when you are reading a question. For many geography topics this will be as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Answer structures

Social	Economic	Environmental	Political
To do with people, their quality of life, health, education and prosperity	To do with money, work, industry, jobs and prospects	To do with plants, animals, water, air and resources	To do with power, different viewpoints and policy, and the decisions to which these lead

Command words

The command word tells you what approach to adopt in writing your answer. In the question above it is *evaluate*. In other words, weigh up or assess. Be aware that there could be two or more command words.

The command words used in A2 examination questions will be different to the ones you are used to from AS. This is perhaps the key difference between AS and A2. It means you will need to 'raise your game' to continue your success from AS. Table 4 shows a simple comparison between AS and A2 command words:

Table 4 AS vs A2 command words

Familiar command words from AS	Moving up to A2
State	Explain
Describe	Compare
Comment on	Assess
Explain	Evaluate
Suggest reasons	Justify

You should be able to see the difference immediately. Getting to grips with command words can be a challenge. Table 5 is designed to help you understand what different command words require. It uses the example of biomass as a source of fuel to replace petrol and diesel. This should be familiar from the Energy security topic in Unit 3.

Table 5 Understanding command words

Question	What does it require?	Increasingly higher skill level
Describe what biofuels are	A simple *statement* of *what* biofuels are. For example: 'They are a replacement for diesel and petrol, made from plant material such as maize'	
Explain why biofuels are used	A reason (or reasons) *why* biofuels are used. For example: 'They are used *because* they are made from a renewable resource and *because* they are cheaper than petrol and diesel'	
Evaluate the use of biofuels	Discussion of the *positive and negative* sides of using biofuels. It wants you to *weigh up*, or *assess*, both sides. For example: 'Biofuels produce less carbon dioxide (+) than fossil fuels because biofuel crops take in carbon as they grow, and they are cheaper than fossil fuels (+). *However*, biofuel crops take up land that could be used to produce food (-) and fossil fuel energy is used (-) to convert the biomass to liquid fuel' Notice that this answer includes a *range* of points (2 +, 2 -) and that there is *balance* (both + and -)	
Justify the use of biofuels	You need to take a stance and defend it. For example: *'Compared* with fossil fuels, biofuels are better for the environment. Biofuels are essentially carbon neutral, *whereas* fossil fuels release carbon dioxide. Fossil fuels will become increasingly expensive and eventually run out. Biofuels are renewable and *therefore* will remain a cheap alternative long after fossil fuels run out. Biofuels support agricultural employment and help rural areas develop. Fossil fuels support few jobs. *Overall* the benefits of biofuels are greater than those of fossil fuels, and biofuels have fewer costs' Notice that this answer comments on *both* biofuels and the alternatives. You need to do this if you are asked to justify a position or choice. Explain both acceptance *and* rejection	

Of all the possible mistakes to make in exams, misunderstanding a command word is perhaps the most common and potentially most serious. You have been warned!

Table 6 explains the meaning of the most common command words and phrases.

Table 6 A2 command words and phrases

Command word	Meaning
Assess	Weigh up both sides of an issue or solution and come to a conclusion
Compare	Set items side by side and identify similarities and differences
Consider	Describe and explain a range of different views on a subject: explore a range of positions
Contrast	Point out only the differences between two or more items
Discuss	Give both sides of an argument (for and against) and come to a conclusion
Evaluate	Weigh up several options or arguments and come to a conclusion about their importance/success
Examine	Investigate in detail, offering evidence for and against
Explain	Provide a detailed set of reasons why something is as it is
Justify	Give the reasons why something should be done, and why other options should be rejected
Suggest reasons/how	Provide an explanation, say why
To what extent	Say 'how far' you agree with a statement option by examining its advantages and disadvantages

'Evaluative style'

Examiners say that good students write using an '*evaluative style*'. This means that their answers explore several sides of an argument continually. They recognise that geography is complex and there is, for instance, no 'one' solution.

Consider this question and answer:

Q: Evaluate a range of options that might increase UK energy security.

A: Solar power could be used to make us more energy secure as it uses free energy from the sun and we would not need to rely on importing energy from other countries. It is expensive to install and does not work all the time. Wind power is similar. The energy costs can be similar to oil and gas. Some people object to having wind turbines near them because they are ugly and can be noisy. In France they use nuclear power for 70% of their electricity. It is expensive to set up. Once built, the power stations can last for 40 years. The uranium fuel has to be imported from other countries. It can be reprocessed and used again. Some people object to having nuclear power stations nearby because of the dangers of radioactive leaks, or even terrorism.

This answer has some good points. It uses three examples, and there are occasional facts and some explanations. It is almost evaluating, but not quite.

It would be improved if the candidate used the 'evaluative style' word toolkit: although, but, despite, nevertheless, yet, on the other hand, however. The answer would then be more evaluative:

A: Solar power could be used to make us more energy secure as it uses free energy from the sun and we would not need to rely on importing energy from other countries. ***However****, it is expensive to install and does not work all the time. Wind power is similar. Some people object to having wind turbines near them because they are ugly and can be noisy,* ***but*** *the energy costs can be similar to oil and gas. In France they use nuclear power for 70% of their electricity,* ***although*** *it is expensive to set*

up. ***Nevertheless****, once built, the power stations can last for 40 years.* ***Despite*** *this, some people object to having nuclear power stations nearby because of the dangers of radioactive leaks, or even terrorism. The uranium fuel has to be imported from other countries, but* ***on the other hand*** *it can be reprocessed and used again.*

You should notice that the use of evaluative words changes the style. In the second example the candidate is discussing the costs and benefits in a much more evaluative way.

Levels marking

All your answers at A2 are marked using levels mark schemes. There is no 'point' marking at A2 because all the questions demand extended writing. Questions and parts of questions are worth 10 or more marks. Because all answers are levels marked, quality of written communication and language is always taken into account.

For a question marked out of 10–12 there are three levels; for a question marked out of 15 or more there are 4 levels:

Table 7 Mark scheme levels

Question worth 10–12 marks		**Question worth 15 or more marks**	
Level 1	1–4 marks	Level 1	1–4 marks
Level 2	5–7 marks	Level 2	5–8 marks
Level 3	8–10/12 marks	Level 3	9–12 marks
		Level 4	13–15 marks

Think of levels in mark schemes as a staircase you have climb in order to reach the top level. Each step up, into the next level, requires a little bit more of you:

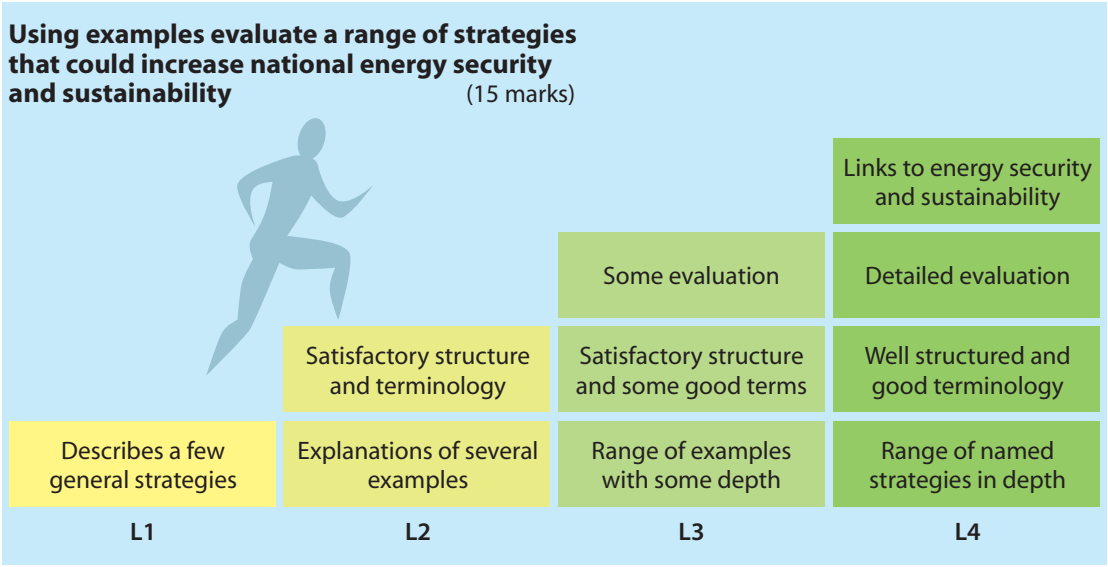

Figure 1 The levels mark scheme steps

The golden rules for success

In the heat of the exam it is easy to forget the golden rules of doing well in geography exams. These apply particularly at A2 because A2 questions are more open and less structured, and you are more 'on your own' than at AS. Try to remember the rules set out in Table 8.

Table 8 The golden rules for A2 exam success

Range	Give several examples, at least two. If the question allows for it, try to make the examples a bit different (contrasting), such as one at a large scale and one at a small scale
Balance	If you are discussing a topic or issues, give both sides of the argument, e.g. costs and benefits, advantages and disadvantages. Don't be one-sided
Facts	Include some hard facts. It is much better to say '$3.5 billion' than 'lots of money'
Style	Avoid writing in the first person. Try not to write 'I think that' or 'My conclusion is'. Instead, use the third person, e.g. 'A common view is' or 'Overall the evidence suggests that'
Place	Geography is about places. An exam answer which does not refer to any places will be weak. When you use examples, name them, say where they are
Structure	Rather than just writing and writing, try to write to a structure. When writing about impacts, commonly used examples are social, economic and environmental positives and negatives. When writing about movement (people, industry or money), a useful structure is costs and benefits to host and source
Relevance	There are some classic case studies and examples which we continue to use, such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 or the 1995 Kobe earthquake. We use these because they are unusual – they are 'one offs'. Apart from these, examples and case studies need to be recent. There is nothing particularly unusual about Hurricane Andrew in 1992, and you were probably not born when it struck. There are much better, more contemporary case studies
Realism	Be careful how you phrase things, especially when the red mist of the exam descends. Here are some (common) simplistic statements which could make your answer look less than convincing: 'the country of Africa' 'in the developing world there is no education' 'South Korea, an LEDC country' 'most migrants to the UK live off social security' None of these statements is true. Don't fall into the trap of making sweeping statements: they are likely to be wrong
Overview	Even if you are not asked to in the question, you should try to provide an overview at the end of your answer. All you need is perhaps two sentences that summarise what you have said and 'round off' your answer. Examiners are impressed by this

Revision: the final piece of the jigsaw

Few students enjoy revision. However, it is vital that you review your work, learn it, and test your understanding.

Every student has to decide his or her own revision strategy. However, there are a few rules that work for most students:

(1) Revise in short bursts. For most students 15–30 minutes is enough. Beyond this time, you cease to take much in.

(2) Try to do something active between revision sessions. Move into another room, take the dog for a walk, make a cup of tea, have a dance! The more you can take your mind off revision, the fresher you will be when you go back to it.

(3) Just reading your class notes does not work.

(4) Try to revise using as many of your senses as possible. Reading only uses one sense – sight. If you read and write, for instance making revision notes from your file, you are using sight and

touch. If you revise with a friend from your class and occasionally test each other or read out your notes, you are also using hearing. You might think this is silly, but driving is a complex skill that most students of A-level age can master quickly – partly because it uses most of your senses, and your powerful brain quickly learns to assess all these signals, which helps you to learn.

(5) Revision involves taking the large volume of material from your course and condensing it into a form you can more easily learn and recall in the exam. Your job is to identify strategies that will allow you to do this in the least painful way.

Some suggested revision strategies

(1) Start by getting organised. Make sure your class notes are clearly sorted. This is a long-term strategy, of course. If your file is poorly organised, and the exams are fast approaching, then get help – borrow a friend's file or ask your teacher for help.

(2) Plan your revision. Set aside days and times for all subjects that you need to study, and stick to your timetable. This will allow you to continue to do all the other things you enjoy, and fit in revision as well.

(3) Set yourself clear goals. For instance, you might allocate one revision session to revising the causes of climate change. Do not just open your file anywhere and start revising – make your revision structured and logical.

(4) Make notes on your notes:

- Use an exercise book or note pad – this will help keep things organised.
- Break down your notes into bite-size chunks, using subheadings. This makes reviewing your notes easier.
- Use numbered or bullet points. Try to pare down the information in your file to key points and important facts and figures.
- Use several different coloured pens to identify patterns and links.
- Pick out key words and process terms, and write down their definitions.
- Redraw key diagrams in a simplified way. You may be able to use these in the exam.

(5) Make mind maps and spider diagrams:

- Take a topic such as the impacts of climate change and make it the centre of a spider diagram or mind map.
- Use A3 paper to give you plenty of space with which to work.
- Break impacts down into a structure, such as social, environmental and economic, or developed world and developing world.
- Next, use your file to add specific impacts to the structure, including examples, key facts and figures.

Spider diagrams can be a useful way to organise a mass of notes into something more coherent from which it is easy to revise. You can use them as posters and put them up on the wall. Glancing at them repeatedly will help the visual 'picture' stick in your mind, and recalling it in the exam will be easier.

(6) Make your own flash cards:

- You can use large Post-it notes or postcard-sized pieces of card.
- Flash cards are ideal for key case studies, key processes, key terms and definitions, and important diagrams.
- Making flash cards forces you to include only key information, as you have limited space. You will find you can condense your notes into something much easier to review.

(7) Use your teacher:

- Teachers like nothing better than being asked questions. Make a note of any problem areas as you revise, and ask your teacher to go over these in class.
- Ask to do practice exam questions. You may not like these, but they are one of the best ways to revise and practise your exam skills. Try to look at exam mark schemes so you can understand how marks are awarded.
- Ask to have regular key terms tests at the start and end of lessons. This will make you much more confident in using the technical language of geography. These can be done using Post-it notes – for instance, matching key words to their definitions.

(8) Use your friends and family. Some students find they can revise with a friend, although this does not work for everyone. Revising with someone else has some advantages:

- If you get stuck your friend may be able to help.
- You can ask each other questions and test each other. This uses more senses, which helps you learn.
- Forcing yourself to explain a process or case study to a friend is a good way to learn yourself, and to highlight areas on which you need to work.
- Working with someone else can be more motivating, and less lonely, than sitting on your own trying to revise.
- You can also ask your family to give you quick quizzes on key terms.

Introduction to Unit 3

Unit 3 overview

Unit 3, Contested planet, has six topics which you should have studied in class:

1 Energy security
2 Water conflicts
3 Biodiversity under threat
4 Superpower geographies
5 Bridging the development gap
6 The technological fix?

Topics 1–3 focus on resources, their use and misuse. Topics 4 and 5 focus on the rich and the poor respectively, and topic 6 examines the role technology might play in dealing with a range of social, economic and environmental issues. In some ways, this last topic provides the overview to tie the first five topics together.

Unit 3 will be available in both the January and June exam series. For each exam series, *one* of the six topics will be used as the basis of the Section B issues analysis. The choice of Section B topic will be random. This will leave five topics, each of which will have an exam question in Section A of the Unit 3 exam. You will choose *two* of these five questions. Figure 2 illustrates how this will work.

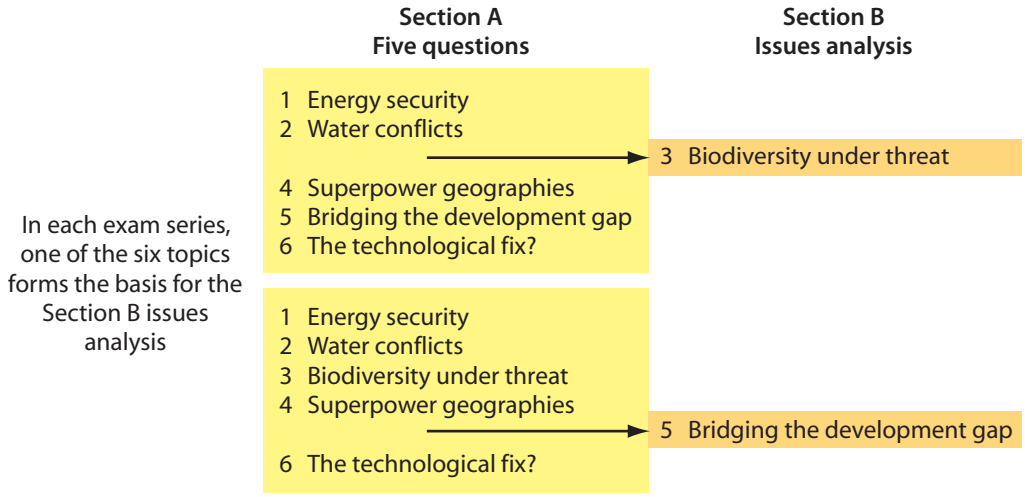

Figure 2 Understanding Unit 3

Over several years each of the six topics will form the basis of the Section B issues analysis, but there will be no set rotation, and it is possible to get the same issues analysis topic in back-to-back exam series.

Unit 3 Section A

In Section A, each of the five questions is worth 25 marks. Each question has two parts, 1a and 1b, worth 10 and 15 marks respectively.

The part 'a' questions are data stimulus questions. There will be a resource (figure) for you to examine and the question will expect you to use this resource, plus your own knowledge, understanding and examples, to answer the question.

The part 'b' question will be more open, without a resource. It will generally use command words such as *assess* or *evaluate*. This question will demand an evaluative style of answer, in which you use evidence, examples and case studies to make your case.

As Section A contains resources, you will need to develop your interpretation skills to ensure you use the resources to good effect. There is a wide range of resources you could be given to use. These are described below.

World maps

World maps (see Figure 3) are a common resource in a unit with a large number of global themes. They often prove problematic. Make sure you do the following:

- Read the title carefully – in this case, per capita energy consumption in 2007, not total national energy consumption.
- Read the key carefully – in this case, energy consumption is measured in tonnes of oil equivalent (this means all energy used, converted to its equivalent in oil).
- Look for patterns. Very few world maps display a stark, simplistic north–south divide. In this case, Europe has a complex pattern and there is much variation in the middle east. Look at the overall pattern but also the pattern within regions and continents.
- Look for anomalies – in this case Argentina and Morocco stand out, as do Holland, Portugal and Switzerland.

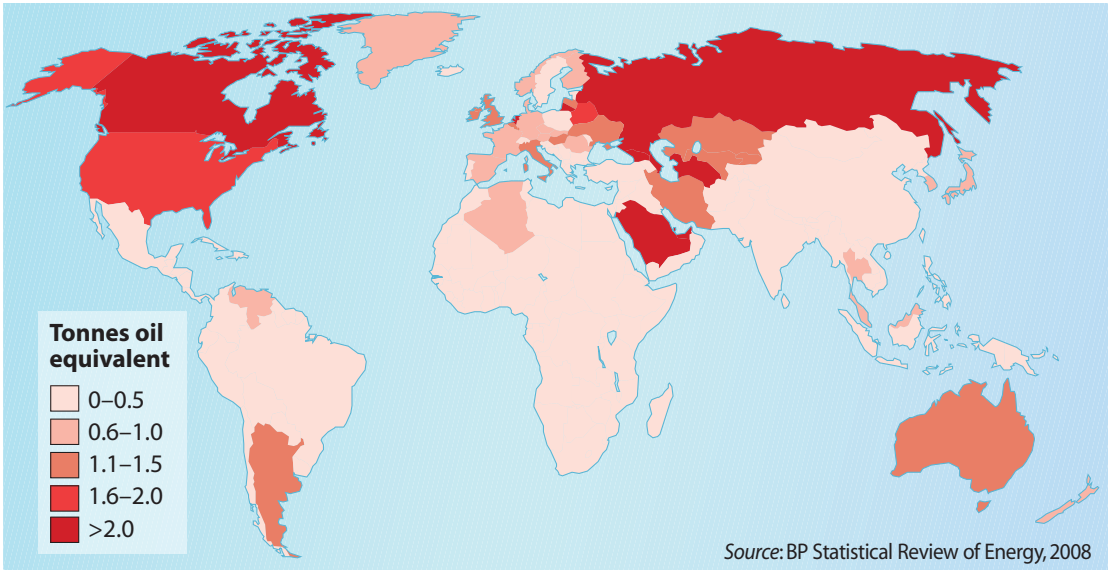

Figure 3 World energy consumption per capita, 2007

Tables of data

Tables of statistics (see Table 9) tend to put candidates off, but there is no reason to fear them. A good tip is to take a highlighter pen into the exam and be prepared to use it if you encounter a table.

- Read the title carefully: in this case, trends in poverty.
- As with maps, look for a date. The trends here are 1981–2001, which is a little out of date compared to the map above (2007).
- Pick out patterns with your highlighter. Notice that some regions have seen large falls in poverty (east Asia and Pacific, middle east and north Africa). Other regions have seen large increases (sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America). Elsewhere there has been little change (south Asia).
- When regions are grouped like this, the data begin to show patterns.
- Again, look for anomalies – the change in eastern Europe is much larger than that in any other region.

Table 9 Poverty trends, 1981–2001

	Number of people (millions) living on $1 per day			Regional population (millions) 2001
	1981	2001	Change since 1981	
East Asia and Pacific	796	271	–66%	1,823
Eastern Europe and central Asia	3	18	468%	474
Latin America and the Caribbean	36	50	40%	518
Middle east and north Africa	9	7	–22%	300
South Asia	475	431	–9%	1,378
Sub-Saharan Africa	164	316	93%	673
Global total	1,482	1,093	–26%	6,127

Source: Chen and Ravallion 2004

Graphs

You can expect to be given more complex graphs than at AS. They may show several types of data together, as in Figure 4 (change and targets).

- Take careful note of axis labels – in this case percentage change and countries.
- Look for general patterns first – most countries are within the +/- 20% range.
- Look for anomalies – Spain and Lithuania stand out as being well beyond the 'typical' range.
- As with the data shown in Table 9, look for groupings. Three countries in the graph show virtually no change.
- This graph is made difficult by the target bars. These show that, for instance, Germany was set a -22% target but has not quite achieved it. Spain was set a +16% target but has far exceeded it. This is 'bad', as it means Spain's greenhouse gas emissions have grown much more than they were targeted to.
- There is an obvious grouping of those countries which have met their targets (France, UK, Poland and Lithuania) and those which have not (the rest).

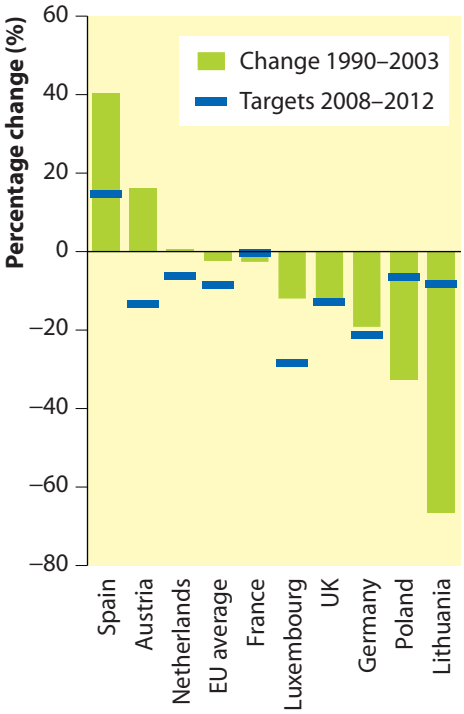

Figure 4 Percentage change in greenhouse gas emissions, 1990–2003, compared with the agreed Kyoto targets for 2008–2012

Cartoons

Exam papers sometimes include a cartoon. The cartoon is often linked to a question along the lines of 'State the message of the cartoon'. This is asking you to put into in words what the cartoon is saying visually.

Unit 3 Section B

Section B is the synoptic part of A2 geography. It is designed to examine your ability to:

- understand complex resources
- see links between different topics
- draw threads together to come to an overall understanding
- come to conclusions which are based on a range of evidence
- engage in debate about controversial subjects

The issues analysis will always have some common themes, regardless of the topic. These are:

- *Players*. Who is involved in the issue? What are their views? Who might they be in conflict with?
- *Actions*. How might the issue to resolved? Should it be bottom up, top down or a mixture? Does it need a high- or low-tech solution? Who should resolve the issue?
- *Futures*. How might the issues affect future generations? Do the solutions need to be sustainable, business as usual or more radical?

In Section B there will be a sequence of three questions linked to the issues analysis resources. These questions are worth 40 marks. In general they will follow a fairly standard sequence (Table 10).

Table 10 Unit 3 Section B question sequence

Question 1	An examination of the issue, explaining the issue and perhaps examining a range of viewpoints, or picking out key factors or causes To some extent this will be a 'background' question to help you get to grips with the topic and explore different viewpoints
Question 2	An evaluation of the options or impacts This could be an in-depth question where you examine the issue in detail and use evidence from the resources provided, your own research and other parts of your geography course
Question 3	An assessment of solutions or a justification of a decision This question could be in the form of a detailed conclusion or an overview. It will tend to require you to sum up carefully and to use evidence to support your view

The pre-release resources

Before the Unit 3 exam, you will receive the pre-release resources for Section B in your school or college. They will be based around one of the six topics from Unit 3.

You will get a 5–6 page resource booklet containing:

- text
- maps, graphs, diagrams and data
- the opinions and views of players
- suggested websites

It is important that you work on these resources to prepare for the exam.

Questions

Go through the resources and pick out any key words that you are not 100% sure about. Examine the diagrams and graphs. Do you know what they mean? Make a list of problem areas and questions. Ask your teacher about these.

Lessons

Attend any lessons on the pre-release resources. Don't be tempted to 'revise at home'. Your teacher might devise some group activities to help you think about the topic. Hearing the views of your peers makes these an excellent way to learn.

Synopticity

Look for synopticity. The purpose of the issues analysis is to assess how well you can see links between different parts of geography and link topics together into overall themes. You need to look for the links. You can do this by using a spider diagram to dissect the pre-release resources (Figure 5).

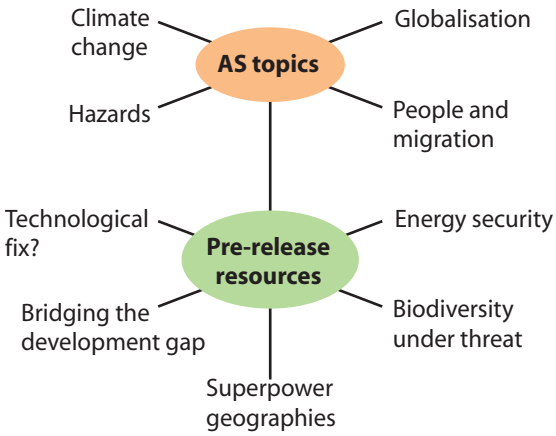

Figure 5 Spider diagram

Remember to look for links to AS topics, and the options you studied in AS Unit 2 and A2 Unit 4. Try to look for links between links!

You also need to think about overall themes. These are the big concepts in geography that tend to be present in most issues. Do your pre-release resources have any of these themes?

- the development gap
- sustainability
- global environmental degradation

Analysis

Some of the pre-release resources may lend themselves to certain analytical techniques. Views of players can be analysed using conflict matrices. A range of options for solutions could be suitable for impact analysis. These sorts of activities are often best done in class, in groups.

Web sources

Explore the websites mentioned in the pre-release resources. Make a research summary sheet for each website, recording the following data:

- Who does the website belong to? How are they involved in the issue?
- What are the views given on the website? Does it seem biased?
- Why is the website there? Does it seem to have a particular standpoint or agenda?

Try to avoid printing out a forest of web pages which you may never read.

Research

Do some wider research. Use your library, resources centre or departmental resources. You could look at past issues of *Geography Review* or other sources to see if the particular issue has been covered.

Synoptic examples

One useful way to demonstrate your synoptic skills is to prepare some parallel examples. These are examples which relate to the topic in question but perhaps show slightly different outcomes or have similarities and differences when compared with the examples in the pre-release.

Introduction to Unit 4

Unit 4 overview

Unit 4, Geographical research, has six topics, but you study only one of these. Your teacher will guide you about which topic to choose to get the maximum support from your centre. Some schools and colleges allow a choice, but it is important to study only one option and to stick to it over approximately 10 weeks.

In the final exam you have no choice regarding a title, but you will have a pre-released 'steer' a few weeks before the exam. This will guide you into last-minute revision and fact-finding, and you may have the opportunity to have a mock exam at your school or college. One of the biggest constraints on achieving a high grade in this unit is your ability to write a coherent essay/report in 1 hour 30 minutes, so the more practice you can get doing these reports the better.

The options available

- Tectonic activity and hazards
- Cold environments: landscapes and change
- Life on the margins
- The world of cultural diversity
- Pollution and human health at risk
- Consuming the rural landscape: leisure and tourism

Each option has four enquiry questions in the specification broken down into sub-enquiry questions. Your textbook is structured to follow these. See below for a summary.

Each report essay will be set either to cross over the four enquiry questions within each option or to examine several sub-enquiry questions within an option. For example, a title might test your understanding of enquiry questions 3 (human impacts) and 4 (response) in the Tectonic activity and hazards option, or it might be mainly on one enquiry question, such as impacts and trends (question 3 in Human impacts).

Unit 4 will be available in both the January and June exam series, but there will be no set rotation of enquiry questions and it is possible consecutive exam series may have the same combination.

Here is a more detailed summary of the options in Unit 4:

Option 1 Tectonic activity and hazards

Causes

- range of events, hazards, disasters
- event profile
- plate movement causes
- plate margin causes

Physical impacts

- extrusive activity
- volcanoes and hotspots
- intrusive activity
- earthquakes

Human impacts

- reasons for habitation in tectonically active areas
- range of impacts
- impacts in differing economic development stages
- trends, frequency and impact over time

Response

- varying approaches in differing economic areas
- strategies – modification of loss/event/vulnerability
- effectiveness, changes over time, future strategies

Option 2 Cold environments: landscapes and change

Defining and locating

- cold, glacial, periglacial environments
- systems
- distribution changes over time
- British Isles: glacial and interglacial history

Climatic processes and their causes

- climatic causes
- long-term changes
- meteorological processes
- British Isles: spatial and temporal relationships between glacial and periglacial environments

Distinctive landforms and landscapes

- glacial geomorphological processes
- glacial landforms
- periglacial geomorphological processes
- periglacial landforms

Challenges and opportunities

- definitions and links
- past and present challenges and opportunities
- overcoming challenges
- approaches to use and management

Option 3 Life on the margins

Global and local feast or famine

- current issues of food supply and security
- environmental issues
- spatial variations in food supply
- food security and quality of life

Complex causes of food supply inequalities

- causes of famine and surplus
- role of population pressure in food insecurity
- attempts to increase supply
- who is most affected by food insecurity

Desertification and life at the margin of survival

- desertification: scale and impact
- dryland ecosystems and physical causes
- vulnerability of dryland ecosystems to humans
- food production and desertification

Role of management in food supply and security

- management techniques and strategies
- range of management and strategies
- sources and international efforts
- effectiveness and role of sustainable strategies

Option 4 The world of cultural diversity

Defining culture and identifying its value

- definitions
- links to cultural landscapes
- vulnerability and threats
- value and protection, e.g. Wales

The geography of culture

- factors affecting diversity
- urban–rural contrasts
- government's and players' roles
- cultural imperialism, e.g. McDonaldisation

Impact of globalisation

- significance
- role of media
- hybrid globalisation, e.g. Bollywood
- impacts of consumerism

Cultural attitudes to the environment

- range of attitudes
- attitudes and exploitation/protection of landscape
- anthropocentric values, e.g. China
- conflicts between environmentalism and consumer capitalism

Option 5 Pollution and human health at risk

Defining risks

- human health risk range
- patterns at different scales
- patterns over time, e.g. epidemiological model
- health and quality of life and economic development

Complex causes of health risk

- range of causes including pollution
- relationship between socioeconomic status and health
- role of geographical features
- models, e.g. diffusion

Pollution and health risk

- link between different pollution types and health
- incidental and sustained pollution health risks, e.g. Bhopal, Chernobyl, Harbin, versus global warming, ozone depletion
- pollution and economic development: Kuznets curve
- role of pollution fatigue and public pressure

Managing the health risk

- socioeconomic and environmental impacts of health risk burdens
- differing management strategies and policies

- agencies, especially international
- short- and long-term sustainable management effectiveness

Option 6 Consuming the rural landscape: leisure and tourism

Growth of leisure and tourism landscapes

- growth and pleasure periphery
- range of rural landscapes
- attitudes of groups involved
- activities and conflicts

Significance and fragility of rural landscapes

- physical and ecological value
- fragility
- models, e.g. carrying capacity and resilience
- qualitative and quantitative environmental quality measures, e.g. in National Parks

Impact on rural landscapes

- negative impacts
- positive impacts
- changes over time
- threats and opportunities in different economic development areas

Rural landscape management issues

- arguments for and against management
- range of management strategies
- attitudes and strategies of different groups and conflicts
- effectiveness of different approaches

Researching the chosen option

Chapter 8 in your textbook suggests several key stages or phases in this unit. These are summarised in Table 11.

Table 11 Key phases

Approximate timings	Phase
1 week	1 Planning which option to research
10 weeks	2 Reading, research and organisation of a file 3 Practising skills and techniques of selection, essay writing, sourcing
6 weeks – may overlap with research phase	4 Decoding the pre-release steer, called Research Focus
$1\frac{1}{2}$ hours	5 Writing the exam: planning, then implementation

Planning which option to research

Your initial choice of an option is critical: it must interest you and it must be manageable for you as a subject of sustained research. The specification clearly shows compulsory items of study (in the left-hand column headed 'What students need to learn'), then suggests lines of research (in the right-hand column headed 'Suggested teaching and learning').

Reading

The object of research is to gather a range of information from varied sources. It is essential to read around the topic – but read with a pen in your hand, and always jot down notes and reference the information in case you wish to return to it in the preparation period just before the exam. Remember: BAW (i.e. books, articles, websites).

Look into all the enquiry questions over several months, independently gathering relevant mini-examples and larger case studies with guidance from your teachers, who should be able to help

with the more difficult ideas and concepts. Extract any useful notes from your AS studies on World at risk or Geographical investigations.

Orderly, cross-referenced organisation and storage of information is critical: your varied information types and sources should be structured so that you can find them easily once the steer is released. You could use a system based on enquiry questions or topics. Create a glossary of specialist and more generic terms to use in the exam.

Primary fieldwork may be relevant to your chosen option. Make sure you can summarise key findings from this. If you are doing research over several months it needs to be carefully structured, and you must summarise large amounts of information. Putting this onto small cards or into A4 summaries will help you with your final revision and will ensure you have covered all the sub-enquiry questions.

Practising

An extended essay requires a high level of skill: practise timed questions and familiarise yourself with the DRAQ mark scheme. (Ask your teacher, who should have a copy of the generic mark scheme.) You should try to understand how the examiner will view your work. Since there are potentially so many types of answer to essay questions, a generic mark scheme is used to assess them, no matter which title you have chosen. Table 12 outlines what your examiner looks for at key grade boundaries.

Table 12 Characteristic features of A-, C- and E-grade responses

Grade A candidates	Grade C candidates	Grade E candidates
Well-focused introduction, clear discussion and definitions linked to title Well-selected research: range of case studies and examples used to support argument Ability to formulate arguments Effective conclusion linked back to main body, with ongoing evaluation of case studies within essay Well written, with use of evaluative language and specialist terminology May be topical, using models	Tries to introduce with some degree of detail, defines rather than discusses Some range in research, not all proven to be sourced Tries to argue a case, although may lose some focus Some ongoing evaluation or a more effective conclusion Quite well written, a few errors, some geographical vocabulary	Brief introduction, generic definitions Descriptively used case studies, some not well selected, weak facts on case studies, narrow range: perhaps only two or three Limited arguments developed Lacks sourcing apart from, for example, Google Brief conclusion, lacks ongoing evaluation Satisfactorily written, some syntax errors Scattered use of terminology May simply agree/disagree with quote/statement

Instructions

It is important to understand the instructions given in a question. Remind yourself of the difference between command words and phrases such as *evaluate*, *to what extent*, *assess* and key words such as *factor*, *challenge*, *threat*.

Here is a question based on Option 6, in which these words are highlighted.

> **To what extent do you agree that leisure and tourism are posing increasing threats to rural areas?**

Instruction words tell you that you must concentrate on only leisure and tourism in rural areas – London's Olympics are not relevant.

Instruction words form a 'box' which sets the boundaries for your answer, in this option leisure and tourism in rural areas. If you stray outside this box, you will not be answering the question.

Key words give you the detailed content that your answer must be about. In this case the focus is threats, i.e. not just past challenges causing negative effects but the growth of these and their effects on an area.

The command word tells you how to approach writing your answer. In this case you have to make a judgement of how much you agree with the statement – perhaps you have examples which challenge the statement.

Vocabulary

Practise using linkage phrases such as *in comparison* or *however* and higher-level vocabulary such as *paradoxically*, *ironically*, *of paramount importance*. Use of geographical terminology is essential — the terms depend on the option chosen.

Diagrams

Practise drawing diagrams, models, sketches and maps quickly and making them obvious to a stranger. Practise using black and white and hatching (patterns) for diagrams (online marking means colour is not seen by the examiner).

Table 13 A hazard profile model showing the role of factors influencing hazard impacts for two case studies

High negative impacts						Low negative impacts
High magnitude	X	Y				Low magnitude
High frequency			Y		X	Low frequency
High vulnerability – poverty	X		Y			Low vulnerability
High density of people	Y	X				Low density
High-value buildings/infrastructure not well protected/constructed		Y		X		Low-value or well-protected/ constructed buildings
Low hazard salience		X	Y			High salience

X= Asian tsunami 2004 ***Y= Kobe earthquake 1995***

Structuring

Practise structuring an argument: A2 has a focus on how you use information, not just on your ability to recall details. See Figure 7 for some ideas on terms and phrases which indicate to the examiner you are trying to produce an argument, e.g. *To an extent…*, *It could be argued that…*, *On the other hand…*, *Against this it could be argued that…*

Decoding the steer

The steer is released 6 weeks before the exam, so you should have an opportunity to discuss and practise aspects with your teachers and peer group.

- Ask yourself the question: what does the steer suggest you focus on? Refer back to the specification and then extract relevant parts of your file to concentrate on – maybe from one or several enquiry questions and sub-questions.
- Add extra information if your preparation is light on that part of the option.
- Get topical information if it is relevant to your option – what's in the news?
- Practise essay planning and timed writing, brainstorm command words and practise your flexibility in answering different titles – remember you have no choice of essay title in the exam.

Writing the exam

This final phase, when you actually write your essay in pressured conditions is 'showcasing time'. Do not fall into the trap of being so overprepared that you cannot really show the examiner how hard you have worked on this module. Think of taking the exam as going through a series of hurdles with the overall objective of keeping to timings, to ensure you reach the conclusion.

Planning the essay title

Deconstruct/dissect the essay title, select and reject information, examples and case studies, and

choose a structure. You will have an examination booklet with about 16 sides, which means you have plenty of room for planning the essay before you launch into it. Indeed, the first page will be labelled 'planning sheet': use it to create a spider diagram or bullet points, splitting your essay plan into introduction, main essay and conclusion. Spend 5 minutes or so on the plan, but try not to write too much or you will jeopardise the essay. See Figure 6.

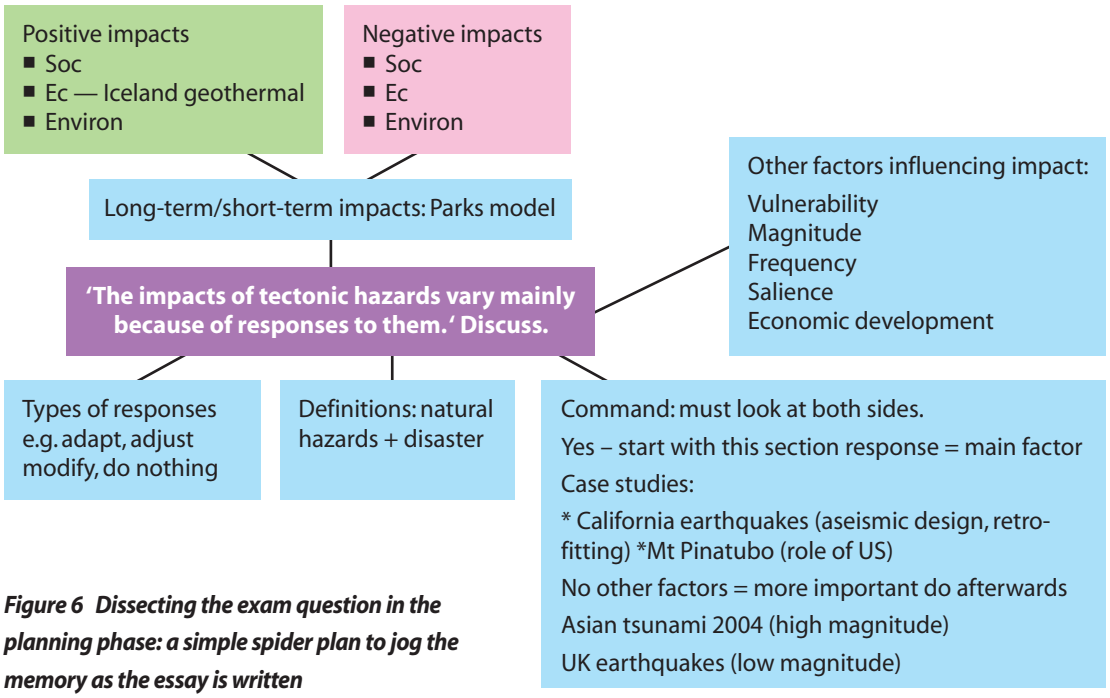

Figure 6 Dissecting the exam question in the planning phase: a simple spider plan to jog the memory as the essay is written

Implementation of the essay

- Remember throughout the DRAQ mark scheme.
- Start by discussing the title, not just recalling definitions. Figure 7 provides an example of this. This example shows obvious in-depth knowledge of the enquiry questions, and uses high-level vocabulary and a diagram to frame the ideas and give a structure to the main essay.

'When trying to maintain rural landscape quality, some impacts are more easily managed than others.' Discuss.

Rural landscape quality involves the level of aesthetic and natural functioning that an area has, which includes its fragility and resilience. However, rural areas are seen increasingly as a consumable item by those involved in twenty-first century leisure and tourism, and many negative impacts have resulted, from total destruction to partial degradation, minor trampling to major pollution incidents. Many rural areas in countries with varied levels of economic development are preserved or have some measure of conservation in place to reduce especially the issue of 'hotspots'. The following diagram summarises the case studies that will be used to investigate the varying effectiveness of management strategies, chosen to represent differing landscapes, differing scales and impacts plus differences in management, from local to international, conservation to radical change of the rural landscape.

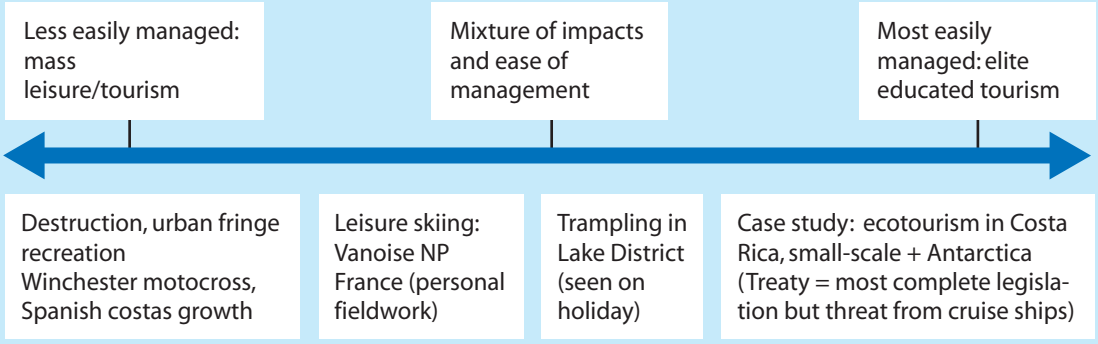

Figure 7 Starting an essay

- You will need to reference some key sources, either in brackets within the essay or as footnotes. Avoid a list of bibliographical details at the end. You should clearly show that your research goes beyond vague Google searches or the debateable source of Wikipedia. Here are some examples of good practice in proving sources of information:

  Increasing the resilience of nations and communities to disasters, including those related to tectonic hazards, has been debated globally over the last few decades, as summarised by the United Nations website on the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 adopted in Kobe in 2005.

  The May 2005 Radio 4 podcast on the 2003 record levels of air pollution in London reported that ozone levels were so high that there was a photochemical smog over London, which in turn caused respiratory health problems for people with breathing difficulties and even some deaths.

  The following diagram on the influence of changing climates on cold environments was adapted from the AS Unit Guide to the Global challenges unit, by Cameron Dunn.

- You may decide to use a model or a diagram to explain a point: make sure any axes are labelled (see Table 13 and Figure 8). If you use a map it may be helpful to have a scale. Whatever you choose, ensure it has a title and is linked to the prose. There is no need to remember a world map or basic locational map: the examiner will know where Bam or Chernobyl or the Lake District are.

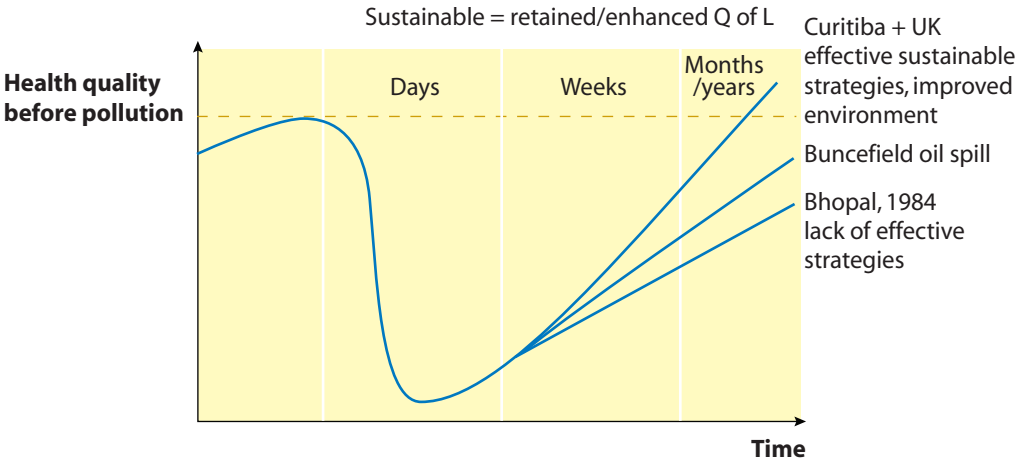

Figure 8 Park's model on hazards adapted for an essay on pollution impacts on health

- Avoid statements such as 'I am going to…' and 'as I said earlier…': they show either too verbose a style or a lack of planning. Flag up to the examiner that you are about to start on a new area or want to contrast or compare something (Table 14).

Table 14 Key words and phrases to signal your intentions to the examiner

Illustration, i.e. case studies	For example… That is… Another example of… is…
Contrast between case studies and themes	But… However… Albeit… On the other hand… Yet… Another aspect to consider is… In contrast… Conversely…

Evaluation of material in essay	To an extent… It could be argued that… It could be said that… The main reason/factor/process could therefore be said… My evaluation of this is… Other groups may… On the other hand… Against this it could be argued that… One view that could be taken…
Extension to material presented	Moreover… Furthermore… In addition… Another… In the long term…
The next step, i.e. next theme or case study	Then… After that… Ultimately… Similarly…
Conclusions, i.e. ongoing evaluations and final summary	Therefore/Thus/Finally… Consequently… As a result… As has been shown… As a sub-conclusion… In conclusion, the statement cannot be fully agreed with because…

- Try to weave in ongoing evaluation of your examples and case studies – don't leave this until the conclusion. Never describe in one section and then explain in another: in this exam you need to demonstrate ongoing synthesis of data.
- Check for 'Geogtalk': have you used correct terminology and higher-level vocabulary? Figure 7 shows an example of a student trying to do this.
- Make sure you argue a case: most A2 essay titles expect you to debate a statement or viewpoint.
- How much should you write? The introduction will take a page or so in average handwriting – any more than this and you will reduce your chances of covering enough material in the main discussion section. Similarly, the conclusion should be on half a side, and should show clear reference back to the precise concepts, case studies and examples used – don't suddenly introduce a new one here just because you have thought of it at the end. If you have only written a few sides between your introduction and your conclusion you are unlikely to have showcased enough knowledge, applied it to the question or developed an argument.

Table 15 lists some common problems experienced by students in an exam – and tells you how to resolve them.

Table 15 Common exam problems and solutions

Problem	Solutions
Panic, don't know where to start, can't answer anything	Deep breath, shut eyes and focus. Scribble some notes: think with a pen always Reject models, concepts and case studies as well as accept them Don't cross out plan Think positive: the examiner is *not* out to show what you don't know

Problem	Solutions
Running out of time	Bullet points Don't worry about gaps on a page or leaving something to go on to a conclusion – max your marks
Thought of something extra and no room to fit it in	Neatly add an asterisk (*) and refer examiner to a specific page
Starting to write the same content even if different question	Think. The exam is carefully devised, so you should never have to say, 'As I said earlier…'
Got time to spare	Unlikely if you have planned time properly, but if you have, return, check spellings etc. – boring but QWC important Add a diagram or map at the end with an asterisk (*) reference to where it fits in your answer