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# Geography

How to get an A in the Junior Cert  
Geography Exam



By Eve L.

*Eve L. got an A in her higher Junior Cert Geography paper. Here, she shares what she learned.*



Geography certainly broadens your knowledge on the wider world and is very different to what you learned in primary school! The course is so diverse: from economic activity, to geology, to urban sprawl, to map-work. I really enjoyed studying Geography for the Junior Cert because there were always new things to learn about the world, which made studying more beneficial than just acing exams – that was just a bonus! The exam itself lets you pick your favourite topic to answer on, and in general is really forgiving – but not by any means 'easy!' In this guide, I'll attempt to share with you the secrets to the world, and Junior Cert Geography!

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## Layout

- ▶ The Geography exam takes place over a 2-hour period. It is divided into short and long questions, the short questions being the so-called folder.
- ▶ The exam is worth 150 marks in its entirety. The folder is worth 60 marks, or 40%, and contains mostly multiple choice questions. The long questions are worth the remaining 60%, from which you have to pick 3 to answer out of a possible 5.
- ▶ Each long question – 1-5, has an A, B, and C section to it. You must answer all three in each question. One of these questions will be a map question

### Section 1 – Folder (40%)

- ▶ The **folder** may be worth 40% of your exam, but certainly won't take 40% of your time (48 minutes) If you practice the short questions in your exam papers enough, you'll literally have them done and be placing your folder under your seat within 15 minutes.
- ▶ In exams like History, the short questions usually require you to write a sentence or so as an answer – in Geography, it's usually a multiple choice question where you delete a wrong answer, circle the correct answer, and fill in the blanks.
- ▶ **If you know your stuff**, each of these should take less than a minute to answer, with the exception of the map questions, in which you have to look carefully to find what you're looking for.
- ▶ Notice how I said 'if you know your stuff' in that last point – it's rarely running out of time that causes people to do poorly in the short questions. Just like in Religion, History, Business, and Science; the short questions literally test you on all areas of the course with no hope of escape. **You have to know at least a bit from every topic to get by.**
- ▶ Studying from your book will get you to a certain point – you'll know all the info (hopefully) but will you know what sort of questions they like to ask? This is why I stress the importance of papers for subjects like Geography, Business, and Science – where there is no choice within short questions.



- ▶ For my Junior Cert, I studied Geography every Tuesday night, and always, **always**, did at least one year's short questions before I wrapped up for the evening. I can't stress how helpful this was for this portion of the exam. I noticed that they tended to ask a lot about economic activity and that sometimes they asked questions about weather and isobars, etc.
- ▶ I always corrected my short questions, too, to see where I was going wrong, and what answers would guarantee full marks. Geography rarely recycles previous questions, because the course is so broad, but questions tend to be quite similar and the information stays relevant. If you have several 'folders' of short questions completed by the time you come to your mocks, you'll be shocked at how easy they come to you.
- ▶ I also used the Exam Builder feature on **Studyclix Premium**. After I finished a topic, or indeed a few topics, I would take a test in it to see if I knew how to answer them. These are great for long questions too.
- ▶ So the key to success in short questions? **Practice**. Also, don't forget to answer the question you're being asked in the exam. What I mean by this is, read the question carefully, and if they ask you to circle an answer, don't underline, etc. It's very easy to get over-excited when you see a question you've answered before – but remember, it will be different in some way as they don't reuse questions in this subject.
- ▶ **Get through the short questions quickly** – spend 20 minutes on them at the most, and check for 5 minutes – that would be my recommendation. You can of course spend up to 48 minutes pruning and perfecting answers, but the long questions are called long for a reason. Priorities, people!

## Section 2 – Long Questions (60%)

- ▶ I LOVED long questions. I answered every single one from previous state exams between September and May of third year. I love the way Geography is set up – you can pick the questions



you feel most comfortable answering. Few exams are this forgiving; but it's important to note that you, once again, need to know your stuff.

- ▶ Unlike History and Business, the long questions aren't set to one topic, e.g. Final Accounts or the Reformation. They could contain 3, seemingly completely unrelated topics, such as ocean currents, irrigation, and desertification – all linked under one theme. You might see section A and think to yourself, 'I've got this one!' but realise that C, is a topic you found very difficult and would never pick to answer! For this reason I suggest **reading through the long questions before taking the plunge.**
- ▶ **The minute you're allowed open your exam papers, I suggest reading through the long questions.** This allows you to be mulling it over in the back of your mind as you're answering your short questions. Read through each section within the 5 questions too. Remember that **one of these questions will be a map or aerial photograph question**, for definite.
- ▶ After a few minutes of reading through your long questions, go and answer your short questions as quick as possible (without rushing them, obviously!) If you play your cards right, you could have up to 90 minutes to do your long questions – 30 minutes for each question, and 10 for each sub-section.
- ▶ **Choose your order in which to answer the questions according to your strength.** If you find luck isn't on your side, and there's only **ONE** question in which you truly feel confident answering all the sub-sections, belt ahead and do it! Not only will it warm up your hand, it will give you the confidence to keep going. Just say to yourself, 'I did really well in the short questions, and I'm going to do really well in this section. I've already secured a good grade.'
- ▶ When it comes to answering long questions, it's all in how you answer them. You could be able to write a near thesis on volcanoes, but may not get full marks unless you answer it properly.
- ▶ For **Physical Geography** questions, such as those on rivers, glaciers, the sea, rocks, volcanoes, earthquakes, rainfall, mass movement, etc., I followed an acrostic formula in order to ensure my answer



covered all aspects of a standard A1 answer:

- ▶ **Description:** e.g. a waterfall is a feature of river erosion which occurs when a river flows over a vertical drop.

**Example:** e.g. an example of this would be found in Glencar, Co. Leitrim.

**Process:** e.g. when a river flows over an area comprising a layer of hard rock above a layer of soft rock, the soft rock is eroded quicker by process of *hydraulic action, abrasion, and solution*.

**Explanation:** e.g. this creates a fall in the river. A plunge pool forms at the base of the waterfall due to the force of the falling water. Undercutting then takes place and creates an overhang. This eventually collapses and the waterfall retreats.

**Diagram:** (here you draw a labelled diagram of the stages in creating a waterfall, label them 1,2,3, etc. and additionally label the features such as the hard rock, overhang, etc.)

- ▶ This formula guarantees full marks if you follow correctly. In theory, it can only really be applied to some areas of Physical Geography, but I have used it when writing about weather instruments, just by cutting out the 'example' or 'diagram' portion, and for rocks I put in 'uses' instead of diagrams. I always include a diagram, unless they have included a picture in the question. Examiners love diagrams!
- ▶ The Physical Geography sections to which this formula doesn't apply includes *climates*; but that's pretty straightforward. You just have to be able to talk about: the **Zone, Location, Temperature, Rainfall/precipitation, Soil, Vegetation, Wildlife, and Human Activity**.
- ▶ *Soils* also require special attention: more often than not, you're asked to compare soils under the following headings: **vegetation, fertility, organisms, colour, texture, mineral content, and location**.
- ▶ In some parts to long questions, you have to be able to define words or discuss human's involvement in the subject, e.g. human interaction with the sea. In these cases, you can never go wrong with the **SRS** formula – a **significant relevant statement followed by a development** or explanation. In short, you make a point, and explain/develop it, e.g. 'One method of coastal



protection is rock armour (S) These are large boulders at the base of a cliff or in front of dunes, which the waves hit when they break (D) This causes them to lose energy and reduces their eroding power (D) Rock armour can be seen in Tramore, Waterford.'

- ▶ If you look at the marking schemes for past exams, you'll see it printed below many sample answers, '**St1 + D1 + D1**' – this indicates how many marks going for the statement and development sentences, as well as how many of each you have to make. Unfortunately, in the exam, they'll only tell you how much the questions in each part are worth, e.g. Section A part (i) is 2 marks & (ii) is 8; so it is up to you to estimate where the marks are going. As a rule of thumb, anything that asks you to 'name' can't be worth more than 2 marks each. Aside from that, you'll just have to **develop your point as much as you can.**

- ▶ The other two theory components are pretty similar to each other and often overlap in long questions – **Human Geography** and **Economic Activity**. Similar to Physical Geography, SRS (sometimes called SRP) is your friend and will get you the marks.
- ▶ These topics also have case studies which you must know about, e.g. a region of low population density in the developing world, a heavy industry, etc. (There are less of these in Physical Geography)
- ▶ The last strand in JC Geography is **O.S. Map-work** and **Aerial Photographs**. A common misconception is that this section is easy – totally false. A lot of work

has to go into maps. Like general theory questions, **the correctors will be looking for SRP and waffle will not be tolerated!**

You also have to be well practiced at drawing sketch maps and knowing how to read and follow maps in general. I personally rarely did map questions because I found the work I had to put into them was too much for only 30 marks and that theory came easier to me – but, most of my friends say that only for the maps, they wouldn't have done as well in their exam. It's really down to you, what your teacher advised you on, and how hard you've worked on the topic.

## Helpful Hints





- ▶ My general advice for cracking Geography is to **practice** (here we go again). Yes, even though I say it for everything – that’s honestly how I achieved so many A’s in my exams. Do as many past questions as you can – it’ll do more good than harm!!!
- ▶ Constant memory-jogging is essential for such a long course; **go over your notes from class regularly**, revise the past exam questions you’ve done – even reading through your Geography book like you would a novel helps. Just don’t forget the information!
- ▶ I also think discussing topics in subjects like Business, History, Geography, Religion, etc. is really beneficial. **If you discover something interesting when you’re studying; tell somebody about it – you won’t forget it!** It’s strange how much I retained when I started telling mum all about plate tectonics!
- ▶ Knowledge will get you so far; cleverness will get you all the way. Know your stuff, be able to tell anyone that asks all about population pyramids, and be able to teach the first years all about bilateral aid – but you need to do it in an exam setting. Time and technique separates the men from the boys here.
- ▶ **Have all necessary equipment** - Bring pencils, sharpeners, a ruler, crayons or colouring pencils, string, and anything else you think you might need for doing diagrams and sketch maps – you can’t whisper over to your mate in the exam hall to borrow a pen!
- ▶ **Label your questions and sub-sections clearly** – the Geography exam is notoriously difficult to correct as it is, so make it easy for your examiner and put ‘Question 1,’ across the top of the page, and label each new sub-section accordingly, and indeed, each question within the sub-section. It’ll make the examiner less stressed when correcting your exam – making you more likely to do well.





- ▶ On the off-chance that you finish early – like most people in my year did – **don't make the mistake of leaving the exam hall early**. You'll end up kicking yourself if you realize you'd made a mistake on the way home, with no chance to rectify it. Take the time you have to re-check if you've made as many developing sentences as you could, labelled all your diagrams – and if you still have a large amount of time on your hands after that, do one more long question to cover yourself.
- ▶ LASTLY – **don't panic** if you don't see a long question you feel comfortable answering when you first open the paper. Calm yourself by answering some short questions, and by giving yourself that time to put things into perspective. It will all be fine!



*Best of Luck in your  
Geography exam!*

*You'll do great!*

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