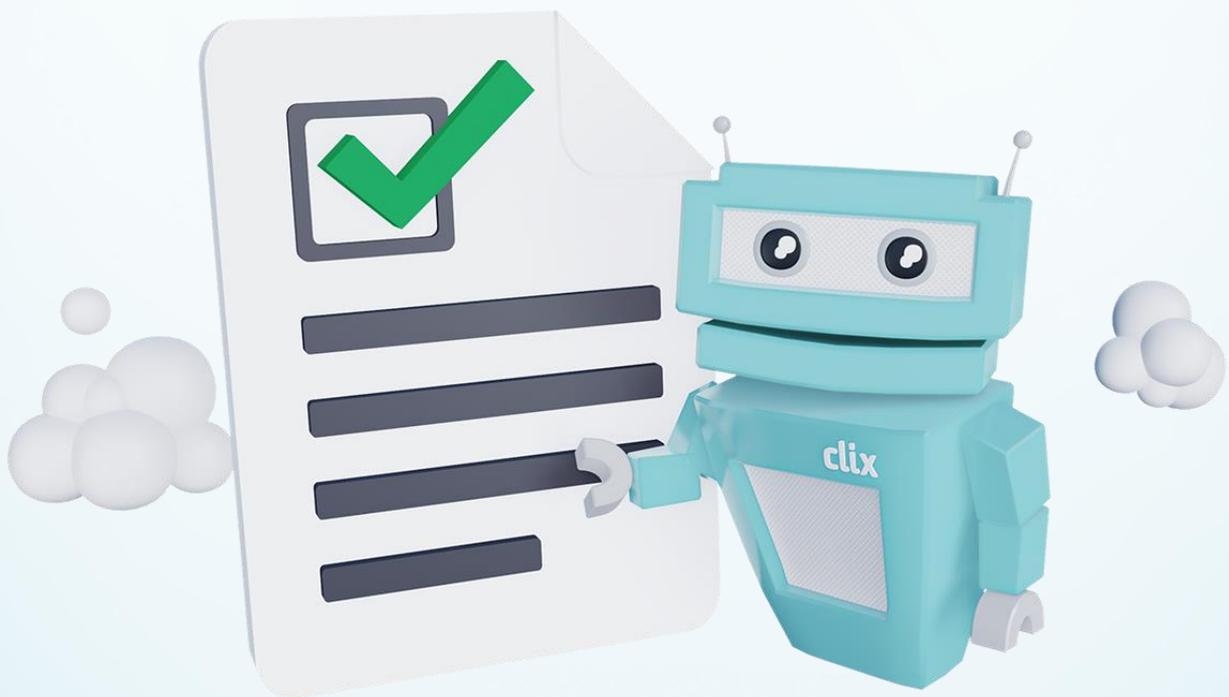


# History

How to Succeed in your Junior Cycle

History Exam



**by Laura O'Brien**

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Here she shares her hints and tips for the exam.*



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## Introduction

For most students, History can be a hit or a miss. It seems like you either love it more than anything, and have resolved to do it at Senior Cycle, or you really dislike it. Either way, you'll want to do well and you can!

Remember this, the examiners want to give you marks, they are looking for places to add in some marks for you. And you can make this easy for them. This guide gives some general tips from an experienced examiner on where some of the common simple mistakes can happen and how they can be prevented. Whatever grade you're hoping for, this simple guide can help get you on track.

Yes, there is a bit of "learning off" needed for History (as there is for all subjects), but you can find easy ways to get better at this. History is not about knowing lots of dates, it's essentially a series of stories about people's lives that you are asked to retell, analyse and examine.

## The CBAs

### What are the CBAs in History?

In a nutshell, you are being asked to find out about someone or something about History that you will not be taught in class.

You will do one in 2nd year called 'The Past in My Place' and one in 3rd year called 'A Life in Time'. These will involve you doing some of your own research on an event/person/place etc and creating a report on it.

It's like being a detective, we want to go off and find clues/evidence on your own and tell us what you found out!

Something original and not simply copied from Wikipedia is what they're looking for!

You must do one CBA based on Ireland and one on the Wider World. Generally, CBA1 will lend itself more naturally to being the "Irish one". Either way, you cannot do both CBAs on either Ireland or the Wider World.

So let's go through each of them now:

## CBA1: The Past in My Place

**What?** This involves you researching something in “your place”: this could be your town, county, country of origin, where you’ve spent loads of summers etc. You could also focus on your personal/family history. Basically, something from your “world”, something personal to your life/locality. You might live near a castle, or the site of a battle, a monument etc. The possibilities are endless...

**How?** Once you’ve picked your topic, you need to start your research. You could start by asking family members or neighbours if they know anything (this would be a fantastic oral source). You could head down to your library and see what books/documents they have. You could head to the site and take some photos/videos. And of course, there’s always the internet but be careful not to over-rely on our friend Google! In order to focus your research, you could create a list of questions you are going to try and answer about your topic. You want your CBA to be quite narrow and focussed and not just a huge jumble of information thrown at me! Like a detective, you are aiming to find out something specific and a list of questions could help here.

For example, there might be a castle or the remains of a castle in your county. You might ask yourself:

- Why was this built? When?
- What materials were used to build it?
- Buildings can change over time so what did it look like when it was originally built?
- What was it used for? Did it change ownership a few times?
- What impact does it have on my place now?

**How?** You also want to keep a good account of your research and your sources, there will be a reflective element to your CBA about how you got on doing this project and how you've improved as an historian. So, I know it's a bit cringe, but keep a journal of sorts about what you enjoy and what you found difficult etc.

**Final Product?** The terms 'report' or 'display' will be thrown at you a lot. You can basically choose any format you like: a PowerPoint file, a large poster, a timeline, a newspaper report, a video, a model, a family tree, a booklet etc.

This 'display' should be well labelled, clear, have plenty of detail both on your topic and on your research as well as a piece of reflection.

## **CBA2: A Life in Time**

This CBA will follow the exact same format and layout as CBA1.

The main differences are:

- 1.** If CBA1 is based on an Irish topic, this **MUST** be from outside Ireland.
- 2.** It needs to be based on a person of historical significance.

Then once you've picked your person, you will research him/her in the same way as above and then create a "display" based on your findings!

It's that simple!

## How will I be assessed?

You will have done 2 CBA's in History, one in 2nd year and one in 3rd year. There will be an Assessment Task based on CBA2.

And, of course, there is a final written exam which will be common level and two hours' duration.

### Final Examination

History comes somewhere in the middle of all your exams and is compulsory in most Irish schools.

The new Junior Cycle History Exam does not have a prescribed layout and, as it has not been examined yet, we are not sure of what trends may emerge. We do know you will likely be asked questions based on pictures, documents and some essay/paragraph style questions.

#### Hint

All questions on the recent sample paper had a picture/document element followed by some "outside knowledge" (the stuff you've learned off) questions.

## Picture Questions

You will have practised lots of picture questions over the past 3 years and so these can be a great place to pick up marks. The 2021 sample paper created by the department gave us an idea of what these would look like. Here's an example:

### Question 5

Examine this photograph of a sculpture on Dublin's Custom House Quay. The bronze figures represent Famine emigrants walking towards the docks to board ships to take them overseas. The sculpture was made in 1997 to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Famine.



*Figure 1: Extract from 2021 SEC Sample Paper JC History*

The first questions called on you to examine the image in detail by asking: The sculpture, 'Famine', was made by Rowan Gillespie. How did Rowan Gillespie convey the idea of famine in his sculpture?

My advice is to answer in as much detail as you can, and only write down what you can physically see in the photographs, as other information will be null and void.

So for example, you could comment here on their skinny frames, tattered clothes, bare feet etc.

After this there will likely be some questions unrelated specifically to the photo but relevant to the topic at hand. For example, in this question the next 2 questions were:

- 1. What are two types of sources that could be used to research the appearance of Irish people during the Famine in the 1840s?*
- 2. It is now 170 years since the Famine ended. Why is the Famine still commemorated?*

These questions are where you have to pull from your head on the day! But remember, if you have taken some time learning your 3 C's: The Causes, Course and Consequences of the Famine, these will help hugely with these questions.

## Documents Questions

Similar to the pictures questions; try to give as much detail as you can. Again, you will likely be very familiar with this type of question and should do very well here. You will usually be asked some basic comprehension questions about what's in the document. Then you might be asked to "dig a little deeper" and give some examples of bias, opinions, facts, prejudice and/or what makes this an example of propaganda.

And, just like the picture questions, you might be asked something that cannot be pulled directly from the document. The sample paper from the department had a short document relating to a plantation.

Here's an example of a document question from the sample paper:

**Question 4**

Read this account of the plantation of Co. Leitrim and answer the questions which follow. The account was written in 1683, sixty years after the plantation began.

The chief town is Jamestown, a well-walled town standing on the river Shannon. The town consists of about 60 families but most of them live outside the walls. There is a good weekly market, four fairs every year and a company of foot soldiers as garrison.

It is very well planted with Protestant inhabitants. The natives or Irish inhabitants are civil, hospitable and intelligent. The Irish women are handsome, and both sexes speak reasonably proper English.

This county has very good pasture, and is far more proper for feeding and rearing cattle than for grain. In it are vast woods, full of large and excellent timber. There are many herds of red deer. The wolves, which were very numerous are now very few. There are several eyries of eagles. Lough Melvin is well stored with salmon.

*Figure 2: Extract from 2021 SEC Sample Paper JC History*

They asked some simple comprehension questions such as :

- 1. In what decade did the plantation of Leitrim begin?*
- 2. Name three features of a plantation town that were evident in Jamestown.*

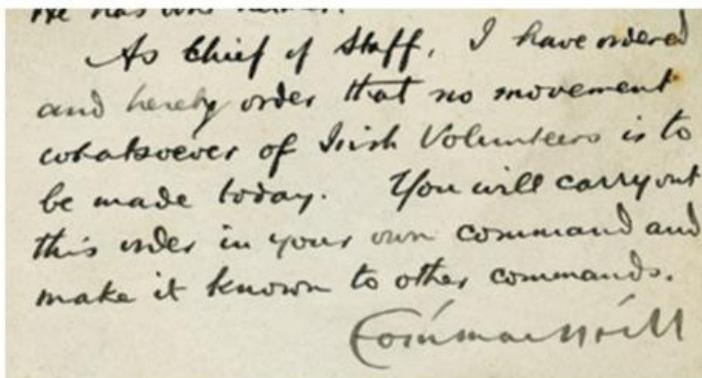
But then you were asked to name a separate plantation you had studied as part of your Junior Cycle and write a paragraph on the changes it had brought about. This would be the "Consequences" part of your 3 C's notes!

Another example from the sample paper was the letter from Eamon deValera to a friend after he had been sentenced to death. It looked like this:

**Question 6**

This question contains extracts from three letters written at the time of the Easter Rising, 1916. Read the letters and answer the questions which follow.

Letter 1: Eoin MacNeill, leader of the Irish Volunteers, to Éamon de Valera on Easter Sunday.



As Chief of Staff, I have ordered and hereby order that no movement whatsoever of Irish Volunteers is to be made today. You will carry out this order in your own command and make it known to other commands.  
Eoin MacNeill

Figure 3: Extract from 2021 SEC Sample Paper JC History

Same layout as before, the first questions were simple comprehension:

1. In Letter 1, what order did MacNeill give to de Valera?

But soon enough, you were digging into your own knowledge for things like:

2. From your study of Easter Week, 1916, why did Eoin MacNeill try to cancel the Easter Rising?

This layout or formula seems to be the main trend of the new paper (we'll let you know if this changes). You will be dealing with lots of sources and then your own "learning-off".

There tends to be more marks for these "outside knowledge" (the stuff you've learned off) questions and so make sure you don't over-rely on the questions relating specifically to the document or picture. Your "outside knowledge" is what's key!

## Essay/Paragraph Questions

As mentioned, these tend to be tacked on as the last part of each section (but this may change after the course is examined a few times). You will be given oceans of space so don't think you have to fill every line but it is important to give as much detail as you can.

### Tip

In general, a good rule of thumb is to think "beginning, middle and end" like you do with English essays!

In History, this is referred to as "causes, course, consequences". So make sure when learning off a certain topic that you can talk about why it started (causes), the main events during it (course) and the main results/effects of it (consequences). You may not always be asked to all 3 but that's how I would advise you to study each topic. A good example of this from the sample paper is when you were asked to name a specific event from the Cold War and give an outline of what happened during it.

## Analysing Sources

The new course places and even greater emphasis on analysing sources (images, documents, letters, speeches etc).

Yes you will be asked basic comprehension questions, as you've seen above, but there will also be times when you will be asked to use the skills of an historian that you've developed over the last 3 years. Your CBA work will also help here.

### Tip

You will need to be able to recognise bias, propaganda, prejudice etc.

On the next page you will find an example to help make this clearer!

Question 8 on the sample paper gave this cartoon from November 1945. It is a comment on relations between the USA (America) and the USSR (Russia) during the early days of the Cold War:

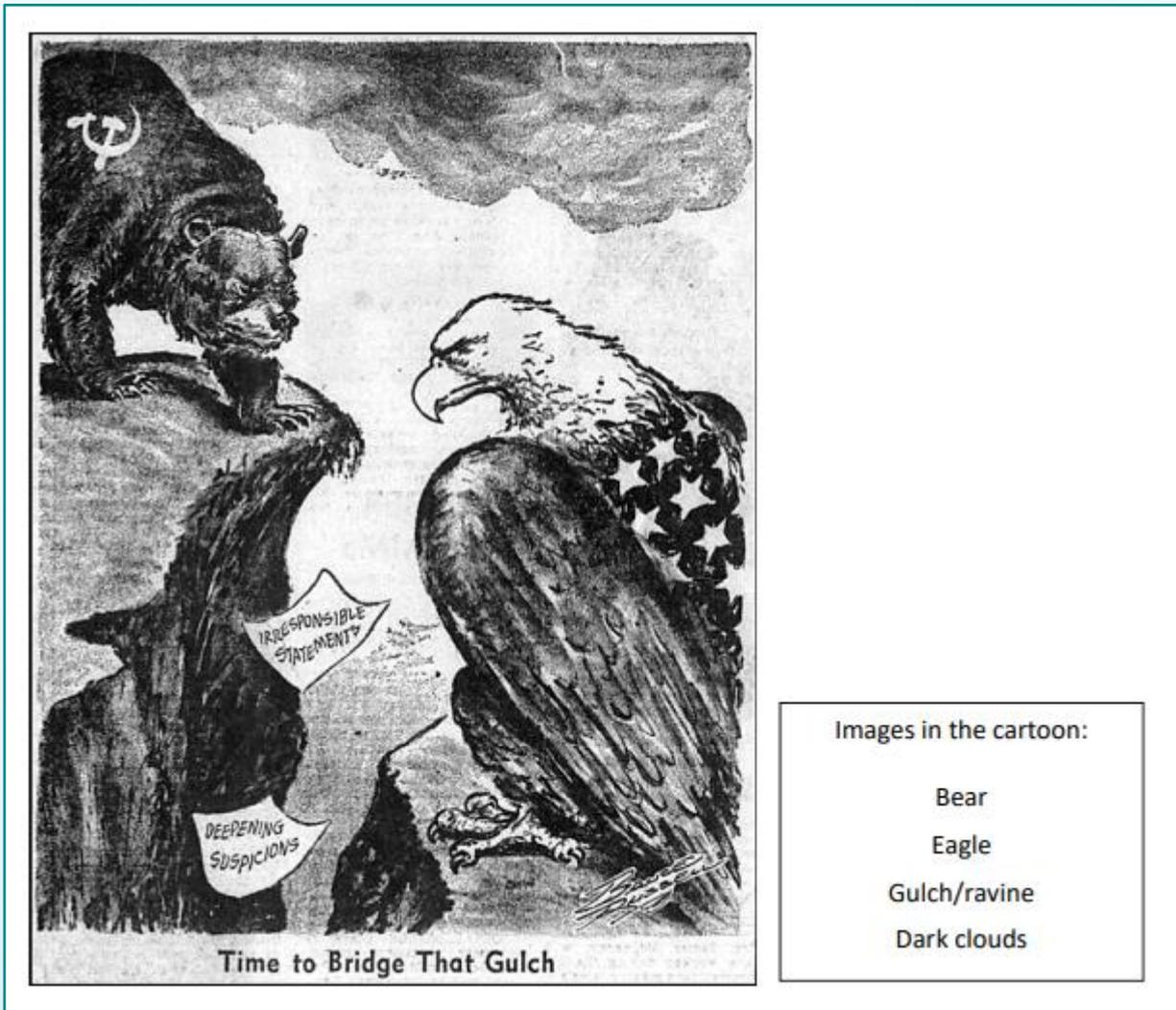


Figure 4: Extract from 2021 SEC Sample Paper JC History

The questions included the following:

1. Do you think that this cartoon is biased or neutral in its portrayal of America's role in the Cold War?
2. Explain your choice, supporting your answer with reference to the cartoon.

And so, with your historian/detective hat on, you would have to look for evidence to prove the bias you think you see. Cartoons/drawings like this tend to show up a lot on papers so it is definitely worth your while having a go at a few of them.

## Helpful Hints

- **Read the questions carefully**, you would be amazed at how easily it is to make mistakes. For example, the sample paper asked you: Describe two challenges that faced Irish Famine emigrants when they arrived in the United States in the mid-1800s. Lots of students answered this as if they were asked “what were the challenges in Ireland that drove people to America”. Stay focussed, read every question at least twice.
- Also, I would strongly recommend **doing the exam in the order that it’s formatted**. This reduces the risk of missing a question.
- If you find you’re asked for 3 of something (3 consequences of WW2), and you can only think of 2, then number your answer 1,2 and leave a blank beside 3 so you know when you’re going **back over your exam**, that you have something unfinished here.
- When studying, you will probably find there are certain topics that can get muddled together. For example, students often mix up facts/events from 1916 Rising, War of Independence and the Civil War. My advice is to **try and visually separate** these in your head. Maybe highlight all of your notes on 1916 in yellow, war of independence in pink etc. Or write them in different colour pens or on different colour sheets. That way, in the exam, you might find it easier to recall, for example, your “pink notes”.
- I’m also a big believer in actually **reading through the paper** before I do it. I always sat back (usually finishing off my lunch!) flicked through the paper for about 3 minutes, read the essay titles, and set to work on the first question! It’s good to read the essay titles before beginning an exam because you’ll subconsciously start thinking about it and recalling all the info.
- **Mid-exam mind maps – big yes**. You’ll have the time, trust me. It takes like 30 seconds, and will shave a couple of seconds off in the long run. Just plan out

your points roughly and refer back to it so you don't go off topic or get stumped.

- When it comes to studying – **exam papers are your friend**. So are marking schemes. Use them often. The marking schemes can shed some light as to how to answer lots of the questions – they are, after all, compiled by history teachers!
- **The key to success in history is to know a lot so that you can write a lot.** It's very much a memory game, but if you watch enough videos online then it soon becomes part of your general knowledge! **Crash Course** runs a great History segment, and there's umpteen really funny blogs online relating to history – not to mention **Horrible Histories!**



Best of luck in the exam!  
You will be great

