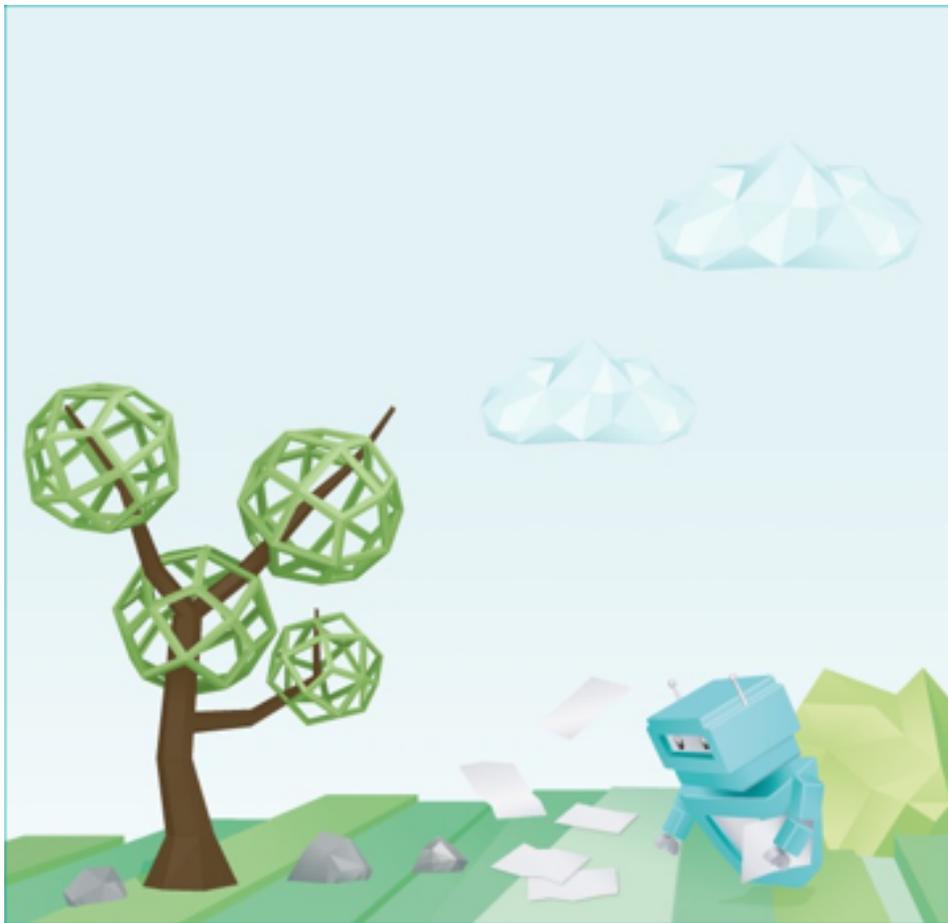


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Politics and Society

How to get an H1 in the Leaving Cert
Politics and Society Exam



by **Sam W.**

Sam W. was a top student in his Politics and Society class. Here, he shares some advice that he believes will help you achieve a H1 in Leaving Cert Politics and Society

In many ways, the Politics and Society course pretty accurately mirrors current affairs. It can be just as disorienting, complex, and occasionally, as downright distressing as the things we watch unfold on television, but it's also totally fascinating and much more engaging and informative than watching the nine o'clock news! I loved Politics for its ability to bring together and explain so many aspects of the world around me. I got a real kick from being free to look into topics I was interested in and applying them to the questions on the exam. However, this freedom often made studying the subject overwhelming, as the content seemed to branch out in all directions. In this guide I hope to advise you on how you can compartmentalise and simplify the Politics paper, making studying (and ultimately, the exam) seem a lot more manageable than it at first appears.

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Short Answer Questions

The first part of the paper is made up of about a dozen multi-part questions which test your knowledge of the key terms, theorists, and topics on the course. The section is worth 50 marks, and there's no reason why anyone can't get full marks once they have the right approach!

- ⊗ **Concise definitions:** I found the best way to tackle the fact-based questions (i.e those which ask you to explain the roles of institutions or explain certain human rights, etc.) was to **learn off the most concise definitions possible**. This makes it easier to remember more of them, and it will help you save valuable writing time. It's also more practical because the allocated space for each answer is quite limited - so **the shorter your definition, the better**.
- ⊗ You'll find these definitions scattered throughout your textbook. My advice would be to **paraphrase to make them more succinct**. This will also help with comprehension and memory retention.
- ⊗ It's important you know as many of these as possible before going into the exam. I always found **flashcards** to be an efficient way of learning them. You can also use apps such as **Quizlet**. Whatever you choose, make sure



you actually study the definitions and know them well enough that you can fly through this section and maximise your marks!

- ☒ **Concise thinkers:** Another question you can be asked is to **summarise a thinker or apply them to a certain issue.** They might show you an image, give you a statement, or ask you to explain the theories of X thinker in relation to Y issue. It's really important to know your thinkers well and to have a broad idea of all the areas of the course each one relates to.
- ☒ Your ability to be concise is tested here too. Thankfully, the key ideas of each thinker can be summed up within a few short

sentences. **Try to summarize the key ideas of each thinker on a flashcard or even a mindmap** and this will make tackling this part of the exam much easier

- ☒ **Concise arguments:** Lastly, you might be asked to briefly argue a statement or discuss the implications of an image. Here, the **point-thinker-statistic-opinion** structure I outline in the discursive essay section of this guide is your best bet for giving the examiner what they want. You're being tested on your ability to critically examine an issue using what you've learnt in Politics and Society, so as long as you **keep it short and grounded in the topics on the course,** you'll have no problems.



Data-Based Questions

This section of the exam is worth 150 marks and is quite manageable if you know what you're doing. Students often don't know where to start with these questions but all you have to do is read carefully and let the critical thinker inside of you take the wheel!

- ☒ **Interpreting statistics:** One of the things you'll likely be asked to do in this section is to draw conclusions from a set of statistics. The good news is that you've been doing this a lot already in your time as a Politics and Society student! All you have to do here is read the source material really carefully and **make sure you understand exactly what the figures relate to, as only then will you be able to understand their implications.**
- ☒ **Don't over complicate these questions for yourself** - most of the time the answer is immediately obvious. Look out for questions that require you to compare the sources or the information they contain as these usually carry more marks, but in order to get them, you'll have to make sure you reference both documents in your answer.
- ☒ **Showing media literacy:** Media literacy is a key part of Politics and Society, and this section is an excellent opportunity to show



that you know what it means and why it's important. The first thing you should do when tackling this section is to **look for the sources of the documents**. They'll always be there somewhere even if they aren't immediately obvious. Knowing exactly where the information comes from is important and you could well be asked about the reliability of the source.

- ☒ This last bit is where the **definitions from the media section of the course** will come in handy. By knowing the difference between traditional and new media, digital and print media, a broadsheet and a tabloid, you'll be able to answer

any questions the examiner has about the quality of a source.

- ☒ **The Short Essay:** The short essay is another tricky exercise in brevity. You'll have limited time and space in which to complete it, but it is relatively easy to do it in the allocated time and do it well once you follow the point-thinker-statistic-opinion structure: **make your point, support it with a theory from one of the sixteen political theorists on your course as well as some statistical evidence, and finally, round it off with your own opinion.**
- ☒ It's a good idea to **make use of the statistics provided to you in the documents, as the topic of**



the short essay and the information in the documents will most likely be closely linked. I'd also advise chucking in a statistic of your own for good measure. Like any essay, this one needs a **quick introduction and conclusion** so make sure to outline your points at the

beginning and put a lid on them at the end, even if there are only two or three of them this time. Other than that, this question functions just like a miniature version of the discursive essays, which I'll guide you through in the next section!



Discursive Essays

For many, the discursive essay section of the Politics paper is the most daunting of all. It's different to any of the essays you'll find yourself writing in your other subjects, and sometimes the seemingly endless range of topics and issues on which you can be asked is often overwhelming. All of that, *and* they're each worth 100 marks. However, like any question, there's always a way around it. Below is a useful framework for tackling this section of the exam.

The Introduction:

- ☒ In an essay, **first impressions are really important**. Your opening paragraph should show the examiner that you have a complete understanding of the topic being discussed and that you have a clear idea of how you're going to go about discussing it.
- ☒ I've always found that the best way to demonstrate understanding is to **define the issue**. By picking out keywords from the title and defining them in your own words, **you'll have a better chance of staying on track throughout**. You'll also show the examiner that you most definitely know what you're on about, giving your arguments that nice cushion of credibility.
- ☒ Once you've done this, you can **briefly list the arguments you're going to cover in the body of your essay**. You don't have to go into too much detail here - simply identifying each angle you're going to cover will be sufficient. Remember



though, this is a discursive essay. It's important that **the arguments you include cover both sides of the issue**, regardless of how strongly you agree with one or the other.

Making a point:

- ☒ Now that you've defined your issue and outlined your approach, you're going to make your first point. The point you make should be **crystal clear** from the first sentence of your paragraph, clearly showing the examiner what to expect from this section of your essay.
- ☒ Your essay is going to be made up of four or five of these 'points' so I find it's best to do **one per paragraph and to alternate between a point that argues for the statement and one which argues against it.**

Know your thinkers

- ☒ Believe it or not, the thinkers are your best friends when writing your discursive essays. Locke, Hobbes, etc. all appear on the course because they champion one big idea, and by knowing these ideas well and reading the question carefully, you'll be able to work out which of your key thinkers could be applied to the question.
- ☒ **Using one thinker per paragraph is an excellent way of keeping yourself on task.** I'd advise linking every point you make to a similar point made by one of the thinkers on the course.



- ☒ It's best to use at least two thinkers in your essay - **one who defends the point made in the question and one who opposes it**, but if you get the opportunity to pop a few in on each side of your argument, then by all means do! They'll only serve to bolster your argument. I also recommend collecting a couple of ideas from theorists that aren't on the course, as an examiner will look very favourably on this.

Statistics:

- ☒ To make a point is one thing, but being able to back it up is quite another. This is where your statistics come in: it's well worth memorising some general facts and figures around each of your key topics.
- ☒ It's a good idea to **pop one stat into each paragraph to back up any point you're making**, but make sure you're **explaining the significance of your fact or figure and not just throwing it in for the sake of it**.
- ☒ There's no need to find overly specific examples - statistics are most useful when they're multi-purpose.
- ☒ It's vital that you also cite your sources. You also need to make sure that they're credible. Again, it's better to go big and get your numbers from somewhere like the CSO than less reliable and more specific sources.

Adding your opinion:



- ☒ Now that you've made your point and backed it up, you can finally throw in one of those opinions two years of politics and society has no doubt provided you with! Finishing a paragraph with a nice refutation of a point you don't agree with or a word in support of one you do is a nice way to close off a section of your essay.
- ☒ To keep things coherent, it's **best to stick to favouring the side which you plan to come out in support of in your conclusion.**

Sticking to the question:

- ☒ While you're piling all of the above into your paragraphs, it's important to make sure you're staying on task. By **recycling a couple of the words from the question in each of your opening sentences, you'll show the examiner that you're arguing the issue they've asked you about** and not the one you wanted to be asked about. Explaining the significance of your chosen theorists and statistics with reference to the question will ensure that you never stray too far from the task at hand.

Writing a good conclusion:

- ☒ A solid conclusion will be the cherry on top of any good essay. Here, you'll want to briefly **go back over your arguments and clarify which you believe to be the stronger side.**



- ☒ Concisely summing up why you believe one side of your argument to be more compelling than the other is always tricky, so I'd advise **deciding on which side you'll come out in favour of before you begin writing and that you subtly push that side a little harder in the body of your essay.** This will make your conclusion almost self-evident by the time you get around to making it.
- ☒ With that complete, all that remains is to finish with a bang. I always liked to **end with a short and snappy slogan** or better still with **a quote from a thinker** as it will stick in the head of your examiner when they're totting up your marks.

Last tips:

- ☒ The most important thing to remember is that this is a discursive essay: you're tasked with **providing both sides of an argument in the body of your essay, subtly pointing to which side you believe is more compelling and then coming to a clear conclusion in your final paragraph.** It's a tricky balancing act but by following the progression I've outlined above (point - thinker - stats - opinion) and being decisive in your conclusion, you can't go too far wrong!



Active Citizenship Project

This part of the subject is all about putting what you've learnt into practice. It closely resembles a more extensive version of the C.S.P.E. project you'd have done for Junior Cert, only this time you're better equipped to decide on and carry out an action. Though the topics and approaches will change every year, the following is the advice I'd give to anyone tackling the project.

- ☒ It's best to **pick the topic which piques your interest**, that way you stand a better chance of enjoying the process, something which will be obvious to anyone reading your write up.
- ☒ Working in a group is helpful as it opens up a whole new area to write about in your reflection. Choose your colleagues wisely and make sure you're all on the same page!
- ☒ Though the project is marked entirely on the write up, **don't neglect the action component** - it's easier to write about something that actually happened than to make it all up. **Don't be afraid to think outside the box and try something different** - it'll help you stand out to your examiner!
- ☒ **Make a note of everything you do**, even what you did wrong -



remember, you'll still get marks for admitting to making mistakes.

- ☒ **Read the bit at the start of the project booklet carefully before you start your write up.** It's important to understand that they're marking you on planning and reflection as much as on action.

- ☒ Remember to **regularly reference the politics course.** Any examiner will be delighted to see you throw in a thinker here and a key term there. It's all about showing you understand the subject and its implications.



Timing

As is the case with most exams, managing your time properly is key. Here is a rough outline of my suggested approach.

? I would recommend spending **five minutes reading through the paper at the beginning of the exam**. You should pick your two discursive essays at this stage and create a small mindmap of ideas for each one. I suggest picking the essays which jump out at you as being the easiest to argue but remember also that you have to be able to defend both sides of any essay you pick.

? Personally, I think it's a good idea to **start with the short questions** in order to get the definitions you

have rote-learned off my chest. By starting with this section you also get to **refresh your memory on some of the key ideas**, which you can then use in your essays. Make sure you don't spend too long on this section - I would suggest giving yourself **20 minutes maximum**.

? With those finished, I'd advise **skipping straight to the discursive essays**. Whether you want to do one before the documents section and one after or both before is up to you, but I always find that once I'm in the



essay zone, I'm there to stay until the job is done! **Each essay should take you no more than 35 minutes.** They don't have to be crazy long, all they need to do is discuss the statement sufficiently.

? I would then finish with the documents. Take **45 minutes** to read through them thoroughly, answer the questions, and do the mini essay. Don't rush through the questions, as **each one can be worth up to 20 marks.** Word your answers carefully and you stand an excellent chance of picking up most if not all of the marks. Give a bit more thought to those that force you to consider both sources as they tend to carry more marks. The mini essay

at the end of this question is worth 50 marks so it's a good idea to **leave yourself 20 minutes of the 45 to do it properly.**

? This should leave you with ten minutes to read back over the paper. Don't be afraid to pop some clarifications in the margins if your essays make less sense upon second reading than they did when you were writing them - the examiner will mark it all.

? My final and possibly most important piece of advice to anyone sitting the exam is to **get interested, get opinionated, and stay informed.** Politics is a subject that rewards those who commit to it. If you have a genuine interest in the topics



you're writing about, this subject will also be infinitely easier. Stay on top of the news, understand the issues in the world around

you, and the rest is all about coherent presentation and a little bit of memory work!





*Best of luck in
the exam! You
will be great.*

