Examination Conventions Preliminary 2026

Examination Conventions for History,
Ancient and Modern History,
History and Economics,
History and English,
History and Modern Languages, and
History and Politics
in the Preliminary Examination 2026

1. Introduction

These conventions have been approved by the Board of the Faculty of History and the Boards of the Faculties of Classics, Economics, English Language and Literature, Medieval and Modern Languages, and Politics and International Relations. Examination conventions are the formal record of the specific assessment standards for the course or courses to which they apply. They set out how examined work will be marked and how the resulting marks will be used to arrive at a final result and classification of an award.

2. Rubrics for Individual Papers

2.1 History Papers

The following papers will be examined by three-hour timed written live examinations taken in Examination Schools. **The European and World History papers is a typed exam rather than hand-written.** Candidates who are unable to type and need to have an alternative mode of completion from the one set for European and World History papers, can apply via their college through the exam adjustments process**.**

HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ISLES PAPERS

This rubric applies to all History of the British Isles papers; any exceptions are noted below	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions, and **COMPLETE** all their answers.

	HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ISLES PAPERS (in date order)	
A16139H1	The History of the British Isles from 300 to 1100	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions and **COMPLETE** all their answers. They should demonstrate an understanding of broad developments within the period and avoid

		undue narrowness of focus. They may also note that the Regulations define the history of the British Isles as 'the history of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and of other territories in so far as they are specifically connected with the History of Britain'.

EUROPEAN AND WORLD HISTORY PAPERS

This rubric applies to all European and World History papers; any exceptions are noted below	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions, and **COMPLETE** all their answers.

	EUROPEAN AND WORLD HISTORY PAPERS (in date order)	
A18359P1	European and World History from 1000 to 1300: Communities, Connections and Confrontations	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions and **COMPLETE** all their answers. Questions marked with an asterisk (*) may be answered with reference to any part of the period and, where relevant, to any part of the world.
A16145P1	European and World History from 1400 to 1650 (Renaissance, Recovery and Reform)	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions and **COMPLETE** all their answers. Each question should be taken from a different section.

OPTIONAL SUBJECT PAPERS

This rubric applies to all Optional subject papers; any exceptions are noted below	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions and **COMPLETE** all their answers. They should illustrate their answers, as far as possible, by reference to the prescribed authorities.

	OPTIONAL SUBJECT PAPERS (in order of paper code)	
A10055H1	Optional Subject: The World of Homer and Hesiod	Candidates must answer **Question 1** and **TWO** other questions.
A10056H1	Optional Subject: Augustan Rome	Candidates must answer **Question 1** and **TWO** other questions.
A10171H1	Optional Subject: Theories of the State (Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx)	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions and **COMPLETE** all their answers. They should demonstrate knowledge of **AT LEAST THREE** prescribed authors, and should illustrate their answers, as far as possible, by reference to the prescribed texts.

PAPER IV PAPERS

This rubric applies to all Paper IV papers; any exceptions are noted below	Candidates must answer **Question 1** and **TWO** other questions and **COMPLETE** their answers.

A10180H1	Paper IV: Approaches to History	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions chosen from **TWO OR MORE** sections (A-G) of the paper and **COMPLETE** all their answers. Candidates are encouraged to answer questions with reference to specific studies or examples.
A10181H1	Paper IV: Historiography: Tacitus to Weber	Candidates must answer **THREE** questions and **COMPLETE** all their answers. They should demonstrate knowledge of **AT LEAST THREE** authors studied in this paper. Questions 15 to 18 should be answered by reference to **AT LEAST TWO** authors.
A10182H1	Paper IV Foreign Texts: Herodotus	Candidates must answer **Question 1** and **TWO** other questions.
A10183H1	Paper IV Foreign Texts: Einhard and Asser	Candidates must answer **QUESTIONS 1 and 2** and **ONE** other question and **COMPLETE** all their answers.
A10189W1	Paper IV: Quantification in History	Candidates must answer a total of **FOUR QUESTIONS** and **COMPLETE** all their answers. Candidates should complete answers to **TWO** questions from Section 1 and **TWO** questions from Section 2. There are five questions in Section 1 and four questions in Section 2. All questions are of equal value. Show your complete workings. Give results with two decimal places. Calculations may be rounded to two decimal places. Unless otherwise stated, the alpha level = 0.05. Useful formulae and statistical tables will be found at the end of the paper. Electronic calculators may be used but **remember to show your complete workings.**

3. Marking conventions

3.1 University scale for standardized expression of agreed final marks

Agreed final marks for individual papers will be expressed using the following scale:

70-100	Distinction
40-69	Pass
0-39	Fail

3.2 Qualitative criteria for different types of assessment

The following criteria will be used in marking the three-hour question papers.

EXAM QUESTIONS are assessed on the following criteria:

Engagement	directness of engagement with the question. range of issues addressed. depth, complexity, and sophistication of comprehension of issues and implications of the question. effective and appropriate use of historical imagination and intellectual curiosity.
Argument	coherence, control, and independence of argument. conceptual and analytical precision. flexibility: discussion of a variety of views.
Evidence	Depth, precision, detail, range and relevance of evidence cited. Accuracy of facts. Understanding of historical debate. Critical engagement with primary and/or secondary sources.
Organisation & Presentation	Clarity and coherence of structure. Clarity and fluency of prose. Correctness of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

These criteria inform the following mark-bands:

FHS: I **Prelim:** **Distinction**	**86-100**	Answers will be so outstanding that they could not imaginably be better within the time constraints of the exercise. These marks will be used very rarely, for work that shows remarkable originality and sophistication in putting forward persuasive and well-supported new ideas, or making unexpected connections.
	80-85	Answers receiving marks in this range will be of consistently excellent quality across all criteria, and will be both distinctive and thought-provoking in their argument and/or approach. Answers will be above and beyond the examiner's expectations of an Oxford student.
	75-79	Answers will be of the highest quality that an examiner might reasonably expect from a candidate within the time constraints inherent in the exercise. Although there may be some limitations in terms of scope and originality relative to responses which receive 80+, answers will be excellent overall, and be characterised by sophisticated engagement with the issues, real analytical depth, factual precision and detail, and independence of argument, as well as strong, incisive engagement with evidence and historical debate, and clarity and coherence of presentation.
	70-74	First Class marks should be awarded to answers that are consistently impressive across all criteria, and that show strong knowledge, analytical skills, and judgement indicating a highly able undergraduate historian. Answers in this range will make a clear, detailed, and fully-supported argument, demonstrate nuance, and be thoughtfully constructed. Compared to responses awarded marks of 75+, they may be less imaginative in their handling of the question, less wide-ranging in scope and/or achieve less depth of detail, and be structured in a way which is effective and efficient rather than impressive and incisive.
FHS: II.1 **Prelim:Pass**	**65-69**	Answers in the upper-II:1 range will be of above average quality across all criteria, and very clearly so where marks just below 70 are awarded. They must exhibit some essential features: addressing the question directly and relevantly across a good range of issues; offering a clear argument involving consideration of alternative interpretations; and substantiating their argument with accurate use of relevant evidence and contextualization in historical debate, within a structure which has been well thought through. They will, though, fall short of First Class quality because their handling of some of the material is uneven, because the writing loses focus or momentum at times, or because the analysis is good rather than genuinely impressive. Essays which are very competent but which lack distinctive qualities in terms of argument and analysis may be placed at the lower end of this band.

	60-64	Answers which the examiners consider to be of average quality across most criteria should be placed in this band. The candidate must show consistent competence by answering the question, demonstrating sound analytical skills based upon a good level of knowledge, and a discernible level of argument, prioritisation and problematisation. Answers will show many similar characteristics to those of above average quality, but will tend to exhibit less ambition, range, depth, precision, knowledge and perhaps clarity.
FHS: II.2 **Prelim:Pass**	**50-59**	Answers toward the top of the II:2 band will be of reasonable quality, showing some specific knowledge and attention to the question that has been asked, and will otherwise be competent across at least some of the criteria. Lower II:2 answers will cover fewer of the criteria, and/or do so less competently. They may talk around the question rather than answering it, or they may seem to be answering a different question than the one set. They will nonetheless exhibit some positive qualities in their presentation of evidence and analysis. Answers will be put in this band if there is limited focus on the specifics of the question, and if there is minimal, undeveloped argument or very limited or inaccurate use of evidence. Answers may have a 'by numbers' quality, fail to identify specific evidence – or misunderstand the evidence in a way that is manifest – be either too narrow or too general, or be characterised by unsubstantiated assertion rather than argument based on evidence. Answers which are too short or written in a very unclear way are also likely to fall into this band.
FHS: III **Prelim:Pass**	**40-49**	Answers will cover only some of the criteria, and/or will do so only very partially, but will exhibit some vestiges of the qualities required, such as the ability to see the point of the question, to deploy information, or to offer some elements of an argument. Such qualities will not be displayed at a high level or consistently, and will be marred by irrelevance, incoherence, error and poor organization and presentation.
FHS: Pass **Prelim:** **Fail (Retake)**	**30-39**	These marks will be used very rarely, for scripts that display almost no knowledge or understanding of the salient issues and which fail to cover any of the criteria. They will be marred by high levels of factual error and irrelevance, generalization and lack of information, and poor organization and presentation.
FHS: Fail	**<30**	Scripts will fail to exhibit any of the required qualities. Candidates who fail to observe rubrics and rules beyond what the marking-schemes allow for may also be failed.

3.3 Verification and reconciliation of marks

Each script is marked by one examiner or assessor. Scripts may be scrutinized by the Board of Examiners for any of the following reasons:

a) The original assessor has requested further scrutiny
b) One or more questions on the exam script are short-weight
c) The candidate has failed to comply with the rubric
d) The candidate has a SpLD
e) The candidate made a Mitigating Circumstances application
f) The mark is out of line with the candidate's other papers
g) The mark is below 50
h) The assessor was new
i) The candidate is on a borderline and has one paper marked 70 or more and one or two papers marked 68 or 69; or has two papers marked 70 or more and one paper marked 59; or has two papers marked 70 or more but an average mark of less than 67.

3.4 Scaling

The Examiners may choose to scale marks where in their academic judgement:

a) a paper was more difficult or easy than in previous years, and/or
b) an optional paper was more or less difficult than other optional papers taken by students in a particular year, and/or
c) a paper has generated a spread of marks which are not a fair reflection of student performance on the University's standard scale for the expression of agreed final marks, i.e. the marks do not reflect the qualitative marks descriptors.

Such scaling is used to ensure that candidates' marks are not advantaged or disadvantaged by any of these situations. In each case, examiners will establish if they have sufficient evidence for scaling. Scaling will only be considered and undertaken after moderation of a paper has been completed, and a complete run of marks for all papers is available.

If it is decided that it is appropriate to use scaling, the examiners will review a sample of papers either side of the classification borderlines to ensure that the outcome of scaling is consistent with academic views of what constitutes an appropriate performance within each class.

Detailed information about why scaling was necessary and how it was applied will be included in the Examiners' report and the algorithms used will be published for the information of all examiners and students.

3.5 Short-weight convention and departure from rubric

A mark of zero shall be awarded for any part or parts of questions that have not been answered by a candidate, but which should have been answered.

Omission of an entire question – the completed questions will be marked, and then the overall mark awarded as the average of those marks multiplied by the fraction of the paper completed (i.e. ⅔ in the case of one essay missing from a three-essay paper).

Failure to complete an essay or question in full – the assessor will mark the question on its merits (factoring in its brevity) and calculate an average mark as usual from all the questions attempted.

All short-weight cases will be reviewed by the Board and the comment sheets will be scrutinised to ensure that all cases are being treated consistently.

Departure from rubric: where a candidate has failed to answer a compulsory question, or failed to answer the required number of questions in different sections, the complete script will be marked and the issue flagged. The board of examiners will consider all such cases so that consistent penalties are applied.

3.6 Penalties for non-attendance

Failure to attend an examination will result in the failure of the assessment. The mark for any resit of the assessment will be capped at a pass.

3.7 Penalties for poor academic practice and plagiarism

The Examination Board shall deal wholly with cases of poor academic practice where the material under review is small and does not exceed 10% of the whole.

If the material affected concerns more than 10% of the whole piece of work or more than poor academic practice, the Chair must refer the case to the Proctors, summarising the extent and seriousness of the plagiarism and including the relevant sources.

4. Progression rules and classification conventions

4.1 Qualitative descriptors of classes

[See descriptors and mark bands under item 3.2 above.]

4.2 Classification rules

In the Preliminary Examination in History, Ancient and Modern History, History and Economics, History and English, and History and Politics, each item in the assessment is given equal weight, and counts as one paper. In the Preliminary Examination in History and Modern Languages, each item of assessment is given equal weight and counts as one paper.

Classification in History and all joint schools except History and Modern Languages

The rules for classification are as follows:

Distinction:	Average mark of 67 or greater. At least two marks of 70 or above. No mark below 60.
Pass:	Agreed marks of 40 and above on all four papers.
Partial Pass (Retake):	Any one, two, or three papers with an agreed mark of less than 40.
Fail (Retake):	All four papers with marks of less than 40.

Before finally confirming its classifications, the Examining Board may take such steps as it considers appropriate to reconsider the cases of candidates whose marks are very close to a borderline, or in some way anomalous, and to satisfy themselves that the candidates concerned are correctly classified in accordance with the criteria specified in these Conventions.

In the joint school of History and Modern Languages:

Distinction:	History: one mark of 70 or above, no mark below 64 Modern Languages: an average of 70
Pass:	Agreed marks of 40 and above on all papers.
Fail (Retake):	One or more papers with a mark of less than 40.

Candidates will receive an average mark for their two history papers, and a separate average mark for their four language papers.

4.3 Progression rules

No candidate shall be admitted to the Final Honour School of History or the joint schools with History unless he or she has *either* passed or been exempted from the First Public Examination *or* has successfully completed the Foundation Course in History at the Department of Continuing Education *or* has Senior Student status.

5. Resits

Failure to attend an examination (without good reason, such as illness) will result in the failure of the assessment. If a candidate has missed an examination through illness, their college must report this to the Proctors as soon as possible. In this case, the candidate may sit the examination/s missed in September for the first time – this does not count as a re-sit.

Any candidate gaining a mark below 40 in any paper or papers in the Preliminary Examination may be permitted to resit that paper or papers in the Long Vacation. Resits usually take place in the first two weeks of September. The mark for any resit of the assessment will be capped at a pass.

6. Mitigating Circumstances

Where a candidate or candidates have made a submission, under Part 13 of the Regulations for Conduct of University Examinations, that unforeseen circumstances may have had an impact on their performance in an examination, a subset of the board (the 'Mitigating Circumstances Panel') will meet to discuss the individual. The Panel will evaluate, on the basis of the information provided to it, the relevance of the circumstances to examinations and assessment, the strength of the evidence provided in support and the extent of the impact. The Panel will also note whether all or a subset of papers were affected, being aware that it is possible for circumstances to have different levels of impact on different papers. The board of examiners will separately consider whether and how to adjust a candidate's results as a result of the mitigating circumstances, taking into account both the Panel's considerations of the notice(s) and the scripts/submissions and marks.

7. Details of examiners and rules on communicating with examiners

Hannah Skoda (Chair)
Filippo de Vivo (Secretary)
Meleisa Ono-George
Sarah Mortimer
Kate Lebow
Conor O'Brien

Candidates **should not under any circumstances** seek to make contact with individual examiners.