

IGCSE American History (0409)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the aim of the course?

The course gives students the opportunity to discover how the U.S.A. evolved by studying the History of America from the mid-18th Century to the start of the 21st Century.

How is the course structured?

There are three components, all compulsory

- Paper 1: The Making of a Nation - worth 45% of the total mark.
- Paper 2: Defining Moments - worth 35% of the total mark.
- Paper 3: History Around Us - worth 20% of the total mark (coursework).

What does the taught course cover?

Called 'The Making of a Nation', the teaching syllabus is a broad outline course built around four themes:

- Government and People
- Who are Americans?
- Economic and Social Change
- America and the World

The syllabus for each theme is set out around a series of Key Questions, Focus Points and Specified Content.

What is the purpose of the Key Questions in each Theme?

The Key Questions have three purposes:

1. They define the significant questions around which teaching and learning need to focus, and around which the examination questions will be developed.
2. They encourage an investigative approach to the taught course. The curriculum content should be studied through critical inquiry and open debate. The syllabus prioritises breadth of understanding. That is why the Key Questions are framed as open questions.
3. They allow teachers maximum use of their professional judgement, giving teachers as much autonomy as possible in deciding what they teach their students.

The Key Questions need to form the core of a Centre's teaching plan.

What is the purpose of the Focus Points for each Key Question?

The Focus points provide guidance on what should be studied for each Key Question.

What is the purpose of the Specified Content for each Focus Point?

The Specified Content defines what should be understood for each Focus Point.

How many Themes should I teach?

All four need to be taught. They lock together to give students a coherent understanding of the History of the U.S.A. and define the examination syllabus for Papers 1 and 2.

The syllabus is a coherent single course, not a series of separate topics. Every topic has some links to others – that is the nature of History. Students need to be aware of such connections and influences, and show this in their answers, using examples to support their arguments. Material from one Theme may be very relevant when answering a question in a different section on a different Theme, and candidates should always be encouraged to make such connections to see the coherent whole.

How is the course divided between Papers 1 and 2?

The course is a coherent single course and everything is tested in Paper 1. Every year, however, two topics are set for in-depth study in Paper 2 (Defining Moments). These two topics change every year and are notified in the syllabus two years ahead.

How many Defining Moments topics should I teach (Paper 2)?

We recommend that one of the two topics is taught. Each topic involves historical inquiry in depth into a specific aspect of U.S. History, using original sources. That will take time, especially since the course for that topic will need to be taught through regular use of source material and will need an additional focus on developing skills in source analysis.

What are the start and end dates of the course?

The course for each theme begins in 1754. Teachers might wish to spend a short time setting the scene with a little background, but this should be kept very brief. No question will be set that assumes any understanding of events or issues pre-1754.

The course ends in 2000, except for Theme 4 (America and the World) which ends in 2010.

All date ranges given in the curriculum content are inclusive.

How should a teacher teach the course for Paper 1?

The syllabus is designed as a series of critical enquiries so whatever teaching approach is chosen it must encourage active learning. The syllabus is set out as a series of questions, not as a list of content. All teaching needs as its main focus the development of understanding.

The skills of analysis, evaluation and problem-solving are essential for higher marks. In answers, arguments need to be supported with relevant evidence if the case being made is to carry any weight.

How should a teacher teach the course for Paper 2?

Paper 2 requires the same basic approach as Paper 1, with two key additions. The chosen topic needs to be taught using relevant primary source material as much as possible. Students need to feel at home with historical evidence, be familiar with modes of speech/writing of the time, be able to understand it in context and to absorb from it the ideas and attitudes as well as the issues of the time.

Alongside this, students need to be taught skills in source analysis:

- appreciating the nature, origin and purpose of the different types of historical evidence available for the set topic, and
- assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the different types of historical evidence available for the set topic.

Each student must be able to do more than mine source for information, or use them merely for reference. Students must be able to interpret what the sources say (and do not say), to interrogate them and evaluate them, if they are to be able to construct historical accounts.

In this way, students will be so familiar with the various types of evidence available for their Paper 2 topic that they can cope comfortably with the unseen sources in the examination paper Insert. Teachers will thus need to select an appropriate range of primary evidence through which to teach their chosen Paper 2 topic. Modern textbooks include a range of sources and the syllabus' Resources List details various easily obtainable sources.

When are the examinations?

IGCSE American History is available in the May/June series. The dates of the two examinations will be found on Cambridge's Examinations Timetable. Marks for History Around Us coursework (0409/03) have to be submitted to Cambridge by 30 April in the year of the examination.

Candidates may retake Papers 1 and 2 in the following October/November examination series. The two set topics for Paper 2 remain the same for the retake examination. Retaking candidates do not, however, prepare a new History Around Us investigation for Paper 3. The mark obtained in the May/June examination is carried forward.

How is each candidate assessed?

Paper 1: The Making of a Nation - 2 hour external examination marked by Cambridge.

Paper 2: Defining Moments - 1 hour 30 minute external examination marked by Cambridge.

Paper 3: History Around Us - 1400 to 1600 word research coursework marked by the teacher and moderated by Cambridge.

Every question is marked separately. Answers to all questions are marked according to levels of response criteria. The criteria for each level define the top mark of that level. Each answer is placed in the level that best reflects its qualities. The mark within that level is also determined by the specific qualities of the individual answer, using the top of that level as the default starting point. No set answer is looked for.

Apart from the basic factual (a) sub-questions of Papers 1 and 2, all other questions place the emphasis on explanation, analysis, evaluation and judgement. See the specimen papers for examples of question types and styles.

The full range of marks is used as a matter of course. All marking is positive. Marks are not deducted for inaccurate or irrelevant material. Half marks are not used.

How reliable a guide are the specimen papers?

The specimens are a very reliable guide to the sort of questions that will be set:

- questions that test knowledge, understanding, and/or judgement.
- questions that require a candidate to explain something
- questions that require a candidate to analyse and evaluate a problem critically
- questions that require a candidate to weigh the relative importance of a variety of factors and make substantiated judgements
- questions that require a candidate to compare and/or evaluate historical evidence critically
- questions that require a candidate to use both historical evidence and their own knowledge and understanding of a problem to judge it critically.

The specimens are not, however, to be taken literally. They do not show the only question stems, commands and types that will be used, or the precise number of sub-question or the specific mark allocation for such questions. Over time, a good syllabus uses a range of question styles and avoids a formulaic approach.

Are there different tiers for candidates of different abilities?

No. All IGCSE grades (A* - G) are available to all candidates. This allows all candidates to show and be rewarded fully for their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Do candidates write their answers on the question paper?

Paper 1: Yes.

Paper 2: Yes.

How much should a candidate write?

This is always a difficult question to answer. Candidates need to explain themselves clearly and carefully, but also succinctly. Very long answers are not required. For a well-informed and able candidate with average handwriting, the following would be a reasonable expectation:

Paper 1

- each sub-question (a) = 1 paragraph
- each sub-question (b) = 1 side
- each sub-question (c) = 2 sides

Paper 2

- Q1 = 1 paragraph
- Q2 = 1 side
- Q3 = 1 side
- Q4 = 1 side
- Q5 = 2 sides

Do candidates have a choice of questions in the examinations?

Paper 1: Yes. The questions are divided into four sections, one for each Theme. Two questions are set in each section. Candidates have to answer three questions, each chosen from a different section.

Paper 2: No (unless both of the set topics have been studied). All the questions in a topic are compulsory.

Do the examination papers include the use of source material?

Paper 1: No.

Paper 2: Yes. There will be up to seven unseen sources in an accompanying Insert. All will be primary. They may be shortened and may be modified/adapted for IGCSE-level candidates.

Careful reading of one or more sources will be required before each question should be answered. No specific sources will be set for study so each teacher needs to select an appropriate range of primary evidence for the set topic through which to support teaching.

Is it acceptable for students to write their answers as bullet points or notes?

No. All examination answers and coursework must be written in continuous prose.

May students take dictionaries into the examinations?

Yes, if it is a simple translation dictionary. These are allowed in most Cambridge IGCSE examinations. 'Simple translation dictionary' means a dictionary that only translates the word and does not give a translation of the meaning or definition of the word.

How much time should be given to Paper 3?

Teachers should allocate one-fifth of the allocated classroom time to the preparation of the History Around Us coursework because Paper 3 is an integral part of the course, carrying 20% of the marks. The work could be carried out either in one block using all the classroom time for that period or should be undertaken as a parallel activity sharing classroom time while the course for Paper 1 and/or Paper 2 is being taught.

Candidates will need regular access to the internet.

No time needs be allocated to a retaking candidate because the summer examination mark is carried forward.

Who picks the site or object for Paper 3?

Each teacher picks the site or object to be investigated by their students. All the students in one class should investigate the same site or object.

Where does the sources pack for Paper 3 come from?

Each teacher puts together the sources pack for their students, based on the site or object that they have chosen.

Where do the questions for Paper 3 come from?

Each teacher sets the questions for their students, based on the site or object that they have chosen.

What help is available to teachers in preparing the coursework task for their students?

For guidance on how to choose a site/object, how to set a series of effective questions, and how to select an appropriate set of sources, see the syllabus and *Paper 3 History Around Us: How to prepare the Coursework*. Included in this is an exemplar sources pack.

Once teachers have chosen their site/object, drawn up their questions and assembled their sources pack, they are encouraged to email their draft scheme with a covering rationale to Cambridge for advice from a Consultant (international@cie.org.uk). For further details, please see *Paper 3 History Around Us: How to Prepare the Coursework*.

Can teachers use/adapt the suggested materials and questions provided in *Paper 3 History Around Us: How to prepare the Coursework*?

Yes, if they wish, provided they add a few more 'primary' sources, maybe from local newspapers/photo collections. This document uses sources available on the Internet; teachers should be able to locate more sources locally.

What is the teacher's role while the coursework is being researched and written?

Students need to be prepared for the coursework by their teacher. The main issues surrounding the chosen site/object should be explained in outline. The skills of using sources and of source evaluation, and how to cite sources, should be taught, as should how historians judge significance.

After that, the teacher takes on the role of a supervisor. Cambridge expects candidates to work under the continuing guidance and supervision of their teacher(s). Guidance on the role of the teacher is set out in the syllabus.

How long should a coursework inquiry be?

Work should be between 1,400 and 1,600 words long, excluding only the compulsory bibliography and footnotes (which may only be used for the citation of quotations). Work beyond 1,600 words will be excluded from the assessment.

What ensures the authenticity of submitted coursework?

Candidates may all be working on the same site/object, but they must carry out their work individually. Coursework must be the candidate's own work. Each candidate will be required to sign a declaration to that effect when the work is submitted.

Enough must be carried out under supervision to enable the teacher to authenticate the work as the candidate's own, counter-signing the candidate's declaration.

Who marks Paper 3?

The teacher(s) in each centre mark the work of their own students using the generic marking criteria in the syllabus. Marks are sent to Cambridge by 30 April. Cambridge moderates each centre's marking.

What format is required for the submitted coursework?

Coursework should be word processed by the candidate, in Arial or Times New Roman font using a font size of 11 or 12, with margins left, right, top and bottom.

Bibliography: There must be a bibliography listing every source used (article, book, museum board, web page, etc.), set out in alphabetical order by author's surname.

Footnotes: All quotations must be acknowledged in footnotes, giving full details of the book/website/etc. being quoted. These may be put at the bottom of each page or listed together at the end.

Does IGCSE American History count towards the ICE Group Award?

Yes. As a full Cambridge IGCSE, American History counts towards the Cambridge International Certificate of Education (ICE). American History is in Group II (Humanities and Social Sciences).