HSIE – Geography
Exam Preparation transcript

(Duration 29 minutes 54 seconds)

Welcome to the HSC hub presentation for geography. This presentation will take approximately 25 minutes to view. A supplementary document with key details from this presentation is also available to view or print. Before we commence proceedings, I would like to pay my respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this meeting takes place, and also pay respect to Elders both past and present.

Welcome to this HSIE HSC hub video for geography. This recording is designed to introduce the exam layout and structure and to provide some tips on preparing for the exam. Each section of the examination will be explained with reference to the 2019 paper, questions, and feedback from the marking centre.

Before the exam day, download the HSC timetable and highlight all of your exams. The 2020 examination timetable has already been released and can be found on the NESA website. This year, the geography exam is scheduled for day 13, Thursday, the 5th of November. The exam commences at 9:25 a.m. and students should arrive to the exam venue 30 minutes prior to the commencement time. Plan your revision schedule to match up with your exams. You should already have a regular study routine that you are following to keep up with your coursework. Continue to study and revise each of your subjects. However, in the days before your exams, you may need to give a little more emphasis to the exams you will complete first. As you complete exams, the time you would have spent on those subjects can then be added allocated to the exams yet to come.

Get a good night's sleep before each exam. Late nights will harm your performance. Last minute cramming is okay, but not at the expense of sleep. Your brain needs time to rest and you'll be able to engage better with the questions if you are not physically and mentally exhausted. Eat your breakfast and remain hydrated. Studies have shown that eating a healthy high protein breakfast and remaining hydrated during the exam will help you improve your examination results. Make sure that you have all of your equipment ready. Pack it up in a clear plastic pencil case or a plastic sleeve the night before so you aren't rushing and forget something on the morning of the exam. This is particularly important in the geography exam, where there are a large number of materials permitted into your exam room.

Materials. What can you bring to the exam? NESA allows a number of items to be brought into all HSC examinations. These include a black pen, please bring spares, black is important as exam papers are scanned to allow for on screen marking and lighter coloured pens may make reading your response difficult. The instructions on the front of the examination paper clearly state that responses should be written in black. A ruler. These are allowed in all exams but necessary in geography for measurement and completion of some skills based questions. Highlighters may be helpful in identifying directive verbs or key terms in the question. 2B pencils, for completing diagrams, but also for marking your responses in the multiple choice section of the paper. Again, 2B pencils are read most easily by the scanners, so please make sure that you use the right pencil. Bring a sharpener in case the pencil breaks. A bottle of water is also permitted in the exam room, however, it does need to be in a clear plastic bottle.

A number of additional items are permitted for the geography exam. A NESA approved calculator, make sure that you check on the NESA website for the approved list for the 2020/2021 HSC period. Simply Google NESA approved calculators and make sure that you have the 2020/2021 list. A pair of dividers and a pair of compasses, both used for measurement. A protractor which is essential when you're calculating bearings. Coloured pencils and/or felt pens are helpful if you're asked to complete a diagram, or if you wish to include an illustration to support your answer. A magnifying glass is optional, but can help you see the finer details of topographic maps included in the stimulus booklet. They can be difficult to see and the magnifying glass allows for you to see the finer detail. A piece of string or thread is also optional, but again can be useful when we're making measurements. Particularly if you're asked to calculate distance along a curved road or waterway, it may be actually easier to do this using the string technique.

Exam layout. In geography, the exam consists of three sections. Section one is multiple choice, which includes 20 questions, each with an equal value of one mark. A total of 20 marks may be awarded in this section. Section two consists of short answer questions. This includes five questions with multiple parts. For each question, marks may range from three to 12 marks. A total of 40 marks may be awarded in this section. Section three, extended responses. Students select two questions from the three provided. Each question has an equal value of 20 marks and a total of 40 marks may be awarded in this section. A stimulus booklet is provided, which contains multiple sources that will be referred to throughout the exam paper. The total examination time is three hours and five minutes. The first five minutes is allocated to reading time. During this time, you will not be able to write or mark your paper in any way. Use this time to ensure that you have each of the sections and that no pages are missing from your exam booklet. You should also ensure that you have a copy of the stimulus booklet, and several writing booklets that you will use for your extended responses. At the end of reading time, you will have three hours writing time. During this time, you are to complete the paper to the best of your ability. Follow the directions at the beginning of each section to ensure that you remain on track to complete the paper within this set time. It's good to note that once you leave the exam room, you will not be permitted to re-enter. It is strongly advised that you remain for the entire duration of the examination period.

Section one is multiple choice. The multiple choice section of this paper has 20 marks allocated. Instructions are given at the start of each section, and they include an indicative time. You may finish the section sooner than the 35 minutes indicated, however, it's not advisable to go beyond this timing. You can always come back if you have time after completing the rest of the paper. In this section, you will be tested on both content knowledge and geographical skills. A number of these questions will require you to refer to the stimulus booklet. Additional instructions regarding which stimulus you need to use are given immediately before the question. Read all of the instructions on the paper carefully to avoid making a mistake. Your answer is not marked on the question paper but on a multiple choice answer sheet attached to the examination. Multiple choice questions from past HSC papers can be tested in online quizzes on the NESA website. The link to these quizzes are found at the end of the presentation or ask your teacher to direct you.

Let's have a look at some examples. In the 2019 HSC paper, question two refers to a climate graph in the stimulus booklet. The instructions located immediately before the question stated, refer to Source B on page one of the stimulus booklet to answer question two. I've placed a copy of the stimulus here for you to see. It is clearly labelled as Source B - Climate graph of a city in the black header bar. The question then reads which season has an average precipitation of approximately 80 millimetres. A, Autumn. B, Spring. C, Summer. Or D, Winter. In order to answer the question, you will need to be able to identify some key pieces of information. Which months relate to which season? How do I determine precipitation using the graph? And how do I determine average precipitation for each season? So let's start by making sure we know when each season occurs. The column graphs indicate the average amount of precipitation received in each month. We know this because the measurement indicators for the column graph are on the right, which is labelled precipitation, and the unit of measurement is given in millimetres. The temperature curves are explained in the key, and while temperature is not part of this question, we can see from the average monthly temperature curve that the coldest months are in the middle of the calendar year. This tells us that the city must be located in the southern hemisphere. If the coldest months were at the beginning and end of the calendar year, then we would be in the Northern Hemisphere. As we also live in the Southern Hemisphere, we know that in this instance, December, January, and February are Summer, March, April, and May are Autumn, June, July, and August are Winter, and September, October, and November are Spring. To determine the average precipitation in each season, you would need to add the totals for each column within that season. For example, Spring which is September, October, and November has approximately 73 millimetres. We can see this by having a look at the September column, approximately 24, October, again 24, and November, slightly higher at 25. As we're looking for a season with 80 millimetres approximately, we would need taller columns. Take a moment to see if you can work out the answer to the question. The answer is D, winter. Congratulation to those of you who were able to answer this question correctly. You may have calculated the answer for winter at 81 rather than 80, but remember that the question asked for approximately 80 millimetres and this is the only answer that is closer to that number.

Let's move on to a question that does not contain a stimulus. In the 2019 HSC exam, question 20 asked which of the following criteria must be met for a city to be classified as a world city? A, it is a capital city. B, it is a regional hub for trade and tourism. C, it has a population of more than 10 million people. Or D, it has developed responses to the challenges within the city. This question is a good example of distractions. Two of the responses refer to features of a megacity, and two responses are possible answers for a world city. The syllabus asks students to examine challenges of megacities and the responses to these challenges, it does not ask this for world cities. Megacities are defined by their populations exceeding 10 million people. However, no size criteria exists for world cities. Once we have eliminated the answers linked to megacities, we can now examine the remaining responses. In your study of world cities, you would have examined a case study. Case studies of cities like London, Paris, and Tokyo may make you lean towards answer A. However, consider some of the other world cities like New York and Sydney, which are dominant and influential at national, regional, and international levels, however, are not capital cities. Answer A is designed to be a distraction from the correct response, answer B, it is a regional hub for trade and tourism.

Section two is the short answer section of the paper. It's allocated a total of 40 marks. Instructions are given at the start of the section and include an indicative time. Section two should be completed in approximately one hour and 10 minutes. Read the instructions section carefully before you start answering your questions. A number of the questions in this section will require you to refer to the stimulus booklet. Follow the directions carefully to ensure that you locate the correct stimulus for each question. All of these questions will have multiple parts. In some questions your answer in one part may impact the next. To avoid making a mistake, read the whole question, including each part, before you start your response.

Question 21 is a skills-based question. It may require you to draw, sketch, or calculate as part of the question. In the 2019 HSC exam, part A asked students to use the data given for the 25 to 29 age group to complete the population pyramid. You can see that the bar graph for the 25 to 29 age range is empty. The information that needs to be added is in the table given. When completing the bar graph care needs to be taken to ensure that the information for males is included on the left side of the population pyramid, and females on the right. The number of people in each category is indicated on the x-axis. When completed, the graph should appear like this. You may wish to use a pencil to draw in the bar graphs in case you make a mistake. Once you are happy, either leave it in pencil or trace over the top in pen. Part B asked students to outline one characteristic of the population pyramid that reflects the demise of the small town. This requires some analysis of the data in the population pyramid that was completed in part A. Demise of the small town could be due to a number of factors including aging population, lack of services, urban pull factors, or low birth rates. In this instance, we can see a very low number of children in the zero to four age group, which is demonstrative of a low birth rate. The written response needs to include direct reference to the population pyramid, as this was the direction in the question. A sample response for this question could include a characteristic of the population pyramid, which reflects the demise of the small town, is the low proportion of residents in the youngest age group, zero to four, which is a result of the low birth rate. Approximately two to three lines of writing per mark is a good benchmark for the detail required in short answer questions. In this example, a two mark question the sample response is four lines.

Now let's look at an example that doesn't refer to a stimulus. In the 2019 exam, question 24 contained two parts with equal weighting. Part A asks students how has one urban dynamic, other than urban village changed the character of a country town or suburb? Part B asks students to describe how two challenges are affecting megacities in the developing world? Answers to this question are not linked, therefore can be answered independently. Answers in this section of the paper need to be well structured and to the point. Better responses will include reference to illustrative examples which support the response. If you need extra writing space, this is provided in the back of the booklet. Please make sure you clearly identify the question number if you are using the extra space, so that markers can link the writing easily. Now let's have a look at the sample responses for these questions. In question 24, Part A asks students how has one urban dynamic, other than the urban village, changed the character of a country town or suburb? You can see that this question has space for both your response and a box titled urban dynamic. You are required to identify the urban dynamic that you will be using to explain the changed character of a country town or suburb you have studied. If you are given a question like this, then please make sure you complete the box with the dynamic that you are using in your written response. In your study of urban places, you have covered urban dynamics causing change. This would have included urban renewal, urban decay, counter urbanization, decentralization, ex-urbanization, suburbanization, urban consolidation, spatial exclusion, and the urban village. This question specifically states that the urban village is not to be used to answer the question. It also specifies very clearly that only one urban dynamic is to be chosen. Do not be tempted to write on more than one option, as this will simply take time and not contribute to answering the question.

In answering the question, there are several pieces of information required in order to achieve all four marks. Identify and explain the dynamic, not just in general but specifically related to the country town, or suburb that you have studied. Secondly, you need to include detail of the location you studied. Is it a country town or is it a suburb? Where is it? Who lives there, et cetera. How is the dynamic changing the character of the place? Give some history to the location, what it was like, how it's different due to that urban dynamic. Here is a sample response for you to see how this comes together in a structured response. “Urban consolidation, or high density living, has clearly changed the character of the Sydney suburb of Pyrmont in the last 20 years. Being so close to the city, its land is highly sought after, and is therefore more expensive. Former industrial sites have been converted into multistorey apartment blocks. This has resulted in the gentrification of the area, and thus an increase in higher wage earners living in the suburb. The character of the suburb has changed in terms of the types of family units, smaller families living in apartments, and less reliance on cars as a form of transport due to the cost of parking and the proximity to the city.”

Part B of question 24 asked students to describe how two challenges are affecting megacities in the developing world. It is important to note that the megacities studied in geography are from the developing world only and should not be confused with world cities that may also meet the population criteria for this classification. Unlike the question in part A, part B requires the identification of two challenges and how they are affecting megacities. In order to answer the question fully, you must provide details of the challenge and the impact of this challenge on the city. These impacts may be for individuals, communities, or governments.

Let's have a look at the sample response for this question. “One challenge faced by megacities is access to housing. The lack of affordable housing has led to the exponential growth in squatter settlements or slums, with often deplorable living conditions, including a lack of access to power or toilets. Residents also have no security or legal rights if the authorities choose to bulldoze these informal settlements. Access to clean water is another challenge in megacities, due to the rapidly increasing population and the fact that most slums do not have direct access to a piped water system. As a result, sewerage facilities are also inadequate, which means untreated sewage is often dumped into open drains. This then has implications for the health of slum dwellers and other city residents due to the likely spread of disease.” As you can see, the writer has clearly identified two challenges, described in detail a number of different ways that these challenges have affected megacities, and formed a logical and cohesive response.

Section three forms the extended response portion of the exam. Instructions are given at the start of the section and include an indicative time. For section three, one hour and 15 minutes is the recommended time. A clear statement outlining how answers are assessed is written at the start of the section. Please read this carefully, as it forms part of the marking criteria for your responses. Three questions are provided in this section. However, you are asked to attempt only two, you should carefully select the questions based on your level of confidence and ability to construct a logical and cohesive response supported by illustrative examples. Each question is allocated 20 marks. Your essays are to be written in writing booklets that will have been provided at the start of the examination. Please ensure you use separate booklets for each response and clearly identify the question number and number of booklets used on the front cover. If you run out of booklets simply ask the exam supervisors for more.

So let's have a look at an example of an extended response question. In the 2019 HSC exam, question 28 asked, “explain how biophysical and technological factors affect the nature of one economic activity in a global context”. Let's pull this question apart a little. Firstly, identifies one economic activity. Economic activities may include things such as agriculture, including rice, dairy, or viticulture, tourism, or manufacturing. Only one economic activity should be discussed in response to this question. Take care not to simply explain the enterprise you have studied, but rather use the enterprise to support the answer that you are constructing as your response. The question asks, explain how biophysical and technological factors affect the nature. So biophysical factors such as climate, topography, and water supply, and technological factors, such as transport, genetic engineering, and computer technology would need to be discussed in how they affect the nature of the economic activity. The nature of the economic activity may include factors such as location, workforce, capital, or labour-intensive nature of production. So, there are many complex aspects to this question. It's key for students to understand that they need to answer all parts, not simply biophysical factors and how they affect the nature of the activity and not simply technological, but both biophysical and technological. Ultimately, the question is asking how these affect the nature of the economic activity. So please make sure that you're actually answering the question in detail. Using quotes, facts, and statistics will give authority to your response and demonstrate to the marker a detailed understanding of the economic activity you have studied. Ensure that the quotes and statistics are included to support the written content and do not include them if they are not contributing to the depth of the response.

Past HSC papers are a useful revision tool to practice your writing and increase your familiarity with the exam structure. Mark your own responses using the marking criteria provided in the notes from the exam centre. We have now come to the end of the presentation. Please remember to ask your teacher for other resources and webinars for geography, also how to access past HSC exam packs and the HSC exam equipment list on the NESA website. Also ask your teacher for more hints and tips for your exam and how to study effectively. They are the expert that you have access to every day and you need to make the most of them. Thank you for joining us.

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