Revising case studies

As exams approach you need to make plans for revision. Go through your notes carefully to make sure you understand geographical concepts and ideas, are familiar with key terms and have learnt facts and figures about the case studies you have studied in class.

Whichever exam specification you are following, you will have learnt about a number of case studies. They could include:

- cities or areas within cities
- specific events resulting from natural hazards or extreme weather conditions
- named landforms, such as a waterfall, coastal feature or river delta
- named ecosystems and the way people have used or abused them

Your case studies will be at different scales, with local, regional, national and international examples, such as a local park or housing area, a regional shopping centre, a National Park, a global ecosystem such as tropical rainforests, or a transnational corporation with branches worldwide.

The first thing you should do is draw up a list of all the case studies you have encountered during your GCSE course. You could then transfer summaries of each case study onto an A5 card — you can buy index cards this size in most stationers, or you can make your own from card or paper. Find out the names of the units in your exam and use these to help put your revision cards into categories. To help sort out your case studies try using different coloured cards to match different exam units — for example yellow for Urban and Rural Settlements, green for Environmental Issues and blue for Managing Hazards.

N = Name of case study.

W = Where, what, when, why? This is background information to the case study, including its location and why you are studying it. A few facts and figures are needed, and some case studies might require a sketch map.

E = Effects. Think about how people and the environment have been affected in your study area, and remember that impacts can be positive or negative.

S = Strategies. For many of your case studies you will have learnt about strategies people are putting in place, such as reducing damage from floods or hurricanes, preparing for hazards such as an earthquake, or trying to improve quality of life in cities.

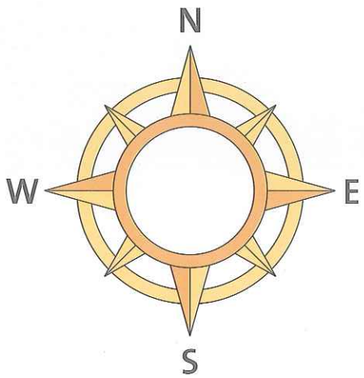

Figure 1 Case study compass

Selecting information

You may have spent several lessons learning about each case study, which means that you will have many pages of notes in your exercise book or file. Each card should contain only the key facts about the case study, so you will need to select these from your notes. To help you decide what to include, look at the case study compass shown in Figure 1, then go through your notes and pick out the information you need. Fill in each case study card using these four categories to help. You should use both sides of the card. Two examples are given in Figure 2.

Why use case study cards?

- It is impossible to remember all the notes in your exercise book, so you need to cut this down to a manageable level.
- Writing key information will remind you about the case study and will show up any gaps in your knowledge. Revision will be much easier to tackle if you have a set of cards instead of a big file or several exercise books. You can ask someone to help by testing you on each card.

When to prepare the cards

Some students like to prepare their case study cards at the end of the course, as preparation immediately before the exam. Others prefer to put them together as a summary at the end of each unit. You could even build them up as you go along, so that each time you learn a new case study you fill in a card and store it for revision.

Name: Hurricane Katrina

People, weather and climate

Where: New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

What, when, why?

- Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on 29 August 2005.
- Over 1,000 people killed, millions forced to leave their homes, many have not returned.
- Much of New Orleans is below sea level and protected by concrete flood walls, earth banks (levées) and pumps.
- Storm surge 9 metres high.
- Water from rain and storm surge meant canal and lake levels rose rapidly. Levées could not withstand extra weight and many broke, flooding most of the city.
- Hurricane moved inland and gradually lost its force.

Effects

1 Strong wind and rain caused massive damage to buildings and vehicles and brought down power lines. All main roads and many bridges damaged.

2 80% of city was flooded when levées broke.

3 Poorest people (mainly black Americans) not able to evacuate city — many slept in Superdome for several days.

4 Most of the population of New Orleans had to leave and go to other parts of the USA, and many have not returned.

5 Government was criticised for not acting quickly enough to help the city and people.

6 Most expensive natural disaster ever in the USA.

7 Much of New Orleans still lies in ruins.

8 It is predicted that severe hurricanes will become more common in the future as a result of global warming.

Turn over

Name: Tourism in Castleton, Peak District (continued)

Strategies

The Peak District National Park has tried to tackle problems caused by tourists in Castleton and the surrounding area:

1 Large car parks built and main roads have double yellow lines. This means visitors' cars are not causing congestion in the village. Money collected in the car parks helps pay for the upkeep of the car parks and for the traffic wardens.

2 New facilities for tourists have been built adjacent to main car park providing toilets, shops and a museum with information about Castleton and the surrounding area. Visitors need these facilities — without them they might not choose to return.

3 There is an information centre, which helps people find accommodation and provides information about things to do, special events and the local weather forecast.

4 Some footpaths have been resurfaced or diverted to tackle problem of footpath erosion — e.g. the steep track up to Mam Tor has been rebuilt with steps made from local stone. It is now safer for people who do not have mountain boots. Use of local stone means it blends in with the scenery.

5 Large boards display information about the area and give advice about how to protect the environment. This educates people about how to use the area without causing damage.

6 Peak District rangers go out on the hills advising walkers and groups about how to stay safe and not damage the environment.

7 The Peak District provides lots of information for schools and groups, so young people learn how to look after the National Park and hopefully protect it for the future.

Turn over

Figure 2 Case study cards

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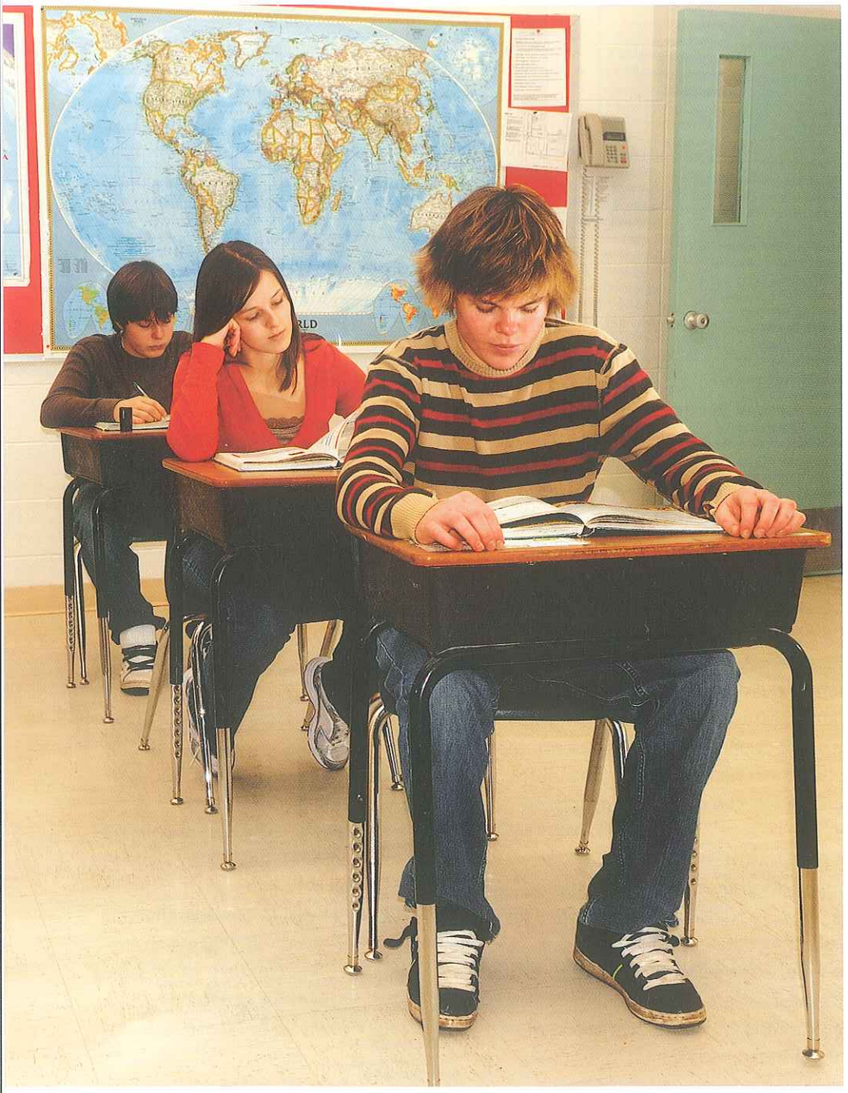
Developing your examination skills



No matter how much you have enjoyed your geography course, careful preparation for exams is essential. Exam success depends on how well you develop — or **extend** — your answers to questions worth 2 or more marks. Many students worry about case study answers worth up to 9 marks. Although these are important, other marks in the exam are actually more important because there are more of them! So think about how to get full marks on short questions as well as longer ones. This Improve Your Grade will help you develop your answers — from 1 mark to 2 marks, or 2 marks into 4 marks.

Understanding mark schemes

First, find out about how mark schemes work. There are two types of marking:

- Shorter questions are **point marked** — that is, the number of marks dictates the number of points that you need to make. For most examination boards, this applies to questions worth up to 5 marks.
- Longer questions (usually worth 6 marks or more) are marked by **levels of response**. There are three levels, 1–3, where Level 1 is lowest and Level 3 highest.

The rules for these are the same whether in Foundation Tier or Higher Tier exams.

Getting high marks on shorter answers

The general rule is that questions worth fewer than 6 marks are point marked. Marks are earned by making a valid point, but often more marks can be earned if you have developed the point you want to make.

Read the answers in the box on the right, which show different ways in which marks can be scored. Each answer is written by a different student, answering the same 2-mark question:

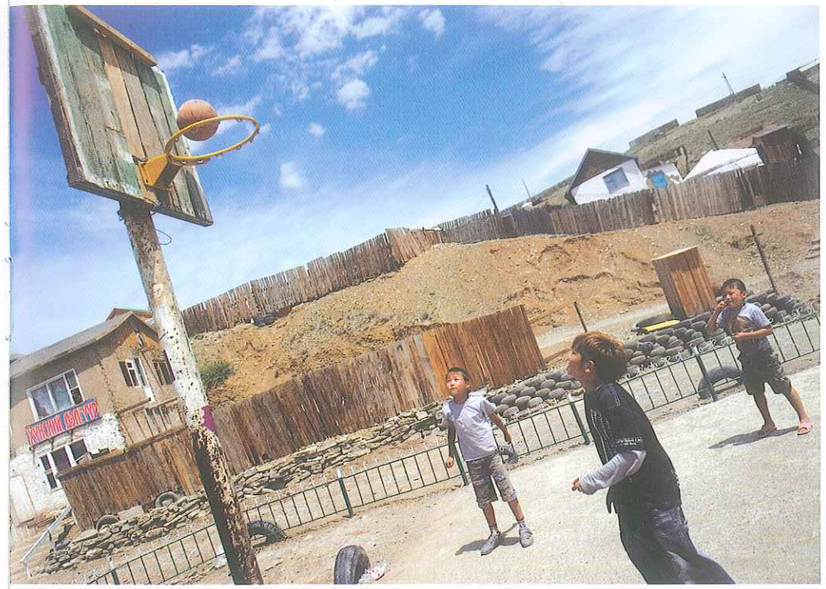
1 Why do people who have recently migrated to cities often have low standards of living? (2 marks)

- Student answers 1, 3 and 5 gained only 1 of the 2 marks.
- Student answers 2, 4 and 6 gained the full 2 marks.

Each mark given is shown by a tick. The key words that led to the extra mark being given are shown in red in the student answers.

Developing a point means remembering the three Es:

- **examples** (student answer 2)
- **expanding** it with more detail or an extra point (answer 4)
- **explaining** a consequence — using link phrases such as 'which leads to...' or 'therefore...' (answer 6)



Children playing basketball in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. This city is the scene of massive urban migration, as thousands of nomads and rural workers search for work

Six student answers to question 1

1 Because people there only earn low wages ✓. (1)

2 Because people there only earn low wages ✓ e.g. in shoe-shining jobs ✓. (2)

3 Because housing is expensive there ✓. (1)

4 Because housing is expensive there ✓ and jobs are low paid ✓. (2)

5 Because people only earn low wages ✓. (1)

6 Because people only earn low wages ✓, which means that they do not have enough to pay for the high cost of living ✓ in cities. (2)

Getting high marks on longer answers

The rules for getting good marks on longer answers are the same as for shorter ones. You will also need to:

- **use examples or case studies** as evidence to support descriptions and explanations
- **use key geographical words or terms**, e.g. instead of writing about 'water soaking into the ground' use the word 'infiltration'
- give your answer **structure and sequence** — not just writing down whatever comes into your mind next

The box below shows how important it is to get the balance right in an answer. In this example the answers are for a 4-mark question:

2 Explain the benefits and problems that may result from transnational companies setting up factories in less economically developed countries. (4 marks)

Two student answers to question 2

1 Growth of industry brings more jobs ✓ to people, which means that people get higher incomes ✓, but some of the companies don't stay long. (2 marks)

2 Growth of industries brings employment ✓, often leading to higher incomes ✓ and consumer spending. This sets up a spiral, which leads to even more companies investing in businesses ✓. However, some companies move on after a few years, so jobs may not be permanent ✓. (4 marks)

It is important to mention both benefits and problems in your answer and to explain your ideas fully. If only benefits *or* problems are given, examiners will not be able to award full marks.

Student answer 1 (above) is just not long enough and only deals with benefits. Note that answer 2 gives three benefits and one problem, but is still good enough to gain the full 4 marks.

Key terms

exam skills mark schemes

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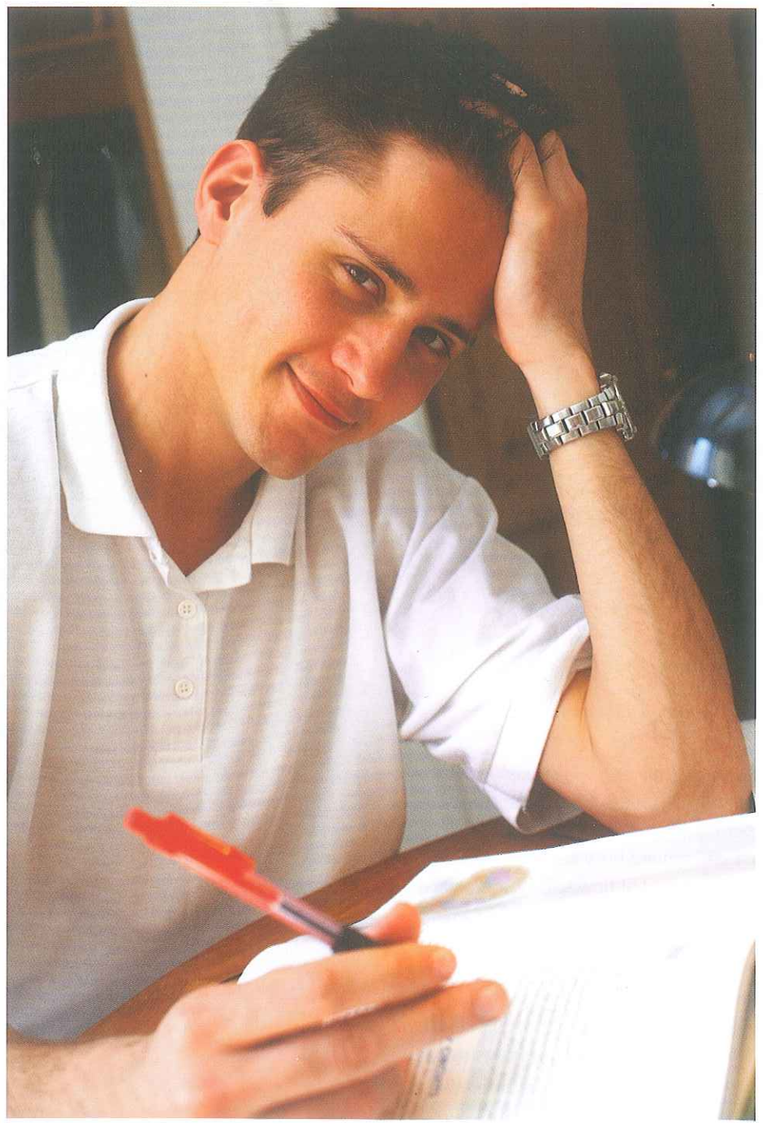
Hitting the high levels



In the previous issue of WIDEWORLD (see Volume 21, No. 1), you were offered suggestions about how to improve your marks in examinations on answers carrying up to 4 marks. This Improve Your Grade will help you to make the most of the longer answers at GCSE, which carry 6 or 9 marks.

In these longer questions, instead of asking candidates to list or make points, examiners ask for explanations — for example, of processes (the effects of erosion on a coastline) or impacts (the effects of the building of a new dam). You may also be required to give a detailed explanation of the effects of processes upon places (such as rural–urban migration on cities in the developing world).

What are 'levels of response'?

Questions of this length are marked using levels of response. Instead of listing all the possible points that a candidate could make in an answer, examiners look for general qualities. These are organised into three levels, which are statements that describe different qualities of an answer. The examiner uses the statements to find the best fit for the answer being marked, looking particularly at:

- its organisation and structure
- the amount of detail
- clarity of explanations
- use of geographical words or phrases
- quality of written communication

Examiners use these criteria to decide between Level 1 (low quality) and Level 3 (high quality) answers. Level 1 answers are usually generalised, with no examples of real places. They contain few geographical terms, and writing may be rambling rather than structured. There may be spelling or punctuation errors. Level 3 answers, in contrast, are specific, almost always about real places, with plenty of supporting data and examples. Answers use suitable geographical terms or phrases and are explained in a clear and structured way. There are usually few spelling or punctuation errors.

1 Using named examples, explain how a city can attempt to reduce its ecological footprint. (6 marks)

Two student answers to question 1

(a) London has made many attempts to reduce its eco footprint. There is a congestion charge, which all cars have to pay if they go into central London. This is intended to put people off using cars and to use public transport instead. All the profits from the charge go towards new public transport schemes, e.g. new buses and improving the Tube, to encourage greater use of public transport for commuting or shopping. Some councils have increased waste recycling so that London will need fewer landfill sites.

(b) Cities make many attempts to reduce their eco footprint. They stop all drivers from going into town centres. They spend a lot of money on new wheelie bins to cut down the number of times you have your rubbish collected and they encourage you to recycle. They tried to collect food waste but everyone said it was smelly.

The box above shows two different answers to this question.

The first answer (a) gains 5 of the 6 available marks, putting the candidate into Level 3. It gets to this level because it:

- is well structured
- deals with a range of examples
- has some detail, e.g. congestion charging and how this is linked to public transport
- uses geographical terms, e.g. commuting, recycling, landfill

The second answer (b) gets just 2 of the 6 marks. The answer mentions how decision-makers try to put people off using their cars and how recycling is encouraged, but it does not explain these ideas fully. It does not get beyond Level 1 because it:

- rambles from one point to another
- does not mention a city by name
- provides little detail
- uses no geographical terms

The mark scheme for this question is:

Level 1	1–2 marks	Poorly organised. A very limited description or explanation. Generalised, with little detail or use of examples. Poorly located places or examples. Little use of geographical words. Spelling, punctuation and grammar weak.
Level 2	3–4 marks	Fairly well organised. Attempts to describe or explain clearly. Uses some examples, but these vary in detail. Places or examples are usually named. Clearly written, with some use of geographical words. Spelling, punctuation and grammar vary but are generally accurate.
Level 3	5–6 marks	Well organised. Describes and explains clearly. Includes a range of specific examples, which are detailed and always named. Well written, with good use of geographical words. Spelling, punctuation and grammar accurate.

Try marking this!

Look at the student answer below, in response to the following question:

2 Using examples, describe the key physical characteristics of either polar or hot arid areas. (6 marks)

Student answer to question 2

Polar areas like Alaska are very cold, with temperatures falling to -30°C or lower in the winter. In the winter there is no sunlight. In the summer it is still cold, at about 10°C. Alaska is very dry with not much rainfall and most of it falls as snow in the winter. The ground and rivers are frozen solid but the top part of the ground does melt in the summer. Animals that live there are usually white, like polar bears and arctic foxes, so they blend in with the snow and can't be seen by prey. They have also got very thick fur and some either hibernate in the winter or migrate to warmer areas.

When analysing the answer:

- decide what it is worth
- offer advice that you think might have helped the student to do better

When you have done this, check with the actual mark given and the examiner's comments (shown at the foot of this page).

Key terms

exam skills
levels of response
mark schemes

Student answer to question 2 — examiner's comment

This response was given 5 marks out of the available 6, making it level 3. The answer has some structure and logic, and deals with a range of characteristics (temperature and rainfall, and the ecosystem). Details are provided, such as places (Alaska), examples of species (arctic fox) and temperature data (−30°C in winter). Some terminology is present (hibernate, migrate), though permafrost is not actually named.