

How to master the AQA 25- mark essay question

In Section B of your exam, you will encounter a choice of essay questions. We will be going through three essay questions you might find on an exam paper in our remote learning sessions. Here are the steps to consider when tackling a 25 mark essay question on the Cold War:

<p>1. Read the question carefully Note (underline or highlight) key words and dates.</p> <p>Make sure you are confident what both sides of the argument are.</p>	<p>You have to answer two essay questions (each worth 25 marks) from a choice of three questions. Try to spend about 45 minutes on each answer.</p>	<p>An example question (A2-2018) would be ‘How effective was Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful co-existence in reducing Cold War tensions in the years 1955 to 1961?’ Any information included within your response that falls outside the time frame will be discounted in the marking of the essay.</p>
<p>2. Plan your essay and form a judgement Use whichever approach will best enable you to answer the question - this could be chronological or thematic.</p> <p>Plan for at least four key arguments, two supporting the statement and two countering the statement.</p>	<p>Plans are your best friend. They can take whatever form you want, but should help you to form a judgement and devise a coherent structure for your answer. It is an excellent opportunity to jot down any key details you think you might forget when you get into the swing of writing – that way you can return to your plan to track your progress and jog your memory.</p>	<p>Forming a judgement you can support throughout your answer is key. For the question above, my judgement would be: <i>Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful co-existence in the years 1955-61 was largely ineffective in reducing Cold War tensions. Khrushchev’s desire to reduce the risk of conflict with the United States was coupled with his continued defence of the superiority of Communism and his intent to strengthen the Soviet economy. This coincided with the USA’s wish to strengthen their own position, so despite the efforts made to start a dialogue between the powers, tension was inevitable.</i></p>
<p>3. Introduce your argument Having made a judgement, advance this in your introduction. The introduction should also be used to show your understanding of the questions, particularly key terms and dates, and to acknowledge alternative views and factors.</p>	<p>Introductions shouldn’t be long. A common mistake is to give too much background information, which eats into your time and delays your focus on answering the question.</p>	<p>Once you have advanced your judgement, like the one above, you only need to briefly outline the direction of your essay. For instance, <i>many would observe the Austrian State Treaty followed by the Geneva Summit (1955) and later the Camp David talks (1959) as outcomes of peaceful coexistence that were effective in reducing Cold War tensions. These were however, overshadowed by developments by 1961, including the space race and actions taken by Khrushchev in eastern Europe and Berlin.</i></p>
<p>4. Develop your argument The essay should proceed logically, supporting your balanced argument through the opening statements of the paragraphs. Remember: comment first, followed by specific and precise supporting information.</p>	<p>Don’t forget to write analytically. Your job is to argue a case and evaluate events, developments and ideas, rather than simply describing what happened in a story-telling (narrative) fashion. To achieve top grades, remember that a good argument will have balance. You should examine alternative ideas and factors, and explain why they are less convincing than those you are supporting.</p>	<p>In order to reach L5 (21-25 marks) you also need to substantiate your judgement. This refers to the process of linking to your judgement, particularly following your counter arguments. For instance, imagine I have just written a detailed analysis of how tensions were reduced in 1959, as peaceful co-existence led to Khrushchev visiting the USA for the Camp David Talks. To substantiate my judgement, I might suggest that the reduction in tensions were only ever short-lived, suggesting limited effectiveness. One achievement of the Camp David Talks was Khrushchev’s withdrawal of his 1958 ultimatum. By May 1961 (following the U2 crisis) the situation was precarious once again and by the Vienna Summit (June 1961) Khrushchev once again demanded Americans leave West Berlin.</p>
<p>5. Conclude your argument Your conclusion should repeat the judgement given in the introduction and summarise your argument.</p>	<p>A good conclusion will not include any new information and will flow naturally from what has gone before. Short and sweet is the best approach.</p>	<p>If, unfortunately, you have mismanaged your time, always conclude your answer in the last few minutes of the exam. If your answer is already limited in its development/completion, it’s best not to also be limited by the absence of a conclusion.</p>
<p>Common mistakes (and how to avoid them)</p>		
<p>1. Presenting an imbalanced response</p>	<p>Plan your answer carefully before you start writing. Check you have understood what the question is asking and what the two sides of the argument are. If the question was ‘Actual confrontation between the USA and the USSR was only a remote possibility in the years 1956-1961’ you would need argue both that actual confrontation was a remote possibility and that actual confrontation was not a remote possibility (in other words, there was a real possibility of actual confrontation).</p>	
<p>2. Presenting arguments, but not linking them back to the question!</p>	<p>Signposting is vital in A level writing. It might seem a little repetitive, but it’s instrumental to staying focused and meeting the demands of the question. You should be linking back to the question (and the specific wording used) at least once within each main argument/paragraph.</p>	
<p>3. Providing accurate supporting information, but not including sufficient detail.</p>	<p>Your knowledge and how detailed it is really comes down to what you do before you enter the exam, so make sure your revision supports this. The next step is ensuring you’ve considered what detailed support you want to include in your essay when you’re planning. Detail isn’t always about dates. Having said that, it’s a little suspect if you reach the end of your essay without mentioning a single date. Detailed support includes obvious things like dates and figures, but specific examples are just as valuable. For instance, knowledge of the different requests made Khrushchev in his telegrams to Kennedy on the 26th and 27th October 1962 would be considered detailed knowledge.</p>	