LEARNING HISTORY

A Guide to Advanced Study

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LEARNING HISTORY

A Guide to Advanced Study

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Preface

The transition from courses leading to an examination at 15 or 16 plus to a course with an examination at 18 plus can be an awkward leap: not only may the period of history be different, but the type of work may change, demanding a wider range of more specialised books and articles, more complex documentary work, essays needing increased use of analytical skills, more emphasis on debate, greater self-reliance at home and in private study sessions, and so on.

Even for a gifted student these changes can be daunting, and for most students – especially if history is a new subject – the first few months can be full of stress. The high point of 16 plus examination success in the summer may soon fade under the pressure of new courses or transfer to another school or college.

This book is designed to be read and used by student historians in the sixth form and in the first year of higher education courses. It is not a manual for instant success, nor is it a revision guide or compendium for any particular syllabus. Examples have been selected from a wide range of course options from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, including British, European and world history. Any bias towards particular centuries or regions indicates the most popular courses according to student numbers in examinations. Do not be put off an example because it falls outside your course. The lessons to be learned from all the examples will have some bearing on problems or topics within your period.

The book opens with a chapter on *How to Start*. This is crucial because it is often a worrying time at the beginning of a new course. Suggestions are made on interesting books to use when starting a course, simple ideas on time-charts to build up a sense of period and chronology, how to become involved with the period being studied and the making of notes. Clearly, teachers and tutors will help considerably – the book is no replacement for them – but there are several pointers on how to get the most out of the course from the outset.

Chapter 2 investigates the writing of essays, a major requirement in all courses and examinations at this level and beyond. A late-seventeenth-century example is taken in depth, and examples of student writing are offered for analysis and criticism. The chapter provides no highway to

first-class essays, but offers guidance on what is expected and how it may be achieved. It ends with a guide by L. G. Brandon to the different wording and types of examination questions.

Documentary material in various forms – written, printed, visual and oral – is playing a more significant role in courses for 16- to 19-year-old students than previously, so three chapters are assigned to studying it. Chapter 3 is an introduction to evidence, using as a case-study the ‘Peterloo Massacre’ of 1819, with many opportunities for understanding how historians approach and use evidence.

Chapters 4 and 5 look at the variety of evidence. Chapter 4 takes two themes – *Political Parties and Elections, 1689–1714* and *The Scramble for Africa, c. 1870–1914* – and explores several aspects of them, using primary written or printed sources with questions that involve comprehension, analysis and synthesis.

Chapter 5 looks into the rich vein of visual, statistical and oral evidence. Again, the emphasis is placed on studying the variety of sources and the questions to be asked of them by the historian. The range is broad, encompassing examples from the Tudors to the twentieth century: from woodcuts to the computer.

Secondary sources are covered in Chapter 6, which describes how to tackle the kind of books commonly used at this level. These range from popular history through biographies to more specialised monographs. The art of extracting information easily and quickly from long and detailed books is of enormous value both at this stage and in a future occupation.

Chapter 7 illustrates the fascinating theme of historical debates by offering brief discussions on three important and challenging examples. As Christopher Haigh wrote, debates are to the historian what experiments in the laboratory are to the scientist. The three debates are:

British history:	Elizabethan Parliaments
European history:	The Origins of the First World War
	The Social and Economic Effects of the Thirty Years’ War on Germany

Suggestions are made on how to take part in the debates and on further reading and thought.

The final chapter looks beyond the syllabus into broader aspects of the study of history: What *is* history? What are the links between history and other disciplines? What other aspects of history are there beyond the political, diplomatic and economic issues so familiar in examination papers? These other aspects may be the springboard for deeper involvement in the subject, perhaps through a research project.

The book concludes with a select list of useful books on the study of history, which should be readable at age 16 to 19.

We hope that these chapters will enable students of a wide range of ability