



Department  
for Education

# **Ancient history**

**GCSE subject content**

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# The content for GCSE ancient history

## Introduction

1. GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding, and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

## Aims and objectives

2. GCSE specifications in ancient history should enable students to learn about the history of ancient societies in their wider context in the ancient world. The study of ancient history at GCSE should enable students to deepen their understanding of the events, people and periods studied and enable them to think critically, weigh evidence (literary and material sources from the ancient world), sift arguments, make informed decisions and develop perspective and judgement. This knowledge and the skills developed will also help them to understand the legacy of the ancient world, and provide them with the basis for further study.

3. GCSE specifications in ancient history should enable students to:

- develop and extend their knowledge and understanding of the military, political, religious, social and cultural history of the ancient world, allowing students to be able to consider the events studied within the context of the history of the ancient world
- develop the ability to ask relevant questions about the past, to investigate issues critically and to make valid historical claims by using a range of ancient sources in their historical context
- understand that ancient historians today rely on fewer sources than are available for modern history, meaning that our version of events often relies on very scarce evidence, and the resulting difficulties in reconstructing the history of the ancient world
- demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of what we believe happened in ancient times and the ancient sources to justify our belief, and reach substantiated conclusions which take into account the reliability of the available ancient sources

## Subject content

4. GCSE specifications in ancient history must require students to:

- study significant events, individuals, societies, developments and issues within their broad historical contexts, which must be taken from 3000 BC to 500 AD, demonstrating both breadth (through period studies) and depth (through studying of a narrower, more specific topic)
- study a period study covering at least 50 years; a longer period study covering at least 150 years; and two depth studies. Specifications must include a rationale for the selection of topics including periods and which indicate how the following criteria for content are addressed
  - a period study must focus on a coherent medium time span of at least 50 years and require students to understand the unfolding narrative of substantial developments and issues associated with the period. A period study must cover a period of time sufficient to allow students to demonstrate understanding of the process of change. For example, a period study could focus on the Persian Wars or the Julio-Claudian emperors
  - a longer period study must require students to understand events throughout at least 150 years, including the most significant events and characteristics of different ages. They should reveal wider changes in aspects of society over time and allow comparisons to be made between different periods of history. This should include at least two aspects of the period, which may include (but are not restricted to) the following: politics, religion, science, technology and war. Through covering a much longer period of time than the shorter period and depth studies, the longer period study should help students to be able to put the events studied within GCSE into the context of the broader history of the ancient world. For example, a longer period study could focus on the rise and fall of the Roman Republic or rise and fall of the Persian Empire
  - depth studies must focus on a substantial and coherent short time span and require students to understand the complexity of a historical event or situation and the interplay of different factors which may include (but are not restricted to) military, political, religious, social, cultural and technological factors. A depth study should ensure that students will have studied the detailed historical context of the event or situation. For example, a depth study could focus on the Year of the Four Emperors or the Boudiccan Revolt
  - the period and depth studies within the specification must form a coherent and substantial study of ancient history in which each of the period and depth studies are reasonably balanced across the full range of assessed content
  - one depth study may be from the same era and geographical location as the longer period study

- study the history of at least two ancient societies, at least one of which must be Greek or Roman history. Study of each of the two ancient societies studied must be a substantial proportion of the course (each society to be a minimum of 20%)
- demonstrate how we know ancient historical events happened, by referencing the appropriate literary and material sources from the ancient world

## Historical knowledge, understanding and method

5. GCSE specifications must require students to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key features and characteristics of the periods studied, including the chronology, events, individuals, developments and the issues in the periods of ancient history they have studied
- demonstrate understanding and appropriate use of historical terms including historical concepts such as civil war, democracy, empire, imperialism, monarchy, and republic, placing these terms in the context of the periods studied
- demonstrate the ability to create their own structured arguments, selecting, organising and communicating their knowledge and understanding reaching substantiated conclusions where possible
- understand, interpret, analyse and evaluate ancient sources and events in their historical context
- demonstrate an understanding of the key features and characteristics of the periods studied, including continuity and change within ancient societies, the causes, significance and consequences of key historical events, and the similarities and differences between situations
- demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between different aspects of the period studied, making connections, drawing contrasts and analysing trends, such as between economic, political, social, cultural, religious and military history; and between short and long term timescales
- demonstrate an understanding of how we know ancient historical events happened, and analyse different kinds of ancient source material (including literary and material)
- demonstrate an understanding of the reliability of literary and/or material sources, particularly with reference to how the portrayal of events by the ancient writers/sources relates to the social, political, religious and cultural contexts in which they were written, for example the influence of mythological literature on Herodotus' writing
- produce evidence-based arguments on the key events studied using the knowledge and understanding derived from the relevant and appropriate literary and material sources from the ancient world



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