

The expert



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Smart study

Get working on your Geographical Investigations now. The SEC website tells us that this section (ie the Practical Coursework Component) must be submitted in a special booklet provided for this purpose. Those booklets should arrive in school soon.

This must be your own work and should be completed under the supervision of your teacher. There are six topics for the 2008 exam, and students should select one of these. Your own teacher is best placed to advise you on which topic to choose.

These topics vary from year to year. The complete list of Geographical Investigation topics is:

- ◆ Geomorphic processes of erosion in a karst or fluvial or coastal or glacial environment;
- ◆ A study of demographic trends in a local setting;
- ◆ Changing land-use patterns in a rural or urban setting;
- ◆ An investigation of the impact of a single economic activity in a local setting;
- ◆ The impact of a local environmental issue;
- ◆ Analysis of traffic management in a local area.

Remember – this geographical investigation is worth 100 marks, ie 20 per cent of the total available for the higher exam. It should not be rushed or left until the last moment.

Familiarise yourself with the paper. The 2007 paper was 26 pages long and you will lose valuable exam time if you do not know your way around the exam paper. You should practise doing exam questions from both the 2006 paper and the 2007 papers. Try to answer these questions within the time limit available to you.

Students should allow 30 minutes per question. This will leave you with 10 minutes to read over the paper at the beginning to select your questions, and 10 minutes to spare at the end of the exam to check over your work.

In the short answer question you are asked to answer 10 of the 12 short questions. It is best to attempt all 12. You will be marked for your best 10.

The questions on Physical Geography, on Regional Geography and on the Electives will be divided into three parts. Students should look at the marks allocated to each part before deciding how much of the 30 minutes for the whole question should be spent on each part. (The 80 marks for these questions will probably be divided 20, 30, 30.)

The questions on the options are essay-type questions. They will not have separate parts; the examiner will be looking for a well-argued answer that has flow and cohesion. An obvious but vital point is that students read the full question before they begin. As most questions have three parts, it can be tempting to jump in and answer Part One before realising that the final part of the question does not suit you at all. Read all questions in the unit before attempting any of them.

Keep revising. You probably do not have the course finished yet. However, working on a new section, such as one of the Options, should not stop you revising one of your core areas, such as Physical Geography. Constant revision helps to both clarify points and to implant this information in your brain. That final revision run just before the exam will be a lot easier if you have been through it a few times already.

Know the lie of the land

The new geography course is relatively new, but with two past papers to guide you, there's plenty of information with which to arm yourself

The new Leaving Certificate higher level geography syllabus was examined for the first time in 2006. Students now have the advantage of two full past papers to help them prepare for the 2008 exam.

Key points

The syllabus for Higher Level is presented in the form of Core, Elective and Optional units (see below).

The "Field Study" question is now called "Geographical Investigation". Under the old syllabus this was optional, but in its new format as a "Geographical Investigation", it is now compulsory and must be handed in prior to the written exam.

The date for the completion of the Geographical Investigation is April 25th, 2008.

The exam will be of two hours 50 minutes duration.

Higher Level students will answer five questions. There are three core units which all must study:

Core unit one – patterns and processes in the physical environment;

Core unit two – regional geography;

and Core unit three – geographical investigation and skills.

There are two elective units and all students are required to study one of these areas:

Elective unit four – patterns and processes in economic activities;

or Elective unit five – patterns and processes in the human environment.

There are also four optional units which are for Higher Level students only. These students must select one of these options:

Optional unit six – global interdependence;

Optional unit seven – geocology;

Optional unit eight – culture and identity;

or Optional unit nine – the atmosphere/ocean environment.



Making the most of the mocks

The mock exams – what are they for, what is the point of them, do we really need them? Clearly a small number of schools and a relatively small number of students feel that they serve no purpose. However, mocks are taken by most students in January or February and most teachers are certainly in favour of them.

Sitting the Leaving Cert geography mock is a great way of getting familiar with the paper. For some time now you have probably been answering questions from the past papers or the sample papers produced by the various publishers. However, you have probably looked at these questions in isolation; the mock will make sure you answer the correct number of questions from the various sections of the paper. Doing an exam question at home, at your own pace is not the same as doing it under exam

conditions and completing the three-part answer in the 30 minutes allocated. If approached seriously, the geography mock exam is a great way to prepare for the real thing and an opportunity to learn from your mistakes. It does not matter if you "mess up", provided you learn from your mistakes and perform much better in June.

Before the mocks

Many students will have the full course covered by this stage, but will not have time to revise it, or even fully learn it for the first time. Others may still have a full section to do. Most teachers seem to leave covering the Option until last.

To prepare for the exam you first need to be clear on the structure of the paper.

See section 1 above on the structure of the paper.

If you do not have everything covered then one approach might be to

concentrate on those sections that you are better prepared for. For instance, you should have the physical geography section covered by now. There will be three questions in the mock exam on this section and you will have to answer one of them. Prepare this section well, practise drawing your diagrams, and know your examples. On the day of the mock, just allow yourself the allocated time for that answer. Do not think that since you will not be really answering on your unprepared section that you can allow extra time for other sections. This is a false way to prepare for the real exam in June. It makes a mockery of the real idea of mocks. You will prepare best by treating the mocks as seriously as the real thing, and approaching them in a planned fashion.

Practise your skills before the mocks. In particular, be

able to draw diagrams of the key physical features and maps of each of the regions you have prepared.

If you treat the exam seriously, you will be in a better position to learn from your results.

During the mocks

How you approach the actual mock exam on the day will decide how successful you will be. You need the correct attitude; you must really want to succeed and you must be prepared to give your best on the day of the exam. If you do this, then the mock will have shown how long it takes you to read through the paper and to decide which questions to do. You will find you will make mistakes, but that's what mocks are for – making mistakes that you will not make again in June.

The importance of timing in the exam is crucial. See Section 4 on how best to