

H2 Geography (9751)

Introduction

To take H2 Geography is to take the lesser beaten path. As you go through the subject, you will find that it requires a greater extent of independence compared to other subjects. There aren't standardised textbooks that all JCs read, and school notes can be either insufficient or wildly excessive, so many students decide to make their own notes. This would consume a lot of your time, but it doesn't have to be a painful experience if you truly enjoy the subject! It was personally my favourite subject in JC :)

The topics themselves are really interesting to anyone interested in Geography. H2 Geography is broken into 4 Themes, and about 50 chapters in total:

- (1) Tropical Environments (Physical Geography)**
- (2) Development, Economy and Environment (Human Geography)**
- (3) Sustainable Development (Human Geography)**
- (4) *Geographical Investigation***

The first 3 themes are where the main bulk of content lies, whereas Theme 4 is equivalent to the weight of 2 chapters at most. And yes, the rumours are true, H2 Geography is very content heavy - be prepared to study hard for it, especially for Physical Geography where you really can't "smoke" your way through! However, I would say that compared to other content-heavy subjects like H2 Biology, it's easier to study for, as it requires less memorisation and more understanding e.g. coming up with your own arguments or viewpoints. This is especially the case for Human Geography where you just need to understand the concepts rather than memorize wholesale. Your load can be further reduced due to a unique feature of the syllabus known as synoptic linking. The syllabus encourages and rewards students when they use relevant content from one chapter to answer questions from another. This means many points that you memorise could help answer many different questions. Your school / tutors may give you some synoptic links, though in my experience they are usually shallow and insufficient. Do try to build on what they give by coming up with links on your own, and then running your ideas by your tutors.

There is some degree of complementarity between Geography with other typical JC subjects. The content you learn in Geography, especially from Theme 2 and 3, can be imported into General Paper essays and AQ, though the essay writing style of GP and Geog may differ somewhat. Some have remarked that Geography is just a giant GP content package. An understanding of Economics can help (albeit to a limited extent) with understanding Theme 2 and 3 as well.

Comparing Geography to Economics, Geography is far more content-heavy than Economics, but tends to be less rigid and technical. In my personal opinion, you are more likely to get away with "smoking" in Geography compared to Economics.

Examination Structure

You will have 2 papers in H2 Geography, each being 3 hours long.

Paper 1 contains your **Structured Essay Questions** - 3 questions of 32 marks each (12-mark part a, and 20-mark part b). Paper 1 is therefore out of 96 marks, and accounts for 50% of your A levels.

For Paper 2, there are 4 **Data Response Questions**, out of 25 marks each. Each question is from themes 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. Paper 2 is thus out of 100 marks, and accounts for the remaining 50% of your final grade.

Cambridge tends to put H2 Biology papers with H2 Geography papers so there's a high chance it will be on the same day - not very good for your brain cells (from the heavy content), and hand (from the intense writing). Most students write till the last moment, so that's 3 hours of non-stop essay-writing. The complementation of your subjects is definitely a factor in deciding your subject combination, but as someone who took both H2 Biology and H2 Geography, I would say that interest in the subject trumps practicality of the exam timetable - so don't let the bad timetabling stop you from doing the subjects you enjoy.

Paper 1: Structured Essay Question

Differences from Secondary School

Unlike pure Geography in secondary school where the only "real" essay you may write is the 8-mark LOU question, in H2 Geography, half your paper will be essays. Not only are you unable to memorise and regurgitate wholesale from the textbook like what you could do in secondary school, you must now come up with your own arguments on the spot, as you can no longer copy and paste model essays since they may not answer the question.

The essay questions are "Levels Marked" based on the level of evaluation and understanding you display. Level 4 (10-12 marks out of 12) is the maximum level part a, while Level 5 (17-20 marks out of 20) is the maximum for part b. Most average to good students tend to hover around Level 3 and 4 for part a and b respectively. You can look at the sample essay answers under the Academic Resources page to get a feel of how to answer standard questions. I have added the links here as well for greater convenience:

- [Sample Essays for Theme 1 \(HCI\)](#)
- [Sample Essays for Theme 2 \(HCI\)](#)
- [Sample Essays for Theme 3 \(HCI\)](#)
- [Sample Essay Extracts to Hit L4/L5](#)

Do take the marks given with a pinch of salt however; different schools have different points that they emphasise (the ambiguity and subjectivity by Cambridge of what constitutes a "good essay" is one of the reasons why some people may be turned off by H2 Geography).

Common Mistakes in Geography P1:

- Blind regurgitation of information without directly answering the question - a lot of students get very excited when they see a question that they have studied for, and rush to write their essay. This is risky in that they don't carefully address all the keywords of the question, and end up missing a huge chunk of content that they should write (e.g. "problems facing the attainment of sustainable development *in cities*" is different from the challenges in achieving sustainable development). Either that, or they miss out on a specific keyword that affects the whole structure of the essay (e.g. "*humid* tropics" and not just "tropics").
 - E.g. if the question says "Compare the temperature and precipitation patterns between humid and arid tropics. [12m]", you must give point-for-point comparison rather than dedicating one paragraph to arid tropics and one paragraph to humid tropics (students may be tempted to do this since they've memorised the details).
- Insufficient depth - usually occurs when students do not adequately study / memorise the subject content and go in thinking they can "smoke" their way through with common sense / general knowledge.

This may come in the form of using precise geographical terminology to show that you understand how key terms are employed:

 - E.g. students may write "*The ITCZ shifts polewards due to the migration of the SSP, which is caused by the axial tilt of the earth. However, the effect of continentality causes the ITCZ to migrate further polewards, rather than remain as a straight line.*"

A more precise wording would be "*The ITCZ migrates northwards during the northern hemisphere summer; this is due to how the SSP is around 23.5°N of the equator during this period because of the axial tilt of the earth. Because of the effect of continentality however, this northward migration is more pronounced over large land masses like Asia (which absorbs solar radiation to a greater degree), resulting in the ITCZ migrating further northwards beyond 23.5°N over the Asiatic continent.*"
- Insufficient breadth - different schools have different requirements but do ensure that as much as possible you give good coverage for different aspects of the topic the question touches on.
 - E.g. cover the economic, social and environmental impacts of Transnational Corporations (TNCs) on a host country / at least 1 positive and 1 negative impact. Students may forget this and focus exclusively on the negative environmental impacts of TNCs for instance.

Paper 2: Data Response Question and Geographical Investigation

- **For DRQ, you'll have about 4-5 questions of varying question types:**

- About 1-2 **point-marked** questions: each point you write (with some brief elaboration) is 1 mark. Most of the time these questions start with "using resource A and B, compare" / "contrast" / "describe the trend of" / "state the type of" (less common) / "identify" (less common). These questions mostly tend to ask you to describe a graph / chart / some form of data representation, or to compare between two sources. These are more "low-level" kinds of questions that people should get close to full marks for (e.g. for a 6-mark "compare and contrast" question, you should have 6 distinct points).
- About 2 **levels-marked** questions: this question type tests your ability to analyse the source(s) and coherently articulate an argument. The question may start with "using resources C, D and E, and your own knowledge, suggest possible reasons for" / "explain" / "evaluate". For these questions, it's usually 1 well-elaborated and clearly substantiated point gives you 2 marks as a general rule of thumb (though there are some exceptions). Take note that it's recommended that you have clear paragraphs per elaborated point (e.g. for a 6-mark question, you have 3 paragraphs each with a distinct point). It's also harder to get full marks for these questions, though not impossible.
- **1 levels-marked last question:** technically, this is also under the levels-marked question type, but I've put it as a separate type because this requires more essay planning, as it is typically worth 7 to 9 marks (if you took Pure Geography in secondary school, this is like your 8-mark LOU in O Levels). Most answers would follow the general structure of:
Very brief one-sentence introduction (to define key terms)
3 body paragraphs (remember to cover all perspectives e.g. 2 for and 1 against, or 1 economic, 1 social, 1 environmental factor etc)
Conclusion with evaluation using a specific criteria (e.g. spatial or temporal scale / evaluation using stakeholders)

- **For GI, you will have about 5 questions of the following types:**

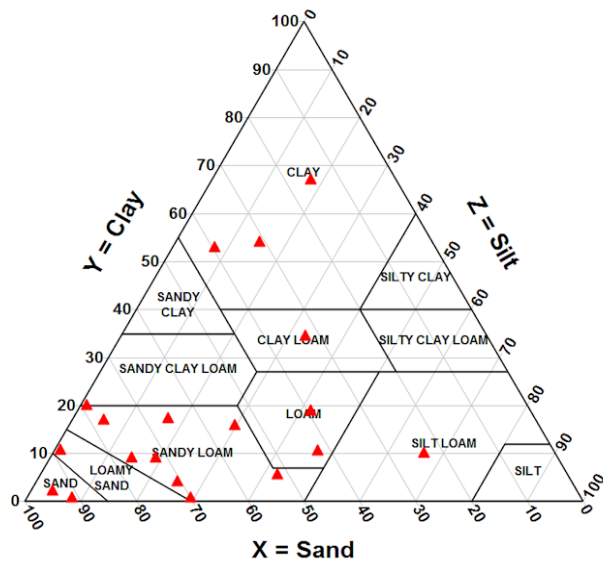
- Comment on the hypothesis / guiding question and/or construct your own
- Research ethics - how to minimise disruption to the natural environment / respecting privacy of interviewees or surveyees [most students like this because can smoke]
- Safety of students conducting investigation [most students like this because can smoke]
- Data representation - construct a bar graph / pie chart / line graph etc and describe how you construct it including the tools involved - Remember to write the TITLE! A lot of students forget this and lose 1 mark :(
- Analyse and draw conclusions from the data given and explain what it means in the context of the investigation

- Comment on the reliability and accuracy of the investigation, and suggest improvements / suggestions on how to extend the investigation [usually will be the last question, worth quite a lot of marks]
- *Refer to the following documents (found also in the Academic Resources tab) for examples:*
[Geography HCI Theme 4 Geographical Investigation DRQ Josiah Teo](#)
[Geography HCI Theme 4 Geographical Investigation and DRQ Judith Ko](#)
- GI in general is pretty easy to score as long as you're familiar with the question types (most students use GI to pull them up), so don't neglect your GI

Common Mistakes in Geography P2:

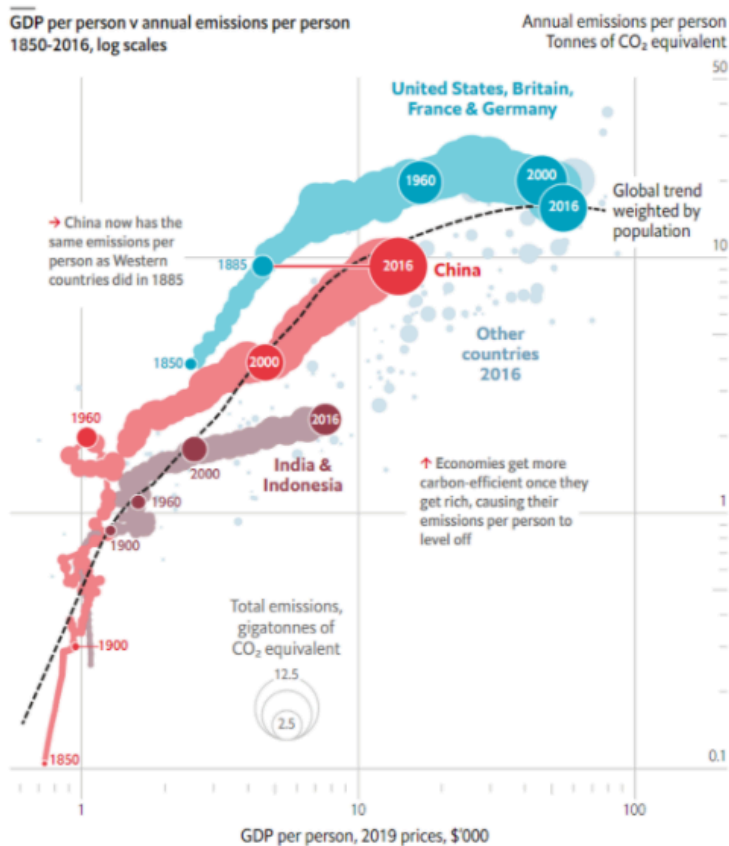
- Not making direct reference to the resources provided, and writing from your own knowledge instead of QUOTING the resource e.g. "As seen in Resource 2..." (quote the year / month / country / magnitude / percentage change etc), and don't just write "GDP of country X rose from \$Y in 2018 to \$Z in 2021", but rather: "GDP of country X rose sharply / rapidly / gradually / slowly from \$Y in 2018 to \$Z in 2021, which is a large / small increase of about ??.% (calculate the percentage if possible and give to 3sf)".
- Not fully capturing all aspects of the resources e.g. direction arrows, latitudes, and scales on maps should be used to strengthen your argument, but are often overlooked by students
- Not reading the command word(s) of the question properly e.g. If a question asks you to "Describe and explain", students commonly only describe, then forget to explain.
- Writing insufficient points corresponding to the number of marks allocated e.g. in a 5-mark evaluation question, a student might only present 2 points - while it's still possible to get all 5 marks, teachers tend to recommend students write 3 or more to be safe.
- Thinking you can smoke your way through DRQ: while DRQ does require less depth and intensive content revision compared to essays, do not neglect to study the content. Concepts found in the syllabus *will* come out, especially in the last part of each DRQ.
- Neglecting niche forms of data presentation (e.g. the triangular graph, the logarithmic graph, the stacked line chart / stacked bar graph). While not so common in A Levels so far, it's helpful to be familiar with how to read them. Here are some examples:

- Triangle graph:

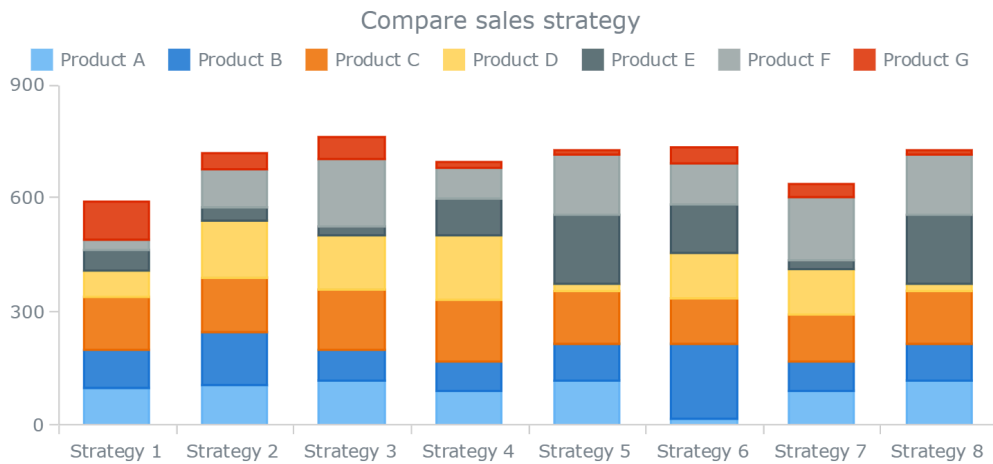


- Logarithmic graph:

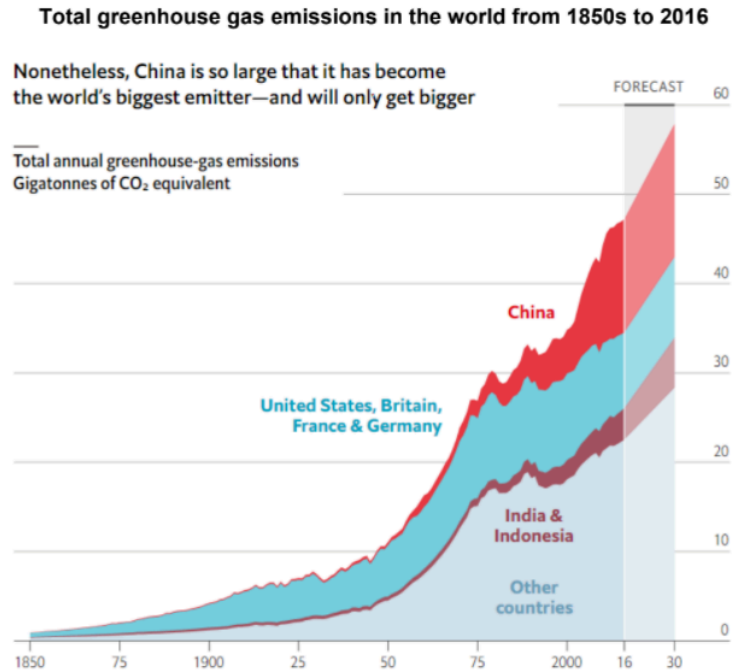
Log scale graph that shows the relationship between GDP per person and carbon emissions per person over time



- **Stacked bar graph:**



- **Stacked line graph:**



I'm assuming that most Geography students would know how to read data presented like those above, but if you don't, please clarify with your Geography tutor, or find videos online that teach you how to do so as these skills may come in useful.

How to Study for H2 Geography

Part I - Regular and Consistent Essay Practice

I think the most crucial factor that helped me do well in Geography was being “forced” to **write essays (or essay outlines) every week** because this drills in a lot of practice. It’s unrealistic to expect to cover all the common essay questions per topic individually, so you could do it as a group, where 2-3 students are assigned to work together on each essay question. Then analyse your essay with your tutor e.g. mistakes made, points that are insightful, style of argumentation and writing, pitfalls to avoid etc. This method lets you learn from the **misconceptions and mistakes of other essays**, as well as their strengths, but most importantly forces you to get into the habit of writing and arguing our points coherently.

If you can’t find students who are willing to do this with you, you can also implement this yourself: rather than writing multiple full essays for each topic, choose a question that demands that you cover a **broad range of content for that particular topic** and send it to your tutor to mark. This forces you to get a taste of how evaluating and writing coherent arguments feel like personally. 1 essay a week is quite demanding for most, so maybe 2-3 essays per month might be more manageable.

Also, it’s a good idea to **read the high-scoring essays of your classmates** to try to understand why exactly they did well, so that you can learn from them. And a lot of people don’t say this, but I find it **equally (if not more) helpful to read low-scoring essays** to find out the kind of writing that examiners dislike (the only problem with this is that it’s hard to get them from people, since you might seem like a bad person when you request to read someone’s poorly-written essay).

If you noticed that I focus a lot more on Paper 1 (essays) than Paper 2 (data response), it’s because for most students, once you understand the content in Paper 1, you would be able to do Paper 2 as well (you just need to practice the skills for DRQs, which is quite self-explanatory).

Part II - Note Making Techniques

In terms of note-making, a lot of students tend to copy the key points from the school notes into their own personal document. This method may be good for familiarizing yourself with the content at the start, but: (1) you will end up having too much content to memorize before the exam if you use those set of notes to study, and (2) you will have to come up with the evaluation on the spot when writing your essay during the exam. The way I studied and made notes for all the H2 Geography topics was as follows:

(1) Lecture: BROAD IDEA

Use lectures as a starter / “appetiser”, to get a taste of what the topic is about. Try to absorb and understand as much content as possible. A lot of students rush to copy down information on the

slides, but the aim here should be to **understand the big picture** of the topic.

(2) Reading #1: SPECIFIC DETAILS (to pad your essay with)

Before the tutorial / after lectures, read through the school notes, keeping the “big picture” you have in the lecture in mind. Your aim here is to **understand both the general idea as well as the specific details**.

(3) Tutorials: POSSIBLE EXAM QUESTIONS

During the tutorial, some teachers get you to do practice essay questions (this helps you understand the content much better). Your aim is to **familiarise yourself with the possible essay questions** that would come out for that topic, to help you with the next step.

(4) Reading #2: NOTE-MAKING (geared towards answering essay questions)

When reading through your school notes once more, look out for points / paragraphs that would answer those essay questions. Write your notes in such a way that they are **centred around essay questions**, rather than content points. So for each page, you could have multiple (similar) possible essay questions at the top, then your notes are the body paragraphs (in point form) that you would write in the exam.

This method means that instead of memorising your detailed notes first, then writing essay outlines next, your essay outlines *are* your notes, which contain the details in point form. These outlines include **evaluation** of the main points! I personally feel like it's too time consuming to come up with the evaluation during the exam itself, so think of good evaluative points for all the common questions for each topic beforehand.

(5) SUMMARY: Create a **condensed list of all the important points that would jog your memory** and help you recall the rest of the points. This summary should only contain the broad points that you can't remember and not all the details you already know. During the exam itself, use this condensed summary (that you should have memorised) to write your essay's backbone, then pad it with all the smaller and less crucial details that you can remember at that point of time to substantiate these main points. If you can't remember some of the content details, it's ok - Geography is a lot more about argumentation than content regurgitation, so you just need to argue for your points coherently. That's why essay writing practice is far more important than content memorization in my opinion.

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High Distinction for H2 Geography under the Hwa Chong Diploma with Distinction

90 RP and A for Geography in the 2020 A Levels