



# Top exam tips for IB geography

## Part 1

Richard Overens provides tips that you can follow to help maximise your performance and minimise mistakes in IB geography papers 1, 2 and 3

**R**evision advice usually covers the construction of realistic revision schedules, using summary cards or flashcards, creating a quiet, calm space for revision, using friends and family for study or testing and so on. You should follow the advice that is most appropriate for you, as a learner, so you use the most effective strategies at this potentially stressful time as you prepare for the final exams.

Geography-specific revision should always include practising subject-specific skills. For example, review basic map skills with a self-test on reading landscapes from contour lines, finding six-figure grid references, using the scale and the key, and so on. You could also practise interpreting information from a range of graph types and infographics. Looking at past IB exam papers is always valuable. Another useful strategy in geography is to try to predict or construct exam questions using the wordings of the syllabus and the command terms in the IB geography guide.

### 1 Read the question carefully

The reason why teachers repeatedly state the obvious is that students repeatedly miss or misread key aspects of a question, and therefore lose valuable marks. Examiners are not trying to catch you out, but they don't want you to reproduce a rehearsed or learned answer, so the question might contain specific instructions that will get you to reflect or analyse before answering. Read every word, looking for specific parameters like dates, places, high/low income countries, and all the key terms in the question. You could underline key instructions if that helps.

Have a look at the following example and see how many specifics you have to consider in the question:

Describe and explain the economic reasons for the softening of the one-child policy in China during the last few years.

### 2 Read ahead

Read ahead a couple of questions. It is a good idea to answer IB geography questions in chronological order, as they often progress through a theme, especially in paper 2, section A. Only if you are confident that they are standalone questions, or if you have a serious time issue during the actual exam, should you answer out of order.

However, simply looking ahead will quite often reveal some useful key terms used in the questions that might help you with preceding questions. Also, reading ahead might be useful for clarifying the question you are answering. For example:

- Question 1 might be, 'Describe the change in the global consumption of water over the last few decades.'
- Question 2 might read, 'Explain some of the factors that contribute to the changes described.'

Glancing ahead to Question 2 might remind you that no reasons are needed for your Question 1 answer, as it is a describe-only question.

### 3 Never leave blanks

Even if you are lacking confidence in a question or topic, you should not feel embarrassed by anything you write down. With the 10-mark questions in particular, IB examiners will have a set of mark bands, and they are looking for a 'best fit' for your answer. If you have something of geographic value and relevance then you should immediately reach the first mark band of 1–2 marks. With short-response questions in the first sections of paper 1 and 2, it really is worth a guess at an example, definition, fact, country, process, feature, place etc.

If you are really stuck then leave the question, but make sure you return to it and put an answer later. If you are still stuck for anything to write, think about the next exam tip...

### 4 You can write about yourself

If you are really stuck, then write about yourself. Tip 3 said that you should never leave a question unanswered. If you are really drawing a blank then try to adapt something you already know for the answer. The first place to start is your home environment. The examiner marking your script is unlikely to know as much about your home town/region/country as you, so consider whether you can use your local knowledge in the answer.

What about the contents of your internal assessment (IA) and fieldwork? You have very specific geographical knowledge on your IA topic, so can you make this relevant to the question? Is there anything else from your interests, holidays or even favourite television shows that you could adapt to the question (provided it is relevant)?

### 5 Categories and classifications

Make sure you know the common geography categories and classifications. A useful tip for all questions (especially if you are struggling) is to think about geographical categories like social, economic, political and environmental topics to remind you of the range of issues and factors that could possibly apply to the question. These categories can help jog your memory with short-answer questions, and will be especially useful for your 10-mark answers in papers 1 and 2, as well as your HL essay in paper 3. Two other popular classifications are positive/negative and short-term/long-term implications. These categories are especially useful for scoring in the AO2 analysis or AO3 evaluation and synthesis level descriptors in the longer answers.

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