

Volume 8, Number 3, April 2013

## Revision

# Marginal gains in essays and exams

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Although the concept of marginal gains is not included in A-level specifications, there is the opportunity to use it to support your answers in essay questions. In such questions grade descriptors are used to characterise answers into a number of different mark bands. Although these vary between exam boards, they all require candidates to include sporting examples to support the points they are making in order to access the top mark bands. This is where you can apply the principle of marginal gains to demonstrate your understanding of the concept of optimising performance.

Exam board	Descriptor (top marking band)
Edexcel	A range of accurate practical examples predominantly taken from global games supports the vast majority of points. A range of contemporary and original statements are included
AQA	Good use of examples to support answer, demonstrates a wide range of depth and knowledge
OCR	Well-argued, independent opinion and judgements which are well supported by relevant practical examples

The table above highlights key phrases from each exam board, indicative of long answers that fit into the top marking band. In addition to grade descriptors, mark schemes contain what is known as indicative content. This is a list of key points that candidates are expected to include in their essay.

## Writing essays

Good essay writing can make a huge difference to your exam grade. A couple of additional marks here could push your mark above the next grade boundary. Practising your essay-writing technique will pay dividends; you can ask your teacher to mark it or use a mark scheme to mark it yourself. As you practise writing and marking past paper questions, try to add relevant sporting examples to the indicative content suggested in the essay mark schemes. However, you must remember to focus your answer on exactly what the question is asking you and use examples to illustrate your points, rather than attempting to share your sporting general knowledge with the examiner.

While each exam board's requirements differ, below are some generic points that you can include in any essay that revolves around optimising performance. Can you think of any others?

## General comments

- Optimising performance is hugely important when races can be won and lost by as little as 1/1000th of a second — e.g. Olympic track cycling finals by photograph finish. Victoria Pendleton lost by 0.001 second
- Optimising performance is about the aggregation of marginal gains; making a lot of small changes to preparation, which each improve performance by a fraction — e.g. the approach used by British Cycling, coined by David Brailsford. Sir Clive Woodward used a similar approach, 100 things, 1% better
- Cost implications — e.g. very expensive, not a level playing field, almost excludes 'poorer' nations or sports
- However, funding is often linked to success — e.g. in UK sport. Could money be better spent at grassroots level?
- Importance of optimising performance from a commercial perspective — e.g. spectators/sponsors/television companies pay to watch records being broken; both tickets and advertising are more expensive for top events such Olympic 100 metres final and Champions League final