

Answering GCSE Geography examination questions

Exam technique

BUG it!

Before attempting to answer the question, remember to BUG it:

- **Box** the command word
- **Underline**:
 - ✓ the theme
 - ✓ the focus
 - ✓ any evidence required
 - ✓ the number of examples needed
- **Glance** back over the question, to make sure that you include everything in your answer

If the question instructs to you use Figure x you must directly refer to it in your answer; for example, a feature of the photograph, a number from the graph or table, or a six-figure grid reference, etc.

Point-marked 2 and 3-mark questions

Questions that do not require developed answers

State two ways in which humans can protect coastlines from erosion. [2 marks]

Humans can protect coastlines from erosion by using sea walls ✓ and rock armour ✓.

This question requires two ways that ecosystems can be protected, without any explanation; each way is worth one mark.

Questions that require developed answers

Describe one way in which humans can protect coastlines from erosion. [2 marks]

Humans can protect coastlines from erosion by building sea walls ✓; these reflect wave energy and prevent waves from breaking directly against the cliff ✓.

This question requires one way that ecosystems can be protected for one mark.

The second mark comes from **developing** your answer:

- **Extended** – describing in more detail
- **Exemplified** – giving an example of what you are describing
- **Explained** – giving a reason why something occurs

Level marked 4,6 and 9 mark questions

Longer, extended questions worth 4,6 or 9 marks are always level-marked.

4-mark questions

These questions will have a mark scheme consisting of 2 levels (Level 1: 1-2 marks, and Level 2: 3-4 marks).

6 and 9-mark questions

There are three levels, with Level 1 being the lowest, and Level 3 the highest.

Level 1 (Basic)

- answers are written in very general terms
- few or no examples of real places (examples)
- few geographical words
- writing lacks structure

Level 2 (Clear)

Level 3 (Detailed)

- answers have specific detail and detailed explanations
- refer to real places (case studies)
- use many geographical words
- structured writing
- **command word is directly addressed**

The quality of your answer is more important than the quantity that you write.

A **9-mark question** requires **no more than 3 developed points**, backed up with examples.

A **6-mark question** requires **no more than 2 or 3 developed points**, backed up with examples.

Always use examples and case studies in your answer, even if the question does not specifically ask for them.

Command words

Command words are the words and phrases used in exams that tell you how you should answer the question.

Learn the meaning of all of the command words, and the sentence starters that you can use to structure your answer listed below.

1-mark command words

- Identify/state/name
- Define

1 or 2-mark command words

- Calculate
- Label

1, 2 or 3-mark command words

- Draw

2 or 4-mark command words

- Compare
- Describe
- Suggest

2, 4, 6 or 9-mark command words

- Explain

6 or 9-mark command words

- Examine
- To what extent... (you could decide that you: fully/partially/do not agree)
- Assess (you could decide that it is very/somewhat/not important)
- Evaluate (you could decide that it has been fully/partially/not successful)
- Discuss
- Justify

Assess

Weigh up which is most/least important; make an informed judgement about the effectiveness or validity of an idea or argument.

For example, 'Assess how effective your presentation technique(s) were in representing the data collected in this enquiry'

First, make a broad evaluative statement – 'The presentation technique that I used, flow lines, were very effective in representing the data I collected.'

Then explain why you came to this conclusion – 'Flow lines were an effective presentation technique because...'

Explain the limitations of the technique, or why the idea may not be completely valid – 'However, a limitation of using flow lines was...'

Finally, write a brief conclusion using evidence from on your argument.

Calculate

Work out the value of something.

For example, 'Using Figure 7, calculate the increase in retail sales value of Fairtrade bananas between 2000 and 2012'.

Compare

Identify similarities and differences.

For example, 'Using Figure 4, compare HDI values in Africa and South America'.

Make direct comparisons between x and y, using data from the figure – 'The HDI values for South American countries are much higher than for African countries; for example, ...'.

Complete

Finish the task by adding given information.

For example, 'Complete the following sentences:'

The greatest number of category four tropical storms happen in the Ocean. Apart from very strong winds, one other associated weather feature of a category four storm is.....'.

Describe

Set out the main characteristics of something.

For example, 'Using Figure 9, describe the distribution of areas with existing licenses for fracking in the UK'.

Do not explain the characteristics.

If appropriate, use **HLGTA** – Highest, Lowest, General Trend (broad pattern) and Anomalies (characteristics that do not fit the broad pattern).

Discuss

Give an overview of a situation or a topic where there are different viewpoints; present key points about different strengths and weaknesses of an idea.

For example, 'Discuss the effects of urban sprawl on people and the environment. Use Figure 3 and a case study of a major city in the UK'.

First, explain the problems cause by urban sprawl; use map evidence (e.g. grid references, distances and directions, etc.) and your knowledge of the Bristol case study to support your points – 'Urban sprawl creates environmental problems such as the loss of countryside, including farmland and animal habitats...'

Then, explain the benefits of urban sprawl; again, use map evidence (e.g. grid references, distances and directions, etc.) and your knowledge of the Bristol case study to support your points – 'However, urban sprawl creates opportunities for people, such as new housing in an attractive environment in the rural-urban fringe...'

Finally, write a brief conclusion using evidence from on your argument.

Evaluate

Judge from the available evidence what is most/least effective.

For example, 'Evaluate the effectiveness of an urban transport scheme(s) you have studied.

Your first sentence should be a broad evaluative statement – 'The integrated transport network in Curitiba has been very successful in reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.'

Then identify the successes/advantages of the scheme – 'The scheme has been successful because it has reduced traffic congestion by...'

Identify the failings/disadvantages of the scheme - 'However, the scheme does have some limitations; there is still traffic congestion in Curitiba because...'

Finally, write a brief conclusion using evidence from on your argument.

Explain

Give reasons why something happens; set out the purposes for something.

For example, 'Using Figure 12 and your own knowledge, explain how different landforms may be created by the transport and deposition of sediment along the coast'.

Give

Produce an answer from recall.

For example, 'Give one condition that is needed for a tropical storm to form'.

Identify

Find, name or otherwise characterise.

For example, 'Identify the coastal landform at grid reference 653 532'.

Justify

Give reasons why you support a particular decision or opinion; support your argument with evidence.

For example, 'Transnational corporations (TNCs) only bring advantages to the host country.'
Do you agree with this statement? Justify your decision.

Your first sentence should be a broad statement of your opinion on the statement - 'I agree that the impact of TNCs is mostly positive to the host country, but there are some significant disadvantages.'

Then explain why you agree with the statement – 'I agree with the statement that TNCs benefit host countries because...'

Explain why you partly disagree with the statement – 'However, I do not fully agree with the statement because TNCs do bring some disadvantages ...'.

Finally, write a brief conclusion using evidence from on your argument.

Outline

Set out the main characteristics.

For example, 'Outline one way that Fairtrade helps to deal with the problems of unequal development'.

State

Express in clear terms a simple idea or statement.

For example, 'State one characteristic of the course of the River Ouse in grid square 5754'.

Suggest

In an unfamiliar situation (e.g. a photograph) explain why something might occur, with a reason.

For example, 'Suggest how the sea defences shown in Figure 11 help to protect the coastline'.

To what extent

Show how far you agree or disagree with a statement or view; judge the importance or success of a strategy, scheme, or project.

For example, 'To what extent do urban areas in lower income countries (LICs) or newly emerging economies (NEEs) provide social and economic opportunities for people?'

Your first sentence should be a broad statement of to what extent you agree with the statement – ‘I agree with that urban areas in LICs or NEEs provide social and economic opportunities to a limited extent /a significant extent / a full extent.’

Then explain why you believe the statement to be true – ‘Cities in LICs and NEEs offer social opportunities such as...’.

Explain the extent to which the assumption of the question is not true – ‘However, there are challenges for people living in cities in LICs and NEEs...’.

Finally, write a brief conclusion using evidence from on your argument.

Use evidence to support this statement

Select and present information to prove or disprove something.

For example, 'Weather in the UK is becoming more extreme.' Use evidence to support this statement.

GCSE Geography Assessment Objectives (AOs)

The exams will measure how far you have achieved the following assessment objectives; different questions are made up of different weightings of AOs.

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge of locations, places, processes, environments and different scales (15%).

AO2: Demonstrate geographical understanding of: concepts and how they are used in relation to places, environments and processes; the interrelationships between places, environments and processes (25%).

AO3: Apply knowledge and understanding to interpret, analyse and evaluate geographical information and issues to make judgements (35%, including 10% applied to fieldwork context(s)).

AO4: Select, adapt and use a variety of skills and techniques to investigate questions and issues and communicate findings (25%, including 5% used to respond to fieldwork data and context(s)).

PEEL

Use PEEL to structure your answer to exam questions.

Always write in full sentences.

Point

Make either two or three points for a 6 or 9-mark question.

Explain

Give reasons for each point.

Use sentence starters such as ‘This is because...’.

Evidence

Include facts and figures from places to back up each point.

Link

Use signposting language to **link your points together**, e.g. 'Secondly, ...', or 'However, ...'.

Write a one sentence 'mini-conclusion' to **link your points back to the question**.

Model answers

Living with the physical environment

The Living World

Study Figure 1. It shows a rainforest in Borneo, Indonesia which has been cleared to make way for a plantation.

Figure 1



Using *Figure 1* and your own knowledge, discuss the impacts of rainforest clearance. [6 marks]

Clearing tropical rainforests by *burning* causes mostly negative impacts on the environment and people.

In the short-term, a positive economic impact might be *that all of the ash that can be seen on the ground from burning the forest* would briefly add nutrients to the soil, making it more fertile for farming for one or two years, increasing the income of farmers.

However, in the medium term, soil erosion would be a negative environmental and economic impact. *Figure 1 shows that all that remains of the trees are burnt stumps*. This is a problem because when the forest canopy is removed, the heavy tropical rainfall is not intercepted by leaves. Soil erosion occurs because rain falls directly on to the exposed ground surface and flows over it in to rivers, removing the soil, making the land useless for farming.

Figure 1 shows air pollution from the burning. In the long-term, the most significant negative environmental impact would be that the carbon dioxide released when the trees were burnt would contribute to global warming, causing the polar ice caps to melt and global sea level to rise. To conclude, the short-term local economic benefits of forest clearance are outweighed by the medium and long-term regional and global negative environmental impacts.

Physical landscapes in the UK

Coastal landscapes

Evaluate the effectiveness of a coastal management scheme you have studied. [9 marks]

The Lyme Regis coastal management scheme has been very successful at reducing erosion.

The £43 million scheme consists of a new sea wall to reflect wave energy, beach nourishment to create a wide beach to absorb wave energy, and cliff pinning and drainage to prevent mass movements.

The scheme has been an economic success because its benefits outweigh its costs. Although expensive, it protects 480 homes worth millions of pounds, and many seafront businesses which attract tourists who contribute millions of pounds to the local economy every year.

Another economic benefit of the scheme is that the harbour is now better protected, safeguarding the jobs of local fishermen. Fishing makes a significant contribution to the local economy, particularly in the winter when few tourists visit.

However, the scheme has been less effective at protecting the environment. Some people think that the new defences have spoilt the appearance of the natural coastal landscape. Also, by reducing erosion at Lyme Regis, less sediment is available for longshore drift to transport along the coast, reducing the width of beaches elsewhere, possibly increasing erosion there.

In conclusion, the scheme has been very successful because it has greatly reduced the rate of erosion, creating economic benefits that outweigh any negative environmental impacts.

River landscapes

Assess the importance of human activity in causing flooding. [6 marks]

Human activity is a less important cause of flooding than natural processes.

This is because for a flood to occur, a large amount of water must reach a river quickly, reducing the lag time and increasing the peak discharge of the river hydrograph.

This most commonly occurs because of heavy rainfall on saturated soils, steep slopes or impermeable rocks such as shales, which reduce infiltration and increase surface runoff. For example, in 2009, 314 mm of rain fell in the Lake District, causing flooding in Cockermouth.

However, human activity can cause floods or make flooding worse.

Deforestation removes the canopy of trees, reducing interception, and increasing surface runoff. Urbanisation replaces permeable natural soils with impermeable concrete and tarmac which reduces infiltration and increases surface runoff.

In conclusion, human activity can make flooding worse, but not necessarily cause flooding.

The challenge of natural hazards

Evaluate the evidence that suggests global climate is currently changing. [9 marks]

There is a lot of reliable evidence from many sources that the global climate is changing.

The first piece of evidence is that scientists have recorded a 0.8°C increase in global temperatures since the nineteenth century. This has probably happened because greenhouse gas emissions have increased, causing the enhanced greenhouse effect. However, this evidence may not be completely reliable because a hundred years ago thermometers were not as accurate as they are today.

The second piece of evidence is that research carried out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has observed that global sea level has risen by between 10 and 20 cm since 1920. This has probably happened because as the Earth warms, the Polar ice caps melt, increasing the amount of water in the world's oceans. Also, as the oceans warm they expand. This evidence is reliable because the IPCC consists of thousands of the world's best scientists.

Thirdly, there is photographic evidence that glaciers in the Alps and Greenland have retreated in the last 100 years because they have melted in the warmer temperatures. This evidence is completely reliable, but it is only proof that certain parts of the world are warming.

To conclude, there are many reliable sources of evidence that climate change is occurring, and although there may be some limitations for each individual piece of evidence, the fact that all of the evidence suggests that the world is warming, makes it compelling.

Challenges in the human environment

The Changing Economic World

To what extent do you agree that Nigeria is a typical newly emerging economy (NEE)?
[9 marks]

I fully agree with the statement because Nigeria exhibits the social, economic and environmental characteristics of a NEE.

Economically, Nigeria has a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of \$2,970; this is higher than you would expect for a LIC (low income country), but much lower than the typical figure for a HIC (high income country). Nigeria's GNI is higher than a LIC because the proportion of the population employed in agriculture is decreasing as the percentage of the population working in more profitable manufacturing industry is increasing. However, Nigeria currently lacks the employment opportunities in the service and quaternary sectors to become as rich as a HIC.

A social development indicator that suggests Nigeria is a NEE is that its urban population is rapidly increasing because of urbanisation, from 29.7% in 1990, to 48.1% in 2015. Millions of people have left rural areas to seek work in its cities. The urban population of a LIC tends to be lower, and then figure is much higher in a typical HIC (e.g. 90% in the UK).

An environmental characteristic of many NEEs is environmental problems caused by rapid industrialisation. Water pollution in the Niger Delta is caused by accidental oil spills. In Lagos, air pollution is caused by emissions from thousands of legal and illegal factories. HICs usually have much stricter environmental laws, suggesting that Nigeria is a NEE.

In conclusion, Nigeria is a NEE because its social, economic and environmental indicators of development place it between a LIC and a HIC.

The Challenge of Resource Management

Assess the potential for increasing the global supply of energy sustainably. [6 marks]

Renewable sources of energy such as solar, wind and hydro-electric power have the potential to increase the global supply energy sustainably.

Sustainable energy is energy that is consumed at a rate less than its supply, with minimal environmental impacts.

Solar power is a renewable energy source which is sustainable because it will never run out and produces no pollution. The Earth receives enough solar energy to meet all of the world's energy demands. Solar panels can be placed on the roofs of buildings, or together in 'solar parks'; the world's first solar park was set up in California in 1982. However, countries with a wetter climate such as the UK have less solar potential because clouds block out some of the sunlight, reducing the amount of electricity generated.

Another renewable source of energy which could increase the global supply of energy sustainably is wind power. Wind power will also never run out, and produces no pollution other than noise. The UK is one of the best locations for wind power in the world, and is considered to be the best in Europe. In 2016, the UK generated more electricity from wind power than from coal. However, when conditions are calm, no electricity is produced.

In the immediate future, renewable energy sources will not be able to supply all of the world's energy needs because population growth, urbanisation and rapid industrialisation in LICs and NEEs such as China are increasing the global demand for energy more quickly than renewable energy sources can be developed.

To conclude, it will be possible to increase the global supply of energy sustainably by developing renewable energy resources, but at the moment they could not replace non-renewable fossil fuels and nuclear power.

Urban issues and challenges

'For those who live in low income areas of cities in the developing world, life presents far more problems than benefits'.

Do you agree with the statement? YES NO

Justify your decision using a case study of a major city in a LIC or NEE. [9 marks]

I disagree with this statement because the economic benefits of living in a low-income area in a city in an NEE, such as the Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, outweigh the social and environmental problems.

For example, a sewing machine operator in a factory in the slum can earn three times as much as a farmer in a rural area. The higher income can be used to pay for home improvements such as a concrete floor which prevents disease. This increases the family's quality of life.

Secondly, although only half of Rio's children continue their education beyond the age of 14 because of a shortage of local schools and teachers, this is still a much higher proportion than in rural areas. A better educated child from a favela has a much wider range of employment opportunities with the potential to earn higher wages.

However, although 95% of Rio's population now have access to clean water, the 5% that do not are concentrated in the low-income favelas. Drinking contaminated water is a major problem for the affected population because it can cause ill-health or even death if a water-borne disease such as cholera spreads through the densely-populated slum.

In conclusion, the economic benefit of higher wages and the social benefit of a better education in an urban slum outweigh the environmental problem of polluted water.