



Preparing for A-Level Politics



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Introduction:

We would very much like to welcome you onto the A Level Politics programme of study in September. You have chosen to study a course that will build upon skills developed at GCSE and introduce you to an awareness of current political developments in the world. This will allow you to think critically in preparation for your future. The course content of A-Level, however, is significantly different to that of GCSE so in order to make an informed decision about your progression, it is important that you thoroughly prepare.

This booklet is broken down into different sections covering aspects of Politics that you might like to investigate and think about. Each section contains wider reading recommendations, possible research questions and some activities to help you make a strong start in September.

Hopefully this guide will help you with some starting points to ease the transition from GCSEs to A Level.

Course details: Edexcel A Level Politics

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Politics/2017/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/A-level-Politics-Specification.pdf>

You should read this document in more detail, but the overview is provided below.

Paper 1: UK Politics and Core Political Ideas

What's assessed?

- Democracy and Participation
- Political Parties
- Electoral Systems
- Voting Behaviour and the Media
- Core Political Ideas – Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism

How will it be assessed?

- Written exam – 2 hours
- 84 marks
- 33% of the A-Level

Questions

- *Section A: UK Politics*
A choice of two source-based essay questions (30 marks)
A choice of two essay questions (30 marks)
- *Section B: Core Political Ideas*
A choice of two ideology questions (24 marks)

Paper 2: UK Government and Non-Core

Political Ideas

What's assessed?

- The Constitution
- Parliament
- Prime Minister and Executive
- Relations Between Institutions
- Non-Core Political Ideas - Anarchism

How will it be assessed?

- Written exam – 2 hours
- 84 marks
- 33% of the A-Level

Questions

- *Section A: UK Government*
A choice of two source-based essay questions (30 marks)
A choice of two essay questions (30 marks)
- *Section B: Non-Core Political Ideas*
A choice of two ideology questions (24 marks)

Paper 3: Government and

Politics of the USA

What's assessed?

- The Constitution
- Congress
- US Presidency
- The Supreme Court and Civil Rights
- Democracy and Participation
- Comparative Theories

How will it be assessed?

- Written exam – 2 hours
- 84 marks
- 33% of the A-Level

Questions

- *Section A: Comparative Politics*
A choice of two short comparative questions on the US and UK (12 marks)
- *Section B: Comparative Theories*
No choice question – comparison question on the US and UK which must refer to a comparative theory (12 marks)
- *Section C: US Government and Politics*
A choice of three essay questions (30 marks)

From GCSE to A Level:

The shift from GCSE to A Level is often based upon the idea of independence. In Politics, the expectations will most likely be that you will take on a greater responsibility for your learning. What this means is that you will be having to come up with your own opinions and ideas about current developments in Politics. This includes: the outcomes of elections and referendums, opinions on political leaders, policy initiatives and judgements on the effectiveness of government.

As well as forming your own opinions, you will also be required to complete essays regularly. This requires discipline and an awareness of recent examples to support your points. In addition, you will also be given tasks to complete quite often in advance of each lesson. You may also be required to deliver things such as short presentations and participate in seminars (discussion and debate-based learning). This requires an increased level of independence and maturity from students compared to GCSE.

Preparation Tasks

Task 1: Coming to terms with Political Vocabulary

The most challenging aspect of A Level Politics is getting to grips with the huge amount of terminology that you will be expected to know and use accurately. Start by creating a working glossary document so that you can collect all the key terms you learn in one place, making it easier to revise in the future.

Democracy	Direct Democracy	Representative Democracy	Pluralism	Suffrage	Pressure Group
Lobbyists	Manifesto	Left-Wing	Right-Wing	Legitimacy	Constituency
Electorate	First Past the Post	Safe Seat	Marginal Seat	Minority Government	Coalition
Mandate	Media	Class	Hierarchy	Authority	Laissez-faire
Equality	Tolerance	Limited government	Capitalism	Communism	Constitution
Codified	Unitary	Parliamentary Sovereignty	The rule of law	Devolution	Parliament
Legislation	Backbenchers	Select Committees	Opposition	Executive	Cabinet
Royal Prerogative	Supreme Court	Judicial independence	EU	Four Freedoms	Elective Dictatorship
Bipartisanship	Federalism	Separation of Powers	Incumbency	Gridlock	Powers of persuasion
Imperial Presidency	Interpretation	Affirmative Action	Campaign Finance	PACs	Electoral College

Task 2: BBC Podcast: Political thinking with Nick Robinson

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04z203l/episodes/downloads>

Available on the BBC Website. Listen to Nick Robinson's Radio 4 Podcast on UK Politics. In this he discusses various recent developments in UK Politics over numerous episodes.

Task 3: A collection of TED Talks on the topic of Politics

Listen to the four Ted Talks listed below. All of these are available on YouTube. When you have completed all of the talks, choose one of the topics in bold to investigate further.

1. How to turn climate anxiety into action
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f52LJJBCLc>
Investigation – How important is climate change to politics? Why should this issue be taken seriously? Why do parties solely focussed on this issue not win elections (e.g. Green party in the UK)?

2. Why Covid-19 is hitting us now and how to prepare for future outbreaks
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGTtGCq9grE>
Investigation – What global impact has Covid-19 had? Have governments adequately prepared for modern-day epidemics? What lessons for the future has this crisis shown?

3. Why Brexit happened and what to do now -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcwuBo4PvE0>
Investigation – Why was the issue of British membership of the EU first debated? Were the campaigns used during this referendum fair? How will this impact British politics in the future?

4. How social media is shaping our political future -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Kd99IIWJUw>
Investigation – Why has social media become so important politically? Who is most affected by social media? How has social media affected the last two British elections (2019, 2017)?

Task 4: Research Task

Below is a grid of key figures, events, pressure groups and institutions within British and American government and politics. Research each different square and answer the question attached.

<p style="text-align: center;">Climate Change</p> <p>How is this viewed in the eyes of Extinction Rebellion or Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Brexit</p> <p>What is the impact of this event: a new opportunity or a huge disaster for Britain?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">President Trump</p> <p>Was the 2016 election a turning point in the US and how likely is Trump to succeed in 2020?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2019 Election</p> <p>Why did Boris Johnson win the 2019 General Election? You can also consider why Jeremy Corbyn lost.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Scottish Independence</p> <p>Do we still need a United Kingdom? Explain your views on Scottish independence</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Protection of Rights</p> <p>How well does the UK and US Supreme Courts protect rights in each country?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">UK Political Parties</p> <p>What do the main parties in the UK stand for? Focus on the most important issues for each and why that is.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">President Obama</p> <p>How successful was the presidency of Barack Obama? Was this more hope than actual achievement?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Constitutions</p> <p>What Constitutions do the UK and US have? What similarities and differences can you identify?</p>

Task 5: Debate

Debating is a skill that you will be required to do regularly at A Level as well as forming strong arguments. Below is a debate question that you will consider.

Debate Question: Should the UK age for voting be reduced to 16?

Consider both sides of this argument and reach a conclusion. You will need evidence and examples to support the points that you make.

Task 6: Essay Question

In your exam you will be required to answer an essay question. You will not be given any information to help you write this response. You will use your own knowledge to identify arguments in support and against the question. You will have 45 minutes to do this in an exam.

Look at the sample question below:

Evaluate the view that Parliament has complete sovereignty in the UK political system (30)

1. Find two arguments which criticise referendums in the UK and two arguments that support referendums in the UK.
2. Can you find an example which supports the four arguments you have just identified?
3. Reach a judgement – overall do you agree that referendums create more problems than solution or not? Explain your view.

Task 7: Source-based Essay Question

In your exam you will be required to answer a source-based essay question. For this you will be given an extract which you will not have seen before the exam. You will need to read through this and analyse the different arguments in support and against the question. Then you will write a response that focuses on the information in the source. You have 45 minutes to do this in an exam.

Look at the sample question on the next side.

4. Find two arguments which criticise referendums in the UK and two arguments that support referendums in the UK.
5. Can you find an example which supports the four arguments you have just identified?
6. Reach a judgement – overall do you agree that referendums create more problems than solution or not? Explain your view.

- (b) *The source involves comments on the 2016 EU referendum from the Constitution Unit of University College, London and statistical information concerning the referendum provided by Parliament.*

In a parliamentary democracy, advisory referendums are potentially destabilising because they generate alternative, competing sources of democratic legitimacy. If a referendum demonstrates that a majority of the public hold the opposite view to elected representatives, which view of democratic legitimacy carries most authority? Some reasonably take the view that a referendum won by a very narrow margin is an insufficient mandate for major change. A 'Leave' vote, if implemented, is effectively irreversible: a 'Remain' vote leaves open the possibility of future referendums on the same issue. For this reason, many constitutional commentators believe that major referendums should require some form of super-majority – 60 per cent of votes cast is the threshold most commonly suggested.

However, there are arguments that support the legitimacy of the EU referendum. It produced a turnout of 33 million voters, more than any other referendum. It was a very rare example of direct democracy for the whole of the UK. Clearly parliament only exists and MPs only function by and for the will of the people. Key factors endorse its legitimacy: holding it was a feature of the Conservative manifesto. World leaders regard the vote as being decisive, as Mrs May has stressed in meetings with EU leaders. In summary – the government is constitutionally mandated to implement this decisive vote by the people.

Proportion of the vote across the UK in the EU Referendum June 2016

	Leave the EU %	Remain in the EU %
England	53.4%	46.6%
Wales	52.5%	47.5%
Scotland	38.0%	62.0%
Northern Ireland	44.2%	55.8%
United Kingdom (overall)	51.9%	48.1%

(Sources: adapted from <https://constitution-unit.com/2016/07/22/the-eu-referendum-and-some-paradoxes-of-democratic-legitimacy/> and <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7639>)

Using the source, evaluate the view that referendums create more problems than solutions.

In your response you must:

- *Compare and contrast the different opinions in the source*
- *Examine and debate these views in a balanced way*
- *Analyse and evaluate **only** the information presented in the source*

(30)

Task 8: Open Learning Courses

You should engage in Open Learning courses and receive the certificates of participation. Though the learning process, you should comprehensively engage with the tasks and produce learning notes. You should make selections to engage in at least 50 hours of study before study commences in September.

Introductory

From Brexit to the Break-Up of Britain <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/brexit-the-break-britain/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab>

Politics, Media and War: 9/11 and its Aftermath <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/people-politics-law/politics-policy-people/politics/politics-media-and-war-9/11-and-its-aftermaths/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

The Law Making Process in England and Wales <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/the-law-making-process-england-and-wales/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

Judges and the Law <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/judges-and-the-law/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

Human Rights and Law <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/human-rights-and-law/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

Intermediate

What is Politics? <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/what-politics/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

The Politics of Devolution <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/people-politics-law/politics-policy-people/sociology/the-politics-devolution/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

The Problem with Crime <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/sociology/the-problem-crime/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

Constitutions in Transition <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/constitutions-transition/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

Advanced

Rights and Justice in International Relations - <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/people-politics-law/politics-policy-people/politics/rights-and-justice-international-relations/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

We hope that you enjoy working through these tasks and gaining an insight into A-Level study.

This programme is very different to GCSE study and requires dedication from you to your research and personal study. However, you will find it interesting and rewarding – so we'll look forward to seeing you in September.