GCSE Plus

Scheme of work – accompanying presentation

Differences in study: GCSE v GCSE Plus

GCSE Study	GCSE Plus Study
Classroom-based work	Largely independent work
Assessed by exam	Not assessed by exam – the project is graded by the school and moderated by the exam board (like coursework)
Emphasis on **end result** (eg essay)	Emphasis on **process** as well as **end result** (eg how you arrived at the final essay)
Subject content determined by a **specification/teacher**	Subject content determined by the **student**
Teacher **instructs** students	Supervisor **guides** students
Learning resources are **given** to the student	Learning resources are **selected** by the student (i.e. Research)
All students work at the same pace, determined by the teacher	All students work at a pace they decide, to best achieve their aims and objectives

Reasons for doing a GCSE Plus

Link to career aspirations

Relevance to A-level/university courses

Just for fun

I've always been curious about…

What is your motivation for completing a GCSE Plus?

Good fit with my skills and experience

Because I care about this issue

Personal challenge – can I achieve it?

I want to try something new

If I had free time, I'd do this anyway
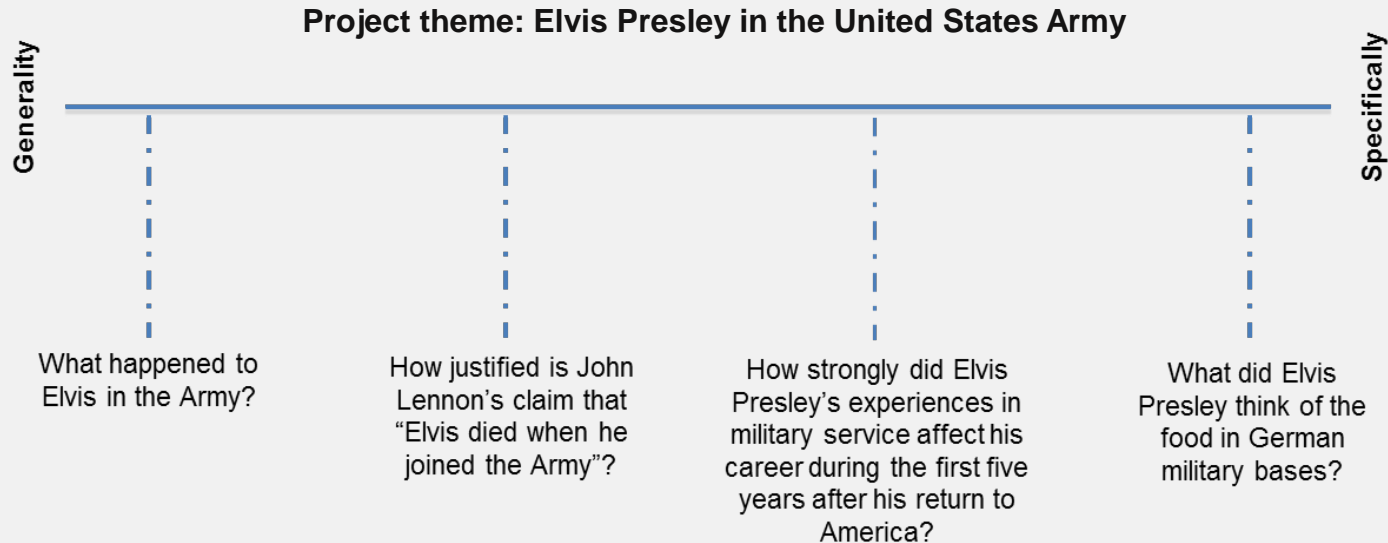
Turning topic ideas into research questions

	Yes	No

1. Does the proposed title and action allow the student to:
   (a) expand upon an aspect or aspects of the specification content covered in the associated OxfordAQA International GCSE.
Or
   (b) explore a topic not part of the relevant specification but which is clearly an established area of the subject?
	☐	☐

2. Is the proposed title and action clear and focused on an issue which can be managed within the timescale, available resources and word count?	☐	☐
3. Will the proposed title and action allow the student to access the higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation, rather than simply describe and narrate?	☐	☐

Qualities of good research questions

- Precise language
- clear definition/scope
- significant
- realistic prospect
- information is available
- personal interest to you
- a real problem to answer/debate.

- Not vague
- not limitless/unwieldy
- not trivial/niche
- not deluded/grandiose
- not remote/unknown
- not purely an exercise
- not descriptive/a simple tour

Focusing the research question (RQ)

Once you have established the broad area or topic of a research project, the next task is to develop the RQ. It is helpful to imagine this as a spectrum, ranging from generality to specificity. A skilled researcher understands how to find the right point on the spectrum so that a possible RQ has appropriate focus; it needs to be manageable, but should also be 'big' enough to be significant. It may help to put your ideas into a spectrum diagram:

Project theme: Elvis Presley in the United States Army

Generality ————————————————————————————— Specifically

What happened to Elvis in the Army?

How justified is John Lennon's claim that "Elvis died when he joined the Army"?

How strongly did Elvis Presley's experiences in military service affect his career during the first five years after his return to America?

What did Elvis Presley think of the food in German military bases?

Setting aims and developing objectives

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The primary focus of your GCSE Plus should be expressed in terms of aims and objectives:

Aims	Objectives
An intention or aspiration; what you hope to achieve.	A goal or a step on the way to meeting the aim; how you will achieve it.
Aims are statements of intent, written in broad terms.	Objectives use specific statements which define measurable outcomes.
Aims set out what you hope to achieve at the end of the project.	**eg** 1. **Gather research relating to historical developments in golf ball technology.** 2. **Decide on appropriate criteria by which to assess impact.**
eg To investigate the developments in golf ball technology in the last hundred years and assess which has been most significant.	3. **Assess each development in light of these criteria.**

mycourse.solent.ac.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=2744&chapterid=1293

SMART objectives

- **Specific** – Be precise about what you are going to do.

- **Measureable** – You will know when you have reached your goal.

- **Achievable** – Do you have the necessary resources to achieve the objective (eg time, money, skills)? Or are you attempting to do too much?

- **Relevant** – Is your goal relevant to and consistent with your overall aim?

- **Time constrained** – Determine when each stage needs to be completed. Is there time in your schedule to allow for unexpected delays?

Practice research questions

1. Certain people have an aptitude for learning foreign languages: truth or myth?

2. Predictive genetic testing - should it be used?

3. Will we be able to create a conscious artificial intelligence within the next 20 years?

4. Is the criminal justice in the UK system institutionally racist?

5. An investigation into the effectiveness of alternative medicine in horse sport injuries.

6. How has the discovery of exoplanets affected the probability of there being life on other planets?

Taking a critical approach to sources

When you come across a resource that looks like it might be useful for your project (in terms of content) you should ask yourself how **believable** the writer/source is.

Another word for 'believable' is '**credible**'.

So – a key question when **selecting and evaluating** resources is:

How credible is the origin of this resource?

(The origin of a resource is usually either a person or an organisation).

We can assess the credibility of a resource by asking five questions:

1. What is the **reputation** of the person or organisation responsible for the resource? (eg one politician might have a reputation for always being fair and speaking the truth whilst another might have a reputation for being easily influenced by external organisations such as businesses).

2. Does the person or organisation have the **'ability to see'** the issues directly or rather through factors that might distort the issues? (eg the autobiography of an Auschwitz survivor or a scientific research team working on a new medicine might be very credible for this reason).

3. Does the person or organisation have a **vested interest** to lie or tell the truth regarding the matter in question? (eg a policeman has a vested interest to tell/report the truth – it is part of his job – whereas a company might have a vested interest to hide particular facts).

4. Does the person or organisation have **expertise** in the issues? (eg this is often missing in informal and personal internet blogs and can be an issue with resources such as Wikipedia. Also note that a 'Professor' might not be an expert in a particular field, eg Stephen Hawking's declaration that 'Philosophy is dead').

5. Does the person or organisation approach the issues in a **neutral** way? (eg when both sides of an issue are mentioned/explored and the writer/organisation has no links with associated parties) – the opposite being **bias**.

Other useful terms for assessing credibility

1. Corroboration – Research/evidence that agrees with other research/evidence that is independently produced increases the credibility.

2. Peer review – Articles in academic journals are often peer reviewed by experts in the field to ensure that the quality of evidence and plausibility of claims can be relied upon. However, most of what is published on the internet does not go through peer review.

3. References – Resources that are appropriately referenced tend to be more credible than those that are not.

Assessing the credibility of websites

1. It can be difficult to determine the credibility of internet sources. You can work out a fair amount about the neutrality and vested interest of an article by the type of organisation which has published it - is it a newspaper, journal, university, independent organisation, profit-making organisation, governmental organisation, non-governmental organisation, pressure or fundraising group?

2. Look at the top-level domain suffix in the URL address. While any website owner can register any domain name for a fee, the conventions in the box opposite are generally observed.

US	UK	Usage
.com	.co.uk	Commercial businesses
.biz		Less often used, but also commercial businesses
.edu	.ac.uk	Educational institutions such as universities
.org	.org.uk	Non-commercial and non-governmental organisations such as charities, pressure groups or community groups
.gov	.gov.uk	Official government website(local or national government)
.net		General purpose/network
.tv		Officially the country code for Tuvalu, an island in the South Pacific. This domain is popular with businesses wanting to stream video over the internet.

Note taking

Whatever the subject of your project, it is likely that you will need to take notes at some time. How you take notes is a personal choice. You may need to experiment with a couple of different methods of organising and storing notes to see what works for you.

Notes should help you to:

- Concentrate – making notes keeps you active and involved.

- Understand – highlight key points and summarise key information.

- Remember details – of your sources and ideas.

- Keep a permanent record – so you can refer back, quote accurately and avoid plagiarism.

The seven steps to good note taking

1. Decide how to store your notes.

2. Scan the source, thinking about the nature and relevance of its content – is it worth a closer look?

3. Survey the reading material.

4. Label your notes.

5. Read.

6. Recall and review.

7. Use your notes and reference accurately.

How to avoid plagiarism

To avoid plagiarism you should reference your work appropriately. This is done in several ways:

- By adding an **in-text reference or citation** whenever you **quote, refer to or paraphrase** another person's ideas/writing.

- By adding a more detailed **reference list** at the end of your work of all the sources your have referenced in the work.

- By adding a **bibliography** after your reference list giving details of any sources that you did not directly reference but were used as background reading.

References and bibliographies

My Great Essay
By Adam Smith

I read a lot about writing and vocabulary and found this quotation very useful.

"Learning vocabulary is always a matter of building up fields of words. And we do that by comparing words with other words. That is how parents teach children."

(Crystal, 2006, p29) ❶

In conclusion I think I learned a lot from this book and from my parents.

References
❷ Crystal, D (2006) *Words words words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bibliography
❸ Murray, W (2008) *All about essays*, Newcastle: nlearning Press
Dawes, J and Rowley, J (1998) 'Enhancing the customer experience: contributions from information technology', *Management Decision*, 36:6, pp.350-357.

In the body of the text you only include the author's last name, year and optionally the page number you are referring to ❶. You give the full bibliographic reference ❷ at the end of your work in the references section.

You should include any source used as background reading ❸ in a 'Bibliography' section.

You should use in-text citations whenever you use a source in your work:

- as a specific reference to information or facts from the source
- as a direct quotation (the same words as the original)
- in a paraphrase (a rewording of the original).

Your reference list and bibliography are always presented in alphabetical order by author, last name. There is no need to divide your bibliography up into, say, a textbook section and an internet section. Simply go by the author's last name. If you do not know the author, or it is not given, you should use the name of the organisation that created the material instead.

How to reference different types of sources

Bibliographic information

Different sources require you to record different information in your bibliography and references section. We provide details of what to record for three main formats below:

■ textbooks
■ journal articles
■ websites (and images from the web).

The following formats are taken from *Cite them right* (Pears and Shields, 2008).

Bibliography information for a textbook

Author last name, initial | Title of article in *italics* | Publisher

Crystal, D (2006) *Words words words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Year of publication | Place of publication

Bibliography information for a journal article

Author(s) last name, initial | Year of publication | Title of article in quotation marks

Dawes, J and Rowley, J (1998) 'Enhancing the customer experience: contributions from the information technology', *Management Decision*, 36:6, pp. 350-357.

Title of publication in *italics* | Issue | Pages

Bibliography information for a website (or online image*)

Author(s) last name, initial | Year of publication | Title of web page in *italics*

Rowell, G (2008) AMBeR - *Generic Penalty Tariff*. Available at: www.plagiarismadvice.org (Accessed: 17 May 2009).

The website address | The date you looked at the website

* In the case of an online image 'author' would refer to the photographer or illustrator.

What is an argument?

An argument is a piece of writing or speech that:
1. contains a **conclusion** and at least one **reason**
2. attempts to **persuade** you of a point of view.

In an argument:
- conclusions **support** reasons
- reasons are supported by **evidence** (eg statistics, examples etc).

The stronger this support is, the stronger the argument.

A simple visual representation of how an argument works is the 'argument pyramid'.

The argument pyramid

A simple and fictitious example of an argument

A recent survey in the US showed that basketball is the most exciting sport to watch. It also involves the most skill and fitness as sports scientists now agree that the sport uses more of the body's muscles than any other sport. Therefore basketball must be the best sport there is.
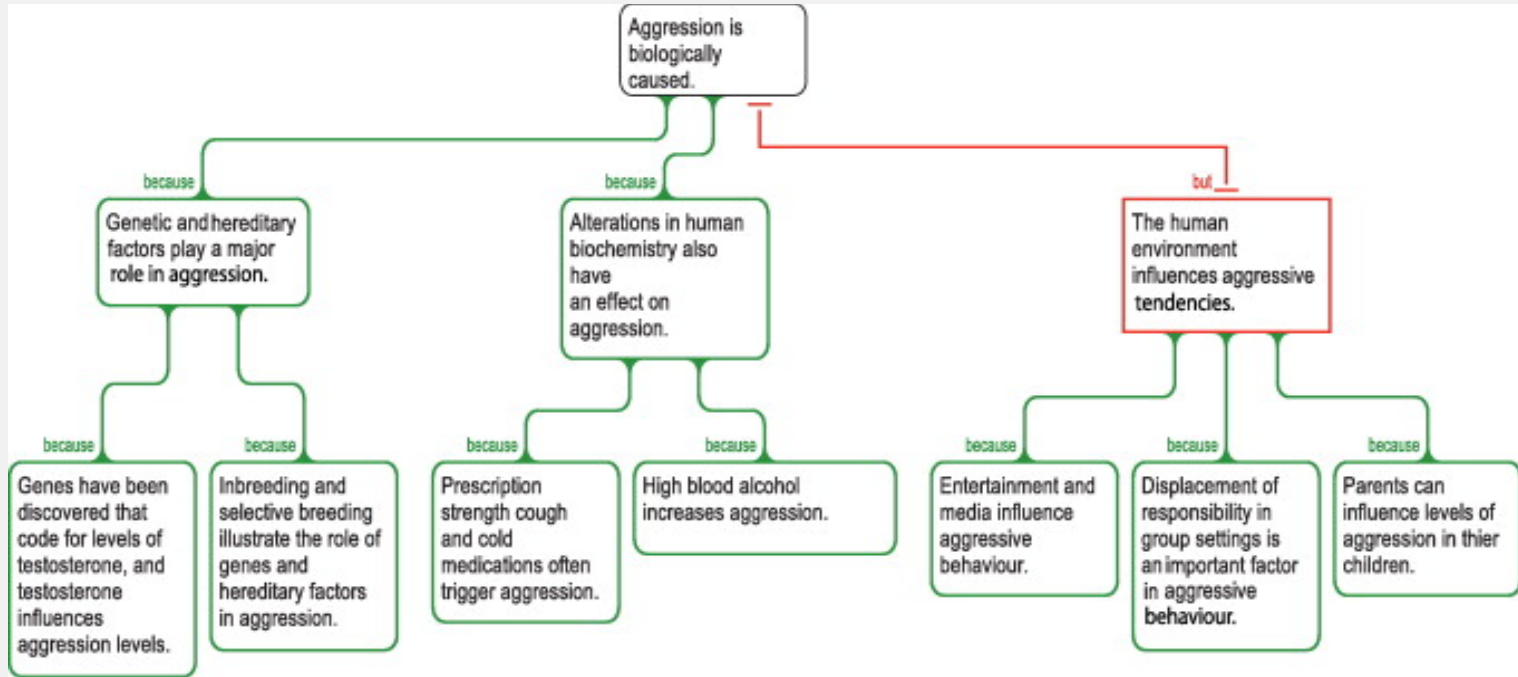
A simple and fictitious example of an argument (continued)

CONCLUSION: Basketball must be the best sport there is.

REASON 1
Basketball is the most exciting sport to watch.

EVIDENCE
A recent survey in the US.

REASON 2
Basketball involves the most skill and fitness.

EVIDENCE
Sport scientists now agree that the sport uses more of the body's muscles than any other sport.
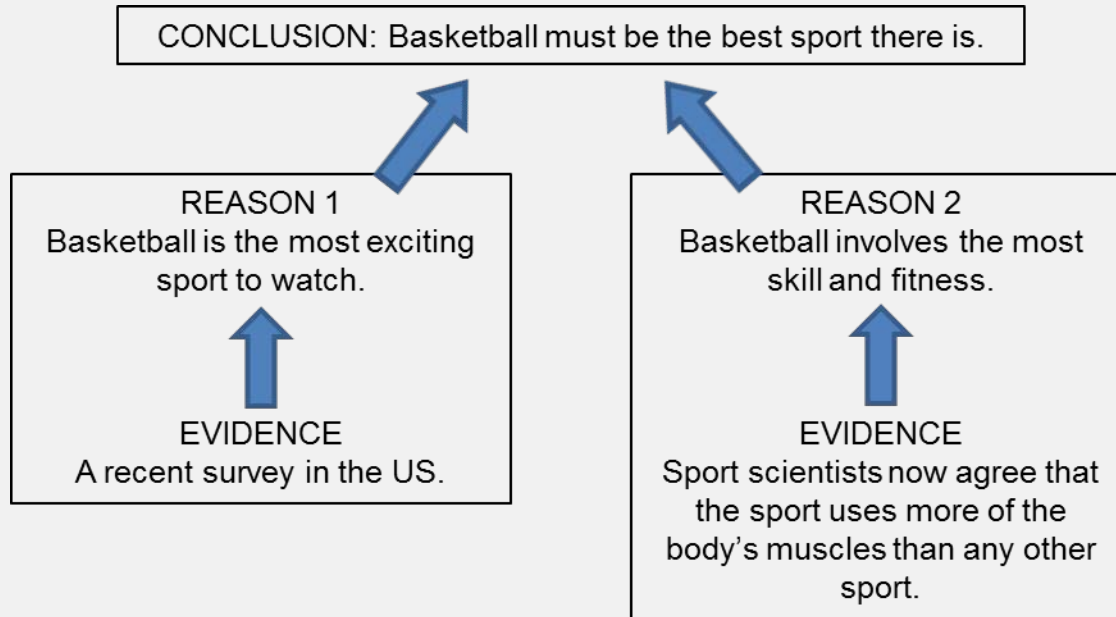
Visualising your argument – using argument maps

An argument map can help you to understand how the different points you want to make can link together to form a logical argument. It can also help you spot gaps, assumptions and counter-points in an argument. When you are happy that you understand how your argument fits together, you can use the argument map to help you evaluate it systematically – that is, assess the strength of each piece of supporting evidence and the logical connections between each conclusion and its reasons.

A example of an argument map

Reprinted from Thinking Skills and Creativity April 2013, Volume 8. Article - An examination of the effect of argument mapping in students' memory and comprehension performance by Christopher P. Dwyer, Michael J. Hogan, Ian Stewart with permission of Elsevier.

What is evaluation/review?

- A 'higher-order' thinking skill – ie one that requires more cognitive ability and has more generalised benefits.

- Making judgments about information (ie sources), validity of ideas or quality of work based on a set of criteria.

- What criteria? With GCSE Plus the criteria are largely the aim and objectives you set at the start of the process.

| Analyse | Evaluate | Create |
| Apply |
| Understand |
| Remember |
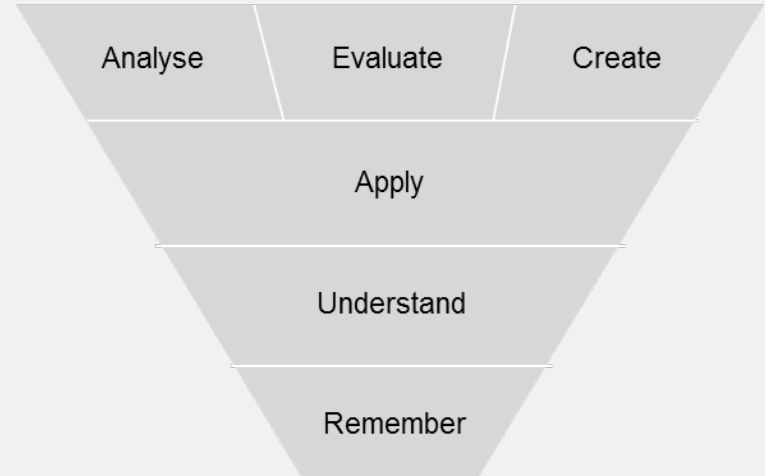
The cognitive element of Bloom's taxonomy.

How to review…

- No piece of work is perfect. Therefore, always aim for a **healthy balance of successes and failures** in your review. The ability to critically analyse your own work is the key to improvement and success.

- **Be honest**. If you try and make up or embellish your review it is will be obvious to the person who is grading your project.

- Your review needs to be **detailed and careful** so support it with **explanations**, eg 'I found it difficult to find suitable resources on this particular aspect of my work because…'

- Your review should be completed in the relevant part of the *Progress diary*.

What to review

You can use AO1, AO2 and AO3 to structure your evaluation.

AO1 – Organisation

- Did you set appropriate aims and objectives?
- Was your project plan realistic? Have you kept to it?
- Did you manage the process well?
- Did you organise your time and resources well?
- Did you solve problems successfully?
- Did you take appropriate decisions?

AO2 – Research

- Did you manage to find enough resources?
- How credible were the sources you used?
- Were the sources directly relevant to your title?
- Did you analyse information from your sources adequately?

AO3 – Realisation

- How far have you achieved the aim and objectives you set at the start?
- How strong were the conclusions your made?
- Did you manage to synthesise your research effectively?
- Was your report appropriately presented and referenced?

Get help and support

Visit our website for information, guidance, support and resources at oxfordaqaexams.org.uk

You can contact the team directly:

E: gcseplus@oxfordaqaexams.org.uk

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