

May 2015 subject reports

Brazilian Social Studies

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-17	18-34	35-45	46-56	57-67	68-78	79-100

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-3	4-6	7-8	9-11	12-13	14-16	17-20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Most investigations were based on historical topics related to the colonial era through to the 20th century, and the return to democracy in the 1980s. In recent sessions many investigations were on subjects concerning the military rule, and about one-third of investigations were also based around this in May 2015. However, it was pleasing to see social issues being discussed, such as women's rights under the 1934 Constitution, the beginning of the favelas in late 19th century in Rio, or the condition of most slaves and their families under the plantation regimes.

In general the selection of topics showed a greater awareness of the need to choose subjects with plenty of sources and that are manageable within the word count. A good example of excellence in this respect was an investigation on the life and death of Vladimir Herzog, as a victim of the military.

One example of an investigation with a focus that was too broad was based on the Paraguayan War: the candidate was concerned with the results of the war, but wrote about everything, which became far too wide as a subject for investigation. Another candidate also wrote about this war but did better by examining only the causes and results, and leaving out details about the battles.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: proper planning was not strong, with only 50% of candidates gaining 3 marks.

Criterion B: marks of 3 out of 4 were awarded to most of the candidates—a good sign.

Criterion C: results were not, in general, satisfactory. Candidates should choose their two most important sources to strengthen understanding of the linkage between criteria B, C and D.

Criterion D: Just 50% of candidates reached a mark of 3/4 and this remains the most difficult area. This criterion emphasises the linkage with B and C.

Criterion E: Generally well managed—the conclusion should be concise.

Criterion F: The number of marks at 1 and 0 were small, but only a few candidates gained 3 marks, so there is a lot to do to improve in this area.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Detailed (but not over long), appropriate sourcing is still the basis of success. Candidates need to provide a comprehensive bibliography (list) of sources used.

Further comments

None.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-7	8-14	15-19	20-23	24-27	28-31	32-40

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Section A

The main difficulties were a lack of attention to what a specific question demanded and a failure to support answers with evidence from the sources. There was a lot of detail available on changes in farming and government-backed investment and the green revolution, which should have been used all the time. Questions 2, 3 and 4 also could have been answered with much more use of statistics contained in the documents.

Section B

Candidates missed some details from the sources.

Answers to question 7 were poor, with not enough emphasis on accurate detailed evaluations.

In both sections, candidates tended to have difficulties with addressing concepts or theories, preferring to rely on broad generalizations or vague words rather than more specific examples. Proper referencing of the sources in the answers could also be improved.

Questions that demanded comparison and contrasting between documents, such as in Qs 2, 3 and 6, presented frequent challenges for students, who often could not properly interpret non-written documents, or failed to address all the differences and similarities, or sometimes to connect those.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

There was a lot of understanding and good performance in questions 4 and 8 and a good balance was achieved on both these polemical questions, especially on the politics of the end of Empire. This showed the value of open-ended questions in 4 and 8, which still need to be answered by specific detail and argument.

The other questions were clearly dependent on interpretation of the sources, and some candidates' answers were relevant and accurate, demonstrating good teaching of how to approach this task; other candidates struggled, as mentioned above, either because they failed to interpret (mainly non-textual) sources like the graph correctly, or because they didn't make good use of the source information in their replies.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Good use of time is extremely important in these 90 minute examinations which place a lot of emphasis on the two last questions of each section – they are worth 40% of the maximum 100% of marks. This is useful as a guide to how much time needs to be spent on the other six questions.

Comments on individual questions have been dealt with in sections 1 and 2 above.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- teaching some case studies could help students to understand how to use examples effectively, and to use theories and concepts/key-words more accurately.
- students could practice structuring their answers clearly, especially for questions 4 and 8, referring back clearly to the document sources from where the pieces of information were extracted. Candidates do not have to write a small essay but could answer in note form if necessary, but with clear, relevant statements.
- students should be taught how to explore documents in order to fully detect and acknowledge their differences and similarities.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-7	8-14	15-18	19-22	23-27	28-31	32-40

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

The biggest weakness perceived by examiners was the inability of candidates to understand exactly what the questions required of them, and to answer about what was specifically asked.

Once this is understood (“what does the question ask you to do?”), planning should give an immediate focus on the question so that candidates do not waste time on writing about material is not relevant. There was plenty of evidence in the good essays that showed how effective planning brings results; there were some good examples in question 2.

Too many candidates still waste time on making irrelevant comments which are not supported by evidence, resulting in vague generalizations instead of a focused answer.

More balanced evaluation is needed—e.g. questions like Q6 need to be seen from different points of view in order to be answered properly.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

The overall picture is very positive, and many students were well prepared and demonstrated much relevant knowledge to good purpose. In good answers, general statements were supported by an appropriate amount of detail and depth—there were good answers to Qs 1 and 8: in Q1 details about Vargas' building up of industry were carefully managed and controlled, while in Q8 time was dedicated to examining each military decree and then showing what resulted as democracy was crushed.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Q1: was a popular one. Vargas' determination to replace coffee by home grown industrial development stressed the defence of workers and control over energy supplies. The essay was in general well-managed, although some essays had an overly historical emphasis rather than a geographical one (it was necessary to explain the importance of the strong investment in the manufacturing sectors).

Q2: students appeared well prepared to answer this question, and there was some really good analysis that demonstrated the potential gains and losses of a changing pyramid shape.

Q3: very few candidates answered this question.

Q4: the case for and against ethanol and petroleum were detailed, and many answers were very effective. The best answers balanced the arguments really well.

Q5: answers to this questions were disappointing, with too much irrelevant detail (a number of candidates spent time on explaining monoculture and Holland's occupation of the NE Brazil) and limited mention of Pombalism. The growing negative feelings of Brazilians towards the Portuguese and the Portuguese exploitation of gold were emphasized, but the details were not brought together well. .

Q6: this was well-answered by most candidates who balanced the evidence well.

Q7: Kubitscheck's approaches to reforming Brazil were clearly detailed, and most of the candidates stressed the successes of car production—only a very few mentioned his financial problems.

Q8: the dictatorship's decrees were examined in depth in the best answers; the answer required discussion of many aspects, and some students found difficulty in addressing these—weaker answers were too vague.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

It is always good for candidates to practice writing the essay-style of answers required in Paper 2— some candidates seemed not to know how to structure their answers effectively.

It's recommended that teachers ensure that candidates realize the importance of understanding the key point of a question. There were a few examples where candidates wrote a lot about the subject, but didn't answer what was specifically required by the question.

Schools, teachers and students should be congratulated on the quality of the good essays.
