

IB History at Varndean College

Course Start

Course Start is independent learning you need to complete as a fundamental part of your introduction to the course. It should take you approximately 5 hours to complete.

Course Name	IB History SL and HL
How this Course Start fits into the first term of the course	This induction will begin to look at the nature of history. What do we mean by history? What is the role of a historian? We will begin to consider some of the depth studies which will be relevant later in the course, such as China, giving you a better understanding of the period. In addition we will consider the nature of revolutions throughout history and their consequences. Finally we will consider the idea of interpretations, where do historians' views come from, and why do they differ?
How will my Course Start learning be used in lessons?	This will be linked directly to your first week of teaching, and referred back to as we begin China and your coursework.
Course Start learning objectives	• Understanding key concepts in History e.g. causes, consequence, turning points, significance, change & continuity, interpretations • Understanding chronology & significance of events for one of your Y1 Papers • Developing appropriate study skills for IB History
Study Skills	• Independent research • Conceptual thinking • Developing your own ideas & opinions



Hello!

Welcome to Varndean College History Department – we are history obsessives & have put together a course that we think you will find rewarding, engaging, challenging, maybe even inspiring.

To help you feel confident and ready for IB History, we've put together some activities to introduce you to key concepts from the course including causation and impact; change and continuity; historians' perspectives. We hope that these will also help you to reflect on the nature of History as an academic discipline, and patterns that we can observe in events that happened in vastly different times and places.

- 1. What is History?**
- 2. Historical Concepts**
- 3. Case study: twentieth-century China**

We suggest that you do these tasks in 2 or 3 sessions over the summer - don't try and do them all in one go! You **must** work through all 3 tasks (and you **should** do all of the questions in each section):

You **could** also delve deeper into the past by following up some of the suggested links or dipping into anything that catches your eye from the reading list.

We've included some course details and FAQ at the end of this document, but If you have any other questions or concerns, feel free to email me.

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TASK 1: What is History?

Read the article below and answer the question at the end!

What is the point of history?

Does historical research get us closer to 'the truth' of past events? And how does that help you in today's society?

History does not have lessons. This may come as a surprise, as it is common to hear people talking about learning 'the lessons' of the past or claiming that 'history is on my side', but I think it is true. If historical events carry simple lessons, it suggests that the same actions will always have the same result. But they do not. Just because one coup attempt fails, it does not mean that all coup attempts are futile. The fact that one invasion of a country succeeded does not mean that other attempts will also succeed. The fact that one set of circumstances produced a dictatorship does not mean that similar circumstances will always do the same. Every disastrous or failed development in human history has had its supporters claiming that it has 'history on its side', or that its opponents will end up in the 'dustbin of history'. History is many things, but it is not a dustbin.

Interpreting the past

History is primarily a method of disciplined understanding, and its underlying principle is a respect for the truth. When historians come up with a new way of interpreting the past – one which challenges and changes the way we have understood it hitherto – they are not doing it to be contrary or to fulfil a whim. Rather, they do it because in some way they think their new thinking gets us closer to the truth.

It may be a question of correcting a misunderstanding; it may be a different way of interpreting familiar events; it may be more a question of adding different perspectives into the picture – for example, women, children, environmental issues, disability – in order to get to a fuller understanding of what happened; or it may be the addition of new evidence that has recently come to light. Whichever one of these applies, the result is a more accurate understanding of the past than the one we had before. We are closer to the truth.

Historical truth

Talk of historical truth can take us into deep philosophical water. What is 'truth'? What might 'the truth' look like in historical terms? Is there such a thing, indeed? Is it possible to construct in every single detail, in terms of your thoughts and feelings as well as your actions, big and small, a 'complete truth' of even a single day in your own life? If that is almost impossible, how much harder is it to do something similar for major historical events or movements? Nevertheless, that is what historians do – they try to get closer to this notional 'truth' by adding to or altering existing historical knowledge and understanding.

Truth and society

No doubt this will seem all very well, but you might think it's not going to help you much in a job interview if you are asked the point of your having studied history. But if you think that, think again. There are plenty of areas of work that seek to identify the truth – police and judicial work are obvious examples, but it is also true of many types of work, including journalism, science, social work, marketing, administration and government. The film director Ridley Scott recently defended his film Napoleon against historians criticising its inaccuracies by asking historians the arguably fatuous question, 'How do you know? Were you there?' The answer to his question, of course, is that historians study in close detail the evidence left behind, from which we can work out the truth of what happened and we can also denounce false claims. The ability to find out the truth is often lacking in life and is always needed.

Think for a moment of the implications of Scott's question. If we hold to the idea that 'If you weren't there, you can't know', then anyone can come up with any idea, however crazy or offensive and dangerous and claim it as 'true'. If we start believing that everyone's own view is their 'truth', then we cannot challenge even deliberate lies and falsehood. Conspiracy theorists or Holocaust deniers routinely make sweeping claims without a shred of evidence, but will come up with ever more outlandish analysis to undermine clear evidence that contradicts them. In the end, a society that has ceased to care about truth, or about whether people's claims can be substantiated, has no defence against those who live by lies. Such people rarely intend good to others.

So, study history because you enjoy it, or because you learn to analyse and argue, or because you want it to open careers to you – all of these are valid and good reasons. But the real importance of studying history lies much deeper: free study of the past is an unmistakable sign of a society committed to truth, and ultimately such societies offer more freedom and justice than those which are not.

The Royal Historical Society has recently published a report, 'The Value of History in UK Higher Education and Society', which is accessible to all at: <https://tinyurl.com/jezw4wwa>.

Task: In 300 words, explain what history means to you. Why have you chosen to study it? What do you want to gain from it?

TASK 2: Historical concepts

2a. Cause and Consequence : Pillars of Failure

You are going to visually map out why the historical regime collapsed by identifying its weak points, or "cracks." **This can be any regime of your choosing.**

On a blank piece of paper, sketch four large columns or pillars. Label each one with a key foundation of a stable society:

- Geopolitical (Foreign relations and international pressure)
- Social (Public trust, unity, and civilian life)
- Constitutional (The laws, government system, and leadership)
- Economic (Money, jobs, and financial stability)

Think about the historical regime. Based on specific historical evidence and facts from your notes or readings, draw cracks into each pillar. Label each crack with a specific event, crisis, or failure that weakened that part of society.

Look at your cracked pillars as a whole. Underneath your drawing, write one concise sentence identifying which specific crack was the absolute tipping point—the most immediate cause of the regime's ultimate collapse.

2b. Significance: Concept Map

Write the name of **any conflict of your choosing** in the center of your page. On one side, map out the Immediate Effects. These are the direct, short-term consequences that happened during or right after the conflict (e.g., destruction of property, loss of life, or sudden political shifts).

On the other side of your page, map out the Overall Significance. These are the bigger-picture, long-term impacts. Think about how this conflict fundamentally altered the society, changed people's mindsets, or shifted the balance of power over time.

Review your map and look at the connection between the short-term chaos and the long-term changes. At the bottom of your page, write a clear concluding paragraph explaining exactly why this specific conflict acted as the driving force that made later authoritarian rule possible.

TASK 3: Case study: twentieth-century China

As we have seen, China was subject to huge changes in the twentieth century, experiencing several revolutions including in 1911, 1949 and 1966-76.

Must do:

1. **Watch:** documentary [This documentary on Mao Zedong](#). Note down dates of key events in twentieth-century China.
2. **Read:** [article by Michael Lynch - Mao: Liberator or Oppressor?](#)
3. **Create:** a timeline showing 10 key events that you identify as being important to twentieth-century China. You must include at least one event from before 1920, and at least one from after 1976.



You **should**:

- include a brief explanatory sentence about each event, and / or illustrate them with images or symbols
- think carefully about Lynch's article and try to identify what arguments he puts forward about Mao Zedong. Is his portrayal negative, positive or a mixture?

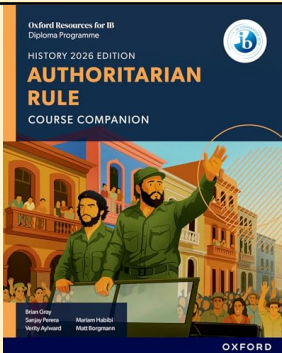
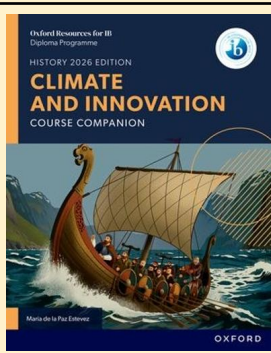
You **could**:

- choose to present your work in a creative way - powerpoint presentation, podcast, video or Ted talk.
- use <https://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/> to find out more about any events or people who you've found interesting.
- read [Frank Dikötter's article on the Cultural Revolution](#).

IB History: Course information & FAQs

	% of final marks	
	SL	HL
Paper 1: Exploration and innovation	30%	20%
Paper 2: Authoritarian states / The Cold War (Two essays – one from each topic – 90 minute exam)	40%	25%
SL/HL internal assessment Historical investigation Coursework – structured research project (choice of topics)	30%	20%
Paper 3: History of Europe (HL only) Russia 1855 - 1924 Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia 1924-2000 The French Revolution & Napoleon 1774-1815 (Three essays – 150 minute exam)		35%

1) Do I need to buy a textbook?

	It would be very helpful to buy one of these textbooks before you start. We are aware that these can be expensive and will make sure the library has some copies.	
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2) What equipment will I need for History lessons?

You will need to bring a ring binder with dividers, some A4 lined paper, a pen, pencil and a highlighter. Coloured pens also come in handy! And a laptop.

3) How much IB History homework will I get each week?

About an hour and a half of 'planned study' each week. This could be research, preparing for a group discussion or presentation, writing an essay, or revising for a timed essay or quiz.