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## UK politics

# How to reach a judgement

### What makes one argument stronger than another?

A-level politics examiners expect you to have a clear viewpoint on every question, and to support that opinion with persuasive and accurate evidence. There is no room for sitting on the fence! It is easy to decide your view on a question, but the trickier part is to explain *why* you are dismissing one set of arguments and supporting another. What is it that makes them more convincing, and how do you show the examiner this? AO3 marks are solely based on your ability to do master this skill, and you need to show this throughout your essays, not just in the conclusion.

The less convincing argument might be:

- out of date and no longer relevant, e.g. 'The view that the first-past-the-post voting system creates strong and stable government is no longer an accurate argument to support its retention, as in recent years it has created minority and coalition governments at Westminster.'
- linked to a particular ideological perspective that you do not share, e.g. Conservatives might defend the House of Lords as representing tradition.
- difficult to prove, e.g. 'It is clear that referendums in recent years, such as Brexit and Scottish independence, have created significant problems for UK democracy. Therefore, referendums have created more problems than they have solved.'

## Judgement in your introduction

First, decide what your answer to the question is. If you have no strong opinions, just pick whichever one will be easiest: the one you can support with plenty of relevant contemporary examples. In your introduction, explain briefly both sides of the argument, define any key terms and then state your view. Here is a sample introduction. Can you work out what the question is?

Devolution was introduced by the Blair government after referendums in 1997/98. It has been an ongoing and uneven process consisting of the gradual transfer of powers to Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and some English regions. Supporters argue that the process protects the unity of the UK by allowing important decisions to be taken closer to the people and recognising national differences. However, a stronger argument is that devolution poses a significant threat to the unity of the UK, as in Scotland particularly there is strong support for independence and regular demands for another referendum. Devolution has encouraged, rather than satisfied, this interest.

## Judgement in each paragraph

Start each paragraph with the view that you do not agree with and support it with evidence to show why some people may take this perspective. Then move onto the more convincing argument. Make

sure the two arguments match up: they must connect in some way to the same aspect of the question. Explain why the second argument is more convincing, using evidence:

Judges are arguably not neutral as they are unelected and not representative of the public demographically. They lack the personal experience to rule on many cases, as they come from a predominately white, middle-class and male perspective. This could lead to discrimination against minorities, as they will not understand the forms of oppression that some people face. However, this argument is weak as judges will possess considerable experience, training and knowledge to act neutrally, regardless of personal experience. Since the Constitutional Reform Act was passed, Supreme Court judges are appointed by an independent commission. This helps to ensure that they have the qualities needed to be neutral. Therefore, despite social background, judges are able to be neutral.

## Judgement in the conclusion

No surprises here: summarise the debate, dismiss the weaker argument and state the most important reason why you have reached your judgement:

Although first-past-the-post has weathered the test of time and provided the UK with many strong and stable majority governments, democracy is more important than strong government, and the two-party system distorts politics. The Additional Member System is much fairer as it reflects how people vote, which creates accountability and representation by allowing other parties such as the SNP and the Scottish Greens to have their voices heard. Therefore, the case for proportional representation has been established.

## Helpful terms and phrases

Don't make the examiner search for your view. Make it obvious by your use of language. Here are some useful sentence starters and terms to show that you are making supported AO3 judgements:

- 'A more convincing/stronger/weaker argument is'...
- 'It is clear that this argument is flawed/naive/out of date because'...
- 'The previous point fails to recognise that'...
- Add 'however' midway through every paragraph. This will ensure that you have a debate within each paragraph.
- 'Therefore' is also a useful word. It will help you to explain *why* you have come to your judgement, rather than just stating it.

In conclusion, the key to success at AO3 is to explain why you support a particular perspective, not just to state that one argument is more convincing than another.

## Student task: essay planning with an AO3 focus

- 1 Pick any essay question and plan three paragraphs. To do this, you need three arguments on each side of the argument. Then match them in a logical way (the weaker and stronger arguments need to focus on the same aspect of the debate), to create a paragraph plan.
- 2 Next, add a piece of evidence, preferably contemporary, for each argument.
- 3 Finally, write a concluding statement to each paragraph (2–3 lines), explaining why you find the second argument more convincing than the first.

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