

Tips for Writing the Social Studies 11 Provincial Exam

Step 1: Preparation

This is not a test that you can simply walk into and write without preparing in advance. Advance preparation will dramatically improve the mark you earn.

- ❖ **Know what you are facing.** This exam has two main parts. The first consists of 55 marks from objective questions. History questions will cover the period 1914-2000 only. Geography and Politics questions will come from the areas listed in the [Prescribed Learning Outcomes](#) that the Ministry provides for the course. The second part of the exam requires that you write two essays (12 marks each, for a total of 24. These are marked according to the ministry's 6 point [making system](#), which is multiplied by 2 to arrive at 12 points). You have 2 ½ hours to write this test, which is more than enough. However, you should use all of the time available.
- ❖ **Know what the examiners are trying to do.** Look at the [exam specifications](#) – the plan used by the test writers when they came up with the exam.
- ❖ **Get comfortable with the exam format.** The test comes in a booklet and looks bigger than most tests that you have faced. Look at the sample tests and answer keys that the ministry provides ([Click here for the exam search page](#), then tick the appropriate boxes). Write the tests at home and then mark the objective parts. Have your parents or others look at and criticize the essays.
- ❖ **Study hard.** This is an active process. Master the content of the course by learning the names, terms and dates. While this is not the most important knowledge learned in the course, it is impossible to deal with the important material (the whys and their implications) without knowing this. You won't be able to make sense of exam questions without it!
 - **Use your flash cards.**
 - One technique is to continue sorting what you know from what you do not know. Study only the ones you are unsure of. Keep removing cards that you become comfortable with. The idea is to gradually master all of the names and terms in the course.
 - Another technique is to take cards that represent events and put them in the right historical order. (You will need to have dates on the backs of the cards to make this work. If you do not have them there now, add them.)
 - Have parents or friends ask you questions based on your flash cards.
 - **Create time lines.** For the History portion of the course, or even to trace political or geographical developments, it is important to know what happened in the correct order. This is all about understanding cause and effect. Topics that you must know time order in include:

- The growth of Canadian Autonomy (Independence).
- Canada and World War I.
- Canada and World War II.
- Canada's role in the Cold War.
- French/English Relations in Canada between 1914-2000.
- **Predict possible essay topics.** The Ministry of Education's Social Studies 11 exam specification booklet lists four important themes. The essays must come from these, so there is a finite number of possible questions. Of course the question could be specific or it could be general. However, if you prepare the study topics below (taken from *Social Studies 11; Provincial Exam Preparation*, Open School, BC, 2005), You should be ready for almost anything that the examiners might put to you:
 - **Theme 1. Autonomy and International Involvement.**
 - Growth of Canadian independence from 1914 colonial status to full nationhood.
 - Evolution of Canada's status as a middle power.
 - Canada's role in the First World War.
 - Canada's role in the Second World War.
 - Canada's role in the cold War.
 - Canada's role in the United Nations' Security Council, General Assembly, UN agencies, peacekeeping.
 - Canada's role in wars since 1950.
 - Canada and human rights issues, 1939 to the present.
 - **Theme 2. Politics and Government.**
 - The legislative process – how laws are made.
 - Elections and the electoral process in Canada.
 - The citizens' influence on public policy.
 - Impact of the Charter or Rights on Canadian society.
 - **Theme 3. Society and Identity.**
 - Canadian immigration policies 1914-2000.
 - Social safety net.
 - Treatment of minorities: Canada -- a tolerant society 1914-2000?
 - Treatment of aboriginal peoples in Canada 1914-2000.
 - Changing role of women in Canada 1914-2000.
 - Regionalism in Canada.
 - Canada's cultural achievements.
 - Causes, events, results of the Great Depression.
 - Effects of economic cycles on the development of the labour movement in Canada.
 - Quebec and its relationship to the rest of Canada 1914-2000.
 - **Theme 4. Human Geography.**
 - Population issues – ways of responding.

- Standard of living in Canada compared to the rest of the world.
- Global warming.
- Poverty in the developing world and Canada's response.
- Threats to water supply and Canada's response.
- If past exams are anything to go by. You can more or less count on one of the questions being primarily historical and one is often geographical.
- **Be sure to answer both questions.** You are not being given a choice here. You must answer both.

Step 2. Writing the Exam.

Having prepared as best as possible, you need to be comfortable when writing the test.

- ❖ **Relax and get a good night's sleep before the exam.** Make sure that you have studied well in advance, so that you do not panic study the night before.
 - **Get rid of tension before you sleep.** Complete studying before 8 or 9 p.m. the night before, then do something relaxing: Some people find a long run helps to get rid of physical tension and ensures a good night's sleep. Other people find reduce mental tension by watching a funny film. Know yourself. What do you find helps you sleep easily?
 - **Eat a meal, though not a heavy one, at least an hour before the test.** You do not want to go into an examination hungry – grumbling stomachs are distracting. You also do not want to go into a test right after a heavy meal as your body is focused on digestion and there is a tendency to feel a bit sleepy while this is happening.
 - **Dress flexibly.** You can never tell what conditions will be like in the examination room. It may be hot or cold. Dress in layers so you can adapt to either conditions. Feeling freezing cold or sweltering hot takes your mind off the task at hand.
 - **Get to the exam early.** Murphy's Law states that "everything that can go wrong will, and at the worst possible time." This is the day your transportation plans go haywire. Be sure to allow for this. Take an earlier bus; allow extra time to ride or walk. There is nothing worse than rushing into an exam late and in a panic.
 - **Reduce physical tension.** If you are too nervous, it will get in the way of remembering things you know.
 - If you feel tightness in the neck and shoulders, be sure to use passive relaxation, where you close your eyes, imagine yourself in a comfortable place, and consciously relax your muscle groups, starting with the extremities and moving to your core body. Now take ten deep breaths. Do not do this if you are not feeling muscle tension as it will relax you too much.
 - For lesser tension, or if you notice mental blocks on the exam, try deep-breathing. Take ten deep breaths to get oxygen to your brain

- **Look over the whole test.** Glance through the test to see its scope and to look at the essay questions. Tests always contain plenty of information. Since all multiple choice question statements (though not the answers) are true, you can mine the test for useful information. Knowing what the essay questions are before you start will allow you to mine the test for useful information as you answer the objective questions.
- **Attack the test logically.** Always do the objective questions first. They give you the most marks for the least time and effort. They also give you data to mine for the essays. You should skip over questions that stump you – though always fill in a guess on the answer sheet as you move on. Be sure to mark these items so that you can go back to them if you have time later. Do not waste time puzzling endlessly over a one mark item! Do the essays last.
 - **Tips for multiple choice questions.** Only one answer is right, so choose carefully. Eliminate wrong answers first. Put a line through them on the test booklet. Every time you eliminate a distracter, you improve your chances of getting the question right – even if you have to guess. Note: History questions are generally asked in time order – looking at the questions before and after might help if you have to know something about dates in the answer. Any time you come across a question using “except” or “not,” you need to slow down and think more carefully.
 - **Tips for matching questions.** These are like multiple choice, but you have to match something from column II with a descriptor from column I. Always read all of the items in both columns before starting. Note that it is unlikely that an answer will be used twice. Like in multiple choice questions, eliminate the responses you know to be wrong in order to arrive at or guess at the right response.
 - **Tips for true/false questions.** These are really just simplified multiple choice questions with only two possibilities. Do not overcomplicate them. Do not think the examiners are trying to trick you.
 - **Tips for Essay Questions.** 24 of 79 marks come from this section, so it is important to know how to attack the two essays.
 - **Answer both questions.** You are not being presented with a choice here. Answer both.
 - **Know what the command words mean.** Look at the [command words sheet](#) that the ministry provides to be sure you know what you have to do.
 - **Be very careful when you answer Geography questions.** Marking North Vancouver exams, we continually notice the same problem; students apply their general knowledge but forget to include specific course content. Curiously this problem is generally not present on history essays. The difference between a pass and a high mark is always this

detailed information, so always think back to course work and do not just answer off the top of your head.

- **Plan before you write.** Be sure to allow 5 or 10 minutes to just down thoughts and organize them. I also suggest that you leave space for your introduction and write the rest of your essay before going back to write your introduction. This allow you to modify your introduction if you come up with more material while writing. You must have an introductory paragraph with a clear thesis (this is your argument presented in a single sentence), a body with several points and evidence for each point, and a conclusion. The following suggestions come from Open School's *Social Studies 11; Provincial Exam Preparation*.
 - **Read the question carefully.** Know what you are being asked to do.
 - **Identify the command word.** Circle it or put a box around it and underline any other key words.
 - **Create a chart in your planning space.** Fill it with appropriate information. ([Click here](#) to see the pages from this book – this is a must read).
- **Write small.** A complaint that we markers regularly pass on to the ministry is that not enough space is given for the essays – both for planning and marking. Write small to get everything you want in.
- **Write legibly.** If a marker cannot read your writing, he or she cannot grade it. Unreadable work will not be given any credit at all. If your handwriting is as bad as mine, you might choose to print.
- **Use all of the time allowed.** Once you leave the test, you cannot go back. Do not rush out. Go over your work.
 - **Do not change multiple choice answers unless you are absolutely sure that you got the answer wrong.** Many people overcomplicate things and change right responses to wrong ones. When guessing, your first guess is more often than not your best one.
 - **Do edit your essays if you have the chance to.** In particular, look at your introduction and thesis. If anything in your essay does not relate to your thesis, you need to either cross it out or change your thesis to ensure that it is consistent with it. Neat edits are better than leaving incorrect or misplaced material as you originally wrote them. The ministry's note to the marker tells the marker to "remember that this is a draft work." We do not expect it to be perfectly neat and tidy. It is a work in process.