

Geography

H How to get A Distinction in the Junior Cycle Geography Exam



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Introduction

Geography certainly broadens your knowledge of the wider world, and is very different to that which you learned in primary school! The course is so diverse and broad: from economic activity, to volcanoes & earthquakes, to urban sprawl, and map-work. There is something in it for everyone! I really enjoyed studying geography because there were always new things to learn about the world, and its people which made studying more beneficial than just acing exams – which of course is a bonus!



Geography is the study of people's interactions with their natural and human environments. Geographers study the places and regions that emerge as a result of such interactions, as well as the spatial aspects of a wide range of cultural, economic, political, and physical processes and how they are all connected! As I've said there is something in it for everyone's interests.

The exam itself is broad enough and covers a broad range of these topics to suit all types of students, but it is not by any means 'easy!' In this guide, I'll attempt to share with you the secrets to the world of Geography, and the Junior Cycle Geography Exam!



Exam Layout



The Geography Exam takes place over a **2 hour** period and has a mixture of short answer questions as



Remember it is a **Common Level exam** so it covers a range of topics for all different abilities.



The exam is worth 360 marks in its entirety. The exam has a total of **10 questions** of which you must answer them all. **The questions do not all carry equal marks.**



Each question contains a mixture of **short answer questions to start and then paragraph style answers** in which you must give more detailed insight, displaying your knowledge of a specific topic.

Continuous Assessment

With Junior Cycle Geography there is continuous assessment in the form of Classroom Based Assessments or CBAs. These are simply Projects, based on the Geography course that you and your Teachers will work on.

There are two Classroom-Based Assessments:

- **CBA 1: Geography in the news.**
- **CBA 2: My geography.**

Tip

Remember to pick a topic you are interested in, as it will make working on the project more enjoyable!



The result of these CBSs will help form your Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA.) They will appear as:

- **Exceptional.**
- **Above expectations.**
- **In line with expectations.**
- **Yet to meet expectations.**

By doing the CBAs you will develop knowledge, understanding, skills and values that will help in preparing you for the written exam!

Assessment Task

- After you have done your CBAs you will complete an Assessment Task.
- The Assessment Task is a written task and you complete it during class time.
- Once you are done the Assessment Task will be submitted to the State Examinations and will make up **10%** of your overall Junior Cycle Geography Grade.
- Remember, this will be based on the work you did for CBA2, so be sure to pick a topic you are interested in, as it will not only make working on the project more enjoyable for you but it will also make reading the assessment task more enjoyable for the examiner!
- This Assessment task will assess not only your Knowledge of Geography but also the skills that you have gained in the process of completing the “My Geography” CBA.

The Final Examination

- The final examination is a written exam that you will sit in June of 3rd Year. The exam is worth a total of **90%**.
- The exam questions are based on the Learning outcomes in the Junior Cycle Geography course. My tip would be to look at the learning outcomes as they will
- the basis for the exam questions.
- There are no sections in this exam. The exam has a total of **10 questions** of which **you must answer them all**. The questions do not all carry equal marks.
- As the exam is a common paper there will be a variety of questions to suit everyone. There will always be a different mix of questions. However there is a general style of questions. The questions are structured in the following ways;
 - **Short answer questions / multiple choice**
 - **Questions that are skills based**
 - **Long answer questions**

Each question is broken up into parts that examine different parts of the Geography course.

Short answer style questions:

- It's usually a multiple choice question where you delete a wrong answer, circle the correct answer, and fill in the blanks or write a short sentence.
- If you know your stuff, **each of these should take less than a minute to answer, with the exception of the map questions**, in which you have to look carefully to find what you're looking for.
- Notice how I said 'if you know your stuff' in that last point – it's rarely running out of time that causes people to do poorly in the short questions.
- **The short questions literally test you on all areas of the course** with no hope of escape. You have to know at least a bit from every topic to get by.
- Studying from your book will get you to a certain point – you'll know all the info (hopefully) but will you know what sort of questions they like to ask? This is why I stress the importance of papers for subjects like Geography where there is no choice within short questions.
- I would recommend you **test yourself using quizzes and past exam papers** to test your general knowledge of the Geography Course.
- After testing your knowledge always take note of common mistakes made i.e. the difference between the epicentre and the focus when it comes to Earthquakes.
- Also, **don't forget to answer the question you're being asked in the exam**. What I mean by this is, read the question carefully, and if they ask you to circle an answer, don't underline, etc. It's very easy to get over-excited when you see a question you've answered before – but remember, it will be different in some way as they don't re-use questions in this subject.
- So the key to success in short questions? **Practice!**

Skills based questions:

These questions test your skills in Geography.

- They examine your **ability to read maps and aerial photographs**.
- There are **questions based on data tables and graphs** (can you draw and interpret the data on the graph)
- Your **ability to read weather maps and charts** can also be examined here.
- When preparing for the exam, remember that everything in the specification is examinable. So you will be asked questions on larger-scale maps as well as the OS Maps 1:50 000
- How do you improve a skill? **Simple practice**. The more practice you have with reading maps, drawing maps, chart interpretation etc.. the better you will be!
- Be sure you have all the equipment you need for these types of questions - **pencils, colouring pencils, ruler, eraser** but also a **calculator** as you can be asked to do some calculations.
- A common misconception is that this skills based area of the course is easy – totally false. A lot of work has to go into maps and they're only easy if you know exactly how to answer them. No more than general theory questions, the correctors will be looking for SRP and waffle will not be tolerated! You also have to be well practiced at drawing sketch maps and knowing how to read and follow maps / graphs in general.

Essay style Questions / Long answer questions

With these questions you are expected to go into more detail and show of your knowledge and understanding of a certain topic.

- Unlike other subjects, the long questions aren't set to one topic. They could contain 3, seemingly completely unrelated topics, such as ocean currents, irrigation, and desertification – all linked under one theme. For this reason **I suggest reading through the long questions before taking the plunge.**
- **Choose your order in which to answer the questions according to your strength.** If you find luck isn't on your side, and there's only one question in which you truly feel confident answering all the subsections, belt ahead and do it! Not only will it warm up your hand, it will give you the confidence to keep going.
- **When it comes to answering long questions, it's all in how you answer them.** You could be able to write a near thesis on volcanoes, but may not get full marks unless you answer it properly.
- **Be sure you know what keywords are needed to fully answer the question.** Remember keywords are the key in these answers to getting as close to full marks as possible! So know your stuff!

For Physical Geography questions, such as those on rivers, glaciers, the sea, rocks, volcanoes, earthquakes, rainfall, mass movement, etc., I followed an acrostic formula in order to ensure my answer covered all aspects of a standard A1 answer:

Description A waterfall is a feature of river erosion which occurs when a river flows over a vertical drop.

Example An example of this would be found in Glencar, Co. Leitrim.

Process When a river flows over an area comprising a layer of hard rock above a layer of soft rock, the soft rock is eroded quicker by process of hydraulic action, abrasion, and solution.

Explanation This creates a fall in the river. A plunge pool forms at the base of the waterfall due to the force of the falling water. Undercutting then takes place and creates an overhang. This eventually collapses and the waterfall retreats.

Diagram Here you draw a labelled diagram of the stages in creating a waterfall, label them 1,2,3, etc. and additionally label the features such as the hard rock, overhang, etc.

This formula guarantees full marks if you follow correctly. In theory, it can only really be applied to some areas of physical geography, but I would also use it when writing about weather instruments, just by cutting out the 'example' or 'diagram' portion, and for rocks I would put in 'uses' instead of diagrams. I would always include a diagram, unless they have included a picture in the question. **Examiners love diagrams!**

In many parts of the long answer questions, you have to be able to define words or discuss human's involvement in the subject, e.g. human interaction with the sea. In these cases, you can never go wrong with **the SRS formula – a significant relevant statement** followed by a development or explanation. In short, you make a point, and explain/develop **(D)** it, e.g. 'One method of coastal protection is rock armour **(SRS)** These are large boulders at the base of a cliff or in front of dunes, which the waves hit when they break **(D)** This causes them to lose energy and reduces their eroding power **(D)** Rock armour can be seen in Tramore, Waterford.'

Remember!

SRS stands for **S**ignificant **R**elevant **S**tatement.

Know your action verbs. Know what exactly the questions are asking you as I've said the Learning outcomes are the basis for the exam questions and each have an action verb. The Action Verb tells you exactly what they want you to do.

Take LO 1.1 as an example; “**describe** the formation and global distribution of volcanoes, earthquakes, and fold mountains in the context of plate tectonics and structure of the Earth”

There are many parts to this, and it is a skill for you to break up the different elements of what they are asking you to do. But firstly, you must know what the action verbs are asking you to do. Below are some common action verbs:

- Analyse** Examine something in detail
- Consider** Interpret patterns in data
- Compare** Point out the similarities and/or differences
- Classify** Group things based on their similarities
- Describe** Give a detailed overview using words and/or diagrams
- Distinguish** Point out the differences between concepts
- Differentiate** Point out what makes something different
- Evaluate** Examine evidence/data to make a judgement
- Explain** Point out reasons and/or causes
- Use** Apply your knowledge

Furthermore, **Human Geography and Economic Activity** are the other two theory components. They are similar to each other and often overlap in long questions like Physical Geography, aerial photographs and map questions. **SRS** are your friend and will get you the marks.

Helpful Hints

- My general advice for cracking Geography is to **practice** (here we go again). Yes, even though I say it for everything – that’s honestly how many of my students have achieved. Do as many past questions as you can – it’ll do more good than harm!
- Remember that these elements inform how you will experience the learning outcomes within the strands and how you will be examined so be sure you **know how each learning outcome is linked** with
 1. Processes, patterns, systems, and scale
 2. Geographical skills
 3. Sustainability.
- The exam questions are based on the Learning outcomes in the Junior Cycle Geography course. My tip would be to **look at the learning outcomes** and become very familiar with them as they will form the basis for the exam questions.
- **Know your action verbs.** Know what exactly the questions are asking you as I’ve said the Learning outcomes are the basis for the exam questions and each have an action verb. The Action Verb tells you exactly what they want you to do.
- **Constant memory-jogging is essential** for such a long course; go over your notes from class regularly, revise the past exam questions you’ve done – even reading through your Geography book like you would a novel helps. Just don’t forget the information!
- I also think discussing topics in subjects like Business, History, Geography, Religion, etc. is really beneficial. **If you discover something interesting when you’re studying; tell somebody about it** – you won’t forget it! It’s strange how much I retained when I started telling mum all about plate tectonics!!! Know what’s going on in the world around you!

- Knowledge will get you so far; cleverness will get you all the way. **Know your stuff, be able to tell anyone that asks** all about population pyramids, and be able to teach the first years all about bilateral aid – but you need to do it in an exam setting. Time and technique separates the men from the boys here.
- **Bring pencils, sharpeners, a ruler, crayons or colouring pencils, string,** and anything else you think you might need for doing diagrams and sketch maps – you can't whisper over to your mate in the exam hall to borrow a pen!
- On the off-chance that you finish early **don't make the mistake of leaving the exam hall early.** You'll end up kicking yourself if you realize you'd made a mistake on the way home, with no chance to rectify it. Take the time you have to re-check if you've made as many developing sentences as you could, labelled all your diagrams – and if you still have a large amount of time on your hands after that, do one more long question to cover yourself.
- **Don't panic if you don't see a long question you feel comfortable answering** when you first open the paper. Calm yourself by answering some short questions, and by giving yourself that time to put things into perspective. It will all be fine!



Best of luck in the exam!
You will be great

