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# Geography

How to get an H1 in the Leaving Cert  
Geography Exam



by **Muireann W.**

*Muireann W. got a H1 in her higher Leaving Cert Geography paper. She's now doing Biological, Earth and Environmental Science in UCC. Here she shares what she learned.*

When I chose Geography, many people told me it was an easy subject, relying on rote learning. While an element of that is true: you do have to learn many facts, figures and processes, which not the essence of what geography is about as a field of study. Geography requires far more skill than just having the ability to memorise pre-written essays. To truly succeed in Geography, one needs to have a keen understanding of what you learned and why you learned it, so you can adjust your answers accordingly to the specific question. This, paired with knowing the layout of the exam, plenty of practise and a knowledge of a few handy tips is the crux of how to do well in this exam. This guide will act as a map, that will orientate you around the Geography exam, making sure you reach the summit: a H1!

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**The LC Geography paper at higher level is divided into three sections: Short Questions, Core Material & the Electives and the Options Section. You have 2 hours and 50 minutes to complete the exam worth a total of 400 out of the 500 marks. The geographical investigation makes up the remaining 100 marks which is completed within class time.**

## Section 1 - Short Questions

- ▶ **Layout:** This section consists of *12 short questions* each worth *8 marks*. You must answer 10 questions as only marks from **your best 10 attempted are counted - 80 marks in total**. These questions are generally based on diagrams, tables, graphs, maps and aerial photos. They are designed to test your knowledge on all areas of the syllabus.
- ▶ **Timing:** I would aim to complete the short questions in **12 minutes** and attempt all twelve of them. However, if you feel under pressure because of time, just do your best ten. If you have time left over at the end of the exam, you can always finish the two you didn't get done!
- ▶ **Preparation:** To prepare for this section, I went through previous exam papers and I did past years' short questions. This helped me to become familiarised with the style of questions asked, for example, filling in tables or analysing weather maps. It also helped me to realise what questions were my weak points and what I needed more practise on. I was then able to spend more time working on them by completing specific short questions by topic on Studyclix and revising certain chapters in my book.



## Section 2 - Core Material and Electives

**The physical and regional sections examine core material from the Geography course. You must answer one question from the physical section (questions 1, 2 and 3) and one question from the regional section (questions 4, 5 and 6). Each question is split into three parts: A, B and C. Each question is worth a total of 80 marks.**

- **Part A:** is a 20 mark question and should be relatively fast to complete. It might include drawing a sketch map of a region (Only in regional section), aerial photograph, OS map or a graph, interpreting graphical information or simply answering short questions based on a diagram or text.
- **Part B and C:** are two 30-mark essay style questions. They require an examination of a topic through Single Relevant Points (SRP's). Each SRP is worth two marks, therefore the maximum you need to provide is 15 to achieve the full 30 marks.

- **What is an SRP (Significant Relevant Point)?**

According to State Examinations Commissions it is “a single piece of factual information, to which an examiner will assign a mark weighing as prescribed in the marking scheme.” SRPs can come in the form of:

1. a statistic and additional relevant information
2. a geographical term and explanation
3. Statement and explanation
4. a development of previous point
5. A named example
6. A diagram or sketch



7. additional  
information on a  
diagram

- **Electives**

The elective section is divided into sections: 1. *Patterns and Processes in Economic Activities* (questions 7,8 and 9) and 2. *Patterns and Processes in the Human Environment* (questions 10,11, and 12). You must only do one question from only one elective. Similar to the physical and regional sections, they too have parts A, B and C and have the same marking scheme with regard to SRPs. **OS map and aerial photograph skills** are important in the electives as they come up in 30-mark answers.

- **Timing:**

The timing for the physical, region and the electives are the same. You should try to have part A, the 20 mark question done in approximately 5 minutes, while the longer parts B and C essays should take 18 minutes to complete each essay.

- **Preparation:**

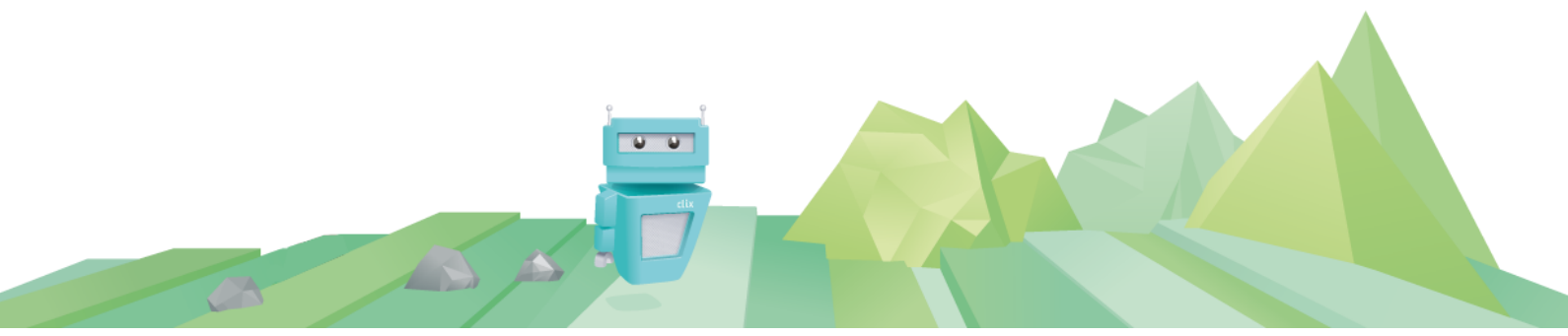
In the question As, you may be asked to draw a sketch map of a region, OS map, aerial photograph or graph.

These are questions you can really prepare for before the exam, as with practise, they will become second nature and there should be no real surprises with them on the day. Just make sure you label everything on a diagram!

With regard to the 30-mark essays, if there was one thing you must know about this section, it's that ***they often change the wording of the questions but are still looking for the same information as previous years' questions*** or the same information with a slightly different approach taken by the student. This is why the information in learned off essays for certain



topics often need to be slightly adjusted to help you avoid answering the question incorrectly. But - don't sweat it, adjusting pieces of information is often easily done! By rephrasing SRPs you have learned or removing certain bits of information within them and adding bits learned from other essays, you will be on the path to answering the specific question asked. This is why an understanding of what you are learning is imperative. Also worth noting is that a knowledge of previous questions is hugely beneficial as well. I often went through the past exam papers, picked questions I found difficult and asked my teacher to explain them to me. In fact, we often spent classes doing this. I then went home, attempted them and asked my teacher to correct them. Not only did this help me to learn my notes but it also helped to understand the different style of questions on each topic.



## Section 3 - The Options

**The options are written in essay format where you provide 24 SRPs through naming aspects, discussion and examples. There is max of two diagrams per answer and only one diagram is credited per aspect. There are also twenty marks going for the overall coherence of the essay. The whole answer is worth 80 marks.**

There will be three questions on your chosen option but you only do one. The options are: Global interdependence; Geoecology; Culture and Identity; and the atmosphere-ocean Environment. There are two ways to approach this question:

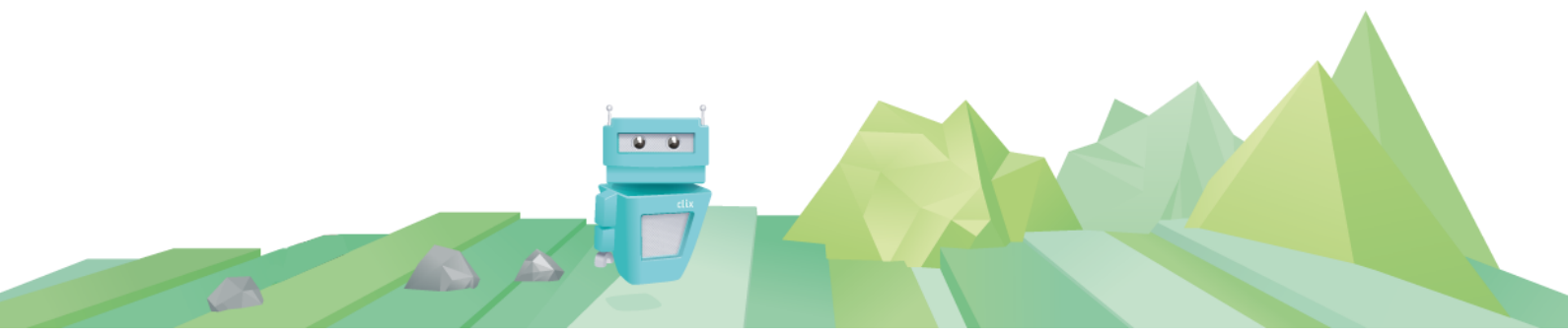
	<u>Approach 1</u>	<u>Approach 2</u>
Identifying aspect	4 marks	3 marks
Number of aspects	3 worth 20 marks each	4 worth 15 marks each
Discussion of aspect	8 SRPs	6 SRPs
Overall Coherence	20 marks (20 % of marks)	20 marks (25 % of marks)

### Timing:

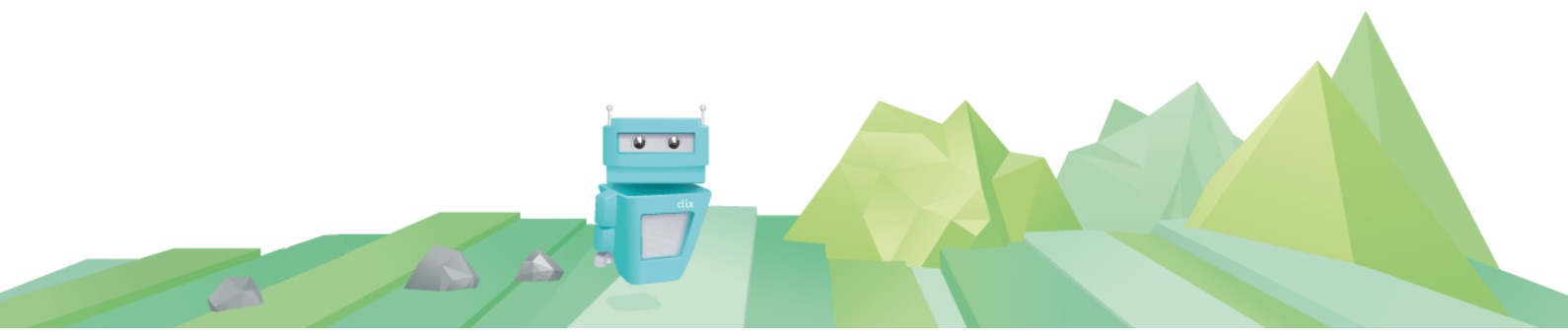
You should spend around 35 minutes on the options question.

### Approaching:

I found the best way to prepare for this section (and as clichéd as it may sound), was practise, practise and more practise! A lot of the questions in this section are repetitive or only phrased with slight



differences. Once you have your general essay learnt off and you keep practising previous questions, it becomes easier to manipulate it to suit the different questions asked. Consequently, you have the best preparation done for anything they may throw at you in the exam. Whether you take the approach to do a 3 or 4 aspect answer, is your own personal taste and your confidence in which one you can deliver your best answer. Be aware though, sometimes they may indicate which approach to take in the question.





## Final Tips!

- **Organisation:**

While this may seem like a no brainer, proper organisation of your notes and study for the Geography exam is truly indispensable. Whether you keep your notes in a copy or a folder, putting in the effort to have them together and writing them as you cover new material in class will be hugely beneficial to you in the long run. Particularly, when your class is finished the course as you can allocate all your study time to just revising and ensuring you have everything covered before the exam. Personally, I would recommend having all your essays together with each SRP distinct from each other, such as putting them in bullet points. I would also compile my notes under each section e.g. physical geography, then subdivided under certain topics e.g. plate tectonics, to make them quickly accessible. Once the course is finished, you should have your own short, summarized 'geography book' which should effectively have in it everything you have done in class and need to know before the exam.

- **Resources:**

What is important to realise is that the information you can use in Geography is not limited to the conventional means of textbooks and revision books. While they may be convenient, there are many other sources of useful information. There are YouTube videos, blogs and sites dedicated to precise topics in geography which sometimes give a better overall comprehension on geographical terms and information. This allows you to gain much more memorable facts to use in essays. There are also many links to such websites on Studyclix!



- **Participation:**

Listening, asking questions and doing any assigned work is essential in being able to have a quick grasp on topics and learning course material for the long run. In doing so, you will save yourself time as you won't be trying to learn as much of it on your own time!

- **Understanding the exam paper:**

Geography is undoubtedly a time constraining exam, which can be made even more difficult by its layout and its vast range of questions. Therefore, being well prepared by familiarising yourself through timed practise questions and reading through past papers is must! That will ultimately ensure that you know what you're doing on the day and ultimately, save you time.

- **Predictions:**

It's true that some questions seem to come up frequently or in patterns. However, never bank on anything coming up! Always make sure you have enough covered to ensure that even if your favourite questions doesn't make an appearance, you're still confident that you have plenty of questions to choose from and that you will not be sitting in an exam spiralling into a panic!





*Finally, I would like wish you  
the best of luck in the exam!  
You will be fine.*

