The portfolio of supervision essays

Further guidance for students taking amended assessments in History, History and Politics, and History and Modern Languages 2020

This document is intended to supplement the instructions on amended assessment in each Tripos by providing further guidance on selecting, preparing and submitting the portfolio of supervision essays. The portfolio of essays has been chosen as an assessment mode primarily on the grounds of fairness: it allows students’ learning to be evaluated partly on work that was completed in Cambridge prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the disruption to study it entails. It is recognized that students will inevitably have questions about a form of assessment which has been adopted at relatively short notice in response to an unprecedented crisis, and for which they have not prepared. We endeavour to answer these questions below.

The portfolio of essays can be briefly defined as follows: it comprises two pieces of existing supervision work by a student, selected by that student independently without help or guidance, then revised to correct errors, amplify essential points, and improve presentation.

Choice of paper

For the papers to be assessed by the portfolio of essays, see the detailed instructions on amended assessment for the relevant Tripos. Second year and finalist students in the Historical Tripos have a choice about the paper they wish to have assessed via the portfolio, or (for finalists offering a dissertation) whether they wish to be assessed on the portfolio rather than the dissertation. Directors of Studies are permitted to give their students general advice when making these choices.

Choice of essays to submit

Students must decide independently which of their existing essays they wish to submit. Supervisors and Directors of Studies should not be consulted in this process. You do not need to inform anyone prior to submission about which essays you have chosen.

Sectioned papers

You may submit any essay written for a supervision on the relevant paper. The sectioning of some History exam papers into Sections A and B can be ignored for the purposes of this assessment, just as it will be for the 24 hour exam taken by second-year historians for the assessment of a paper taken in the first year.

Supervisions

In the interests of equity, revision supervisions on the paper selected for assessment via the portfolio are not allowed. However, we recognize that owing to disruption, some students will have been unable during full Lent Term to have all the supervisions to which they are entitled for the paper concerned. Outstanding
supervisions held over to the vacation can go ahead as planned via remote platforms, though during these sessions supervisors should not guide students directly on the portfolio.

**Deadlines**

The deadline for indicating which paper you wish to have assessed by portfolio (History Tripos second years and finalists), and for indicating that you are a finalist who wishes to be assessed via a Specified Subject portfolio instead of the dissertation, is **27 April 2020**. Details of how to do this will be issued to you directly. The dates for submission of the portfolio of essays (single and joint Tripos students) are yet to be finalized, but will be communicated as soon as possible.

**Components and format of submitted essays**

Each essay must have the question that has been addressed, or other title, clearly inserted at the head of the first page. Essays should be prepared and submitted as two separate files. Essays should be anonymous; put your candidate number, and not your name, on the first and subsequent pages of each essay. Page numbers should be included in each essay. Further instructions about how to submit your portfolio will be provided closer to the deadline.

**Word limits, footnotes and bibliography**

The portfolio comprises essays originally prepared for supervisions. As such, the inclusion of footnotes or endnotes is allowed, but by no means not essential. Similarly, you may include a bibliography in an essay, but this is not a requirement. Students will not be penalized if they do not provide footnotes/endnotes, or bibliographies. The word limit is 3,000 words per essay, excluding footnotes and bibliographies. Supervisor comments or any other material that could identify the student must be deleted before submission. For further guidance on the style to be adopted in your portfolio, see the History Faculty Style guide.

**Editing your essays: what does ‘lightly revised’ mean?**

The first point to note is that it is possible in principle to achieve a high mark for a portfolio of essays which have not been edited beyond the correction of typos and other presentational faults. In most cases, ‘revise lightly’ will first and foremost mean attending to presentational matters (spelling, grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, capitalization of words, etc.). It may also involve reviewing the existing essay structure, making it clear what your argument is and locating it effectively within the historiography. You should take supervisor’s written comments on the original work into account in doing this. Such revision should typically involve correction of minor points on the basis of what you were told in the supervision, and completion of points which your supervision showed to be incomplete. Students should not feel that they have to rewrite from scratch; add in primary sources; enormously extend the coverage to take in material not originally covered; or incorporate extra research or reading. To attempt to do so would in any case be difficult and inadvisable owing to the relatively tight word limit.
Assessment criteria and examiners’ expectations

Markers will be instructed to assess the portfolio essays as supervision essays produced in a relatively short timeframe, and not as polished pieces of work. They must also bear in mind the possibility that owing to disruption caused by Covid-19, candidates may have been restricted in their choice of essays for submission, and / or may have had little or no time to revise their work. Markers will be asked to pay attention to the guidelines in this document when examining. Beyond this, however, no new assessment criteria specific to the portfolio will be used. Instead, markers will assess the portfolio work using existing criteria for the assessment of scripts as provided in the Handbook for Examiners. The focus will therefore be on the extent to which the candidate addressed the question asked; the quality of the argument offered; and the range of knowledge displayed.

Please note that penalties may be imposed for infringement of the word limits, and footnotes and endnotes are to be used purely for bibliographical references and not as a means by which to circumvent the word limit.

Plagiarism and academic misconduct

Attention is drawn to the Faculty’s Guidelines on Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct, and to the declaration on academic misconduct which has been signed by all students. During this period of modified assessment, the Faculty of History is required by the University to maintain its usual standards with regard to academic integrity and the detection of plagiarism. The declaration on academic misconduct that you have signed applies as fully to this portfolio of essays as it does to any other form of assessment submitted to the University. Please note particularly the section in the Guidelines on the Faculty’s use of Turnitin UK software. All portfolios of essays will be run through the Turnitin software upon submission, and scrutinized by the Faculty’s Academic Integrity Officer in the manner described in the Guidelines. Despite the disruption to our normal modes of examination this year, we are determined to continue to operate assessments in a manner that is rigorous and fair for all.

Faculty of History

7 April 2020