

Volume 25, Number 4, April 2016

Exam tips

How to be an outstanding AS politics student

Jessica Hardy

This article was written with the Edexcel syllabus in mind, but will be useful for any AS politics student

Stage 1

The aim of this activity is to help you ensure that you achieve a top grade at AS. It will also help you to enjoy the subject more and to think beyond the limits of the specification. You will be able to use more varied and unusual examples in your exam answers too. But remember — as your subject knowledge grows, you must still make sure you focus on what the question is asking in the exam. Don't add irrelevant information.

Checklist: Are you already doing the following? If not, start today.

- Watching/reading/listening to politics news on a daily basis
- Reading POLITICS REVIEW magazine
- Completing additional exam questions
- Keeping your folder organised
- Using the exam board websites to find past papers, mark schemes and the very useful examiners reports
- Repeating any piece of work that does not achieve your target grade
- Making sure you are aware of exactly how your work could be improved. For example, do you need to write longer answers or include more up-to-date examples?

If the answer to all of these is **yes**, you are ready to go on to the next level. If not, stick to the above until you are confident that you are completing them all successfully.

Stage 2

Media: Who do you follow on Twitter? Whose blogs do you read?

Twitter: Try following your local MP, your favourite MP (or MEP/MSP, etc) and at least one MP from each party. Highly recommended tweeters include MPs Nadine Dorries, Jamie Reed, Douglas Carswell, Caroline Lucas, Mhairi Black, Sarah Wollason, Stella Creasy and David Lammy. For entertainment value, Eye Spy MP.

Blogs: Include LabourList, ConservativeHome, Left Foot Forward and Guido Fawkes (health warning — some of the views expressed may not always be pleasant). The *Spectator* and the *New Statesman* have lots of useful political blogs.

Radio: You can even listen to the radio on your phone in the mornings on the way to school or college. Radio 4 is particularly recommended, especially *Today*, 6–9 a.m., *PM*, 5–6 p.m., *The World Tonight*, 10–10.45 p.m., *Week in Westminster*, Saturday 10–10.30 a.m. and *Any Questions*, Friday, 8–8.50 p.m.

TV: *Channel 4 News*, *Newsnight* on BBC2, *Question Time* on BBC1, *The Andrew Marr Show* on BBC1. Watch PMQs if you can bear it. Your regional news report could also be useful.

Newspapers and magazines: The *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Spectator*, *The Economist* and the *New Statesman* have excellent websites. The Huffington Post is a useful online newspaper. You can also find politics news on BuzzFeed UK and Vice.

Suggested activities

- Set up a debating club/society at your school/college
- Set up a politics club at your school/college and invite outside speakers to visit
- Have a mini referendum on EU membership or organise a session to educate your fellow students on the various arguments for and against Brexit
- Organise a campaign to encourage all students to register to vote
- Join a party or pressure group. What is the most obscure and unusual pressure group you can find?
- Finally, just talk about politics with people around you of different ages and backgrounds — find out what they think. Listen and disagree or agree.

Politics in the holidays and spare time

- Visit a court
- Visit the Supreme Court
- Visit Parliament and attend a debate or select committee
- Visit one of the devolved assemblies
- Attend a local council meeting
- Visit your local museum — it will probably have a section on politics, e.g. Sheffield Weston Park
- Attend a politics department open day at a university
- Find out who your local elected police commissioner is (if you have one) and attend a meeting held by them

Additional reading material

How to Be An MP, by Paul Flynn

How Parliament Works, by Robert Rogers

The New Few: Or a Very British Oligarchy, by Ferdinand Mount

The Establishment and How They Get Away With It, by Owen Jones

The Audacity of Hope, by Barack Obama

Sex, Lies and the Ballot Box: 50 Things You Need to Know About British Elections, by Philip Cowley

Recommended websites

www.politics.co.uk

www.parliament.uk/education

www.polis.cam.ac.uk/about-us/election (Cambridge University's politics podcast)

www.hansardsociety.org.uk

www.totalpolitics.com

www.theyworkforyou.com

Stage 3

How this information will help in your exams

Your examples bank

For each topic in AS politics, create lists of examples that you could use in the exam. This could take the form of a table, and as your knowledge of current affairs increases, you can add more up-to-date and unusual ones. For example, when you are reading about David Cameron's suspension of collective responsibility for the EU referendum, you can add that to your examples bank in the section on the executive. Make sure you also add how you can use this example, e.g. to show that occasionally, collective responsibility is suspended in order to allow ministers to campaign on different sides, to avoid a split in the government or party.

'Recent events in' activity

As part of your revision programme, make a list. What can you add to this list below?

Pressure groups: There is going to be a new law restricting charities spending government grants on lobbying (www.tinyurl.com/hnhteqn). The Age UK and energy tariffs debate (www.tinyurl.com/zkpzd96).

Democracy: The implications of the recent changes to voter registration (www.tinyurl.com/nnxv94f). The implications of the upcoming EU referendum.

Elections: Upcoming London mayoral election and NI/Scot/Wales elections.

Political parties: Jeremy Corbyn and the splits in the Labour Party — is this a return to the values of Old Labour? The Tory division over the EU referendum.

Judiciary and civil liberties: The promised abolition of the Human Rights Act (www.tinyurl.com/zt56h8q).

Constitution and constitutional reform: The upcoming EU referendum and possible implications for the constitution, e.g. if the UK votes to leave what will be the implications be for Scotland?

Executive: Suspension of cabinet collective responsibility for the EU referendum (www.tinyurl.com/zj2zoyj). When has this happened before?

Parliament: David Cameron threatened to make lots of new Conservative peers if the Lords blocked changes to tax credits (www.tinyurl.com/hp8x9oq). The use of statutory instruments (www.tinyurl.com/zuyky9u). Find out what statutory instruments are.

All of the above will also be useful for your university application and personal statement.

Visit your careers office — where is the best place to study politics? Where would you like to go?

Good luck!

Jessica Hardy is online editor of POLITICS REVIEW and head of politics at St Francis Xavier College, London.

This resource is part of POLITICS REVIEW, a magazine written for A-level students by subject experts. To subscribe to the full magazine go to www.hoddereducation.co.uk/politicsreview