

NEA questions and answers

What advice would you give about the marking and annotation of student work?

Ensure that an internal standardisation process is followed. Provide annotation on the work itself as well as on the mark sheet, with comments on the students' work reflecting where credit is being given. Signpost the areas and strands of the mark scheme using abbreviations and brief comment based on the assessment criteria (eg 1a effective reference to spec content). Wording should reflect the mark scheme criteria but shouldn't 'lift' from the mark scheme without personalising comments.

What kind of work can teachers/students do in preparation for their NEA investigations?

Provide information about the structure of the NEA, and the way in which the work is assessed.
Plan the early stages of the investigation. Think about areas of interest/possible aims of enquiries
Teach general skills, including types of presentation and tools for analysis/statistical methods.
Use photographs/ videos/webcams to suggest possible context.
Develop titles around photographs, then come up with appropriate methodologies
Practise methodologies in the school grounds.

What is the guidance for students working collaboratively in small groups?

Data can be collected by students in groups if appropriate to their investigations. In addition to this, students are permitted to work together to collect data to overcome health and safety challenges. If students are working in a group to collect their primary data they should still be independently making decisions around their own data collection techniques, sampling strategies and recording data. Students should not use data collection sheets provided by teachers or fieldwork providers during previous fieldwork activities.

Given the disruption to education over the past two years is it necessary for the NEA to be an independent investigation this year? What is the meaning of independence?

The statutory guidance for the NEA needs to be followed this year. The final choice of title, question or issue being investigated must still be made by the student. Each student should be independently making decisions around their own data collection methodologies although students may work together in collecting primary data if their investigation topics are similar. Secondary data should be sourced individually.

The independent investigation must relate to a topic in the geography specification. Independent means that the student must carry out the enquiry without relying on teachers and other students. However it is not necessary to work in isolation, or have a unique topic or theme for the investigation.

What sort of feedback should we give when considering NEA proposal forms?

Provide effective and realistic general guidance so that students can demonstrate independence. Ensure that the investigation structure is feasible, locations are suitable, that the programme of data collection is appropriate to the investigation and will yield sufficient data. Avoid making teacher guidance on the proposal form too specific. Don't approve title without any written general advice or direction; take opportunity to reduce breadth and advise against potentially very long studies.

What advice would you give about the literature review?

Refer to literature throughout the NEA

Use more than one source, and don't depend on a single textbook or Wikipedia

Use academic literature if you can

Be concise when writing up your literature review and ensure it links to the geography of your investigation and your findings

Use newspapers to find opinions

Evaluate whatever source you use – especially if it's a newspaper.

Better reports use a range of sources that might include textbooks, newspapers, journals, or reports from local government or a non-governmental organisation such as the Runnymede Trust

Great reports make use of academic journals –google scholar?

What should students include when considering the ethical dimension?

This may involve being aware of cultural differences and the possibilities of causing offence through manner or dress, building 'consent' and 'confidentiality' into questionnaires and interviews and generally avoiding causing problems for the public, such as blocking pavements or interrupting trade.

In physical geography, main ethical considerations relate to consent and access to study sites and potential damage; it could include concerns over trampling, damage to plants and animals or possible pollution, including litter or contamination of study sites.

A student has written an NEA with a word count of 15,000. With the guideline for the word count being 3000-4000, the student is greatly over and I wonder how this will be assessed? The student is concerned that by editing down significantly, the content and the thread of the writing will be lost.

I agree that 15000 words is an unusually lengthy report. There is no automatic deduction of marks for being over the word guidance. Some reports are self penalising if they lose focus or become repetitive. If the study is focused throughout and linked to the title or research question it may not be necessary to make substantial changes. However, if for instance the literature review is over long and not all directly relevant to the study the student may not achieve Level 4 in this part of the mark scheme. I agree that it is difficult to edit or paraphrase a whole report, but the student needs to be certain that the work is relevant and coherent, and doesn't include aspects that are extraneous to the central theme of the investigation.

The whole class carried out a practice investigation on urban regeneration and some have used the data from this in their final reports. Is this OK?

Students are allowed to practise elements of an investigation. For example, students could use a prior fieldwork opportunity to plan an investigation, practise fieldwork techniques and complete an evaluation etc. However, for the Independent Investigation, students should conduct all the elements of an investigation entirely anew. Any attempt to treat a practice investigation as a 'draft' of the student's non-exam assessment would be considered to be malpractice.

All students attended the same field course and have come up with very similar titles. Could this be a problem?

If multiple students have similar titles then this is only malpractice if students did not independently come up with their own titles. Inevitably, if students all visit the same environment(s) for fieldwork, there is a possibility of narrowing of titles. This is acceptable as long as students have made decisions about their planned investigation themes and titles independently. If some students independently come up with the same or similar titles, the Independent Investigation Proposal Form and written report provide every opportunity to demonstrate independence.

Several students collected coastal data together and so they are sharing the same information, but they have different titles and the conclusions they have drawn from the data are very different. However they have used the same package to produce bar charts and pie charts so their data presentation is very similar. They have all also carried out a chi 2 test and got the same correct answer. Can they be credited fully for data presentation and analysis?

The teacher should mark the work as normal; it is permissible for students to work in small groups to collect data, and it will be immediately apparent from the work if they have different proposals, including the titles and research questions/hypotheses. Even if the titles are similar there may be no cause for concern. It is quite feasible for students to select similar presentation techniques if they are processing the same data. Presumably their interpretation and analysis of the data would be different, and the conclusions must independently written. If the work is selected for moderation, the teacher would be advised to explain that although the data presentation is similar, the students chose to use the same package independently and that there was no collusion.

One area that is causing concern is the possible use of ChatGPT and other essay writing Bots that are available for free on the internet. They have considerable capabilities and may be difficult to detect. What are the implications for schools when marking their students' work?

It's almost impossible to prevent students from accessing these new technologies and schools may find it difficult to detect their use. There are tools to detect whether the work is produced using ChatGPT, but these are not foolproof, and schools will not be using them widely at the moment.

If a student was to use this, it would be a clear breach of the rules regarding the NEA. If you suspect that any of your students were to use this, or indeed if any form of plagiarism was detected, please report this to the exam board.

The advice when marking your students' reports is: Does the write up match the detail on the CRF? Has the student annotated their graphs/charts/data tables with analysis detail? How does the write up compare to their class work? It is often noticeable if there is a distinct difference.

The other factor to bear in mind is that each student must declare that their NEA is their own work. If they were found to be involved in malpractice, then it could impact on all exam results.

Exam boards rely on the professionalism of staff in schools to determine whether the work is authentic or not-they will know the capabilities of their students. In the longer term, these changes could alter the way that we assess coursework, especially if the software becomes increasingly sophisticated.

What do A/A* investigations look like?

They tend to:

have a tightly focused fieldwork question with limited number of hypotheses.
analyse a representative sample of data.
have a strong spatial component.
investigate a small well defined geographical area
link methods to hypotheses, and explain sampling.
have a wide range of graphical techniques and statistical tools
focus on analysing, interpreting and not just describing results
embed all illustrations within the text.
show sustained evidence of thinking critically about the broader geographical context.

Based on previous years' coursework submissions how can students improve their work?

Introduction, theory and literature review

Proposal forms could be more detailed, with methods linked to sub questions or hypotheses, and sampling strategies indicated.

Links to the specification are often too broad, comprising indiscriminate copying of large amounts of the spec content without further comment.

It is vital that the theoretical context is returned to at frequent intervals as it is part of the criteria for interpretations and conclusions. Unfortunately, some students are less focused in their literature reviews, including more generalised information that is only tangentially linked to the purpose of the study.

Some rely heavily on one or two sources rather than researching in more depth. Sometimes, there is a focus on the spatial, rather than conceptual background.

Methodology

Knowledge and understanding of sampling strategies is variable; in some cases it is well understood and applied, while at times it is totally ignored or just listed, without any explanation or justification. Some confuse sampling strategies with methods of data collection, and a few include methods of data processing, which are part of the analysis.

There are instances where the data collection programme is limited to part of a single day, and this is likely to be insufficient to collect adequate data. Make sure the dates, timings and frequencies of data collection are stated.

It is also crucial to think about whether samples are representative, as this affects several strands later in the enquiry write up (including presentation, analysis, interpretation and conclusions).

Presentation, analysis and interpretation

Presentation is frequently confined to graphical techniques. Mapping more data, perhaps with located symbols, would lead to greater engagement with the spatial element.

Some students use simple techniques perhaps because they are uncertain about applying statistical methods to their data. Some students miss opportunities to carry out statistical analysis of their results. There is limited understanding of significance, and some have difficulty relating the results of their analysis to their investigation.

Some students are highly descriptive in their analysis rather than explaining their results fully. A number fail to understand the importance of considering the accuracy of data and a representative sample when interpreting results.

Many fail to link their study to the wider geographical context and tend to see their results in isolation.

Evaluation and conclusions

Some students focus largely on the logistical problems encountered in carrying out the methodology and fail to get much further than the practicalities involved and the possible improvements to the techniques.

Some combine the evaluation and conclusion together which makes it difficult to distinguish the 2 strands.

Some students produce quite sweeping conclusions that are not fully supported by the evidence of data collected.

Some restrict their conclusions to simplistic statements of the obvious based upon limited data sets. These tend to be straightforward and very descriptive, and are often a repeat of the analysis and interpretation.

What help, if any, can parents give to students carrying out their NEA work?

There are limits to what would be termed "acceptable" help.

For example, a parent could assist their child by helping them with the logistics of getting to their study area, by giving them a lift there and back, for example, but the student should collect the primary data, not the parent. They should not provide titles for them, nor should they provide sets of data, or other work which the student passes off as their own.

The parent should not proof-read, mark or amend the student's work or offer written feedback on drafts.

What are the main things to avoid when planning and delivering the NEA part of the specification?

Avoid collecting data in large groups, all based on a single theme.

Avoid relying on a large database that all students dip into.

Titles must not be decided retrospectively ie after the data has been collected in groups. The CRF proposal should be completed and approved before the student embarks on a data collecting programme.

Very similar or identical titles may result from discussion or collusion between students. Those with similar aims can collaborate on sampling and data collection and share data, but the work cannot be teacher directed.

Avoid producing formulaic work with similar presentation and analytical techniques, outcomes and evaluations.

Avoid selecting titles and themes not clearly based on the specification.

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