

Answering the 9 Mark Question

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In GCSE Geography, the highest tariff questions are the 9 markers. They come up in all three papers. While they may seem daunting, using the right technique and a bit of practice, you can be picking up the marks every time, giving your grade a major boost. Let's see how we can write the perfect answer to a 9 mark question, with a model example.

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Reading the Question

Before you even start writing, you have to understand what is asked of you. You should read the question carefully multiple times, because you won't be given any marks for focusing on the wrong topic. It is a good idea to highlight the critical parts of the question.

Using two named examples, evaluate the effectiveness of the immediate and long-term responses to a tectonic hazard in two countries of contrasting levels of wealth. [9+3]

If you have revised the content properly, you should remember the topic that this question is referring to. If not, you should still have a go at the question, using some educated guesses. In this case, the question wants us to talk about responses to tectonic hazards from topic 3.1.1.2 in the specification. The two case studies we learned were the 2010 Chile earthquake and the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Finally, the command word wants us to evaluate, so we have to draw some conclusions on which earthquake was responded to more effectively.

The Introduction

This is the part of the essay where you can impress the examiner with your knowledge. Do not be afraid to state the obvious, as long as it is short and relevant. Make sure to answer each part of the question and define the key words.

Earthquakes can have different responses depending on where they take place. These responses can be immediate, in the days after the earthquake, or long-term, in the following years. Chile - a Newly Emerging Economy (NEE) - was struck by a magnitude 8.8 earthquake in 2010. Nepal - a Low Income Country (LIC) - was struck by a magnitude 7.9 earthquake in 2015. I believe that the responses for the Chile earthquake were more effective than the responses for the Nepal earthquake, because Chile has more wealth and infrastructure to respond effectively to natural hazards.

Notice how I start with basically repeating the question. Of course the responses are going to be different. Next, I define the key words mentioned in the question. This shows that I know what I am doing and have read the question carefully. Then I introduce the two case studies, giving a little bit of background information about both, and mentioning key words. Then I make my point, answering the actual question, and giving a super short reason. Also notice how I keep referring to the question focus, mentioning effectiveness again and again.

The First Paragraph

Now we can actually get into the main part of the essay. The question will usually present you with a decision, and you need to present both sides of the argument to draw a thoughtful conclusion. In this case, the two sides are Chile and Nepal.

On the one hand, the responses for the Chile earthquake were very effective. Firstly, the Route 5 highway was repaired in 24 hours - an example of an immediate response. This allowed emergency supplies to be transported to the affected areas. Secondly, power and water was returned to 90% of homes very quickly - another immediate response. This provided sanitation to people, as well as refrigerating their food. Thirdly, the government helped 196,000 households over the next months - an example of a long-term response. This helped the economy recover while maintaining people's quality of life. Overall, the responses in Chile were very effective in mitigating the effects.

This paragraph starts with a clear point outlining one side of the argument. In this case, it focuses on responses to the Chile earthquake. Then there are three pieces of evidence that are then further explained. I also use discourse markers to signpost the different parts of the paragraph. Finally, there is a link back to the question focus, which is mostly reiterating the point from the beginning.

The Second Paragraph

This paragraph is very similar to the previous one, but it shows the other side of the argument. Instead of supporting the evidence with your explanation, you should undermine it with careful evaluation.

On the other hand, the responses for the Nepal earthquake were quite effective. Firstly, 300,000 people fled from Kathmandu an example of an immediate response. However, while this allowed people to get to safety, it also decreased the available workforce in the capital. Secondly, the government introduced stricter building codes - a long-term response. While this made the country more prepared, it didn't respond

to the current disaster. Overall, the responses in Nepal were somewhat effective in mitigating the effects.

This paragraph also starts with a clear point, this time about the responses to the Nepal earthquake. Then there are two pieces of evidence that are then evaluated to make them feel less important. I use discourse markers again to structure the paragraph. Finally, there is another link back to the question focus, mostly reiterating the point from the beginning.

The Conclusion

Now that we have presented the evidence, we need to summarise it to really drive our point home. While we made a short decision in the introduction, now we have to draw a more meaningful conclusion.

In conclusion, I believe that the responses in Chile were more effective, because they addressed the disaster well and made progress to recover. In comparison, Nepal had far fewer responses, which did little to address the effects of the earthquake due to the limited economic resources available.

You can see that I refer back to the question focus for one last time, comment on the evidence presented in the two argument paragraphs, and summarise everything into a couple of sentences.

The Full Structure

- ❖ Introduction
 - Repeat the question focus
 - Define key words
 - Introduce case studies
 - State your viewpoint
- ❖ First Paragraph
 - Point
 - Evidence x3
 - Explanation x3
 - Link back to the question
- ❖ Second Paragraph
 - Point
 - Evidence x3
 - Explanation x3
 - Link back to the question
- ❖ Conclusion
 - Final viewpoint
 - Summary

If you follow this structure and revise your case studies, you can get the top marks on this question every time! I hope this helps to understand the structure of 9 mark questions.

Good luck!

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