

AQA Geography A-Level

3.3.4.1: (Area 1) Introduction and Preliminary Research Essential Notes

Introduction

Your investigation is worth a total of **60 marks** and accounts for **20% of your overall AQA Geography A-Level grade**. Achieving a good mark in your investigation could benefit your overall grade, so it is important that you **spend the necessary time** working on it. If you **choose an interesting topic**, you should find your investigation enjoyable. Giving your investigation a **real life purpose**, will make your investigation more rewarding. You could research a nearby woodland area for your local wildlife association, or investigate urban form for your parish council - there are many opportunities. These guides from PMT aim to help you through the NEA and encourage you to try hard and create an **insightful, purposeful and unique investigation**. We would encourage you to **read through each guide** before you start your investigation.

Overview of the Investigation

Here is a suggestion for the **order** in which you could complete your investigation:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choose a topic | <input type="checkbox"/> Data presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preliminary research into the topic | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpretation and analysis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choose a relevant title and define how it links to the specification | <input type="checkbox"/> Write up and collate findings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aims and hypotheses | <input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rationale for hypotheses | <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brief plan of methodology | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pilot study | <input type="checkbox"/> Appendices and bibliography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Candidate record form approval | <input type="checkbox"/> Abstract |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Risk assessment and methodology | <input type="checkbox"/> Proofread |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data collection* | <input type="checkbox"/> Contents page |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation/Formatting |

*It is important that your primary data is collected after you have filled in your candidate record form, otherwise this data cannot be used in your investigation.

Choosing a Title

After choosing a topic, it is important to **focus on a specific area** that will allow the investigation to be easily conducted and ensures it will not be too time consuming. A **concise and directed title** is vital and it is necessary to spend time refining and improving it. If a title is too vague, you will struggle trying to prove it and may risk going over the word count.

The title should be **related to a particular area of the specification**, which you will specify in your candidate record form. Effective titles will also have a **locational context** and will explicitly link to a **key concept, theory or process**. The location may be **somewhere near to you**, that **you would like to study**, or that **your school is going on a field trip to**. The title could be a **question, hypothesis or statement**.

A hypothesis or statement can be proven/disproven, whereas a question is answered. e.g.:

- What effect have Coca-Cola had on the character of the PPSEZ, Phnom Penh?
- Coca-Cola have affected character of the PPSEZ, Phnom Penh
- Coca-Cola have positively affected character of the PPSEZ, Phnom Penh

To help decide on a specific focus within your chosen topic area, it is important to **conduct research into key theories, concepts and processes** which relate to it and choosing one of these to further research as part of your title. Once you have decided on a title, ensure to **complete further study into this area** and record this under the **rationale for hypotheses**. Ensure to record all researched sources into a suitable bibliography to ensure these sources do not become lost further into your investigation. Sources to investigate may include: social media posts, magazines, textbooks, podcasts, videos, articles, websites, academic papers and library sources.

When deciding the title and location, it is important to consider:

- If you can easily **get to the location** to collect primary data
- If you can relate it to contemporary issues
- If you can make it **useful to another stakeholder**. **Contacting a local council or organisation** may help with this and allow you to obtain secondary data
- If the **location is a manageable size**, suitable for fieldwork
- If you could **feasibly investigate the title** with the resources available to you
- If there are **opportunities to collect primary and secondary data, of both qualitative and quantitative nature** in that location, for the specific research title
- If it would allow you to **access the whole mark scheme**
- If it would be **safe to conduct fieldwork** in that area
- If you would **find the investigation interesting** - you will spend a lot of time on it!

Before confirming your title, it is advisable to **start planning your data collection**. If it does not seem manageable and there are not opportunities for a wide range of data collection and potentially statistical analysis, you may want to adjust the title.

Linking the Title to the Specification

You should make it clear as to which parts of the specification your investigation links to and explain which specific areas you will investigate. It may be useful to state the **code from the specification** - If you are investigating urban heat islands, you could link this to: **3.2.3.4 Urban Climate**.

Aims/Hypotheses

After confirming the title (e.g. What impact does longshore drift have on sediment size at Pentle Bay beach?), you will need plan out how you will break down this question into its **constituent elements** that are more manageable to investigate and prove. This will allow a clear direction for the investigation.

You may wish to create the following:

- **Aims** (Around 3) - What are your **targets for the investigation** and **what do you want to find out?**
 1. To determine the size of sediment along Pentle Bay beach
 2. To consider whether coastal management strategies have impacted on sediment size at Pentle Bay Beach
 3. To assess whether prevailing wind has lead to the process of longshore drift
- **Hypothesis/Sub-Questions** (Around 3) - The hypothesis/sub-questions should help give **direction to your investigation** and **link directly to the aims:**
 - a. Sediment size decreases along the beach
 - b. Coastal management has had no effect on sediment size at Pentle Bay Beach
 - c. Prevailing wind blows in a regular direction and has caused the process of longshore drift

Reliability and Accuracy

Reliability is often confused with accuracy, but they are both very different. Reliability is how close your results are too each other and accuracy is how close your results are to the actual value.



Not Reliable but Accurate



Accurate and Reliable



Not Accurate or Reliable



Accurate but not Reliable

Referencing/Citations

It is important to **reference/cite any sources of secondary data** (text, images, data, etc.) which you use to assist your investigation as you go along. You can **use software** to help you, such as the referencing tab on Microsoft Word. It is recommended that you use **Harvard referencing**:

Harvard - Reference in text, which is linked to a **detailed bibliography** at the end of the write up. For example to reference the BBC article 'Death of the Nile', you would use the following details:

- Author: Peter Schwartzstein
- Name of Web Page: Death of the Nile
- Date Published: 10/10/17
- Date Accessed: 04/05/18
- URL: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/death_of_the_nile

This would create an **in-text citation** of:

- It is likely that water conflict on the Nile will soon occur (Schwartzstein, 2017)

And a bibliography reference similar to:

- Schwartzstein, P., 2017, *Death of the Nile* [Online], Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/death_of_the_nile, [Accessed 4 May 2018]

You may also wish to include version, publisher or other contributing authors, though the above is the key information. When citing websites, **date accessed** is necessary as websites can be edited. For a **book**, you would list the **city published** and the **publisher**, instead of the **name of the website** and **URL**. If there is **more than one author**, you may write each one, or Peter Schwartzstein *et al.*. The way to reference can change dependent on the source (for example, referencing a recorded interview is different to referencing a documentary) so it is important to research how to reference your specific source.

Rationale for Hypotheses

It is important to **research relevant and contemporary issues** surrounding your fieldwork topic and title as well as the **theory that supports these areas**. This may be referenced in an **introduction** (to be written toward the end of the investigation) and/or in the **rationale for your hypotheses**, which explains why you believe that a hypothesis will be proven.

Example hypothesis: Carbon sequestration is greater in the virgin/ancient woodland of Whittlewood Forest, compared with new woodland at Heartwood Forest.

To research the theory surrounding this hypothesis, you might **investigate other woodland areas**, both in the UK and around the world and use these results to backup theories that you research such as **carbon storage, photosynthesis and Net Primary Productivity (NPP)**. You could also research **contemporary issues** such as **carbon fertilisation and starvation**, which relate to global warming and relevant geographers in the subject. When linked with the **core theory from the specification** and the **history/contemporary issues of the locations** which you are studying, this would provide an excellent start to the investigation. Research may utilise relevant literature, articles, academic publications, videos, etc., found by going to libraries, searching the internet or using a specialist browser such as **Google Scholar**.

Brief Plan of Methodology

It is important to create a brief plan for your methodology that will be included on your **Candidate Record Form (CRF)** that must be approved by your teacher. This will also help you to understand if your title is an appropriate size to investigate, or if it needs adapting. **Be critical with yourself**, as this will save you time later during your investigation if you have a good title. The brief plan for your methodology should include:

- Planned data collection techniques (primary and secondary) (qualitative and quantitative)
- Planned sampling strategy/strategies

- A brief plan of your data presentation techniques (graphs, sketches, statistical analysis). If your planned data collection would not enable you to access the full range of data presentation techniques, you can adjust this at an early stage

Location Analysis

Your investigation must have a locational context and it is important that you describe the areas which you will be studying in your report - **contemporary issues, history, location statistics etc**, which can then be used later to help form your conclusions. If you are **comparing two locations** in your investigation, it is also important to compare the **overview of the locations** in your report.

Risk Assessment

Safety of the researcher and those around them is the most important part of the fieldwork investigation. Before you conduct fieldwork or collect data, you should **assess the potential risks** in the area you will be studying and **plan the necessary methods of mitigating these risks**. There is a tendency to disregard the risk assessment until after the fieldwork, but completing it beforehand is essential. If there are any risks too great to mitigate, consider choosing another location. Risks may be as simple as air pollution when visiting a city, or high speed trains and dangerous platforms on a visit to a train station. All risks, no matter how severe, should be **noted and mitigated**. Always let someone know your exact location if you are conducting your investigation independently and **be mindful of your surroundings**. An example risk assessment may be:

Potential Hazard	Severity of Consequences (A)	Likelihood to Occur (B)	Risk Rating Without Mitigation (A x B)	Methods of Control

Severity of Consequences	Likelihood to Occur	Risk Rating without Mitigation
5 – Fatality/Major Injury	5 – Very Likely	Severity of Consequences x Likelihood to occur (Out of 25)
4 – Major Injury	4 – Likely	1-8 Low Risk
3 – Injury/Illness	3 – Possible	9-17 Medium Risk
2 – Minor Injury	2 – May	18-25 High Risk
1 – Slight Inconvenience	1 - Unlikely	

Ethical Issues

When conducting your fieldwork it is essential to **consider the ethical issues** surrounding your investigation - what is the impact of your fieldwork? Always **aim to benefit the area you are investigating** and at least ensure that you leave it in the state you found it in. If you are visiting a beach, could you **help pick up litter** that would otherwise pose a fatal threat to sea life? If you are visiting an urban area, could you **help a local charity** supporting the homeless? Could you send

your investigation (once the remark date for the fieldwork has passed) to a local group who may be able to use your findings, and could you work with local authorities? Whilst you are not expected to go to these lengths, it would be **beneficial to your fieldwork and give it a greater purpose**.

The **countryside code** is aimed at rural areas and its guidance is **appropriate to follow for all students** and can be accessed through this link: [Countryside Code](#). You should also:

- Tell the locals about your investigation and its purpose
- Gain consent with people before conducting questionnaires/interviews
- Be polite and use good manners
- Show respect for other people and their views
- Be objective
- Avoid leading questions (e.g. Do you agree that Poole needs additional flood defences?)
- Be aware of any social or cultural issues you may encounter

The actions you take to be mindful of these issues could be mentioned in your **data collection methodology**, or in a specific section toward the end of your report, but remember that **ethical issues may be present in other areas** of the investigation.

Pilot Study/Studies

The final stage before confirming your investigation is to **create a pilot study**, which **assesses the feasibility of the fieldwork**. A pilot study can be used to confirm whether the investigation would be possible in your chosen location, or if your planned methods of data collection or title need to be adapted. Pilot studies should also be used to **test the technique of your planned methods of data collection**. For example, testing a **footcount survey** at a local shopping centre to see if the format is suitable. You could then make changes based on problems that arise, and test it again. When you collect your actual data, you will be better placed and find data collection more manageable.

Candidate Record Form

[This planning sheet](#) from the RGS may be useful to help plan your investigation before you complete the formal CRF. The work that you have done so far should be **written concisely in the CRF** as instructed with the title, which you should have **confirmed with your teacher**. Extensive examples and guidance on the CRF can be found [here](#).