

Essay Skills at advanced level: Challenging the Assumption of the question in a concluding section

The "Mr. Angry" classroom exercise involves taking a past paper question and then challenging any "loaded assumptions" within it. This is a great thing to do in a conclusion, and helps to get you into the top level of the examiner's mark scheme. Here are some examples of ideas which students at the International School of Toulouse came up with.

Topic 1: Causes, practices, effects of war

In what ways and for what reasons did the role of propaganda become increasingly important in the twentieth century wars?

The assumption is that propaganda was becoming increasingly important. I would question whether propaganda was becoming important and if it had a role.

How and why did technological developments play an important part in twentieth century wars?

The assumption is that technological developments played an important part in the twentieth century wars. I would question if technological developments played an important part.

In what ways and for what reasons have tactics changed in 20 th century warfare?

Assumption tactics have changed.

The assumption is that tactics have changed, largely they have but some tactics have stayed the same.

Why were the intentions of those responsible for treaties rarely fulfilled?

Assumption is that intentions of those responsible for the treaties were rarely fulfilled.

However intentions of those responsible for treaties were fulfilled sometimes.

Why were the intentions of those responsible for treaties rarely fulfilled?

à The loaded assumption is that the intentions of those responsible for treaties were rarely fulfilled.

à There are a number of successes that came from treaties, for example Treaty of Versailles.

Assess the social and economic causes of one twentieth century war.

à The loaded assumption is that there were only social and economic causes for war, in reality there are more than likely a large number of political causes.

à Political causes for WWII are the foreign policy of Germany, the Nazi-Soviet pact...

‘With reference to two civil wars each chosen from a different region, discuss the view that civil wars are usually caused by economic problems rather than by political or religious differences.’

- Loaded assumption: That civil wars are caused by economic problems whereas it is arguable that political or even social problems and division can cause civil wars. Whilst economic problems were indeed present, the assumption that they were THE cause of a civil war is simply wrong. They may have contributed to other factors such as political difference in Spain for example.

In conclusion I'd point out how the other factors cannot be simply omitted from being the causes of civil wars.

Single Party States – Topic 3

For what reasons, and with what results, were there so many single-party states in the 20th century?

[Assumption made : there were many single party states in the 20th century]

Account for the ineffectiveness of internal opposition to two rulers of single-party state.

- This question assumes that political opposition within the countries were inefficient
 - I would challenge this because in Stalin's Russia, there was opposition in the peasantry against the policy of collectivisation, as a result Stalin altered the policy, for example he made it optional at one point. So therefore the opposition may not have been as effective as they would have liked but it did achieve some results.
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“In order to achieve and retain power a leader of a single party state needed to be ruthless, blind to human suffering and yet charismatic.” To what extent do you agree with this assertion?

Assumption behind this question is that these qualities are needed as opposed to being a choice of the ruler.

In a conclusion, I'd point out examples of where rulers did choose these qualities e.g. if charismatic doesn't need to be ruthless. If ruthless doesn't need to be charismatic.

For what reasons and with what results, were there so many single party states in the 20th century?

- Suggestion is that there were many single party states
 - Could suggest that it is surprising that there is not more considering the economic position of some countries following the Wall St Crash etc
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Examine the global impact of one ruler of a single-party state.

- Suggests that there was a global impact

- In fact Lenin and Stalin pulled back their policies of attempting to push other countries to communism and so they were not trying to provoke any real global problems
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Cold War – Topic 5

« An unnatural alliance that was bound to fall apart after the defeat of the common enemy » - to what extent does this statement explain the origin of the Cold War?

1. The loaded assumption is that the alliance was bound to fall apart.
 2. Evidence against the assumption - Yalta conference and Franco – Russian pact
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“The Cold War was caused by fear, not aggression.” – to what extent does this view explain how the Cold War developed between 1945 and 1949?

1. The assumption is that fear had something to do with the development of the Cold War.
 2. Evidence against assumption – differences in ideology and disagreement over Germany. Also previous events that caused distrust such as the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact.
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In what ways and to what extent, did mutual distrust and suspicion cause the Cold War?

1. Makes the assumption that mutual distrust and suspicion had anything to do with the outbreak of the Cold War.
 2. Evidence against assumption – Differences in ideologies, aggression, also evidence that the USSR and USA trusted the other ie Yalta and France – Russian pact.
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To what extent were Soviet policies responsible for the outbreak and development of the Cold War between 1945 and 1949?

1. The word responsible makes the assumption that Soviet policies were directly shaped to cause tension and outbreak between the two superpowers.
 2. Rephrase the question: To what extent did Soviet Policies cause tension between superpowers such that they led to the outbreak of the Cold War between 1945 and 1949?
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Explain the importance of ideological differences in the outbreak of the Cold War

The question presumes that ideological differences were important at all. Also the word “outbreak” implies that it was a sudden occurrence, rather than a slow yet inevitable process.

I would challenge this by questioning the overall importance of ideology in causing the Cold War, and by attempting to prove that the Cold war didn't break out in the sense of a normal war, but gradually evolved.

For what reasons and with what results was Germany a centre of Cold War Tension between 1945-61,

Was centre of cold war because....

Clash in soviet and western ideology led to different views on how to help “heal” Germany.

à Potsdam and Yalta contributed to this.

à Berlin Blockade and NATO

Wrong because....

Simply other reasons which Germany was not involved in. (foreign policies)

In what ways and to what extent, did the Cold War become less confrontational after 1970? (basically why did Détente happen)

It did become less confrontational because....

Many factors contributed to détente (Cuban missile crisis: fear of nuclear war.

SALT etc.)

Wrong because....

Eventually didn't become less confrontational. Second cold war began.

How and why did the policies of either the USA or the USSR affect superpower rivalry between 1950 and 1970?

Loaded assumption: that the policies of USA and USSR did affect superpower rivalry

I would challenge this assumption by saying Cuba played an important part in affecting superpower rivalry by taking on nuclear missiles. Many people would remember the 1962 Cuban missile crisis as an event that almost led to a nuclear war.

In what ways and for what reasons did the Cold war affect the middle east?

Loaded assumption: Implies that the cold war did affect the Middle East.

I would challenge the assumption by saying the cold war didn't cause the middle east to have economic struggles or have conflicts

To what extent were soviet policies responsible for the outbreak and development of the cold war between 1945 and 1949?

Loaded assumption: that the cold war started suddenly instead of gradual events.

I would challenge the assumption by saying the cold war was gradual but inevitable instead of one event spiraling out of control.