VCE Modern History Units 1&2 Complete Study Guide

Complete study guide · Units 1&2 · Change and conflict · The changing world order · AceGuides

This guide follows the VCAA VCE History Study Design (accreditation period from 2022), Modern History Units 1 and 2: Unit 1 Change and conflict and Unit 2 The changing world order. It covers both Areas of Study in each unit, the historical thinking skills the outcomes ask for, and the kinds of school-based assessment tasks you will sit.

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About this guide

What the course is about

Modern History Units 1 and 2 cover the twentieth century in two halves. **Unit 1 (Change and conflict)** looks at the years between the two world wars, roughly 1918 to 1939: the peace settlement after World War One, the rise of new ideologies and regimes (communism in the USSR, fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, militarism in Japan), the Great Depression, the road to World War Two, and how ordinary people's lives and culture changed. **Unit 2 (The changing world order)** starts in 1945: the causes, course and consequences of the Cold War, and the movements that challenged existing structures of power after 1945, such as civil rights campaigns, decolonisation, anti-war movements and campaigns for Indigenous and women's rights.

Unit	Area of Study	Outcome (in summary)
Unit 1 Change and conflict	AoS 1 Ideology and conflict	Explain how significant events, ideologies and individuals contributed to political and economic change in the first half of the

		20th century, and analyse how these contributed to the causes of World War Two
Unit 1 Change and conflict	AoS 2 Social and cultural change	Explain patterns of social and cultural change in everyday life in the first half of the 20th century, and analyse the conditions that influenced these changes
Unit 2 The changing world order	AoS 1 Causes, course and consequences of the Cold War	Explain the causes of the Cold War and analyse its consequences on nations and people
Unit 2 The changing world order	AoS 2 Challenge and change	Explain challenges to social, political and/or economic structures of power and evaluate the extent to which continuity and change occurred

Schools choose their own case studies inside each Area of Study. One school might teach Unit 1 AoS 2 through Stalin's USSR; another through Nazi Germany or the USA in the 1920s. Unit 2 AoS 2 might be the US civil rights movement, decolonisation in Asia or Africa, the anti-Vietnam War movement or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights in Australia. This guide covers the most commonly taught case studies for every Area of Study so that, whatever your school chose, the material is here.

How you are assessed

Units 1 and 2 are **school-assessed**. There is no VCAA exam for Units 1 and 2. Your teacher decides whether you achieve each outcome (S for satisfactory, N for not satisfactory) based on your work and the assessment tasks. Schools also give graded results, and most run an end-of-semester exam, which is good practice for the Units 3 and 4 History exam.

For each outcome the study design lists the kinds of task that can be used. They are:

Task type	What it involves	Skills tested
Historical inquiry	You research a question, gather and evaluate evidence, and present a reasoned answer (report,	Asking questions, using a range of sources, constructing an argument

	essay, presentation or annotated folio)	
Analysis of primary sources	You answer structured questions on sources from the period (documents, posters, photographs, cartoons, statistics)	Identifying content, context, purpose, perspective and reliability
Analysis of historical interpretations	You compare and evaluate what historians have argued	Explaining and comparing interpretations, judging their usefulness
Essay	A sustained argument in response to a question, using evidence	Argument, evidence, analysis of cause, consequence, continuity and change

Exam tip: Every task type rewards the same three things: a clear argument that answers the exact question, precise evidence (names, dates, statistics, short quotations) and analysis (explaining why or how, not just what happened). Use this guide's "Exam tip" boxes and model answers to practise all three.

The historical thinking skills

History tasks test the same set of thinking skills over and over. Learn the names, because questions use them.

Skill	What it means	Question starter
Cause and consequence	Why events happened and what they led to; weighing short-term and long-term causes	"Explain the causes of…", "What were the consequences of…"
Continuity and change	What stayed the same and what changed over time, and how much	"To what extent did… change?"
Historical significance	Why an event, person or idea mattered; its importance at the time and later	"Explain the significance of…"
Perspectives	The views of people living at the time, shaped by their	"Explain the perspective of… on…"

	position (class, nation, gender, race)	
Historical interpretations	The views of historians writing later, shaped by evidence, era and approach	"Compare the views of historians on…"
Using sources as evidence	Analysing primary and secondary sources to support an argument	"Using the sources and your own knowledge…"

How to use this guide

1. Read each section once before your class starts it, to get the big picture and timeline.
2. After each lesson, re-read the matching subsection and add your teacher's examples in the margin of your own notes.
3. Learn the timeline and key-individual tables at the end of each section until you can reproduce them from memory.
4. Do the "Check your understanding" questions under timed conditions, then mark them using the Worked solutions.
5. Two weeks before a SAC or exam, use the One-page summary and the Practice exam.

Suggested revision plan (for a semester exam)

Week	Focus	Tasks
6 weeks out	Unit 1 AoS 1 (peace settlement, ideologies, regimes)	Rebuild the 1918–1933 timeline from memory; Section 1 and 2 questions
5 weeks out	Unit 1 AoS 1 (Depression and road to war)	Section 3 questions; plan two essays on causes of WWII
4 weeks out	Unit 1 AoS 2 (social and cultural change)	Section 4 questions; practise one source analysis
3 weeks out	Unit 2 AoS 1 (Cold War)	Sections 5 and 6 questions; key individuals table
2 weeks out	Unit 2 AoS 2 (challenge and change)	Section 7 questions; one historical interpretations task
1 week out	Whole course	Practice exam under timed conditions; mark it; revise

		weak areas with the One-page summary

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1. The aftermath of World War One and the peace settlement (Unit 1, AoS 1)
2. Ideologies and new regimes: the USSR, Italy, Germany and Japan (Unit 1, AoS 1)
3. The Great Depression and the road to World War Two (Unit 1, AoS 1)
4. Social and cultural change, 1918–1939 (Unit 1, AoS 2)
5. The causes of the Cold War, 1945–1949 (Unit 2, AoS 1)
6. The course and consequences of the Cold War, 1950–1991 (Unit 2, AoS 1)
7. Challenge and change after 1945 (Unit 2, AoS 2)
8. Working with sources and historical interpretations
9. Exam technique
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1. The aftermath of World War One and the peace settlement

This section covers the impact of World War One, the peace treaties of 1919–1923, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the League of Nations. These are the starting point for every Unit 1 question about the causes of World War Two.

1.1 The impact of World War One

World War One (1914–1918) was the first **total war**: a war in which governments mobilised entire societies, economies and populations, not just armies. It ended with the **armistice** (ceasefire) of 11 November 1918.

Its impact shaped the next twenty years:

- **Human cost.** About 9 to 10 million soldiers died, plus millions of civilians. Australia, with a population under 5 million, enlisted about 416,000 people and lost more than 60,000 dead.
- **Collapse of empires.** Four empires fell: the Russian (1917), German (1918), Austro-Hungarian (1918) and Ottoman (finally dissolved in 1922). Their collapse created new states and new borders.
- **Revolution.** The Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in October 1917 (November in the Western calendar). Fear of communism spreading shaped politics across Europe for decades.
- **Economic damage.** Governments had borrowed heavily. Britain and France owed large debts to the USA; Germany paid for its war largely by borrowing and printing money, which fed later inflation.
- **Political change.** Many countries extended the vote (for example, British women over 30 won the vote in 1918). New democracies such as the Weimar Republic in Germany were born in defeat and chaos.
- **Psychological impact.** Many people were left with a hatred of war (pacifism), which later influenced Britain and France's policy of **appeasement**. Others, especially ex-soldiers in Germany and Italy, were left angry and attracted to violent nationalist movements.
- **Disease.** The influenza pandemic of 1918–1920 killed tens of millions worldwide, more than the war itself.

1.2 Wilson's Fourteen Points

On 8 January 1918, US President **Woodrow Wilson** outlined his **Fourteen Points**, a plan for a just and lasting peace. Key ideas:

- Open diplomacy (no secret treaties).
- Freedom of the seas and free trade.
- Reduction of armaments.
- **National self-determination**: the idea that each nationality should be able to govern itself in its own state.
- A general association of nations (the League of Nations) to guarantee peace.

The Germans agreed to the armistice partly because they expected a peace based on the Fourteen Points. When the treaty turned out to be much harsher, many Germans felt betrayed.

1.3 The Paris Peace Conference and the aims of the Big Three

The **Paris Peace Conference** opened on 18 January 1919. The defeated powers were not invited to negotiate. The main decisions were made by the "Big Three": Wilson (USA), **Georges Clemenceau** (France) and **David Lloyd George** (Britain). Italy's Vittorio Orlando also attended but had less influence.

Leader	Country	Main aims	Why
Woodrow Wilson	USA	A fair peace based on the Fourteen Points; a League of Nations	The USA had suffered far less; Wilson believed harshness would cause another war
Georges Clemenceau	France	Make Germany pay and weaken it permanently; security for France	France had been invaded twice in 50 years; its north-east was devastated
David Lloyd George	Britain	A middle path: punish Germany (voters wanted it) but keep it as a trading partner; protect the British Empire and navy	Public opinion wanted revenge, but Britain needed European trade to recover
Vittorio Orlando	Italy	Territory promised in the 1915 Treaty of London	Italy had lost about 600,000 dead and wanted rewards

Australia's Prime Minister **Billy Hughes** also attended. He demanded reparations, won Australia a League mandate over former German New Guinea, and helped block Japan's proposal to add a racial equality clause to the League Covenant.

1.4 The Treaty of Versailles (28 June 1919)

The Treaty of Versailles with Germany was signed in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on 28 June 1919, five years to the day after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Category	Main terms
Territory in Europe	Alsace-Lorraine to France; the Saar coalfields run by the League for 15 years (France got the coal); West Prussia and Posen to Poland, creating the "Polish Corridor"; Danzig a Free City under the League; union with Austria (Anschluss) forbidden. Germany lost about 13 per cent of its European territory and about 10 per cent of its population
Colonies	All German colonies taken and run as League **mandates** by Britain, France, Japan, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand
Military	Army limited to 100,000 men; conscription banned; no tanks, air force or submarines; navy limited to six battleships; the Rhineland **demilitarised** and occupied by the Allies for up to 15 years
War guilt	Article 231: Germany accepted responsibility for causing the loss and damage of the war
Reparations	Germany to pay compensation; the sum was set in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks

The Germans called it a **Diktat** (a dictated peace). Many blamed the new Weimar politicians who signed it, calling them the "November Criminals". This feeds into the **stab-in-the-back myth**: the false claim that the German army had not been defeated on the battlefield but betrayed at home by socialists, Jews and democratic politicians.

> **Exam tip:** Do not just list treaty terms. Link each term to a consequence. For example: reparations → resentment and economic strain → the 1923 crisis → support for extremists. Territorial losses → grievances that Hitler later exploited (Rhineland 1936, Anschluss 1938, Sudetenland 1938, Danzig and the Polish Corridor 1939).

1.5 The other peace treaties

Treaty	Country	Date	Key outcomes
Saint-Germain	Austria	September 1919	Austria-Hungary broken up; Austria reduced to a small German-speaking state; union with Germany forbidden; Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) recognised
Neuilly	Bulgaria	November 1919	Lost land to Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania; lost access to the Aegean Sea
Trianon	Hungary	June 1920	Lost about two-thirds of its territory; millions of Hungarians left in neighbouring states
Sèvres	Ottoman Empire	August 1920	Arab lands became British and French mandates; harsh terms rejected by Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal
Lausanne	Turkey	July 1923	Replaced Sèvres after Turkish military success; recognised the modern Turkish state

The treaties applied self-determination unevenly. New states such as Czechoslovakia and Poland contained large minorities (for example, about 3 million Germans in the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia). These minority grievances became flashpoints in the 1930s.

1.6 Was the peace settlement too harsh?

This is a classic debate and appears in interpretation tasks.

View	Historian or figure	Argument
Too harsh	John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919)	Called it a "Carthaginian peace"; reparations would wreck the German and European economy
Not harsh enough, or harsh in the wrong way	Often linked to Marshal Ferdinand Foch	Foch is reported to have said "This is not peace. It is an armistice for twenty years." Germany was humiliated but left strong enough to seek revenge
A reasonable compromise	Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers* (2001)	The peacemakers faced impossible pressures; the treaty was not the main cause of WWII; later leaders chose not to enforce it
Reparations were payable	Sally Marks	Germany could have paid; it paid only a fraction of the total, and the burden was eased by the Dawes Plan (1924) and Young Plan (1929)

Common mistake: Saying "the Treaty of Versailles caused World War Two". It contributed by creating grievances, but twenty years passed. You must explain how other factors (the Depression, the rise of Hitler, the failure of the League, appeasement) turned grievance into war.

1.7 The League of Nations

The **League of Nations** was set up by the peace treaties (its Covenant was the first part of each treaty) and began work in January 1920, with its headquarters in Geneva.

Aims: to prevent war through **collective security** (members would act together against an aggressor), to encourage disarmament, and to improve living and working conditions worldwide.

Structure: an Assembly (all members, one vote each, decisions had to be unanimous), a Council (permanent members Britain, France, Italy and Japan, plus temporary members), the Permanent Court of International Justice, and agencies such as the International Labour Organisation.

End of free sample

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