History In-Service Team,  
Supporting Leaving Certificate History.  

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The Research Study: Examples of Subjects And Sources  

The following material includes approaches and advice on the Research Study. It indicates the richness of sources and approaches available to teachers, using a number of relevant examples. References to the advice contained in the Guidelines are intended to root the examples and the approaches firmly within the structure of the syllabus.
Section 1: The contribution of an individual to a particular episode or event or movement.

The “Ulster rebellion and national war (the Nine Years’ War),” is an element in EMI 1. The career of Red Hugh O’Donnell (1572-1602), not a nominated key personality, could be the subject of research studies.
(a) His imprisonment as a hostage and his escape might be an attractive research topic for study by an Ordinary-Level student. The following title may be suggested:
“Why was Red Hugh O’Donnell kidnapped in 1587, how was he held captive, and how did he escape?”
(b) The same aspect of Red Hugh’s life could be the subject of a research study for students at Higher Level but to enable the student to “show understanding of the broader historical context of research findings” (Syllabus, p. 10) the title would have to be phrased differently.
“What aspects of Elizabethan government policy were served by the kidnapping and imprisonment of Red Hugh O’Donnell and what were the circumstances and consequences of his escape?”
(c) Suitable Sources.
(i) There is a detailed account of the capture of Red Hugh O’Donnell, organised by Lord Deputy Perrot in 1587, from a wine ship in Lough Swilly; his escape from Birmingham Tower, Dublin Castle; his flight to O’Byrne through the snow in the Wicklow hills; and his journey back to Donegal. This account in the Annals of the Four Masters (original text and translation into English) is available free on the Internet from UCC History Department at celt.ucc.ie.
(ii) A biography of Red Hugh O’Donnell, Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill, was written by Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh around 1616. It was edited and translated into English by Paul Walsh and published in Dublin by the Irish Texts Society, 1948. Paul Walsh has an excellent and lengthy introduction with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the source.
(iii) There are also many histories by modern historians on this period that are very useful:

Section 2: A historical incident that was an important cause of change

Irish Battles: Examples from EMI 2.
(a) The Nine Years’ War is a nominated element in EMI 2 and battles and warfare could be the subject of many different research topics. Studies of military history and of battles often prove popular. Any of the many battles, fought during the Nine Years’ War, could be the subject of a research study. The Battle of the Yellow Ford or the Battle of Kinsale would attract many young students and they could frame titles for their essays on
(i) the importance
(ii) the tactics used
(iii) the part played by key leaders and
(iv) the results and significance of the battle.

The Battle of the Curlew Mountains is another such subject. An attractive introduction to the Battle of the Curlew Mountains can be found in the fictional account in Standish O’Grady, *The bog of stars and other stories and sketches of Elizabethan Ireland* (London: Fisher & Unwin 1893; many times reprinted, Dublin and Cork: Educational Company). There are very useful studies by excellent historians available on the military history of the Nine Years’ War.
(b) Primary Sources for the Elizabethan Wars.
*Annals of the Four Masters*, vol. 6 (original text and translation into English) is available free on the Internet from UCC History Department at www.celt.ucc.ie)—the wars from an Irish perspective.
Fynes Moryson, *An itinerary containing his Travell ... through Germanny ... England, Scotland & Ireland* (4 vols, Edinburgh: MacLehose 1908), vols 2–3—the wars from an English perspective, mostly that of Mountjoy, with remarkable original documents.
(c) Other Suitable Sources.


**Section 3: An important scientific or technological or Artistic change.**

**Printers and printing.**

(a) A nominated element in EME1 is printing. Any one of the many printers of the period could form the basis of an interesting research study: Aldus Manutius (1450–1515); Geoffroy Tory (1480–1533); Claude Garamond (1480–1561); and Christophe Plantin (1520–89), to name a few of the many.

Here are just a few examples. The Ordinary-Level students could pose any of the following questions as the title of their extended essay:

(i) How did Aldus Manutius organise and develop the Aldine Press and what was its importance?

(ii) How did Claude Garamond contribute to the craft of printing?

Higher-Level students could pose slightly more difficult questions to ensure that they demonstrate that they have attained the learning outcomes that are specified in the syllabus. (p.10). Here are a few examples:

(i) How important a contribution did Aldus Manutius make to the spread of learning by the range and numbers of books published by the Aldine Press?

(ii) How important was King Philip of Spain’s patronage to the success of Christophe Plantin as a printer and what were the implications of that patronage?

(iii) To what extent did the book culture of the Renaissance depend on the great increase in book production during the course of the sixteenth century?

(iv) Estimate the importance of the close collaboration between Erasmus and various printer publishers.

(b) Suitable Sources.

A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to this area. The following are examples of useful sources.


Several articles on the subject of printing have been published in *Past and Present*.


**Research Studies in the arts**

Many international artistic movements found expression in Ireland.


History In-Service Team, Supporting Leaving Certificate History - The Research Study: supplementary materials.  Page 3 of 11
(a) An interesting subject for study in the area of the international Arts and Crafts movement is the work of An Túr Gloine ('the Tower of Glass'), the stained glass studio set up by Sarah Purser in 1924 in Dublin as a result of the urgings of Edward Martyn. Many Research Studies could be based on this subject.

A simple question at Ordinary Level might be:
How successful was Sarah Purser (1848–1943) and her stained glass studio?

At Higher Level the question might be:
Why is An Túr Gloine said to be the most successful and the most long-lasting venture of the Irish Arts and Crafts movement?

(b) Suitable Sources.

The student will find that the following sources are very useful.

A fine essay on An Túr Gloine can be found in Elizabeth Coxhead, Daughters of Erin: five women of the Irish Renaissance (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe 1965; paperback edition 1979).

James White & Michael Wynne, Irish stained glass (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland 1963) [an authoritative source].

National Gallery of Ireland, Irish women artists from the eighteenth to the present day (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland 1987) [an important publication, an invaluable source for students looking for material on women artists for their research studies].


Many other questions can be asked about the life and works and important contribution to the arts of Sarah Purser. The lives of many artists would form an appropriate subject for a research study. The title should be framed in such a way that it allows the student full range to achieve the learning outcomes specified.

(ii) Example Two, LMI3, Mainie Jellett.

(a) Mainie Jellett was a very important painter who brought Modernism to Ireland. She was committed to introducing the Modernist movement and lectured widely on the subject.

A suitable topic might be:
How important an artist was Mainie Jellett (1897-1944) and how successful was she in introducing the Modern Movement into Ireland?

(b) Suitable Sources.


Bruce Arnold, “Mainie Jellett and modernism” in National Gallery of Ireland, Irish women artists from the eighteenth century to the present day (Dublin: the National Gallery of Ireland, 1987).

Stella Frost, A tribute to Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett (Dublin, 1957).


(iii) Example Three, Irish artists, from several topics.

There are books and articles on many other Irish artists, sculptors and architects. Students can take almost any book from the following bibliography and if they use it in conjunction with a general reference work on art, a history of the period and a visit to museums or art galleries or buildings, to view the works of the said artist or sculptor or architect, they will have the material for an excellent Research Study. Many Higher Level students will want to use more sources than the required three and they should be encouraged to do so.

(b) Suitable Sources.

A good starting point for students looking for information on artists and on artistic movements in Ireland is Brian de Breffny (ed), Ireland: a cultural encyclopaedia (London, Thames and Hudson 1983).


C. P. Curran, Dublin decorative plaster work of the seventeenth and eighteenth century (London 1967).


Maurice Craig, The architecture of Ireland from earliest times to 1880 (London: Batsford; Dublin: Easons, 1982).
Patrick Murphy, *Irish women artists from the eighteenth century to the present day* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland 1987).


**Section 4: A historically significant local study. The Kilmichael ambush, LMI 3.**

(a) There are many examples of research studies that come under this heading. A suitable one for students from the Cork area (or indeed from anywhere) could be based on the Kilmichael Ambush, which was carried out on 28 November 1920 during the War of Independence.

There is a fairly extensive literature on this topic, and it includes memoirs of some of the participants and scholarly works by modern historians. Many questions can be posed about the ambush and these could form the title of the extended essay. Questions about the role of Tom Barry in the Ambush and about the varying and contradictory accounts he wrote about the ambush would form the basis for an interesting research study and essay for the Higher-Level student. A simpler question about the planning and execution of the ambush would be suitable for Ordinary Level. Questions can also be asked about the significance of the ambush and its impact on the various forces exercising authority in Ireland at the time. More ambitious Higher Level students could focus on the way various participants and commentators have written at different times about the Kilmichael Ambush and about the different conclusions and interpretations of contemporary historians.

(b) Suitable Sources.


General histories of the period in Ireland also deal with this incident.
Section 5. The historical significance of the activities of a particular individual.

Hernan Cortes, EME 1.

(a) Europe’s conflict with non-European peoples is an area of great interest to many students that can be investigated in either Field of Study. The concept of “empire” is a key one in EME 1 and Hernan Cortes is a key personality. The methods he used in his conquest of Mexico and various episodes of conflict during the conquest would form a most interesting subject for Research Study. There are many sources available for such research.

(b) Suitable Sources.


This is a highly readable and engaging book, one quarter of which is devoted to Cortes’s conquest of Mexico.


This is a primary source written in 1552 by an opponent of Spanish oppression of the Native Americans.


This is a primary source, written in 1555, a frank account of the Spanish conquests of the new world by a man who had been with Hernán Cortes. It was published for the first time in 1632.

There are many books available on this subject some of which are very easy to read and are suitable for Ordinary-Level students.

Example Two, LME 2

Section 6. The historical significance of a particular episode or event or movement.

(i) Example One: The “New Imperialism”, EME 2

(a) The “New Imperialism” is a key concept and a fertile area of enquiry for the Research Study. An example of a suitable topic is the German conquest of South-West Africa.

(b) Suitable Sources.


This is a highly readable and engaging book, one quarter of which is devoted to the German conquest of South-West Africa.


(ii) Example Two: Slavery and the slave trade, EME 5.

(a) International trade in slaves is an element in EME 5: ‘Establishing Empires, 1715–1775’. Much has been written on this vast subject and it offers the possibility for many research studies. The role of individual slave-traders, the attitudes of rulers, the part played by particular cities such as Bordeaux, Nantes or Bristol, for example, would be suitable topics for the Research Study. Sources are available, some suitable for Higher Level and simpler ones for Ordinary-Level pupils. There are many Internet sites dealing with slavery. While many of them are good, students must exercise extreme caution using such sites.

(b) Suitable Sources.

Hugh Thomas, The slave trade: the history of the Atlantic slave trade, 1440–1870 (London: Picador 1997). This is a very large and comprehensive book which has material that could be the basis for many research studies. It also has a large and detailed bibliography which can guide the student to further reading matter.

David Landes, The wealth and poverty of nations: why some are so rich and some are so poor (London: Little Brown, 1998). This is an extremely interesting and readable book that deals with trade in many commodities.
and with the exploitation of resources and peoples. It also deals with slavery and the slave trade.


The first three sources listed above under the heading “Slavery and the slave trade” would also enable students to focus on the sugar industry in the Caribbean islands and in Brazil and on the sugar trade (another element) and their rich potential as subjects for the Research Study.


**Section 7. The historical significance of the activities of a particular individual.**

**History of Women, relevant to all topics.**

(a) Many potential Research Studies could deal with the history of women. Students could use any of the following books in conjunction with a history of the period in question to find sources for their Research Study. Many Higher-Level students will have the ability to and will wish to use more than the required three sources. Remember that oral history is a perfectly respectable primary source that is used by serious historians. Interviews with people who lived through the period or events in question may be used to enrich the study and bring individual testimony to bear on the subject. There are transcripts of interviews of women in some of the listed works and the student may of course carry out their own interviews.

*Discover Women in Irish History* – is a manual, CD ROM and website for Transition Year and senior Cycle Students. It explores the lives of women, their work, the challenges they faced, and the contribution they made. The manual and CD ROM will be circulated to all post primary schools for the next academic year and the website will be available later in the year. It contains an extremely good and detailed bibliography which can point the student in the direction of other sources of information. There are many other useful sources.

(b) Suitable Sources.


Heloise Brown, “An alternative imperialism: Isabella Todd, internationalist and good Liberal Unionist” (Gender and History, 10, 3).

Central Statistics Office, *That was then, this is now: change in Ireland, 1949–1999* (Cork: CSO 2000).

Mary O’Dowd & Sabine Wichert (ed), *Chattel, servant or citizen: women’s status in church, state and society* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies 1995).


Most of the Irish Universities have projects in Women’s history and have useful bibliographies that are worth consulting on their websites.

**Section 8. A local manifestation of a national movement or phenomenon.**

**Local History, relevant to Irish topics**

(a) Another area that will appeal to many students at both Higher and Ordinary Level is local history. The first source of information on such subjects is the local library and the local librarian. The library will have copies of local historical and archaeological journals and of local histories, published and unpublished. Journals vary a great deal in the seriousness of their work and teachers must be careful about the sources they recommend. But most journals have excellent articles by learned local historians and they are often the launching pad for young historians who publish their first articles in the relevant local journals.

The website of the Library Association of Ireland is well worth a visit and its bibliographies will be a help to students and teachers. Many county libraries and local history societies have their own websites and they often have lists of publications on the local history of their counties.
An excellent series which plans to publish on all 32 counties is the Irish County series History and Society which is being edited by William Nolan and others and published by Geography Publications, Dublin. This series is of a very high standard and the articles in these very large volumes are by the leading experts in the field. It is recommended that each school should buy a copy or copies of the appropriate volume/s for their school library/history room. There are usually up to 30 chapters dealing with different areas of local history in each of these volumes and any one of these chapters that deal with subjects within the specified parameters could be used in conjunction with a general history of the period and other material as an excellent basis for a Research Study. Of course many Higher Level students will have the ability and will wish to use more sources.

(b) Suitable Sources.


Libraries will generally have files of local newspapers. They can also advise about meetings of local history societies and will welcome students as members and will be delighted to have more teacher members. Schools could be encouraged to take out membership of the local history society. This will have the additional benefit of the school library or history room receiving copies of the local history journal.

Local archives are another valuable resource. A list of local archives in Ireland is to be found in Seamus Helferty & Raymond Refaussé, *Directory of Irish Archives* (4th ed. Dublin: Four Courts Press 2003). This directory lists over 250 repositories and organisations that hold records of historical significance. It provides addresses including website and email addresses and phone and fax numbers.

The MultiText Project at UCC is preparing a bibliography of local histories and local historical journals and this will be posted on the MultiText site. This bibliography has been commissioned by Professor Donnchadh Ó Corráin to help teachers to achieve the aims of the Revised History Syllabus and it should be an invaluable help for teachers.

**Section 9. History within Living Memory. Oral History**

(a) Oral history may prove a very attractive area for research for all students, the Ordinary Level student as well as Higher Level student. No matter what kind of interview the student does something of historical worth will be achieved that would not have been achieved if the student had not done the interview. It might be just one nugget of information. It has the added benefit of involving and valuing old people. There can be layers of value that subsequent researchers listening to students’ recordings can extract.

Oral history experts are adamant that copies of all interviews recorded by students should be placed in archives so that these precious insights will not
be lost. Most history or folklore departments in universities and colleges of education would be delighted to archive recordings. Experts recommend that three copies should be made of each tape, one for the interviewer, one for the interviewee and one for an archive. The archiving of their work would bring home the value of their research to the students involved.

(b) Conducting Interviews.
There are a number of different approaches to oral history and to conducting interviews. One approach is to use a generic questionnaire to establish key information: age, name, sex, occupation, place of work and residence etc. Often a questionnaire is used to start with. It gives the interviewer something to go on. Another useful approach, particularly when an interviewee is well known to the student, is simply to say “tell me about your life”. Weak students or those who have difficulties with the written word can often carry out this type of research very effectively. They can be given some background information and a standardized questionnaire to establish key details and some suggested lines of questioning as follow up. Then they can be let off with their tape recorders.

It is important to ask interviewees whether or not they want to put conditions on access to the recording. Many are happy to have open access; others will not want their names known though they are happy to have researchers listen to their interviews. Others may not want the recording listened to for some years. Even the accents and idioms of an area, many of which are rapidly changing, will be of interest to subsequent researchers. It is advised that teachers do an interview or two beforehand to get a feel for the process and to find out what mistakes are made. There are standardized questionnaires available that ensure the student gets important data (relating to sex, age, position, background, experiences and allegiances, etc.), which will elicit necessary important information about the source or interviewee. This type of questionnaire is widely used and the interviewers can add what questions they wish to elicit the historical evidence on the subject they are investigating. The history of their school, local sports club, a local organisation, suburb, village, parish, town, religious group, church, building, or monument, all could be useful subjects to investigate. Equally the history of local people and their experience of events local or otherwise would be suitable subjects for investigation. This research could be used in conjunction with a general history of the period. The parameters, laid down by the SEC must be kept in mind. The following volumes should be of help to teachers wishing to pursue this kind of research with their students.

(c) Suitable Sources.


Thompson is regarded as the father of oral history and his book contains a chapter on model questions that can be used by an interviewer. These model questions could be given to students as examples to follow. They deal with a wide range of subjects: the household; domestic routine; meals; general relationships with parents, influences and discipline; family activities; religion; politics; childhood leisure; community and social class; school; work; home life after leaving school; marriage; children; and family life after marriage.
Volume Seven of the *Women's Studies Review* is about life stories, personal testimony and oral history; how best can we understand women’s lives in the past, how can we situate individual life stories gleaned through oral history and biography in the wider context of history in general, and women’s history in particular. The volume contains oral histories of women in Connemara and women teachers in Clare, methodological discussions of how best to inter-view women about the past, and vignettes of biography of ordinary women’s lives in the past. It also contains one complete oral history interview. Caitríona Crowe, of the National Archives, has written a thematic introduction to this issue. Editors are Mary Clancy, Caitríona Clear and Triona Nic Giolla Choille. Copies from Women’s Studies Centre, NUI Galway, Galway. e-mail: wsc@nuigalway.ie.

There are many excellent Internet sites that deal with oral history. Baylor University, Texas, hosts the Institute for Oral History and has a good Internet site. It runs the “oral history workshop on the web” and offers good common sense advice about conducting interviews. When you access the following address click on “workshop on the web” and you will find practical guidelines which you can print for students. The following is the address: [http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/](http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/)

**Section 10. Research studies in the Irish language**

(a) Suitable Sources.

Students who wish to write their research studies in the Irish language have fewer sources to consult if they confine themselves to written sources in that language. However there are some excellent sources in Irish and students are advised to consult them, even if they wish to research areas not covered in these sources. They will find in them a range of technical terms and very useful historical terminology. In at least one respect students studying through the medium of Irish are better off than their counterparts. There is no equivalent in English of the excellent series *Beathaisnéis* 1882-1982 in five volumes (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1986-97) and *Beathaisnéis* 1782-1881, (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1999). These six volumes are excellent biographical dictionaries that focus on the lives of scholars, historians, writers, poets, and on those involved in Irish language organisations and movements. The series runs to six volumes at present and is still being produced. These volumes are excellent and are not expensive and should be in the library and history room of every school.

(b) Bibliography.


