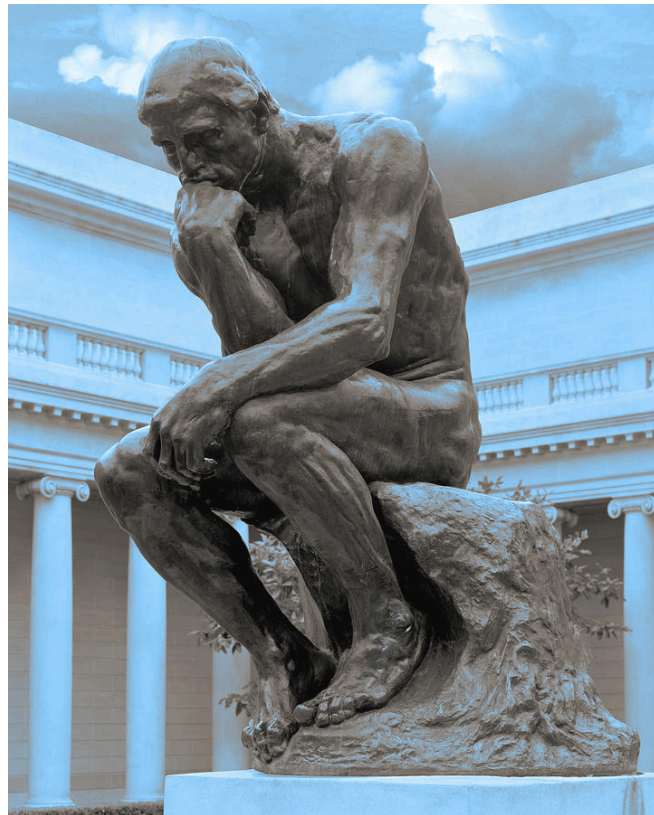


Essay writing 2: Questions

Thinking around argumentation



The Thinker, 1880-1902
Sculptor: Auguste Rodin
Paris, Musée Rodin

Contents

- Recap of commonly used verbs / expressions in English essay titles
- Matching question words from A level politics exam papers with the topics to be discussed. Which combinations are the *most likely* ?
- Interpreting what essay questions require
- Converting expository questions into directives

In the last class, we looked at typical essay question words in Anglo-saxon education contexts, and their meanings (what they ask the writer to do).

1. *Consider something from different points of view, then give your own opinion* **DISCUSS**

2. *Say what something is like* **DESCRIBE**

3. *Assess and explain* **EVALUATE**

4. *Put in sequence; catalogue; mention* **LIST**

5. *Make clear; give reasons for* **EXPLAIN**

6. *Discuss how true facts or arguments are*

TO WHAT EXTENT

7. *Give a short description of the main points*

OUTLINE

8. *State precisely the meaning of; explain*

DEFINE

9. *Describe similarities and differences*

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

10. *Indicate, give evidence of, make clear, demonstrate, illustrate*

SHOW

Match the two halves of the 8 questions on the next slide. Several combinations are grammatically possible, but which are most *likely* to occur, do you think? The questions are from UK A-level politics exam papers.



To what extent

the arguments for and against having a written constitution

Describe

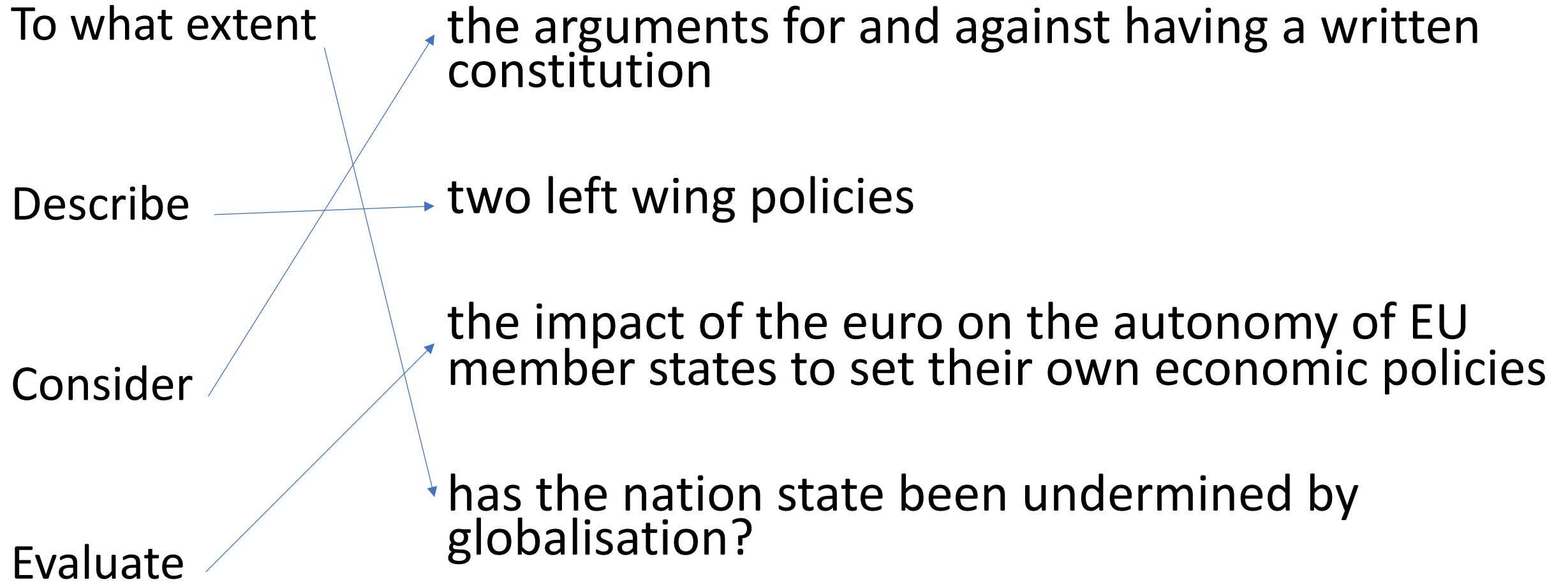
two left wing policies

Consider

the impact of the euro on the autonomy of EU member states to set their own economic policies

Evaluate

has the nation state been undermined by globalisation?



Discuss	trade union power has been eroded [in the UK] since 1979
Explain	three ways in which British politics has a consensus
Outline and assess the extent to which	Liberalism and Socialism
Compare and contrast	the reasons why pressure groups are sometimes criticised

Discuss

trade union power has been eroded [in the UK] since 1979

Explain

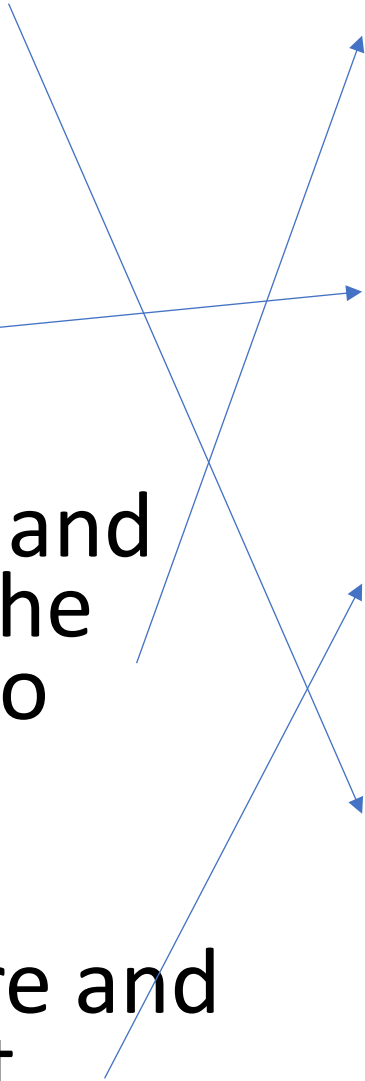
three ways in which British politics has a consensus

Outline and assess the extent to which

Liberalism and Socialism

Compare and contrast

the reasons why pressure groups are sometimes criticised



Interpreting questions

On the next slide are three essay questions on the same topic: Machiavelli's political thought and war. How do they each direct the writer's response differently?

(These questions appear in Cambridge University's guide to undergraduate exams in international politics, 2019-20.)

- Was war central to Machiavelli's political thought?
- To what extent was war central to Machiavelli's political thought?
- Why was war so central to Machiavelli's political thought?

On the next slide you will find a description of the expected response to each of the above questions.

Which description corresponds to which essay question?

The answer *considers* whether key features of Machiavelli's political thought are about war, directly or not; if it decides they are, it will answer the question positively with reference to texts and appropriate contexts/examples to prove the case.

The answer will *assess* the place of war alongside other themes in Machiavelli's thought, and will *evaluate* their *relative* significance, perhaps across a number of his arguments; its conclusion will make an overall statement of that relative significance, perhaps with reference to an overarching interpretation of what Machiavelli's political thought in general might actually be.

The answer will necessarily bring in Machiavelli's context to *explain* the significance of war to his thought; it can assume the centrality of war, and will instead focus on how Machiavelli's context intersects with his political writings, particularly with respect to war.

Notice the verbs used in the description of the model answers to each essay question.

Then use these verbs to reformulate the open questions

Why was war central to M's thought?

To what extent was war central to M's thought?

Why was war central to M's thought?

as directives

WAS WAR CENTRAL TO M'S THOUGHT?

The answer *considers* whether key features of Machiavelli's political thought are about war, directly or not; if it decides they are, it will answer the question positively with reference to texts and appropriate contexts/examples to prove the case.

TO WHAT EXTENT WAS WAR CENTRAL ...

The answer will *assess* the place of war alongside other themes in Machiavelli's thought, and will *evaluate* their *relative* significance, perhaps across a number of his arguments; its conclusion will make an overall statement of that relative significance, perhaps with reference to an overarching interpretation of what Machiavelli's political thought in general might actually be.

WHY WAS WAR CENTRAL TO M'S THOUGHT?

The answer will necessarily bring in Machiavelli's context to *explain* the significance of war to his thought; it can assume the centrality of war, and will instead focus on how Machiavelli's context intersects with his political writings, particularly with respect to war.

- Was war central to Machiavelli's political thought?

Consider / discuss whether war was central to

- To what extent was war central to Machiavelli's political thought?

Assess / evaluate to what extent war was central to ...

- Why was war so central to Machiavelli's political thought?

Explain why war was so central to