Why was the Battle of the Somme a disaster?

L/O – To identify, link and make a judgement about the causes of the disaster
By the end of 1914, the war had reached a stalemate. The techniques and weapons were better suited to defence than attack:

- Barbed wire, trenches and mud made cavalry charges ineffective
- Machine guns could mow down infantry charges
- Artillery could kill the enemy in their trenches, wear down troops and sap their morale but couldn’t make a breakthrough
- Enemy guns could be destroyed but the supplies of new weapons were inexhaustible.
1915 – The Stalemate Continues

- In 1915, the French, British and Germans all tried and failed to break the deadlock.

- Early in 1915 the French lost many thousands in an unsuccessful offensive in Champagne.

- The British captured Neuve Chapelle in March but at heavy cost.

- The Germans were driven back from Ypres in April with heavy losses.
1916 – The Year of Attrition: Verdun and the Somme

• By 1916, both sides tried to break the deadlock. In February, the Germans launched a massive attack aimed at capturing the fortresses surrounding Verdun.

• The German commander, Falkenhayn, came up with the strategy of attrition – ‘to bleed France white’.

• The tactic failed, in that both sides suffered roughly equal losses.
The Battle of Verdun: Feb-Dec 1916

- Both sides poured men and resources into this battle. Attacks followed by counter-attacks and by July 1916, some 700,000 men had fallen.

- The French, led by General Petain, held out but were close to breaking as the Germans had more resources. The French army was at breaking point. Something had to be done.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

- To relieve the pressure, the British led by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig launched their long-planned offensive at the Somme.

- It was planned as the battle that would defeat Germany and end the war.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

- It was meant to be a joint British-French attack. However, by 1916, the French were struggling to defend the town of Verdun.

- This meant the British, under the command of Sir Douglas Haig, attacked alone.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

• After a week-long artillery bombardment, British troops advanced on the 1st July 1916.

• They walked across No Man’s Land in straight lines to the German trenches that could not possibly have survived the artillery bombardment.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

• However the plan went wrong! The German could see what the British were planning and strengthened their defenses. Haig ignored these reports.

• The Germans had also built deep bunkers underground, which gave their soldiers protection from the bombardment.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

- About **1.75 million shells** were fired at the German positions.

- The German front line trenches were **almost** totally destroyed.

- However 1/3 of shells were **duds and did not explode**. They also failed to destroy the barded wire.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

- At 7.30 am on 1st July, 100,000 young and inexperienced soldiers went ‘over the top’ and attacked the enemy.

- Suddenly, the German’s opened fire with their machine guns. Most soldiers did not even make it to the German trenches.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

- On the first day there were 57,000 British casualties. By the end, over 1.25 million men had been killed or wounded. Only 7 miles of land had been captured.
The Battle of the Somme July-Nov 1916

• Back in Britain, politicians and public were horrified by the losses. Haig was called ‘The Butcher of the Somme’. It was the worst military disaster for the British army in history.

• But was this fair? Was it Haig’s poor planning that led to the disaster or were there other reasons?
Why was 1\textsuperscript{st} July 1916 such a disaster?

- Read through the statements on your sheets. Decide whether they are examples of:
  
  a) **Bad leadership and Bad planning**
  
  b) **Failing Technology**
  
  c) **Problems beyond British control**

- Are there any reasons that could be put under **more than one** heading? 
  Shade these...

- Copy the statements onto your grids.

- What is the main group of reasons for the defeat?
Why was the Battle of the Somme a disaster for the British army? - Essay Plan

• **Intro** – Introduce the period of history with good **statistics** or a **dramatic statement** to draw in the reader. Set out your **main argument**. Explain **what else** you will be discussing. **Link** to first paragraph.

• **Main Body** – **describe, explain & analyse each point**
  a) Bad Planning and Leadership
  b) Failing Technology
  c) Problems beyond British Control
  d) **Evaluate** all 3 main problems – **argue** which was a greater cause of the disaster for the British army.

• **Conclusion** – **Sum up** your main argument. **What lessons** can we **learn** from the Battle?