Read through the questions carefully and decide how you wish to answer them. Take a deep breath. Relax. Good luck. Enjoy.

GROUP A (Answer at least one)

1) By 1500, the Grand Principality of Moscow had become a powerful monarchy, independent of its former steppe overlords and indeed poised to take their place as the political epicenter of northern Eurasia. The sixteenth century brought profound political turmoil; but the principality not only survived this turmoil, but grew as never before, to become one of the world’s great land empires. What were the main political institutions – ideals, techniques, practices, and traditions – that Moscow’s rulers used to mobilize and expand their patrimony? To what degree were these institutions reformed or replaced during this era of crisis and expansion, and what indeed explains the Principality’s survival—and unprecedented growth—in the 17th century?

2) In recent decades, scholars around the world have scrutinized the relationship between the early modern making of new forms of “science”—on the one hand—and the creation of modern European empires, on the other. What can we say about the relationship between science and empire in early modern Russia, 1650-1850? How important was science to the making of the empire – and the empire to the making of science – during these centuries? How might the relationship of the two in this case be compared to that pertaining elsewhere? Try to include some sense of chronology in your answer, to the extent that you feel that the relationship shifted over time.

3) A number of scholars interpret the transformation, challenges, and possibilities of Russian social and cultural life from the time of Catherine the Great into the early Soviet era in terms of the life – or lack – of “civil society” in Imperial Russia. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach? Discuss the concept itself and its uses in understanding Russia’s history, 1760-1920.

GROUP B (Answer at least one)

4) Between 1855 and 1880 – and again between 1917-1939 – Russia saw eras of epic political and social change, much of it intended to make Russia a more modern nation (intended, indeed, to create a distinctively Russian model of modernity.) Compare the periods 1861-1914 and 1917-1939 in terms of their modernizing visions (and the conceptualization of “modernity”), orientations toward social change, the groups affected, the mechanisms (engines) of change, and the outcomes.

5) World War II is often treated as a great watershed in Soviet life. Most histories of “Stalinism,” on the one hand, focus on the 1930s, while many recent studies of the Soviet Union
have centered on its history “post-war.” To what extent is this customary division justified? How much was the course of Soviet history transformed by World War II, and how, specifically? What, on the other hand, are the most important continuities between pre- and post-war life in the Soviet Union?