Using Photographs in Geography Exams

<u>**Introduction:**</u>
Photographs get used all the time in your geography exams. They are a key resource and really useful to give you clues for other questions. The problem is that people don't seem to understand how they should use them properly.

The keys to using photos well are:

1. **read the caption** - this will often tell you where the photo is or give you a clue as to the issues it is trying to get across.
2. **look really carefully** - what does it show. Don't just look at the main focus - what's in the background as well? Think about what the point is that the examiner is trying to make.
3. **read the question** - and then do what it says. Often photo questions want you to describe or compare to start with:
   - <u>describe</u> = say what it's like
   - <u>compare</u> = talk about things that are the same and things that are different
4. **real description** - say what's in the photo quickly and precisely. Don't waffle or be vague!
5. **developing points** - a question might ask you to explain why something is like it is. Make sure that you explain properly using well developed points. Don't be vague because it's a photo - you're still looking for Level 3 points.

<u>**a) Describing Photos:**</u>
Take a look at this photo. Describe the area. Remember: be careful and make sure you deal with as many things as possible. Yes there are houses - but what are they like? Do they have gardens? Look at the roofs? How old are the houses? Is there any evidence that they've been improved at all? What about the road? Try and use geographical words if you can - it helps add marks.

<u>**b) Physical and Human Features:**</u>
This is a classic photo question - and gets used in mapwork as well. Do you know the difference? Chances are that you don't in an exam - I've marked thousands of them and consistently people don't know the difference. Here's a quick quiz: take a look at these photos. Which ones show physical features?

If you said B, E and F you're right. If you didn't then you need to have a really hard think about this:

Physical features are **NATURAL** things. **NOT** things made by people

- So hills, lakes, rivers, coastlines and glaciers are physical.
- Caravan sites, houses and motorways are human.

Make sure you get that right

Now, take a look at this photo of the Lake District National Park. What physical features make the Lake District attractive to visitors?

You should be looking to talk about things like the hills, valley, the lack of built up areas, woods, lakes and so on - but make sure you really describe them: are the hills steep or gently or rocky or smooth? Is the lake long and narrow or short and wide? Are there any houses or no evidence of people at all?

Try and use technical terms when you can.

Picture from NVM Digital (copyright free)

HINT: a good way to develop your mark for this sort of question is to link the physical features to the sorts of activities that people could do
e.g. "older people and families with children might like to walk along the flatter land in the valley."

You can use photos like this to revise from. Try annotating them - put the picture in the centre of a piece of paper and write as much as possible about it around the edge.

c) Reading Photographs:

Take a look at this photo of a shanty town on the edge of Johannesburg in South Africa.
Q. What does the photo show you about the quality of life in the area?

- What's in the background? How does this compare to the foreground of the photo?
- Make sure you talk about the housing - what sorts of facilities are people likely to have or not have?
- Look at the person in the centre - what are they carrying? What does that tell you about quality of life?
- What's running down the centre of the street? Is it a river or a sewer? Develop this point to comment on quality of life.
- How crowded is it?

See, there's lots to talk about in the photo if you look carefully.