

Explain why William won (or Harold lost) the Battle of Hastings?

Bold = Paragraph heading (point) *Italics* = Explanation Underline = connectives, linking words

INTRO (SYK Show your knowledge)

The battle of Hastings took place on 14th October 1066. The battle took place in Sussex and was fought between the English king Harold II and William Duke of Normandy who had invaded England on 27th September 1066. Hastings is one of only two battles in English History in which a king lost his throne, the other being Bosworth Field in 1485, when Richard III was also defeated and killed by Henry Tudor.

SWYG (Show where you are going - How you are going to answer the question)

The outcome of this battle was to have a dramatic effect on the history of England. Both men had experience in battle and could be regarded as good commanders. There is no one single reason why William won or in fact why Harold lost. Many factors such as earlier events, luck, tactics, weapons, preparation and decision making contributed to the overall outcome and I will deal with these in my essay.

Some historians believe that Harold lost the battle before the first arrow was shot. *This is because three weeks earlier on the 25th Sept, Harold had fought and defeated the Norwegian King, Harald Hardrada, at the Battle of Stamford Bridge.* However, this was a 'Pyrrhic victory' and Harold lost 1500 housecarls who would have proved extremely important at Hastings had they survived. Harold's army was also exhausted after two long marches and a battle where battle fatigue would have set in. Battle fatigue is a condition from which it can take months to recover. Harold had also decided to ignore his brother Gyrrh's advice to attack William's fleet as it was preparing for invasion, much as Francis Drake had done when he 'singed the king of Spain's beard' at Cadiz in 1587, thereby delaying the Spanish Armada. To add to Harold's problems, Saxon rivalry meant that Edwin and Morcar, the Northern earls delayed sending troops to help Harold.

Harold's forced decision to march south to face William also contributed to Harold's defeat. William having heard about Stamford Bridge, knew that his real chance of success lay in getting Harold to fight as soon as possible after Stamford Bridge, partly as his soldiers would be tired. But more importantly if Harold was given too much time he could get together an army possibly 50,000 strong against which William would stand no chance.

Once the battle had started other factors played their part. The choice of tactics was so important in the outcome of the battle. *Harold's tactics were sound but limited.* The idea was to stay put on the top of Senlac Hill and absorb everything the Normans threw at them. However this did require enormous courage and discipline, with the latter lacking in many of the fyrd who formed the majority of Harold's army. William on the other hand was more flexible and adaptable and when one plan failed he was able to switch to another such as using a combined, simultaneous attack of archers, infantry and knights towards the end of the battle as opposed to the earlier tactics of using archers followed by infantry followed by knights. .

The types of soldiers fighting for each side also determined the result. *Although both sides were evenly matched in numbers,* unfortunately for Harold the majority of his army was made up of villagers who formed the fyrd. These were farmers armed with whatever work tools they could lay their hands on such as scythes, axes and poles. They had no armour and were reduced to packing the shirts with hay and straw to protect them. They had little or no military training. In contrast, William's soldiers were professional well trained and armed, a modern army for the times and simply in a different league to the fyrd.

As with any victory, luck played its part. From the outset, *William seems to have had more than his fair share of luck*, from the winds in the channel unexpectedly changing direction, to landing unopposed in England with Harold fighting up north. In the battle itself, the arrow that injured Harold was a freak shot. Had Harold survived another 30 minutes, dusk would have descended and the first days fighting would have ended. It is likely that during the night many of William's supporters may have decided to cut their losses and returned home.

In conclusion, it is clear that each of these factors played their part, with no one factor totally decisive. Whatever the factors, there is no doubt that this was a momentous event that changed the course of English history.