

Essay Writing

1. Argument/Thesis

Is the main thing the writer wants to tell his or her readers.

(The reason for writing the essay)

It is the focus, the point, that the writer wants the reader to accept.

Don't simply re-tell a story that has been told before. Don't regurgitate what has been written in encyclopedia's, whose aim is provide the facts, the facts, and nothing but the facts.

Find a question, a puzzling issue and then try to resolve it.

2. Good Historical Essays have a sharply focused limited topic

Successful papers have a focused, limited topic.

Ex: "Life of Pierre Elliot Trudeau" → Too broad

"The Roman Empire collapsed due to the birth of 'Christianity'"

"The main cause of the American Civil war was Slavery"

"Threat of American invasion was the driving force for the development of Canadian Confederation"

Best papers have a conflict. Two sides to an issue. This or that?

Ex: Did Harry S. Truman drop the A-bomb in order to save American lives? Or Did he drop the A-bomb in order to demonstrate to the Soviets the extent of American power?

3. Good papers in history are based on primary sources

Primary subjects are texts nearest to any subject of investigation.

Secondary sources are always written about primary sources.

- Paintings, songs, photographs, sculptures, oral interviews, statistical tables, interviews, diary entries, political statements, books/articles.

Investigate all sources. Critically analyze them. Interviewee's can get the story wrong.

4. Write your history paper, as you would a good story.

- A good story begins with problem.
- Something out of balance.
- Re-live the experience
- Create the experience of living through events.
- Essay should climax. (Near the end)
- No surprise ending/new info.

5. Get to the point quickly

- Set the scene quickly
- Reveal tension/problem to be resolved
- Set out pathway for solution

6. Build your Essay step by step on evidence

- Make readers believe you
- Evidence is detailed, factual information from primary and secondary sources
- Evidence is fitted together to create a story.

7. Let your first and last paragraph mirror each other

- These paragraphs provide a good description as to the point of the essay
- The end comes back to the beginning.

8. Document your sources

- Where did you get information from?
- Avoids plagiarism
- Penalties are severe
- Use common sense

9. Historical Essays are written dispassionately

- Don't let your emotions get in the way
- We Judge people
- We decide if people were good/bad
- Let facts speak for themselves.

10. Consider your Audience

- Consider that your readers knows nothing of what you are discussing

11. Contrary Evidence

- Tell the truth of the event
- Use contradictory material in your paper. Use it well
- Readers may think you are careless if you do not.

“U.S President Woodrow Wilson is a hero to many liberals today, including many historians of an older generation. He conceived the idea of the League of Nations; Advocated peace without vengeance.

V.S

A president who treated black Americans as inferior; did not want them to have the vote
Instituted segregation into Civil Service

12. Use Standard English

- Use proper English
- Terrible distraction to try to read grammatically incorrect sentences.

13. Title

- Write a good title for your paper
- Helps to inform reader, and keeps you on track as to what you are discussing.
- Titles, sub-titles, opening paragraphs should fit together like a puzzle.

The Rules of Argument in Historical Writing

1. Always state your argument quickly and concisely, as early as possible in your paper

- Get to the point of your paper FAST
- Be clear, and concise
- Controlling ideas. State them as quick as possible

2. When you make a claim, essential to your case, provide examples as evidence.

- Provide evidence, proof for your claims: If you make a claim, then follow it up with some form of evidence.
- Readers need some reason to believe you.

3. Give the fairest possible treatment to those against whom you may be arguing.

- Do not distort the works of others.
- Do not twist peoples words around.(this is cowardly, and your work will not be respected)
- Effective scholarly arguments are carried out courteously and without bitterness.

“In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Prophet Isaiah)

4. Admit weakness in your argument and acknowledge opposing facts

- If you deny obvious truths about your argument, knowledgeable readers will lose confidence in your fairness.
- Most arguments have a weak point: Therefore, admit weakness and consider counter-arguments.
- Counter-arguments could be argued to be un-fair, misinterpreted, untrustworthy. In either case you have acknowledged that you are aware of contrary points, and you escape the jaws of critics.

***** 5 *** STAY ON TOPIC**

- Don't throw everything you know into the subject. An essay is not a soup bowl. More ingredients isn't always better.
- Don't throw in pages after pages of background information. Get to your point, quickly
- Consistently, ask yourself, "What am I proving?" as your research/write your paper
- Do as much as you can, in as few words as possible.
- The instructor does not want to have to read 4 or 5 pages before he/she figures out what the topic is.

A. Writer's Checklist

- *Is this subject worth arguing about?*
- *Have I gathered enough evidence to make an argument?*
- *Do I represent the views of my opponents in a way they would consider fair?*
- *Have I developed my argument logically?*
- *Is my use of evidence accurate?*
- *Have I tried to prove too much?*
- *Have I stayed on topic?*
- *Have I proven my argument?*

Sources

Documentation Must be provided for:

- All direct and indirect quotations (Paraphrasing)
- Statistics
- An author's interpretation of the evidence (usually the author's name is cited in text)
- Evidence which is in dispute/controversial
- Number Your Pages

Internet Sites

Anyone can create a webpage and put on whatever he/she wants to. Therefore, when viewing a page, keep the following in mind:

- Is the author named?
- Does the site contain information on the credentials of the author?
- Be aware, web-site may be biased
- Has it been updated recently?

Footnotes/Endnotes

Book (Single author)

Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church, (London, 1993), pg. 53

Book (Two authors)

Stanley L. Engerman and Robert William Fogel, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery, (New York, 1989), pg. 206

Works with more than two authors

List only the first author, and then add 'et al'. (meaning and others) after the first author's name. The rest is the same.

Timothy Ware, et al., The Orthodox Church, (London, 1993), pg. 56

Collection of Articles, with only an Editor

Betty Bealey, ed., Macbeth: by William Shakespeare, (Don Mills, 1965), pg.15

A piece from a weekly magazine

Tom Fennel, “The Panic on Wall Street”, Maclean’s, October 26, 1987, pg. 36-38

A piece from a monthly magazine

Michael Kraus, “Soviet Policy Toward East Europe”, Current History, November 1987, pg. 354

An Editorial

F.W. Bateson, “Editorial Commentary”, Essays in Criticism, 17(1967), 1-5

A piece from a daily newspaper

Franklyn Griffiths, “Time to Seek Arctic Deal with U.S”, The Globe and Mail, November 10, 1987, pg. A7

An article in an encyclopedia

Eva E. Neumann, “Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart”, Merit Students Encyclopedia, 18th ed., (1984), Vol. XII pg. 570-572

If you need to refer the same author over again, simply re-type his last name and page number.

Ex: Ware, pg. 234

If the author, and page number are the same,

ex: Timothy Ware, et al., The Orthodox Church, (London, 1993), pg. 56

Ibid. (If on the same page)

Ibid., pg. 78 (if on a different page)

Ibid, refers only to the book directly above it.

Internet Referencing

Thomas More, “The History of King Richard the Third,”

<<http://www.r3.org/bookcase/more/moretext.html>> (Feb. 21, 1998), 23.

CD-ROM Material

Wilson, Woodrow, “Encyclopedia Britannica CD98, (CD-ROM)

Bibliography

Bibliography is the complete list of books, newspapers and articles that were used to research your essay.

BOOKS

A) Items of your bibliography must be placed on a separate sheet at the end of your essay. The first line of every entry must be at the margin. Every subsequent line should be indented 5 spaces.

Ex:

Bradley, A.C., ed The Complete works of Shakespeare
Paul Ltd., 1952

B) List the books in alphabetical order, according to the author's last name first.

C) Do NOT, number entries

Newspaper:

Griffiths, Franklyn, "Time to Seek arctic Deal with U.S.," The Globe and Mail, (Toronto)
No. 43,035,Sec., A, November 10th, 1987

Magazine

Fennell, Tom. "The Panic on Wall Street", Maclean's, October 26th, 1987, pg. 36-39

Encyclopedia

Merit Students Encyclopedia, Vol. XII, 18th ed., New York: Macmillan Educational Company

Online Bibliography

Thomas More, "The History of King Richard the Third,"
<<http://www.r3.org/bookcase/more/moretext.html>> (Feb. 21, 1998), 23.

Useful Abbreviations

et al., = and Others

ed. = Editor, Edition

vol. = Volume

par. = paragraph

pg. = page numbers

Ibid. = The same reference as above.

TITLE
Student's Name
Course Code
Instructor
Date