

U.S. History & Geography Tutorials

Thinking Like A Historian

Historians use many types of evidence to learn about their past. This evidence can be divided into primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary Sources

A primary source is firsthand information about people or events. Primary sources include official documents, such as laws and public speeches, as well as eyewitness accounts, such as diaries, letters, and autobiographies. Primary sources may also include visual evidence, such as new photographs or videotapes.

Another type of primary source is an artifact. This is an item left behind by people in the past. An artifact could be a statue, a tool, or an everyday object.

Primary sources are valuable because they were created at the time that an event occurred. This does not necessarily make them "true," though. Primary sources are created by people and may simply reflect the point of view of those who created them. Perhaps the person was not aware of certain facts or was trying to impress someone. Maybe the person was even lying. So primary sources must be evaluated carefully and considered in relation to other sources on the same subject.

Secondary Sources

Historians also use secondary sources. These are sources created by someone who did not actually witness the events. Secondary sources include news articles and biographies. Your textbook is a secondary source. The author gathered information from many sources to reach an understanding of what happened and why it happened. Then, the author writes his or her interpretation of the events.

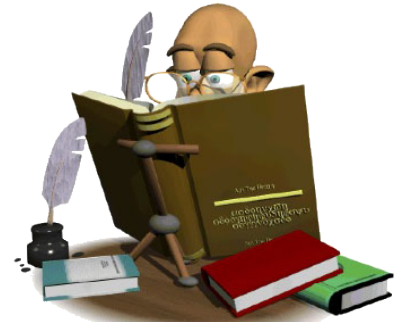
Using Historical Sources

Everyone who wants to know about history starts by asking questions. You, as a student, might be used to the types of questions you are asked in your textbook or by your teacher. Historians, however, ask questions the way a detective would. Each answer is a clue that leads to another question. The questions and answers bring the historian to an understanding of events in the past.

Consider this situation: Anne was watching a television show about Italy in the 1300s. Somebody on the show read from a diary that was written by a young girl at the time. Here is one page from the diary:

Every day, more and more people are dying of this horrible plague. This morning, John the butcher was strong and healthy. By noon, black spots had broken out on his face. He was dead by six o'clock. Outside, the gravediggers are yelling, "Bring out your dead!" I feel as if the world were coming to an end. Uncle Philip wonders if the rats that run through the streets are causing this terrible disease. But Father says that is silly. How can rats kill people? He thinks that someone must be poisoning the water. I think we should run away from Florence to live in the countryside. But everyone says there is nowhere to escape; the plague is everywhere. I am only thirteen, and I fear will not live to see my next birthday.

1. What is the disease? What are the effects?
2. What was the real cause of the plague?
3. How far did the plague reach? How many people did it kill?
4. Who is the writer? Did she survive?

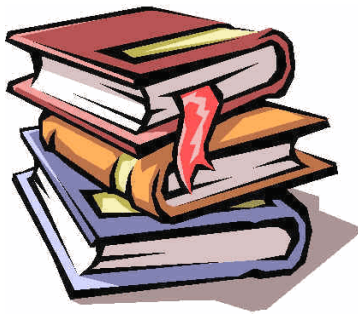


Hearing the diary excerpt, Anne asks herself many questions. Some of her questions are shown above. Trying to find the answers to the questions is the same sort of thinking that historians use to find out about the past. Anne may follow several steps to find the answers to her questions:

- **Read and observe.** Anne can look for further information about the plague in primary and secondary sources. She might look on a map to discover where Florence is located.
- **Speculate.** Anne might make some guesses, called hypotheses, about the answers to her questions, to help her get started.
- **Evaluate evidence.** As Anne uncovers more information, she will test her hypotheses against information she finds. She can always change her hypotheses as she learns more.
- **Draw conclusions.** Anne states what she believes are the final answers to her questions.

Using a Library

Libraries have many types of sources to help Anne find the answers to her questions. She might begin with an encyclopedia in print or on the Internet to get some basic information. An encyclopedia is organized like a giant index. The topics are listed in alphabetical order. To learn more about the diary entry, she might look up the plague.



A library also contains books, magazines, newspapers, and other references, such as atlases and books with statistics. Anne might look in a historical atlas to find maps of Europe in the 1300s. This may help her discover how far the plague spread.

Anne might also find books about the effects of diseases on history. She can use the library's catalog to find which books are available in the library. The catalog may be cards in drawers or an index on the computer. The books that are listed may be nonfiction or fiction. To find information about the plague, Anne probably should start with nonfiction, or a factual account of events. Fiction books, such as stories and novels, will be interesting, but they may contain information that was created by the writer to make the story more dramatic.

The library will also have magazines and newspapers. These may be available in hard copy or in an electronic format, such as microfilm. Magazines and newspapers are organized differently from books. They do not contain chapters; instead, they contain articles and special features. They may also contain advertisements.

To make the best use of these sources, Anne will need to practice her skills of reading like a historian and using maps.

How to Read History

Reading a magazine, an Internet page, or a textbook is not the same as reading a novel. The purpose of reading nonfiction texts is to acquire new information. Here we'll focus on a few skills that will help you read nonfiction with a more critical eye.

Analyze the Author's Purpose

Different types of materials are written with different purposes in mind. For example, a textbook is written to teach students information about a subject. The purpose of a technical manual is to teach someone how to use something, such as a computer. A newspaper editorial might be written to persuade the reader to accept a particular point of view. An author's purpose influences how the material is presented. Sometimes, an author states his or her purpose directly. More often, the purpose is only suggested, and you must use clues to identify the author's purpose.

Distinguish Between Facts and Opinions

Active reading enables you to distinguish between facts and opinions when reading informational texts. Facts can be proved or disproved, but opinions reflect someone's own point of view. Because newspaper editorials will usually offer opinions on current events and issues, you should watch for bias and faulty logic when reading them.

Identify Evidence

Before you accept a writer's conclusions, you need to make sure that the writer has based the conclusion on enough evidence and on the right kind of evidence. A writer may present a series of facts to support a claim, but the facts may not tell the whole story.

Evaluate Credibility

Whenever you read informational texts, you need to assess the credibility of the writer. In other words, you have to decide whether the writer is believable. This is especially true of sites you may visit on the Internet. All Internet sources are not equally reliable. Here are some questions to ask yourself when evaluating the credibility of a Web site:

- Is the Web site created by a respected organization, a discussion group, or an individual?
- Does the Web site creator include his or her name as well as credentials and the sources he or she used to write the material?
- Is the information on the site balanced or biased?
- Can you verify the information using two other sources?
- Is there a date telling when the Web site was created or last updated?

Build Vocabulary

One of the most important steps in reading informational texts is to make sure you understand the key vocabulary used by the writer. Most textbooks show key terms in bold print to help you identify them. However, other important terms might not be in bold; make sure when you read that you ask yourself 'Is this a person, place, thing that is important?'

Being An Active Reader

Before reading a social studies book, you need to learn some reading skills and strategies. To be an active reader, you need to make sure you know whatever you need to know in order to read a textbook successfully. As you read . . .

- **Predict** what will happen next based on what has already happened. When your predictions do not match what happens in the text, re-read the confusing parts.
- **Question** what is happening as you read. Constantly ask yourself why things have happened, what things mean, and what caused certain events.
- **Summarize** what you are reading frequently. Do not try to summarize the entire chapter! Read a bit and then summarize it. Then read on.
- **Connect** what is happening in the part you are reading to what you have already read.
- **Clarify** your understanding. Stop occasionally to ask yourself whether you are confused by anything. You may need to re-read to clarify, or you may need to read further and collect more information before you can understand.
- **Visualize** what is happening in the text. Try to see the events or places in your mind by drawing maps, making charts, or jotting down notes about what you are reading.

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How to Pre-read a Textbook Chapter



Step 1 - Read the chapter title.

The title will tell you what the overall theme of the chapter is.

Step 2 - Read the chapter subtitle (if there is one).

The subtitle suggests a specific topic that the chapter is about.

Step 3 - Read any "focus" questions at the beginning of the chapter.

These questions will give clues about what is important in the chapter. They are meant to guide your reading and help you focus on the information you should pay attention to.

Step 4 - Read the chapter introduction or the first paragraph.

The introduction, or first paragraph if there is no introduction, will tell you where the material is starting and where it is heading.

Step 5 - Read the boldface subheadings.

The subheadings (which are usually in a larger font and a different color) indicate a major topic of the chapter.

Step 6 - Read the first (topic) sentence of each paragraph.

The first sentence often tells you what the paragraph is about or states the main idea. Sometimes the information in the first sentence might be an attention getter, transition sentence, or a lead-in statement. If this is the case, go to the second sentence for the main idea.

Step 7 - Look over any aids.

Notice important words that are in italics or in **boldface** type. These are usually chapter terms and are usually followed by a definition or example.

Step 8 - Look over any other visual aids.

Make sure to look over material that is numbered (1,2,3; I, II, III; etc.), lettered (a, b, c), or presented in list form. Graphs, charts, pictures, diagrams, and maps are other visual aids that help to provide information that is important in the chapter.

Step 9 - Read the last paragraph or summary.

The last paragraph, or summary, gives a condensed view of the chapter and helps you identify important ideas. Often the summary outlines the main points of the chapter.

Step 10 - Glance over the end-of-chapter material.

If there are review questions, read through them quickly since they will identify what is important in the chapter.

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Chapter Pre-reading Worksheet

1. Chapter Title:

2. What does the introduction tell you about what the chapter will mainly cover?

3. Does the chapter have a summary (yes ___ no ___) or a conclusion (yes ___ no ___) at the end? If yes, what did you learn by reading it?

4. How is the chapter organized? For example, do the subheadings suggest that you will read about a process, chronological events, an analysis, a comparison or a contrast?

5. List the different visual aids included in the chapter.

6. Name two concepts that chapter's visual aids help you to understand.

7. List five specialized terms from the chapter which are in *italics* or **boldface** type.

8. Are questions included at the beginning of the chapter or in the margins to focus your reading on the main ideas? Where are they located? Write two of these focus questions.

9. Is there a vocabulary list? Is it at the beginning or the end of the chapter?

10. Are there review questions at the end of the chapter? If yes, write the question and identify where you will find the answer to two of these questions.

Question:

Answer location:

Question:

Answer location:

11. What is the difficulty level (Very difficult – Somewhat difficult – Easy) of the chapter?

12. How many pages are included in the chapter?

13. Into how many sections is the chapter divided?

14. Estimate the time it will take you to read the entire chapter.

15. What is your reading and study plan for this chapter? Will you be able to read the chapter at once, or will you have to break it down into two or three sessions?

16. How will you divide the chapter so you can read and study it in the most effective way?

17. Where and when do you plan to read this chapter?

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Taking Cornell Notes

What are the advantages of using the Cornell note-taking system?

1. It is a method for mastering information, not just recording facts.
2. It is efficient.
3. Each step prepares the way for the next part of the learning process.

How should notes be recorded?

The distinguishing feature of the Cornell system is the layout of the page on which you take your notes. The page layout includes large margins on the left and bottom of the page.

Cue (Recall) Column

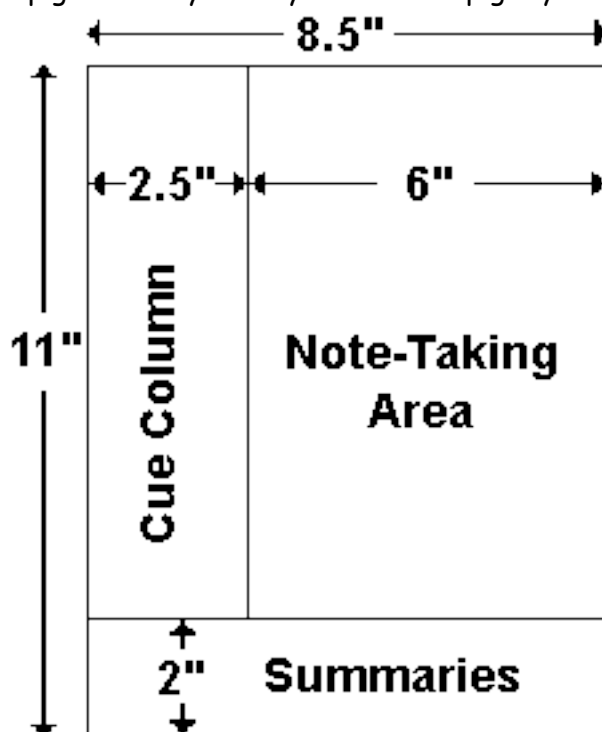
The space to the left of the vertical margin should be reserved for a cue (or recall) column. You should not write in this area while you are taking notes. The cue column is not created until you **review** your notes. As you study the material in your notes, you should devise questions which the notes answer (think "Jeopardy"). These questions are the "cues" that should be written in the cue column. By writing questions, you are forced to think about the material in a way that clarifies meaning, reveals relationships, establishes continuity, strengthens memory, and attempts to predict test and exam items.

Note-Taking Area

The space to the right of the vertical margin is where you actually record your notes during the lecture. Pick a note-taking format with which you are comfortable -- there are no hard-and-fast rules for this aspect of the Cornell system. However, you should not attempt to copy word-for-word every word spoken by the instructor or read from the text. It is usually not difficult to separate the essential material from the non-essential.

The Summaries

The area below the horizontal margin near the bottom of the page should be reserved for a summary of the notes on that page. A summary is brief -- at most, only 4-5 sentences. The page summary provides a brief review of the important material on the page. More importantly, in writing a summary, you are forced to view the material in a way that allows you to see how it all fits together, in a general sense. The summary should be written in your own words... helping you to **own** the information.



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What are the advantages of using the Cornell note-taking system?

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How should you take notes?

- Try to get main ideas down. Facts, details, and examples are important, but they're meaningful only alongside concepts.
- Don't force an outlining system, but do not use any obvious numbering.
- Use abbreviations to save time.
- Use graphic organizers or pictures when they are helpful.
- Separate blocks of information logically by skipping lines between them.

How do I make my notes more useful?

- Read your notes and underline key words and phrases.
- Correct/enhance incomplete items:
 - Loose dates, terms, names.
 - Notes that are too brief for recall months later.
- Write questions in the left-hand column about the information on the right.
- Read underlined words and write recall cues in the left-hand column (key words and very brief phrases that will trigger ideas/facts recorded on the right). *Note:* These are in addition to your questions.
- At the bottom of the page, write a summary paragraph about your notes.
- If possible, compare notes with a study buddy.

What are the best ways to use your notes to prepare for a discussion, review, quiz, test, etc?!

- Cover up the right side of the page. Read the questions. Recite the information from memory as fully as possible. Uncover your notes and verify information frequently (single, most powerful learning tool!).
- Reflect on the organization of all activities for which you have notes and study the progression of information. Compare these notes and recall cues. (This will prompt categories, relationships, inferences, opinions/experiences). Record all of these insights! **REFLECTION = THE KEY TO MEMORY!!**
- Review by reciting, reflecting, and reading insights.

Review your notes regularly.

Short, fast, frequent reviews produce better understanding and recall.

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Answering HRQs

Much of your writing will be in the form of History Review Questions (HRQs). Students often do worse than they should when writing their answers. There are two reasons for this. 1) Students do not have the knowledge to properly answer the question because they have not done the assigned reading. 2) Students have not fully understood what they have been asked to do.

Reading the Text

The study of history means reading. There's no escaping that simple fact. Often, students do not read assigned text because they feel the reading is boring or too long or too complicated. Review the tutorial on pre-reading a chapter. Read the pages that have been assigned and are directly related to the lectures presented in class. Take Cornell Notes on the reading from the text and underline and/or highlight information from the online text. Look for information that sounds important - don't write down/underline/highlight everything!

The Components of a Question

To score high marks it is important to fully understand what a question means and how it should be answered. Most questions contain the following components:

1. *Subject matter or topic.* What is the question about?
2. *Aspect or focus.* This is the angle or point of view on the subject matter. What aspect of the subject matter is the question about?
3. *Instruction or prompt.* This refers to the instruction word or phrase. These instructions tell you exactly what to do.

The 5 Ws

A good strategy to follow is to include the "Five Ws" (who, what, when, where, why) and how; then, relate those facts to one or more of the historical themes discussed in the unit. Usually, a student can answer the five w's and how; but when it comes to adding the significance, the student often has some difficulty.

The "historical significance" can involve: a) placing the topic within a general process in history, b) noting that the topic helped cause something else, c) noting that the topic was the result of earlier historical happenings. Think in terms of what came **before** and what came **after** the topic. Often, you can link the topic to one or more of the themes in the course.

The Process

To answer a question completely, you must do the following:

1. **Read!** Make sure you have read the assigned pages from the text and the online text.
2. **Review.** Look over notes/highlights
3. **Plan.** Understand the components of the question.
4. **Restate.** Reword the question as the first sentence in your answer.
5. **Answer.** Make sure to specifically address the question using the "Five Ws"

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Answering HRQs

The Vocabulary of Questions

Here is a list of the most common *instruction* or *prompt* terms with an explanation for each.

Account for: requires an answer that gives the reasons for the subject of the question.

Analyze: requires an answer that takes apart an idea, concept or statement in order to consider all the factors it consists of.

Compare: requires an answer that sets items side by side and shows their similarities and differences.

Contrast: requires an answer that points out only the differences between two items.

Define/Identify: requires an answer that explains the precise meaning of a concept; will include a definition, probably expanded.

Describe: requires an answer that says what something is like, how it works and so on.

Discuss: requires an answer that explains an item or concept, and then gives details about it with supportive information, examples, points for and against, and explanations for the facts put forward. It is important to give both sides of an argument and come to a conclusion.

Evaluate/Assess: require an answer that decides and explains how great, valuable or important something is. The judgment should be backed by a discussion of the evidence or reasoning involved.

Explain: requires an answer that offers a rather detailed and exact explanation of an idea or principle, or a set of reasons for a situation or attitude.

Illustrate: requires an answer that consists mainly of examples to demonstrate or prove the subject of the question. It is often added to another instruction.

Justify: requires an answer that gives only the reasons for a position or argument. Answer the main objections likely to be made of them.

Prove/Disprove: requires answers that demonstrate the logical arguments and/or evidence connected with a proposition prove requires the 'pro' points, and disprove requires the 'contra' points.

State: requires an answer that expresses the relevant points briefly and clearly without lengthy discussion or minor details.

Summarise/Outline: requires an answer that contains a summary of all the available information about a subject, i.e. only the main points and not the details should be included. Questions of this type often require short answers.

Trace: requires the statement and brief description in logical or chronological order of the stages (steps) in the development of a theory, a person's life, a process, etc.

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Writing An Essay

We face three kinds of sources: primary (from the time and place we study - firsthand accounts; secondary, scholarly sources--written later by experts in the field, and tertiary sources (dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.). While you may consult a tertiary source for basic background information, you may never cite a tertiary source in your paper. Forget most online sources, especially those without a refereeing system, such as Wikipedia. We **FIND** historical information by **READING** primary & secondary sources. We **EVALUATE** sources by comparing the relative strength of different documents or interpretations. If a scholarly source is not scholarly; don't cite it!!

First skim the assigned reading. Scan chapter subheadings which highlight major topics & themes. Notice the relative amount of space dedicated to various events, themes, & persons. More space usually means greater importance. Notice important persons & events.

Read **ACTIVELY**. Underline text, make notations in the margins, take notes, or jot down page references relevant to each question. Reflect on what you read. It's one thing to know what the author says & another to evaluate it & synthesize it into your own interpretation. Set aside time to reflect, criticize, note patterns & themes. Drawing together information from various sources (synthesizing, integrating) is a key cognitive skill for many disciplines, including history.

Incorporate information from classroom notes. Look for key concepts, themes, and examples that you can add to your essay.

Conceptualizing and Organizing Your Essay

Consider your Audience: In preparing any act of communication, ask yourself a basic question: "**Who is my audience?**" Who are you writing or speaking to? Audience should determine your vocabulary, style, and level of detail. If you have a writing or speaking assignment, always be certain that you understand the target audience. For this class, your audience is someone interested in your topic but with no background. Imagine your audience does not have any knowledge of American history. Thus, when you use specific vocabulary terms, you must define them briefly. When you introduce a historical figure (someone you quote or discuss), you must briefly identify them. If you refer to prior historical events, describe them briefly. Finally, you must organize your ideas clearly, because your reader is not a mind reader. S/he does not already know the structure of your interpretation. You must clearly, logically present and explain your ideas so your audience can understand and appreciate them. This is the first rule of writing. Violate it and nothing else can make up for that.

FOCUS on what the question asks. Read it thoroughly and thoughtfully. Be certain that you understand it. Note whether you are being asked to discuss, contrast, trace, justify, evaluate, critique, etc. Students often write "around" a question because they do not understand what they are supposed to do.

ANALYZE the type of question being asked. Examining the imperative verb. Are you asked to "compare" (which always means compare AND contrast; bring out points of similarity & difference), "evaluate" (give good and bad points, appraise, critique), "summarize" (give the main points briefly), "trace" (follow the course of, describe the progress or changes)?

ORGANIZE your ideas clearly and logically. Avoid a "shotgun" approach - do not spray facts and ideas around at random. How do you organize an essay? By organizing each paragraph within the essay. "Good paragraphs should develop one coherent issue. The first sentence of a paragraph should do three things: explain what the paragraph is about, connect it to your thesis, and connect it to the paragraph before."

OUTLINE. Look at how the question is phrased. Does it have several parts? Does it group things topically, such as economic, political, & social factors? Use the phrasing of the question as a guide for organizing your answer. Outline your answer. Besides helping organize your ideas & factual evidence, an outline assists you in budgeting your limited space. If the outline for a 1000 word essay has 4 major sections, for example, then you should devote no more than 250 to any one section. The outline helps you stick to the point. Don't ramble or get sidetracked. Write about what is asked; not about what you know best. An outline keeps you from "overwriting" some portion of the question & leaving out other sections.

Writing, rewriting, editing, revising

SUMMARIZE your reflections & **COMMUNICATE** them in clearly written essays. Take full advantage of computer tools: word processing, grammar and spell checking software, etc. to write and revise a clear, thoughtful paper.

Construct a good historical analysis includes the selection of significant historical events & processes, the organization of evidence into meaningful, well supported arguments, & the clear, convincing presentation of those arguments in a well integrated interpretation. Be selective; be organized; be critical of sources; be analytical, not just descriptive.

- Make certain that you understand what the prompt (verbs) in the question or assignment mean.
- Use standard English and avoid jargon if you wish to be understood
- Avoid language that will alienate or offend people through careless phrasing.
- Avoid including information that is inaccurate. Double-check your information!
- **SUPPORT** your arguments and generalizations with specific historical evidence.

Use real historical events and words that illustrate and "bring to life" what you've analyzed. Read your sources and then re-read them! A good essay is well supported by factual evidence. **When you state a generalization, back it up with a specific example. This is the most common failure in student essays.**

REMEMBER: People make history -- history is the study of human actions in the past -- so be certain that you write about people and what they did! Try to support your essay with examples of what real people did and said. Do not quote secondary sources (the authors of your textbooks) directly. Use your own words instead of those of the textbook author(s). Search your assigned readings for appropriate primary source quotations --voices from the past-- and incorporate them into your essay.

THINK -- don't just parrot. Yes, you need to discuss historical events and yes you must deal with the facts. But this is your interpretation-- your analysis -- so bring your ideas! Not every great thought about history has been thought. There is room for your interpretation--as long as you support your ideas with historical evidence.

USE FORMAL LANGUAGE. Use proper grammar and punctuation.



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The 5-Paragraph Essay

The five-paragraph essay follows a defined format. The first paragraph introduces us to the thesis of the essay and directs us to the three main supporting subtopics. The second through fourth paragraphs are all similar in format. They individually restate the subtopics, and are developed by giving supporting information. The fifth and last paragraph restates the main thesis idea and reminds the reader of the three main supporting ideas that were developed. All of these paragraphs are important.

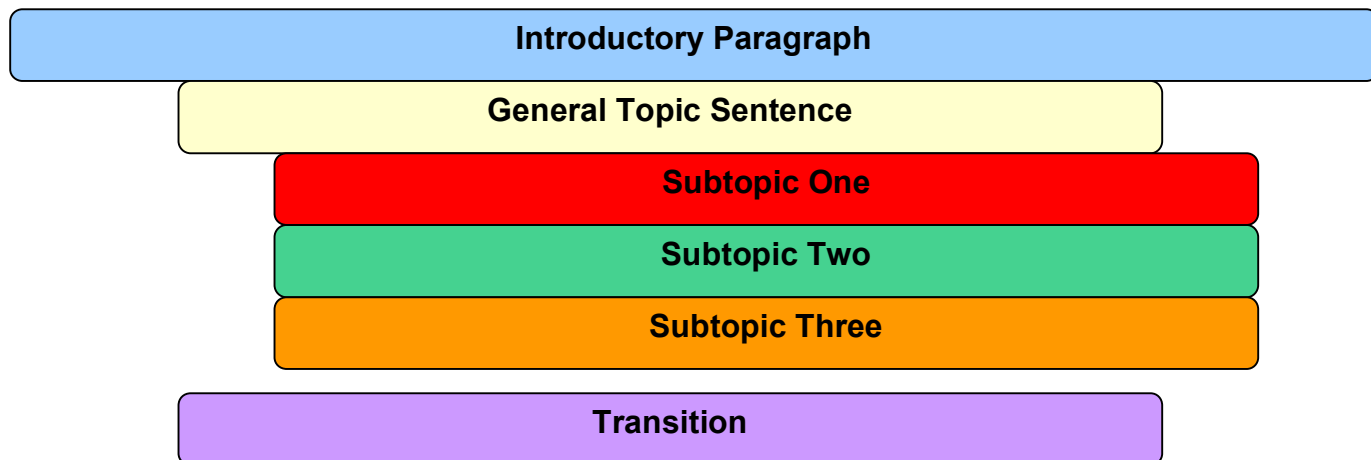
The introductory paragraph is the place in which you introduce the reader to the topic. It is important to make this a clear and limited statement. This is where you, as the writer, grab the reader's attention. Because of its purpose, it is often the first sentence of the paragraph. It is followed by three sentences (subtopics) that develop the thesis. Between this paragraph and all paragraphs of the essay, there needs to be some kind of a transition word, phrase, or sentence. This transition must connect one idea to the next.

Next, the body of the essay contains paragraphs two through four. They are all constructed the same way. Their topic sentences are restatements, often in original form, of the three supporting ideas presented in the first paragraph. The subtopics of each of the paragraphs in the body of the essay are, again, supported by three or more supporting sentences. These cement, in the reader's mind, the importance and relationship of each of the subtopics to the thesis statement.

Finally, the fifth paragraph is the summary paragraph. It is important to restate the thesis and three supporting ideas in an original and powerful manner as this is the last chance you have to convince the reader of the authenticity of the information presented. Because the purposes of the first and fifth paragraph are so similar that some writers construct them at the same time. They will edit them, as necessary, as they do with each and every part of the essay.

It is important to reiterate that each of the paragraphs is joined together by a transition word, phrase or sentence. Transitions help the reader to follow the flow of the logic and sequencing. All of the essay types follow this basic transition format. However, there is more latitude with the narrative essay because of its nature.

To put it more visually, the structure model has been color-coded and looks like this:



First Supporting Paragraph

Restate First Subtopic

First Supporting Detail or Example

Second Supporting Detail or Example

Third Supporting Detail or Example

Transition

Second Supporting Paragraph

Restate Second Subtopic

First Supporting Detail or Example

Second Supporting Detail or Example

Third Supporting Detail or Example

Transition

Third Supporting Paragraph

Restate Third Subtopic

First Supporting Detail or Example

Second Supporting Detail or Example

Third Supporting Detail or Example

Transition

Closing or Summary Paragraph

Synthesis of Main Topic

Synthesis of Subtopic One

Synthesis of Subtopic Two

Synthesis of Subtopic Three

Expository v. Persuasive Writing

EXPOSITORY essays require that you, the writer, give information, explain the topic or define something. To accomplish that, they are best developed by the use of facts and statistical information, cause and effect relationships, or examples. Since they are factual, they are written without emotion and usually written in the third person. That means that the use of the pronoun "I" is not usually found within the essay.

Expository essays also have a distinct format.

- The thesis statement must be defined and narrow enough to be supported within the essay.
- Each supporting paragraph must have a distinct controlling topic and all other sentences must factually relate directly to it. The transition words or phrases are important as they help the reader follow along and reinforce the logic.
- Finally, the conclusion paragraph should originally restate the thesis and the main supporting ideas. Finish with the a statement that reinforces your position in a meaningful and memorable way.
- Never introduce new material in the conclusion.
-

PERSUASIVE writing attempts to convince the reader that the point of view or course of action recommended by you is valid. To accomplish this, you must develop a limited topic that is well defined and debatable (that is has more than one side). It is important that you understand other sides of the position so that the strongest information to counter the others can be presented. In the essay, only one side of the issue is presented.

Like all kinds of five paragraph essays, there is a specific format to be followed.

- The topic sentence cannot be a fact as facts cannot be debated. It should be a statement of position. That position must be clear and direct. This statement directs the readers to follow along with your logic towards the specific stated conclusion that you want them to support. Do not make it personal so do not use personal pronouns. Make it definitive.
- Then, in the same introductory paragraph, state the three best reasons that you have to support your position as the remainder of the opening paragraph. These reasons become the topics of each of the three supporting paragraphs. Again, be sure they are able to be supported with additional separate facts.
- In the body of the essay, the writer uses specific evidence, examples, and statistics and not broad generalizations or personal opinions to persuade the reader that the stated position is a valid one. Each topic sentence for the support paragraphs have been introduced in the beginning paragraph. Each additional sentence must closely relate to the topic and the sentence that came before it. This way, the logic of the argument is easy to follow.
- Be sure to use adequate transitions between paragraphs as they make it easy for the reader to follow the logic of the presentation.
- As one closes the essay, it is most important to clearly redefine the topic and restate the most compelling evidence cited in original form. Remember, this is the last chance to remind the reader and convince him/her to accept the writer's position.
- Do not introduce new material in the conclusion.

Rubric for History Essay

A or B: Superior or Excellent Essay

Area 1: Focus, Content, Ideas, Analysis, Interpretation

- 1) Focuses on what the question asks. Does specifically what the question requires: Fulfills the demand of the action verb: compare, synthesize, critique, evaluate, etc. Be certain that you know what common key verbs in essay questions mean.
- 2) Analyzes the actions and motives of people in the past (individuals and groups) and what they did.
- 3) Incorporates the actual words of historical figures and sources into the essay.
- 4) Attempts to explain (interpret) key historical issues specified in the question, such as cause-and-effect or comparison.
- 5) Briefly identifies the people mentioned, identifies sources quoted in the text, and defines terms.

Area 2: Inclusion of Relevant Historical Evidence

- 1) Supports all thesis statements (assertions, explanations, interpretations) with specific, warranted evidence (examples, illustrations, concrete historical actions).
- 2) Establishes direct links between events of the past and the writer's interpretation of those events.
- 3) Draws evidence (supporting examples) from **ALL** the required readings, incorporating information and direct quotations from at least three different sources into every paragraph (excluding introduction and conclusion).
- 4) Includes appropriate primary source quotations. Persons quoted clearly identified.
- 5) Includes statistical evidence, especially when making social or economic arguments (raw numbers, percentages, charts, graphs).
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Area 3: Organization, Logic, Integration of Sources

- 1) Organizes ideas and themes into logical sequences and subtopics appropriate to the question.
- 2) Includes a brief, clear introduction that summarizes the paper's major focus, most important points, and guides the reader on what to expect in the body.
- 3) Includes a final, logical summation or conclusion.
- 4) Each paragraph focuses on and supports a single idea; one topic per paragraph. Logical transitions between paragraphs create a clear flow from point to point through the essay.
- 5) Within each paragraph, integrates relevant evidence from more or more different examples and sources.
- 6) Makes as complete an argument as space permits and within established word length, plus or minus 10 percent.
- 7) Avoids false statements and/or inaccurate information.
- 8) Includes statistical evidence, especially when making social or economic arguments (raw numbers, percentages, charts, graphs).

Area 4: Writing Clarity and Correctness

- 1) Presents ideas in direct, clear, concise sentences. Avoids long, complicated sentences (20 words plus).
- 2) Expresses ideas in active-voice.
- 3) Exhibits strong sentence fluency--the language flows clearly and clearly.
- 4) Employs action verbs.
- 5) Does not incorrectly mix past and present tenses. Writes in the simple past tense.
- 6) Correctly cites sources, using whatever system (endnotes, for example), specified by the teacher.
- 7) Uses correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Does not make common word use and grammatical errors.

C: Competent, Developing Essay--on track but still has a ways to go

- 1) Simply narrates events or tells a story, rather than explaining, interpreting, analyzing.
- 2) Strays from the question; includes information, people, and events not directly related to what the question asks.
- 3) Fails to make a logical argument. Information is simply put down on paper in no particular order.
- 4) Fails to provide specific relevant, appropriate supporting evidence for every general statement.
- 5) Includes some evidence that is not relevant and/or factually correct.
- 6) Does not show knowledge of the required number of assigned readings. Fails to cite and quote from the required number of sources.
- 7) Often expresses ideas in the passive voice.

D or F: Early draft or emerging essay

- 1) Not yet there -needs more thought, more revising, more hard work.
- 2) Does not focus on nor answer the question asked.
- 3) Shows little knowledge or understanding of the assigned readings.
- 4) Most paragraphs lack historical specifics; few or no primary source quotations and/or overuse of quotations from secondary sources
- 5) Many simple assertions that lack relevant evidence or illustrations.
- 6) Commits "serial plagiarism;" isolating each source instead of integrating information from several different sources into each paragraph.
- 7) Entire essay overly general; no specific supporting examples; little evidence from the required readings; inadequate and/or incomplete citations.
- 8) Exhibits poor writing, such as typos, sentence fragments, subject-verb disagreements, considerable overuse of the passive voice, grammatical and word use errors.
- 9) Mixes past and present tenses. Write history in the simple past tense.
- 10) Often appears hastily written, as a first draft, with careless errors and little evidence of careful thought.
- 11) Makes unsupported assertions based on prejudice or preconception, not on evidence.

