


Writing History Essays

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Writing History



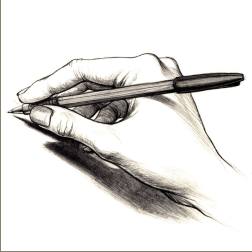
- ◆ History is a discipline based on interpretation.
- ◆ Do not fall into the trap of simply giving narrative.
- ◆ An essay requires an argument. Be sure to provide one.

Writing History


- ◆ Examine the past critically, but try to avoid judging the past by today's standards.
- ◆ Read the past in the context of the time.
- ◆ Base your judgments on the weight of evidence. Be prepared to change your mind about things.

Pre-Writing

- ◆ Establish a topic.
 - ◆ Understand the topic that has been assigned. If unclear, ask!
 - ◆ If you are to set the topic, be sure to establish a clear working thesis. This must argue something contentious.




Establish a Working Thesis



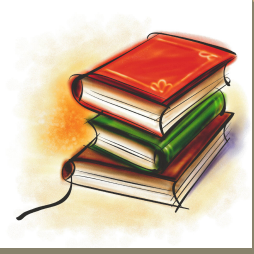
- ◆ Your thesis is your argument boiled down to a single sentence.
- ◆ Establish a clear thesis.
 - ◆ Research may cause you to modify your argument, but you need to start somewhere.
 - ◆ Make adjustments as you need to do so.

Conducting Research

- ◆ This means work:
 - ◆ Start with summaries – encyclopedias give nice overviews.
 - ◆ Consult books with chapters on your topic.
 - ◆ Move to more specific sources – books on the topic may be available.
 - ◆ Consider articles, if available.
 - ◆ Consult the Internet – but ensure the source is scholarly before believing what it says.
 - ◆ Read, read, read.




Conducting Research




- ◆ Be sure to use primary and secondary sources.
 - ◆ Primary sources were produced at the time: things like diaries and journals, literature, government records, artifacts, etc.
 - ◆ Secondary sources were produced after the fact and have the benefit of hindsight. Such sources include, articles and books.

Evaluating Sources

- ◆ Don't waste time reading rubbish.
 - ◆ Try to use scholarly sources – look for footnotes and endnotes to ensure the work is well sourced (avoid lecture notes because these are generally lacking!).
 - ◆ Expect to see a thorough bibliography if you are to trust the source.
 - ◆ Be wary of websites belonging to special interest groups – they have an axe to grind. Most sites ending in .com are trying to sell something. Also be careful about personal sites.




Taking Notes




- ◆ Take careful notes and always in your own words – or use quotation marks. Be sure to note page numbers and sources.
- ◆ Be sure to keep bibliographical information for web site print-outs.
- ◆ Take precautions to ensure that you never plagiarize.

Establishing Your Thesis

- ◆ When you have read widely, you should re-evaluate your working thesis.
- ◆ If you think of your topic as a question, your thesis is a one sentence answer to it.
- ◆ A good thesis is contentious, supportable and of interest to your reader.




Outlining




- ◆ Once you have amassed your notes and know what you are trying to prove, you need to create the skeleton of your essay.
- ◆ Map out your ideas then create a point-form outline.

Outlining

- ◆ Your outline sets the form and content of your essay.
- ◆ Arrange your points in order of importance (the first and last paragraph are the power positions).
- ◆ Give your supporting points and details.




Writing the Essay




- ◆ Consider your audience – in your case it is your teacher. In the real world it is the reader of your book or the journal that your article appears in.
- ◆ Assume the reader is educated and mature. Do not assume he or she is psychic – be sure to explain yourself fully.

Writing – Essay Format

- ◆ Every essay has a beginning, middle and end.
 - The beginning is the introduction, which sets the scene and contains your thesis
 - The middle is the body, which gives the evidence that proves your thesis
 - The end is the conclusion, which restates your thesis and explains its relevance.



The Introduction



- ◆ This introduces your paper.
 - ◆ It reveals the topic as clearly stated in your thesis.
 - ◆ It states the relevance of the topic.
 - ◆ It establishes the chronological or thematic framework of the essay.

The Body

- ◆ No proof is offered in the introduction.
- ◆ Evidence is given in the body.
- ◆ You **are not** limited to 3 body paragraphs. Use as many paragraphs as you have points to raise.
- ◆ Each paragraph is a unified whole, with a topic sentence that connects it to the thesis.



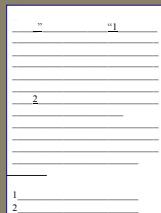
The Body – Citing Sources



- ◆ As you support your thesis, you mention the ideas of others, provide statistics, or give quotes.
- ◆ All of these need to be cited.
- ◆ Remember, it is the weight of evidence which proves your thesis.

Citing Sources - Footnotes

- ◆ One way to cite sources is to insert a citation number in your text and give a corresponding citation at the bottom of the page.
- ◆ Start numbering from 1 again on each new page of text.
- ◆ Your word-processing software probably has a wizard to do this for you.



Citing Sources -- Endnotes

Endnotes

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

- ◆ Another way to give citations is to provide them in a single long list at the end of your essay, before your bibliography.
- ◆ This is often easier to set up than footnotes. Just number from 1 in your first citation to whatever your last one is in your essay, and show all citations on the endnote page.
- ◆ Your word-processing software probably has a wizard to help you do this.

Citing Sources – Using Quotations

- ◆ If you use someone else's words, they must be given as a quotation.
- ◆ Short quotations (under 3 lines in length) are put in quotation marks and fit into your own text.

Johnson was quite clear in describing the situation, saying: "Mr. Benoy simply doesn't know what he is talking about. He was not there."¹

Clearly all is not as he would have it. Johnson and others have shown conclusively that pigs do not fly. They merely plummet when deposited from a great height...

Citing Sources – Using Quotations


Johnson was quite clear in describing the situation, saying

Mr. Benoy simply doesn't know what he is talking about. He was not there and he had no intention of being there.¹

Clearly all is not as he would have it. Johnson and others have shown conclusively that pigs do not fly. They merely plummet when deposited from a great height...

- ◆ Long quotations are given differently.
- ◆ When a quote is over 3 lines in length, it should be indented from both margins and single spaced to set it apart from your own text.
- ◆ No quotation marks need be given.


Plagiarism




- ◆ This occurs when a writer knowingly or unknowingly presents the words or ideas of another as if they were his or her own.
- ◆ It is also plagiarism if someone writes your paper for you.
- ◆ Avoid plagiarism by doing your own work and citing sources properly.

The Conclusion

- ◆ This is more than just a signal to your reader to not look for more text.
- ◆ It reminds the reader of the thesis and confirms that the thesis has been proved.
- ◆ It also helps the reader see the relevance of your views.
- ◆ Do not introduce new evidence.



Editing



- ◆ Once your paper is written, you are still not finished.
- ◆ Editing is a big part of the writing process.
- ◆ Use the spelling and grammar checking functions of your word processing programme.
- ◆ Get others to help by looking over your work.
- ◆ Rewrite unclear passages and get rid of poorly written bits.
- ◆ Above all, strive for clarity

Evaluation

- ◆ Consider the marking of your work to be the criticisms of your reading audience.
- ◆ It is intended to help you improve your writing.
- ◆ Think about what went right and what went wrong, so your next paper can benefit from this process.



Finis
