

Historical Analysis Assignments

Instructions for Historical Analysis Assignments: (10% each; 3 total) The purpose of these assignments is to help you better engage you with your sources and aid in studying. All assignments are a 1-2 page essay and must include at least one primary source and one secondary source. ALL SOURCES MUST BE CITED.

Assignment #1 (pick one): Describe the geography and environment of the Middle East. How did this shape the nature of states in Late Antiquity? What role did geography and environment play in the events of the Arab conquests? **OR** How does the biography of the Prophet Muhammad take on religious and legal importance in the first three centuries of Islam? What challenges does this pose for historians? How did early Muslim scholars tackle these challenges? **OR** Can the medieval Islamic world be said to constitute a cohesive civilization? What elements of similarity can be found across the broad geography that we have studied thus far in class? What differences are there? What would a traveler from one end of the Muslim world recognize at the other? (due 3 October)

Assignment #2 (pick one): When and how did Spain become part of the Islamic world? Why did it cease to be a part of it, and what consequences did this have? **OR** Compare the Arab conquests of the 7th century with the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century. In what ways were they similar, and in what ways did they differ? Be sure to consider the cultural effects as well as military and political aspects of the conquests. **OR** How was the economic system of the Islamic world affected by the Age of Exploration? (due 24 October)

Assignment #3 (pick one): Describe the structure of the Ottoman and the Safavid militaries. How did the two evolve over time? In what ways are the two institutions similar, and in what ways do they differ? **OR** What were some of the significant changes to the structure of the Ottoman state that took place during the 1600s? What were the main consequences of these changes? **OR** Why was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt a turning point in terms of the relationship between Europe and the Middle East? What is the significance of this event? (due 14 November)

The organization of the essay:

The classic essay presents an introduction that states a thesis; has several body paragraphs, each of which is devoted to explaining a single idea that helps prove the thesis; and ends with a conclusion that clearly re-states the main ideas in the essay.

1) The Introduction. Be sure that your introductory paragraph lets the reader know what your main question is. But you **MUST** do more than this in the introduction! Your introduction must present a thesis statement. The thesis statement is the main point of your answer. It can be one sentence or several sentences. But it must be a logical statement that answers the question. By the end of the first paragraph, the reader should know what your argument is and should have a sense of how you will develop that argument in the essay.

Again, remember that the thesis is not just a restatement of the question! It is the core of your ANSWER to the question. One of the biggest problems with most students' introductions is that all they do is re-phrase the question?they don't present an answer!

2) The Body. The body of your paper should be composed of several paragraphs, each of which is completely devoted to explaining one main idea. So if your thesis has three "sub-points," you need to have three body paragraphs (etc).

Again, you must break your thesis down into several "sub- ideas" and provide evidence to prove these ideas. That is the function of the body paragraphs in your paper. Be sure that each paragraph in the body of your paper is devoted to explaining a single main idea (one main idea per paragraph). That main idea should help us understand your thesis.

It is extremely important that each paragraph has a clear Topic Sentence. The topic sentence (the first sentence of the paragraph) must present the main idea of that paragraph, and everything in the paragraph must be related to the topic sentence. (If you have a fact, or information, in the paragraph that is not logically connected to the topic sentence, then you have to move that fact/information to another paragraph where it does fit with the topic sentence!)

After the topic sentence, each paragraph needs to include evidence that supports the main idea in the paragraph. In other words, you have to illustrate and prove your point in that paragraph. Remember (and this is really important) that you must EXPLAIN what the evidence means--don't assume that it is obvious!

This is where you integrate the documents into your essay. Try to use as many primary sources as you can! And be sure to refer explicitly to the primary source. ("In his August 6, 1786, speech to Congress, John Jay argued that?" or "In his 1630 statement A Model of Christian Charity, John Winthrop insisted?").

Remember, the difference between a good essay and a really good essay is that a really good essay explains the evidence in the

sources. Every time you present a quotation from a document or paraphrase or summarize information from a document, you need to explain what that information needs and how it relates to your main point.

In really good essays, each paragraph ends in a transition sentence that guides the reader to the next topic sentence. (example--"The differences in the composition of the settlers of New England and Virginia help us to understand the difference in family patterns in the two regions.")

3) Be sure that you end your paper with a concluding paragraph that sums up your main ideas and makes clear how all of these ideas add up to your main point (thesis), and how your main point answers the main question of your paper.