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HIS 270 S21: Europe's Long Twentieth Century **Writing Handout**

Basics:

- **Length:** Your Midterm Paper must be **1500 words** long, and your Final Paper must be **2500 words** long. I will give you 200 words of wiggle room (over or under). If your paper length varies by more than that, your grade will suffer. The Works Cited page *is not included* in the word count.
- **Formatting:** Please put your **name** and a **title** on the first page and **number** your pages. You must use **12-point font, double spacing, and 1-inch margins.**
- **Citations and Bibliography:** Please follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which you can access **for free on the Library website** here:
<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

When citing a source in the body of your paper, you may use **internal citations** or **footnotes**. If you are not familiar with how to format footnotes, please see the *Chicago Manual of Style*. If you are citing one of the pdfs I've given you, check the syllabus or **WorldCat** for complete bibliographic information. WorldCat is available for free on the Library website:
<https://washingtonandjeffersoncollege.on.worldcat.org/advancedsearch?databaseList=>

Here is an example of a Chicago-style **bibliographic** entry:

Litveiko, Anna, "In 1917," in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds. *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49-65.

If you use a web source (including audio, video, film, and images), you must provide the URL and date of access in your bibliography. In a footnote, you must also include the **time code** for the clip you are referencing. Here is a **bibliographic** example:

Vladimir Lenin, "Communism is Soviet Power + Electrification of the Whole Country."
<http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/electrification-campaign/communism-is-soviet-power-electrification-of-the-whole-country/>. Accessed March 6, 2020.

- **Submission:** Always submit your work via **Sakai**. Please use **Microsoft Word**. If you prefer to write in Google Docs, you can convert your file to Word as a final step. If you don't have Word on your computer, you can download it for free here:
<https://washjeff.happyfox.com/kb/article/24-install-office-365-on-a-windows-or-mac-computer/>

Writing Style:

- In a history paper, you should employ a **formal** writing style. You may not use the first person, slang, or contractions. Even so, keep in mind that the primary goal of scholarly writing is always CLARITY. Often, this means writing simply. Avoid convoluted sentences and vocabulary words that seem impressive but might not mean what you want. Here are some examples of mistakes resulting from trying to write impressively:

Example 1: “One can easily see that a kicking situation is taking place between Bill and Jim.”

Example 2: “My argument is that the subordination of economic questions of cost and profitability to the political imperative of “building socialism” created through the interaction and conflict between political authorities, workers, and management a set of social relations, both formally sanctioned and informally practiced, which granted workers the means of pursuing, within limits, a way of life which was compatible with Soviet ideals of dignity, self-improvement, and creative labor.”

Example 3: “Inconceivable!”

“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

What is wrong with each of these examples? How can we fix them?

- Be careful to avoid broad generalizations. Structures like, “Since the dawn of time, humankind has always...” are not useful to us as scholars. We only know a small portion of human history, and we’ve studied even less than that in this class. Stick to what you can say with assurance based on your sources.
- Watch out for meta-narrative. It is important to give your reader a sense of structure, but don’t get stuck *writing about your writing*. (“In the above paragraph, I have just done x. In the next paragraph, I will do y.”) Let your argument be the main attraction!
- Avoid filler. If you find yourself including something that doesn’t support your thesis, just to fill up space, get rid of it.
- Spelling and grammar: They count! Why? Consider the following examples:

Example 1: Learn how to cook crack and clean a crab.

Learn how to cook, crack, and clean a crab.

Example 2: You know your shit.

You know you’re shit.

DO use the spell-checker, but DO NOT rely on it exclusively. Neither of these mistakes would be caught by a spell-checker. A good way to check your grammar is to read your paper out loud or ask a friend to read it for you. A fresh pair of eyes can be very useful!

Structure:

A formal history paper consists of three basic parts:

The Introduction sets up the subject or problem on which the paper will focus. It also presents the **thesis statement** and a roadmap for the argument. It does not include contextualizing

background information. Save that for the Body. The ideal Introduction contains four parts, which fit into a single paragraph:

- a) Setting up the question or problem
- b) Previewing the argument (briefly!)
- c) Explaining the stakes (why the argument matters)
- d) Articulating the **thesis statement**

The Body presents your argument step by step, employing a logical flow. If the paragraphs can be shuffled and make as much sense as before, then you haven't achieved logical flow. Your reader needs to understand why A comes first, followed by B, followed by C, etc.

Strive for balance in your body section. Don't let any one point take over, and don't let your final point get squished for lack of space.

*Remember to tie *every point* back to your thesis. This is not the same as tying every paragraph back to your thesis!

The Conclusion sums up your argument and leaves the reader feeling satisfied. The information here is similar to the introduction, but it is not the same thing. The Introduction is the start of the story, while the Conclusion is the end of it. Avoid the urge to connect to broader themes you haven't discussed elsewhere in the paper. The conclusion should not contain any new information or arguments.

Sometimes, by the time you get to writing your conclusion, your thesis (main argument) has shifted away from where you started. That's okay! Remember to give yourself time to revise your Introduction and Body sections so the whole paper fits together smoothly.

Structural Pro Tips:

- Tell a story! All stories follow the Introduction-Body-Conclusion model, and the more you think of your work here as a story, the more naturally it will flow.
- Don't worry about The Five Paragraph Essay. You're not in high school anymore. Take as many paragraphs as you need to prove your argument.

Introductions are hard! Let's look at one that works well:

Today, Socrates is remembered as an excellent citizen of Athens, someone who was willing to sacrifice his personal wellbeing for the greater good by asking hard but necessary questions. This claim seems to be verified by the fact that he was sentenced to death for asking such questions, and he did not try to escape his fate. However, this view of Socrates is mistaken. His actions were in fact harmful to Athens. **[The preceding sentences set up the problem.]** When he questioned the wisdom of leading citizens, he destabilized order and authority in the city. Further, when he criticized the jury at his trial, he made a mockery of Athenian legal processes. Finally, in convincing Crito that one should not care about the opinion of the majority, he undermined Athenian democracy. His decision to accept the jury's sentence does not make up for these wrongs. **[These sentences preview the argument.]** It is essential to correct the misperception of Socrates, because contemporary politicians and activists often refer to him to justify their behavior. By relying on Socrates as a positive example, they extend the harm he did to Athens into the present. **[These sentences explain the stakes.]** In this paper, I will argue that Socrates proved himself a bad citizen of Athens by undermining its core values while claiming to be its most loyal son. [This is the thesis statement.]

Thesis Statement:

This is the key to your paper. Your thesis statement presents your main argument in one sentence. It must be a debatable claim, not a statement of fact or an opinion.

Your claim must be specific and based on historical evidence.

Your claim should arrive in the first paragraph of your paper.

Which one of these examples is a good thesis statement, and why?

- 1) The Soviet Union was a communist country.
- 2) Stalin was a terrible person.
- 3) Soviet society was complicated and had many features.
- 4) The Bolshevik Revolution was the greatest upheaval in the entire history of humanity.
- 5) Stalin's economic transformation of the Soviet Union during the First Five-Year Plan was hard on citizens but justified by its success.

Evidence:

An argument won't stand up unless you prove it, and to do that, you need evidence. Here are some tips for working with primary sources:

- Think like a historian! Whether working with textual or media sources, remember to place them in their historical context and think about how that context affects the actors, their creative outcomes, and critical response.
- Be creative when working with primary sources. Ask yourself key questions: What does this source reveal about its historical and cultural context? What are the author's perspective and assumptions? What rhetorical strategies does the author employ to get her message across? How has the author been influenced by her time, place, and objectives?
- Always keep your argument in mind. Remember, your job is not only to convey information, but to make a critical assessment of the interaction of historical factors. How do these factors fit together? How did Situation A lead to the development of Situation B? What are the implications of that process?
- Be careful with quotations. Weave the quote into your text, and make sure you explain what it means and how that helps you prove your argument.

Make sure your quote is long enough to fully express the author's idea, but not so long it takes up a ton of space. Avoid long block quotations; figure out the essence of what you need for your argument. Make sure you copy it accurately and give a **proper cited** footnote.

Rules for Citation and Plagiarism:

- Direct quotations must be in quotation marks, followed by an internal citation.
- Summaries or paraphrases of ideas unique to the source must also have a citation. Ask yourself, "Is this the author's idea or mine?" Err on the side of caution.

- **Plagiarism:** any time you use another author's words or ideas without citing them, you are **stealing** them. **If you plagiarize, you will automatically fail my class.** You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. "I didn't mean to" or "I didn't know" are not valid excuses. If you're not sure, ask me! Err on the side of caution. It's always better to over-cite than to plagiarize. If you plagiarize, I am obligated to report you to the Dean of Students, and then it's out of my hands. Please, let's not start down that road.

Other Useful Tips:

- Write an outline! You may not stick to it, but the process of writing an outline will help you:
 - a) Organize your thoughts
 - b) Figure out your main points, what evidence you'll use to support each point, and how each point ties back to your thesis
 - c) Develop the logical flow necessary for a coherent, persuasive historical essay
- Stick to the sources and engage with them directly. Be creative, but also be honest in your assessment of what type of argument they will support. Avoid blanket statements, generalizations, personal stories, or things you're pretty sure you heard somewhere, but you don't actually know for sure.
- Be generous to the author. Give her arguments full consideration, even when you're refuting them. Watch out for your own assumptions about the sources and about historical processes.
- Read carefully. Don't attribute to the author something she did not actually say. Be aware that the author may use sarcasm, or may quote somebody else's argument she plans to refute.

More Resources and Writing Help:

- The Purdue OWL website: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html
- Dr. G's Patented Guide to Good Paper Writing (on the website)
- Me! My office hours are at the top of this handout. Outside of those hours, you can always reach me by email.