

## HST 101: Ahmedabad as Gateway to the World Monsoon 2022

### Tips for writing essays & rubric

(lightly adapted from Harvard's SW14 and HUM 52 Tips for Writing Essays)

Whether you're majoring in the humanities, sciences, or in business, the processes of writing an essay in history are useful beyond this class. In fact, you'll find that the work you put into writing an essay is useful beyond your years at the university. Indeed, writing an essay demands that you break down large and complex problems into easily understandable pieces, that you gather data into analyzable masses, and that you present your findings to an audience.

For HST 101,

#### **A good history essay requires the following:**

##### **1- A defined topic or problem**

***You may choose any topic related to the history part of this course that speaks to you.***

The first challenge of any essay, and specifically a history essay, is clearly defining the problem you are addressing by drawing boundaries around your inquiry. This can be challenging, so to help you in the task of creating a clear argument, you must choose your topic from any of the themes listed in the first half of the course outline (the history part of the outline).

##### **2- An argument supported by evidence**

***You may use materials that we have read for class, but you must also seek out a minimum of two outside sources: 2 books and 1 peer-reviewed article.***

Now that you have a topic in mind, it's time to think about your argument. Generally speaking, your argument will answer a question, for example:

- Why did this event happen?
- How did it happen?
- Who was involved?

The best way to come up with an argument is to define a *why* or a *how* question. Your argument is the answer to that question.

Arguments must be placed in the introduction to your paper.

Arguments are only convincing when they are supported by strong evidence. Evidence usually speaks to what happened, when, where, on what scale, from whose point of view. Evidence may be a statement of widely accepted, documented and documentable fact, for example: "Gandhi's Salt March was an act of nonviolent civil disobedience." A source may also serve as historical evidence: a document, a map, an image, an object, statistics.

Whatever your source, you must think critically about the kinds of information it provides you, the information it doesn't provide you, and why. Who or what produced the source, in what context, for which audience? Are there any biases and agendas that you can discern from the source's producers? (see slides from Session 3 presentation on reading primary sources for the kinds of

questions you should ask about sources). You should strive as much as possible to assess the author's point of view and choice of evidence.

Statements of fact are not arguments. For example, "Ahmedabad is the Manchester of India," is a statement but not an argument. In order to turn your statement into an argument, consider adding *because*, or *as a result (of)* to link it to an event.

Broad value judgments (the British Empire was good/bad) are not effective arguments unless examined. To make this an argument, consider adding *according to*, *because of*, or *in this example*.

Address counter-arguments (arguments that could be reasonable supported by another person looking at the same topic).

### 3- An effective structure and clearly written presentation

***Mandatory: you must visit the Writing Studio at CleF and work with a tutor for 45 minutes to edit a complete or nearly complete draft (1000 out of 1500 words minimum).***

***Once we have received confirmation from the Writing Studio that you worked with an editor on a nearly completed draft, your paper will automatically be bumped a half grade (e.g.: from B to B+).***

Your writing should make your views clear to the reader. If your views are obscured or confusing, you cannot present a convincing case for your argument. Indeed, a good essay can convince the reader of its argument.

Good writing requires **effective structure**. Start from a place of abundance. Consult your reading notes and your class notes. Try creating a point-by-point outline before you write. This will help you write an essay that flows logically from one point to the next. As you write and you edit your essay, as yourself these questions:

- Does the paper present its claims in a logical order?
- Am I repeating myself in the paper
- Does the structure of the paper reflect the argument?

Good writing also requires appropriate word choices and following grammatical conventions. Make sure of the following

- Does the paper present its evidence in an appropriate form (avoid, excessive quotations, for instance).
- Are the words chosen precisely?
- Are the sentences constructed well?

Proofread your work before visiting the Writing Studio and submitting your essay for grading. Try reading aloud to catch problems of style and structure in your work.

## Grading rubric:

Truly outstanding papers (A) will:

- Present a creative, bold, well-supported argument, and show an insightful approach to the questions at hand.
- Support the argument with well-chosen, convincing evidence from outside readings, class readings, and lectures.
- Demonstrate great fluency in writing, with clear, engaging prose and a solid structure.

Extremely strong papers (A-/B+) can:

- Present a clear argument, deriving logically from a clear question.
- Support that argument with evidence from course material, but may rely more on summary than on true analysis.
- Be clearly written, but may benefit from proof-reading, tighter structure, more accurate language.

Good papers (B/B-) may:

- Lack a clearly defined thesis statement or argument.
- Use insufficient or poorly chosen evidence.
- Contain considerable repetition, awkward phrasing, convoluted structure, and other stylistic issues that impede reader comprehension.

Papers that could be improved (C-range):

- Have no argument, or demonstrate lack of comprehension of the topics and questions involved.
- Use evidence inaccurately, inadequately, or inappropriately.
- Involve consistently problematic use of language, no discernible structure, or significant departures from word limit.

You will see two grades on your papers, a letter grade and a point grade. The grade ranges applied are as follows:

A: 95-100	B+: 88-89	C+: 78-79	D: 65-69
A-: 90-94	B: 83-87	C: 73-77	F: below 65
	B-: 80-82	C-: 70-72	

Point grades will be assigned in order to offer greater accuracy in feedback and assessment (e.g. a B paper might be at the top of the range, an 87, or the bottom, 83).

**Penalties for late papers (2/3 letter grade for first day late, 1/3 letter grade for each subsequent day) will be assessed at 6 points for the first day and 3 points for subsequent days.**

**Plagiarism is an automatic F**

We look for and reward improvement over the course of the semester!