

Criteria for Student Writing

Questions on how to approach writing essays
and what Dr. Huggard looks for in grading exams and papers



- I. *Introduction*
- II. *Body* **The basic format for an essay!**
- III. *Conclusion*

The following questions will prepare you to write essays for exams and papers:

1. **Do you show an adequate understanding of the historical materials that you are writing about?**



Know your subject before putting a single word on paper (or on the computer). Having a good or excellent grasp of the material always makes writing easier and clearer for the reader. This step in writing an historical essay should be taken before any other steps.

(Hint: prepare extensive notes and outlines before you begin writing an essay. This kind of preparation both provides you with a framework for your essay and reminds you of the most important points you want to make and what specific historical data you want to place in the essay to make your argument convincing to the reader)

2. **Are you answering the question[s] posed to you by the professor? Are you addressing all parts of the assignment fully?**



Be sure to answer the questions put before you. Be creative in compiling the information, outlining your ideas, and then finally composing your essay. Yet, always make sure that you are answering the specific question[s] at hand.

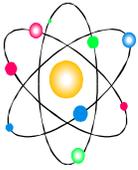
(Hint: carefully follow directions given in writing or in class concerning each specific essay question or assignment)

3. **Is your main idea clear? (Do sentence structure and word usage obscure your points or make them unclear to the reader?)**



Be sure to present in the *Introduction* of your essay or paper the **theme or themes** (also known as the **thesis** or **thesis statement**) that you will develop. Do not bring in information that is interesting for its own sake, but make it fit into an argument for your point of view.

(Hint: be willing to be creative in developing your own ideas about a subject instead of preparing a "grocery list" of information. Think for yourself!)



4. Have you adequately developed and explained your main idea or theme?

When you explain and develop a theme, the reader should be able to understand easily what you are going to discuss or argue. This step requires thinking deeply about the subject. In other words, scratch below the surface of your subject and get to know it well before trying to write about it. In the **Body** of your essay you will provide the details to argue your theme[s].

(Hint: when developing your own themes or ideas in an essay, write clearly without over flowery language. Try to write as you would speak. Read your prepared essays aloud sometimes, even tape them, and listen to how your written work sounds so that you can make changes that make it easier for your readers to understand)



5. Do you make logical transitions from paragraph to paragraph and from section to section in the essay?

When you are discussing your points, do they make sense together? Show the relationships between your previous and next points when you break up your ideas into paragraphs. The final sentence of one paragraph and the first sentence of the next paragraph should make sense in sequence. This aspect of the essay requires you to think ahead of time about the subject you are writing about.

(Hint: each paragraph has a theme that is connected to the larger theme of your essay. Make sure that the theme of a paragraph makes sense and is related to the overall theme. It may also help to complete portions of the essay separately so that you prepare fully for each important section rather than try to write the whole thing in one sitting—unless, of course, you are preparing for or writing an examination, which you do complete in one sitting)



6. Finish your job!

Do not forget the task at hand. All too often students start with a bang and end with a bust. Be sure to follow through with your theme to the very end of your essay in the **Conclusion**. Put your own imprint on your work by finishing it with your own thoughts and ideas as they fit within the framework of the materials that you have been studying. Preparing each section separately, rather than writing the entire essay in one sitting, will help you to focus on the various themes fully and you will not get worn out trying to complete the whole assignment in one sitting.

(Hint: knowing your materials, in this case historical information and ideas, will enhance your writing and will allow you to begin to think for yourself, a key component of becoming a critical thinker and freed from the confines of other peoples' ideas and thoughts.)



7. Need help with your writing? Use the Writing Center in BH 1108!

8:30am-4:30pm Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays

8:30am-6:30pm Tuesdays

8:30am-2:30pm Fridays

Call for appointment: 986-6929 or email: write-in@nwacc.net (give 48 hrs. for response)

