

The Argumentative Essay: History 20

Historians use essays to identify and discuss claims made about historical events and personalities. Good writers make use of a combination of evidence, arguments, logic and references to primary sources. Ultimately, a reader should leave reading an essay feeling they have a clear understanding of the historian's central arguments.

PURPOSE: compose an argumentative essay on any history related topic of your choice (from any time period). Ultimately, this is *not* a narrative essay, i.e. you are not retelling events in the order in which they occurred. Instead, you must take a clear stance on a particular issue and defend it using relevant arguments.

PROCEDURE

1). Develop an original argument (also known as a **thesis**) in either the form of a question or statement. In the end, the argument will be presented in statement form in the actual essay; however, you might find it easier to develop the argument in question form first. For example:

Question Form

Example 1: Was the Committee on Public Safety justified in launching the Reign of Terror to preserve the democratic aims of the French Revolution?

Statement Form

Example 1: The Committee on Public Safety was justified **using** violence to preserve democracy in France.

Good arguments present a defensible position worded as simply and clearly as possible. Additionally, good arguments are composed in **active voice** if possible.

Active voice is achieved by using as few words as possible, verb forms ending in -ing and -s, and avoiding un-necessarily complex adverbial phrases, e.g. could have been, will be, has been, etc.

In Example 1, the writer argues democracy could only be saved through violence. The implication is more peaceful approaches, e.g. maintaining freedom of speech, freedom of association, etc. to preserving the democratic aims of the French Revolution were inadequate. Also, the writer used a verb form ending in -ing, e.g. using, etc. helping establish active voice.

Question Form

Example 2: Did the Industrial Revolution change the Western World for the better?

Statement Form

Example 2: The Industrial Revolution changed the Western World for the better.

In Example 2, the writer argues the Industrial Revolution improved the Western World, e.g. better technology, increased food production, etc.

In your opinion, which one of the two arguments is the easiest to defend and why?

2). Research and develop supporting arguments for the thesis. This is achieved through a combination of contemplation, reading, brainstorming and discussion. Consult relevant websites, journals and books to find information to incorporate into the essay. However, be aware not all websites and sources are created equal; that being, sites like *Quora*, *Wikipedia*, and personal blogs are not sources of academically trustworthy information. Instead, seek out pages belonging to genuine academic institutions like universities and make use of print materials like journals and books. In the end, if you are uncertain about whether or not a resource is academically trustworthy please consult with your instructor.

3). Start drafting the essay. In reality there is no formula to follow when it comes to composing an essay; however, it is considered best practice to start by being clear on what position you are trying to defend, conducting relevant research to support that position, and *then* start drafting the actual essay in stages, e.g. first, second, third and final draft.

4). Submit the essay via *Google* Docs to the instructor by giving them full editing privileges. Share the essay with rdelaine@lcbi.sk.ca.

STANDARDS

The essay must have/be:

- Minimum 500 words in length and a maximum of 750
- Free from grammatical, historical and logical errors
- A thesis statement where the writer is arguing clearly in favor of a specific (and defensible) position that is precisely worded
- Include relevant evidence in support of the argument in the form of references to outside sources, supporting arguments, and appropriate logic
- Concluding paragraph answers a question posed by the thesis, i.e. a thesis statement can be converted into a question (see step 1 under the heading “PROCEDURE”)
- Incorporate a minimum of three citations referencing information used from books and websites, e.g. including a combination of direct in-text quotations or simple references to where information was found
- Formatted according to Chicago citation style, e.g. title page, foot notes, bibliography
- Avoid the use of all personal pronouns, e.g. I, me, we, you, us, etc. because this is a formal essay

EVALUATION

The essay is assessed according to the writing rubric below:

Criteria/Score	3	2	1
Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word minimum/maximum Clearly and Effectively Stated Thesis 	<p>Essay meets word minimum and maximum.</p> <p>Thesis presents a clear argument that is <i>both</i> defensible <i>and</i> precisely worded.</p>	<p>Thesis presents an argument that is <i>either</i> defensible <i>or</i> precisely worded.</p>	<p>Essay does not meet either the minimum or maximum standard.</p> <p>Thesis presents an argument that is <i>neither</i> defensible <i>nor</i> precisely worded.</p>
Arguments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logic Quality of Concluding Paragraph 	<p>The essay does not have a single error in logic.</p> <p>It is evident the concluding paragraph directly <i>and</i> precisely answers a question posed by the thesis.</p>	<p>The essay suffers from one to three errors in logic.</p> <p>The concluding paragraph directly answers a question posed by the thesis.</p>	<p>The essay suffers from four or more errors in logic.</p> <p>It is <i>not</i> evident the concluding paragraph answers a question posed by the thesis.</p>
Format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citations (Chicago) Title, Footnotes, Works Cited page. 	<p>All direct references and in-text quotes are formatted correctly.</p> <p>Title page, footnotes, and works cited page are <i>all</i> present and properly formatted.</p>	<p>All direct references, <i>except</i> one or two, and in-text quotes are formatted correctly.</p>	<p>All direct references, <i>except</i> three or more, and in-text quotes are formatted correctly.</p> <p>Title page, footnotes, and works cited page are <i>either</i> not all present <i>or not</i> all formatted properly.</p>
Grammar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spelling Punctuation 	<p>The essay suffers from no grammatical <i>and/or</i> punctuation issues whatsoever.</p>	<p>The essay suffers from a combination of one to three grammatical <i>and/or</i> punctuation issues.</p>	<p>The essay suffers from a combination of four or more grammatical <i>and/or</i> punctuation issues.</p>
Style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language Argumentation 	<p>Essay is written in exceptional well, e.g. <i>all</i> sentences clearly entail and transitions are smooth.</p> <p>Essay's arguments are exceptionally <i>and</i> skilfully composed, argued, and supported.</p>	<p>Essay is written well, e.g. <i>most</i> sentences entail and transitions are generally smooth.</p> <p>Essay's arguments are reasonably well composed, argued, <i>or</i> supported.</p>	<p>Essay meets minimum/maximum word count; however, sentences frequently <i>do not</i> entail and transitions are rough.</p> <p>Essay's arguments are <i>neither</i> effectively stated <i>nor</i> supported.</p>

Chicago Style: Citing Resources

Any time you incorporate a non-original idea—an idea you did not come up with yourself—into your writing you must give credit to the original creator. Not giving credit to others is considered academically unethical and will result in academic penalty; therefore, anything you use from a book, website, journal, magazine, etc. must be properly referenced. With that said, not everything has to be

referenced, e.g. simple facts or commonly understood concepts. When in doubt ask the instructor for guidance on whether a reference is required or not for a picture, piece of text, graph or whatever.

There are three instances when you would use a citation and these are: direct references, short in-text quotations, and long in-text quotations. Students more than likely will only make use of direct references.

Direct References

Direct references indicate to readers where the essay's writer found a piece of information. The writer indicates this source in something called a footnote (see bottom of the page) using a superscripted number.

Here's an example of a paragraph composed by a student using a *Harry Potter* book as the primary source:

Harry had his father's perpetually untidy black hair, his mother's bright green eyes, and a lightning bolt-shaped scar on his forehead. He was rather small and skinny for his age with a thin face and knobby knees.¹ His tendency to wear round eyeglasses made him even less imposing of a figure. The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was his scar.² He was not impressive physically but the lightning bolt on his forehead represented a rare combination of strength and courage.³

Superscripted numbers in the body of the paragraph indicate to the reader they should look at the footnotes section below. Footnotes are used by writers to record what sources were used in the writing of their essay. There are a total of three footnotes used in the creation of the paragraph above, i.e. the first refers to a Sparknotes website, the second refers to a print book, and the third to another website; it is always wise to use a mix of print and web based sources.

Note: pay special attention to how books and websites are formatted differently. You will be expected to follow this formatting *exactly* as it appears below.

Short In-Text and Long In-Text Quotations

Writers incorporate quotations—the literal words spoken by someone else—in order to support the essay's thesis and supporting arguments. Short quotations are defined as quotes 30 words or shorter while long quotes are defined as 31 words or greater.

There are many different ways to insert a quotation into an essay. The method used depends entirely upon a combination of the writer's style and the circumstances.

¹ <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/harrypotter/characters.html>

² Jason Williams, *The Complete Guide to Harry Potter*, 17.

³ http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Harry_Potter

Here's an example of both a short and long quote being inserted in the same paragraph:

In 1940 the German Army pinned the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) against the English Channel. The complete capture of Britain's entire army seemed almost guaranteed. Wilf Cowie, an English soldier trapped at Dunkirk observed that "I was one of the last to get out of Dunkirk. It was horrible on the beach."⁴ Germany's air force continuously dropped bombs on top of the retreating British. The Germans were determined to make a decisive end to the war:

Luftwaffe planes were firing at us and then there was the shelling. That was the worst thing of all. The shells screamed as they were going over the top of you and you never knew where they were going to land. Once I took shelter in a bomb hole with three other lads. I was the only one who came out alive.⁵

Cowie's experience was shared by over two-hundred thousand soldiers over the course of several days of German bombardment. Ultimately, he was able to reach the safety of England because of the courageous contributions of the English Navy along with fishermen. The successful evacuation of Dunkirk proved to be fateful to the Allies' cause. On the website *History Today* journalist Patrick Wilson argued in the harbor of Dunkirk the freemen of England defied the most powerful army in the world.⁶

The thing to remember is while short quotes are incorporated directly into the paragraph, long quotes are formatted differently. Insert a paragraph break between the beginning and end of long quotes and also indent them five spaces on both the left and right. Do not forget to include the footnote number and format the source properly below.

FORMATTING CITATIONS

Use the Citation Machine (www.citationmachine.net) to format *all* of your footnotes and Works Cited references. You will have to create a user account on the site. The account is free and useful, in that, you're likely to continue using the account for the remainder of your school career (high school through to university, etc.)

⁴ Karen Farrington, *Witness to World War II* (Toronto: Strathearn Books Limited, 1995), 71.

⁵ Farrington, *Witness*, 71.

⁶ Patrick Wilson, "Dunkirk: Victory or Defeat?" *History Today*. <http://www.historytoday.com/patrick-wilson/dunkirk-victory-or-defeat> (Date Accessed: October 30th, 2017).

LCBI High School

Center all three fields, e.g. school name, title of essay, and student name, etc.

All three fields are the same font and font size (11).

Bold the school name and essay's title (and sub-title if you use one).

The school title is formatted at the top of the page. The student name, date, etc. is formatted exactly at the bottom of the page.

The center field (or title) is formatted one space above the exact center of the page.

TITLE OF ESSAY:
SUB-TITLE OF ESSAY IF NEEDED

Jenna Johnson
History 20
Mr. Delainey
Nov 9, 2020

Works Cited

"Dunkirk: Victory or Defeat?" Dunkirk: Victory or Defeat? | History Today. Accessed October 30, 2017.
<http://www.historytoday.com/patrick-wilson/dunkirk-victory-or-defeat>.

Farrington, Karen. Witness to World War II: an illustrated chronicle of the struggle for victory. Place of publication not identified: Abbeydale Press, 2006.