

Writing History

It's not your typical story!

Writing History

- Writing for a purpose, not to entertain
- Not just informative, expository writing
- Also not quite persuasive writing as you would do in English
- Somewhere in between. A technical form of writing
- Not to say it shouldn't be interesting, but that it is a different thing than you have learned before.

Three Types of History

- **Narrative** – To relate the story of a particular event or series of events
- **Descriptive** – To paint a complete picture of a place, people, or point in time
- **Argumentative** – To propose and defend a point of view regarding historical relationships and processes

**In this class, yours will nearly always be
Argumentative**

What is Historical Writing?

- Historical analysis is critical
- It evaluates sources, assigns significance to causes, and weighs competing explanations.
- It carefully selects and uses analysis of a few critical facts to support a point.
- It is CLEAR, CONCISE, FOCUSED writing

What it is NOT

- Grandiose, flowery statements
 - “Throughout time there have been many questions of history that have puzzled and befuddled historians.”
- Unsupported generalizations
 - “Native Americans revered the land and treated nature with respect”

What it is NOT

- Anachronistic judgments
 - “European settlers in the 17th century were pretty stupid not to realize they could bring deadly disease and wipe out Native populations.”
- Overlong summaries or recitations of facts.
 - *Don't mistake vomiting facts for argument!!!*

Points of Style

- ALWAYS use past tense!!!
- ALWAYS use active voice!!!
- ALWAYS use third person!!!
 - NEVER say “I,” “me,” “myself,” etc.
- NEVER use jargon, slang, or informal language

So what's your point?

- Argumentation means you are trying to support a particular position on or interpretation of a historical event or question.
- Your position or interpretation is expressed in a clear, concise **THESIS STATEMENT**
- The thesis is a statement of **PURPOSE** for your writing
- A good argument will include categories of analysis or main points that are introduced in the thesis.
- The thesis statement then is a sort of road map to your writing.

A good argument

- A good historical argument will include:
 - An Introductory passage framing the topic or question of your paper, establishing historical context and expressing your position (the thesis)
 - Body paragraphs which examine each category of analysis in your position using analysis and interpretation of historical facts
 - A conclusion which summarizes your argument without simply repeating it.