

Writing a Good History Essay

HIST 2020: US since 1877

Dr. Potter

Argument and Thesis Statement

- The argument directly answer the question asked of you, and the thesis statement provides your reasoning.
- Your argument and thesis statement tell the reader how *you* interpret the subject matter under discussion in your essay, and why you interpret it in the way you do.
- they work together to make a claim that others might dispute.
- they also work together to provide a road map for the essay; in other words, they tell the reader what to expect from the rest of the essay.
- They are usually several sentences at the end of your introductory paragraph. The rest of the essay, or its body, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.

Evidence

- Supports and elaborates on your argument
 - Quotations from the primary source(s) assigned
 - Your own paraphrasing of an idea or moment in the primary source
 - An aspect of the primary source (date produced, where published, etc.)
 - Historical context and/or background knowledge about this time period or issue in history
- Give your evidence and EXPLAIN why it supports your thesis statement

Strategy for Planning and Writing Your Essay

- Read primary document(s) and any other related course readings
- Read assigned question – make sure you understand what it is asking
- Brainstorm possible answers – these are possible arguments
- Brainstorm your reasons for each answer – these are possible thesis statements
- Make a list of moments in or aspects of the text that support your answer(s) to the question – this is your potential evidence
- Evaluate your lists:
 - Which argument and reasoning (thesis statement) are the strongest?
 - Which argument and thesis statement are best supported by your evidence?
 - Which argument and thesis statement are of an appropriate scale for your essay, given the time and space constraints?
- Choose the best argument and draft a thesis statement that explains your reasoning for that argument. Then choose the evidence you will use in the body of your essay. Make sure you can *explain* how your evidence supports your thesis statement.
- Make an outline of your essay. This semester you will use the Paper Planning Worksheet homework assignments to help you with this step.
 - Introductory paragraph with argument and thesis statement
 - Body paragraphs
 - Each body paragraph should make one point that supports your thesis, that point should be stated in the topic sentence of the paragraph
 - Each body paragraph should have evidence to adequately support that paragraph's point
 - Conclusion paragraph that sums up and reiterates your claim, and then explains why this is an important claim to make
- Write the essay