

General Writing Tips for History

Most Important Rules for Writing History

- Always write using the past tense; never use present or future tense. History happened in the past, and your writing should reflect this.
- Never use first- or second-person in any form. Avoid “I, me, my, we, our, etc.” (first person) and “you, your, etc.” (second person). Never include a phrase such as, “In my opinion...,” or “As you can see....”
- Avoid the use of “extreme” words, such as “always, never, the greatest, worst, etc.” Likewise, never use an exclamation point unless you are using a direct quote.
- Avoid writing in passive voice; write in active voice instead. Instead of writing, “Pennsylvania was established by William Penn as a safe haven for Quakers,” change it so the subject comes before the verb and the object: “William Penn (subject) established (verb) Pennsylvania (object) as a safe haven for Quakers.”
- Always offer analysis. Your thesis and the bulk of your essay should answer the questions “how?” “why?” or “in what ways...?” Likewise, your essay should demonstrate your understanding of cause-and-effect in history.
- A successful essay has three main components: 1) a well-developed thesis that offers some analysis (how/why/in what ways); 2) abundant use of specific historical evidence; 3) analysis that demonstrates how the evidence proves or supports the thesis.

Key to Common Teacher Comments

DAQ	Doesn't Answer Question	The sentence, paragraph, or essay fails to answer the question as it was asked.
H/W/IWW	How? Why? In what ways?	Offer some analysis; answer either how? why? or in what ways? this happened
DST	Doesn't Support Thesis	This statement fails to support (or “prove”) the thesis.
dev	Develop	This idea or concept needs to be developed further. Keep going and explain more.
PV	Passive Voice	Avoid the passive voice. Change to active voice. (See above for explanation.)
1st / 2nd	1st person / 2nd person	Eliminate the use of the first-person (second-person).
OTP	Outside the Time Period	This piece of evidence is outside the time period restraints of the essay.
SYK	Show You Know	Use a specific term, person, event – <i>by name</i> – to show the reader you know it.
A/P/C/POV	Audience/Purpose/Context/POV	Use of document fails to address: intended audience, purpose, context, or author's point of view
vague	Vague	The sentence or argument is vague. It needs to be more specific.
uncl	Unclear	The meaning of the sentence or the argument is unclear. [What do you mean?]
weak	Weak	The sentence is weak. It fails to say anything significant.
awk	Awkward	Construction of the sentence is awkward. It does not flow.
WW	Wrong Word	Wrong word choice, at least in this context.
cond	Condense	Condense this wordy sentence(s). You are using too many words to say this.
comb	Combine	Combine two or more sentences into one sentence.
chron	Chronological Order	Arrange the ideas, sentences, or paragraphs in chronological order.
over	Overstatement	The argument is an overstatement. Scale it back.
cliché	Cliché	Eliminate this cliché or slang expression. Use more formal language.
red/rep	Redundant/Repetitive	A word, argument, or sentence is overused. Consider a new one.
RO	Run-on Sentence	The sentence is a run-on and likely needs to be made into two sentences.
frag	Fragment	This is not a complete sentence.
a	Capitalize	Capitalize this letter/word.
sp	Spelling Error	The word is misspelled.
contr	Contraction	Eliminate the use of this contraction. Write the full word out.
↵	Eliminate Punctuation	Remove this punctuation mark.
^	Insert Missing Element	Insert this word, phrase, or sentence here.
OK	Acceptable	This sentence or argument is acceptable, but not exceptional.