

History 110A and 110B, Fall 2014: Second Writing Assignment

Writing papers is an accepted way to determine a history student's ability to search for, obtain, and process information, and to assess and discuss that information critically. In this class, your "First Writing Assignment" and your "Second Writing Assignment" together will contribute 30% toward your final course grade. **Plan accordingly!**

For BOTH History 110A and 110B, the readings you may select to analyze are to be found in the Strayer textbook assigned for that course. These readings have been selected to illustrate the values, beliefs, and concerns of people in past times. In order to more clearly understand these readings and to cultivate the skills of critical thinking that are essential to the college learning experience, the student should subject each reading to an analytical process, and then write about their analytical conclusions. This instructional handout, in the subheading entitled "Critically Reading an Historical Document," offers a series of steps on how to read and analyze the information contained in a reading. The steps ask you to pose and answer certain questions to illustrate the stages of processing the information contained in a given reading. These questions are intended to help you understand the author, his or her times, his or her concerns, and his or her motivations, and to place this information in the wider context of the events of history and the dynamics of "cause and effect" which drives all historic actions over time. Using the information contained in this subheading, the student is required to write a paper analyzing a selected reading from those contained in the Strayer textbook.

1. The Assignment

Your assignment is to select any one primary source reading from the Strayer textbook (the choice is yours), and conduct a full analysis of that reading using the steps described below:

First, identify the document about which you are writing, and write a brief (two or three paragraphs) biography of the author of the document and the times and civilization in which he or she existed. If the author is not known, then write about the civilization and the events and/or issues of the time when that document is known to have been written.

Second, perform (and write about) a critical analysis of the document (reading) itself, using the steps described in "Critically Reading an Historical Document" (next section of this document). Your analysis must include information which answers EACH STEP (one through four inclusive) and EACH QUESTION in each step.

Third, discuss the results of your analysis. What did you learn? Tell me (in writing)! **USE THE FIRST PERSON** to tell me what you have learned and determined. If you express a personal opinion, be sure to tell me why you think that way and how you came to that opinion! You may go to other sources (such as the text or specific sourcebooks) to obtain additional information about persons, places, or events that is essential to your analysis, but this assignment is not intended to be a detailed research paper, rather it is an instructional to teach the analytical thought process essential to successful critical thinking. **However, ALL sources of information, including the reading itself, must be correctly cited using FOOTNOTES!**

This writing assignment should result in a paper of a **minimum length of a cover page plus FIVE FULL typewritten pages of text (double spaced), about 1500 words, plus a bibliography listing other sources used, if you did so.** You must identify the reading upon which you are performing this analysis, and clearly describe each step of the analytical process. If you do use citations, they must be in the **Chicago Manual or Turabian format (FOOTNOTES)**, as described in the Benjamin book (Chapter 10). Your paper also must have a **cover sheet** similar in design to the one on this handout. Your finished assignment is **due on Friday, October 10, 2014, for both 110A and 110B classes**, at the start of class. Late papers will not be accepted without prior arrangement or satisfactory emergency justification. During his regular office hours Dr. Myers will be available for consultation on this assignment.

2. Critically Reading an Historical Document¹

Primary source readings are intended to convey the observations, opinions, and emotions of those who wrote them, to provide the history student with a better understanding of the impact of historic events. For this reason, the student must view these readings not as impartial chronicles of events, but rather as the impassioned (and thus biased) feelings of the participants. It is important to remember that all documents reveal the opinions and desires of those who wrote them or caused them to be written. To get the most out of these readings, the student should approach them with a critical eye. The following steps are recommended to get the most from these sources:

Step One: Read the item carefully, treating it the same as if you were reading a map to help you find your way if lost.

Step Two: Ask a first set of questions which help you identify the nature of the document and its author: 1) Who wrote this document? 2) Who is the intended audience? 3) What is the story line (content)? 4) What opinions, biases or prejudices do you detect from this document?

Step Three: Ask a second set of questions which help you to probe behind the presented "facts" to gain understanding at a more critical level: 1) Why was this

¹ This section is adapted from Mark A. Kishlansky, editor, *Sources of World History*, volume I (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), pp. xv-xxii.

document written? 2) What type of document it this? That is, what form does it take and why is that form essential to the intended purpose of the document? 3) What basic assumptions does the author make in this document? How do these assumptions reflect the bias or intent of the author?

Step Four: Pose your own questions about the past addressed by the document, exercising your own critical imagination, probing the material presented, and developing your own assessment of its value. The questions you ask here may not always have definite answers, but should arouse debate and discussion in which you now may participate with authority: 1) Can I believe this document? Learn to question believability and look at presented facts or issues from a different perspective. 2) What can I learn (or, what do I know) about the society that produced this document? Look for unintended information by reading "between the lines." 3) What does this document mean to me? You should "demand" the meaning of each document you read. What did it mean to the historical actors of its era? What does it mean to your society? How do you appreciate an alien/earlier culture? How often do you have to understand the assumptions of other cultures to understand your classmates?

If you develop the discipline of asking your questions in the order just given, you will soon find that you are able to understand the historic documents you read-- and other documents in your life as well. How much more comfortable will you feel once you have confidence in your ability to critically analyse the world you confront, not just here in history class, but in your daily life? This is the real value of "reading critically."

3. Finishing the Paper

The paper you submit must be typewritten, using 12 point type with a Times New Roman or similar serif-style type font. It must have margins of 1 inch on each of the four sides (top, bottom, left, right), and have a text of five full pages plus a cover page. ("Five full pages" means five pages of text with additional lines carrying over to a sixth page.) It must identify the reading you have chosen, and tell why you chose it. It must contain all of the steps of critical analysis and respond to all of the questions posed in the previous section "Critically Reading an Historical Document." Finally it must conclude with a discussion of what you learned from your critical analysis, and, therefore, what that document meant to your understanding of history.

4. Available Primary Source Readings (Select ONLY ONE to analyse in your paper)

Students in either History 110A or History 110B classes are free to select one (and ONLY ONE) primary source reading contained in the Strayer textbook from the list of assigned readings given in the "Schedule of Assignments" handed out for their course. A primary source reading from any time period or on any topic from any time in the semester may be selected for this paper; you are not just limited to readings

assigned to a specific date in the semester, but you must select readings assigned for your Course