**HISTORY ESSAY WRITING GUIDE**

**History Essay Writing Guide Contents**

The History Essay Writing Guide will hopefully aid in the completion of essays. It is meant specifically for history essays using the Chicago Manual of Style for citations. It includes the following topics (subheadings):

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**Research**

Research is a process through which a student becomes knowledgeable on a topic. Research involves collecting resources (books, articles, films, documentaries, lectures, websites, and more), reading/listening/watching the resources, recording and organizing pertinent information and recording the referencing information.

**Collecting Resources:** Students must use resources from respected academic individuals and institutions. Books and scholarly articles are recommended when possible. Websites should be sponsored by a reliable organization (generally speaking .org and .edu websites are superior to .com). It is ideal to include both primary and secondary resources, and, a range of sources that cover multiple perspectives and opinions. Remember, primary resources are of the time period being explored whereas secondary resources were after the fact. To cover multiple perspectives and opinions means to approach the topic from various vantage points and lenses. The topic may appear different to a person of low income than to a person of high income, or, to a conservative than a socialist. The types of perspectives and opinions covered are obviously topic dependent, but ultimately attempt to approach research with some balance and open-mindedness.

**Using Resources:** Well ahead of the due date students should read, listen or watch resources. It might take two to three weeks, or longer, to read the necessary resources and organize the subsequent information and thoughts. Start researching early!!!! Once researching, be sure to record interesting quotations/paraphrased ideas/statistics immediately so the information does not become misplaced or forgotten. Write it down Right away!!!! Proper research will result in a few pages of notes. Within these notes the substance of the essay should be roughly assembled. It may take a lot of time to go from research notes to a thesis and plan, so again, leave time for this process. Remember, each part of the eventual argument to be developed in the essay should be supported by a quotation/paraphrased idea/statistic from a reliable source.

**Recording Referencing Information:** Recording referencing information can be done with various styles. Generally, sciences, some social sciences and business employ APA formatting whereas history, English and politics employ MLA formatting or the Chicago Manual of Style. For the purposes of this class we will be using the Chicago Manual of Style. Remember that a teacher or professor might demand a particular type of referencing format. Be sure to clarify with the instructor the specifics for the particular class.

All resources that contributed to an essay must be properly referenced. Directly used (quotations/paraphrased ideas/statistics) must be followed by a footnote (a number in text corresponding to a number and information at the bottom of the page). All resources that appeared in footnotes and other relevant resources used must then appear in the bibliography. The bibliography and footnotes will require certain specifics pertaining to the resource used. This will be shown in examples later in this guide. For a thorough and up to date version of the Chicago Manual of Style or any other format, go to the Owl at Purdue, the definitive referencing website. Here is the link for the Chicago Manual of Style. The left menu offers the formats for the citation of different types of resources: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>

Very generally, make sure to record a book’s author(s)(editors, translators when applicable), title, publishers and year published, plus the page numbers where the specific quotations/paraphrased ideas/statistics were found. If it is a website record the author(s), organization, date last modified or date accessed and the URL.

**Title Page**

Depending on your teacher a title page may or may not be a necessity. Additionally, specific types of style (Chicago, MLA) have specific types of title pages, (and possibly, headings). For the purposes of this class there is no need for title pages or headings, this is a waste of paper (minimal albeit). On the first page of the essay make sure to include an underlined title and the name of the student.

**Essay Structure Diagram**

The following diagram shows the basic structure of an essay. Information on each part of an essay follows.

**Introduction**

**Thesis**

**Thesis**

**Conclusion**

**Body Paragraph 1**

**State (Point)**

**Example (Proof)**

**Explanation (Discuss)**

**Link (Discuss)**

**Body Paragraph 2**

**State (Point)**

**Example (Proof)**

**Explanation (Discuss)**

**Link (Discuss)**

**Body Paragraph 3**

**State (Point)**

**Example (Proof)**

**Explanation (Discuss)**

**Link (Discuss)**

**Link (Discuss)**

**Transition**

**Introduction**

Writing an introduction for an essay is often challenging. Here are a few ideas to consider. First, go from the general to the specific. Second, contextualize the time period and place. Third, hint at broader historical significance. Fourth, attempt to include a hook that will capture the attention of the reader. Fifth, consider composing the introduction when the body paragraphs of the essay are completed. Remember, an introduction is selling your paper!!

**Thesis**

A thesis captures the main position and ideas advanced in a paper. It should be the product of the research conducted on the topic and the subsequent thoughtfulness. It must, obviously, address the topic. It should appear at the end of the introductory paragraph and be one to two sentences in length (note: in later years of university and in professional essays a thesis statement may be developed throughout the first few paragraphs and may not follow a standard format – high school students should be advised to avoid these difficulties). The thesis often summarizes the three, or more, body paragraphs of the paper (also known as a thesis with a directional statement) but a thesis does not have to do this.

**Example Thesis**

*Topic:* Assess the importance of the Second Battle of Ypres.

*Thesis (without directional statement):* Incongruent with the scale and scope of the engagement, the Second Battle of Ypres was uniquely significant, foreshadowing future developments and trends.

*Thesis (with directional statement):* Incongruent with the scale and scope of the engagement, the Second Battle of Ypres was uniquely significant, foreshadowing future developments and trends. It involved an early use of chemical weapons, altering the nature of warfare, it allowed the allies to maintain their lines and hold a corner of Belgium, a recurring pattern throughout the conflict, and, it demonstrated the bravery and competency of Canadian Soldiers, repeated in latter battles leading to respect and independence for Canada as a nation.

**Body Paragraphs and S.E.E.L.**

Each body paragraph contributes to proving the thesis. Use the SEEL approach (similar to point, proof, discuss and other methodologies).

**S**tate: making a statement that supports the thesis (or an aspect of the thesis) [point]

**E**xample(s): proving the statement with an example(s), evidence (quotations/paraphrased ideas/statistics) [proof] \*

**E**xplain: explaining the example(s), why and how it (they) prove(s) the statement at the beginning of the body paragraph [discuss]

**L**ink: linking the example(s) to the thesis [discuss]

\*A statement made at the outset of a body paragraph may be fully supported by one, two or three examples, depending on the convincingness of the evidence, and, the complexity and controversy of the argument.

If using the Chicago Manual of Style, every time a quotation/paraphrased idea/statistic are employed, there must be a footnote and corresponding entry in the bibliography. Quotes under 25 words should appear within quotation marks and within the normal text. Quotes over 25 words should be single spaced with wider margins and no quotation marks.

Examples of two planned body paragraphs and examples of the body paragraphs as they would appear in the essay follow. The examples will be based on the below thesis with the underlined section of the thesis the topic of the body paragraphs (because the underlined section of the thesis requires a two part argument, there will be two body paragraphs, though this is really a matter of preference and style over necessity).

*Incongruent with the scale and scope of the engagement, the Second Battle of Ypres was uniquely significant, foreshadowing future developments and trends. It involved an early use of chemical weapons, altering the nature of warfare, it allowed the allies to maintain their lines and hold a corner of Belgium, a recurring pattern throughout the conflict, and, it demonstrated the bravery and competency of Canadian Soldiers, repeated in latter battles leading to respect and independence for Canada as a nation.*

**#1 Example of Planned Body Paragraph**

**State:**

The bravery of Canadians was demonstrated in the Battle of Ypres.

**Example(s):**

Quotation - “……through terrible fighting, withered with shrapnel and machine-gun fire, hampered by their issued Ross rifles which jammed, violently sick and gasping for air through soaked and muddy handkerchiefs, they held on until reinforcements arrived.”

Statistic - 6 035 casualties over 2000 dead.

**Footnotes:**

“Ypres 1915”, Veterans Affairs Canada, Last Modified October 23, 2014, http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/canada/canada4

“Second Ypres”, The War Museum, Accessed September 22, 2015, http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/second-ypres/

**Explain:**

Maintaining position when confronted with poison gas requires fortitude. Soldiers witnessed the impact the gas was having on their comrades. Describe effects of gas. To not move when confronted with a challenge that could result in painful death is indeed brave. Statistically, there were significant casualties, showing some men refused to retreat amidst the poison gas and machine gun fire.

**Link:**

Canadians were indeed brave, but being so, and being perceived as so are different challenges. Did the international community recognize Canada’s sacrifice?

**#2 Example of Planned Body Paragraph**

**State:**

Bravery at Ypres, other battles, earning respect for Canada as a nation.

**Example(s):**

Paraphrased idea: Congratulatory messages were cable to the Prime Minister.

Quotation: Reputation as tough and dependable troops.

Paraphrased idea: This directly leads to independence.

**Footnotes:**

“Ypres 1915”, Veterans Affairs Canada, Last Modified October 23, 2014, http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/canada/canada4

“Second Ypres”, The War Museum, Accessed September 22, 2015, http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/second-ypres/

J. Bradley Cruxton and W. Douglas Wilson, Spotlight Canada, 4th ed, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126.

**Explain:**

Canada’s courage and bravery in the Battle of Ypres, led to recognition from other powers, specifically the United Kingdom. This occurred again at the Somme, Vimy and were instrumental in Canada receiving more independence. Canada began the war being commanded by British officers but finished under its own tutelage. Ypres was a first and important step in this direction.

**Link:**

Ypres was the first of the great Canadian battles and showed the bravery with which Canadian soldiers would fight, and, how this bravery would then be received by the international community.

**Example of Two Completed Body Paragraphs**

The bravery of Canadians was demonstrated in the hellish conditions that comprised the Second Battle of Ypres. After the use of poisonous chlorine gas on French colonial troops a wide gap in the allied lines was opened. Canadians were ordered to move in and block German advancement. During the night Canadians valiantly defended the breach and counter attacked. The following day the Canadians:

……through terrible fighting, withered with shrapnel and machine-gun fire, hampered by their issued Ross rifles which jammed, violently sick and gasping for air through soaked and muddy handkerchiefs, they held on until reinforcements arrived.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This eloquently expresses the difficult conditions in which Canadians suffered and demonstrates the bravery with which they fought. To maintain positions during an attack of poisonous gas without a gas mask risks a terrible death. Chlorine Gas causes burning of the throat and eyes, painfully eating at soft tissue. Soldiers not affected would have witnessed those who were. Confronted with this terrifying new weapon and despite casualties of 6 035 with over 2000 dead, the lines were held.[[2]](#footnote-2) Considering this was the first taste of battle and an early use of chemical weapons Canadian soldiers were more than exceptionally brave. The sacrifice did not go unrecognized.

The bravery shown by Canadians resulted in respect for Canada as a nation. Immediately following the battle congratulatory messages from established powers were cabled to the Prime Minister.[[3]](#footnote-3) Canada had proven itself in battle and garnered respect. Of further importance Canadians were beginning to develop a reputation as “tough and dependable troops”.[[4]](#footnote-4) This reputation was further enhanced through the Somme, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele, leading to Canadian prestige and more independence from the United Kingdom.[[5]](#footnote-5) Ypres was the first of the great Canadian battles and showed the bravery with which Canadian soldiers would fight, and, how this bravery would then be received by the international community.

**Conclusion**

A conclusion should summarize the main argument and can reverse the introduction by going from the specific to general. It may contextualize the essay and state the overall significance. It should leave the reader intrigued and contemplative, maybe even convinced.

**Bibliography**

Any resources used toward the completion of the essay must appear in the bibliography. This is especially true of resources that appear in footnotes. The bibliography should be in alphabetic order. Again, refer to the Owl at Purdue for specific information regarding how to properly reference each type of resource.

**Example Bibliography**

Bibliography

Cruxton, J. Bradley and Wilson, W. Douglas. Spotlight Canada. 4th ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press,

2000.

“Second Ypres”. The War Museum. Accessed September 22, 2015.

<http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/second->ypres/

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http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/canada/canada4

1. “Ypres 1915”, Veterans Affairs Canada, Last Modified October 23, 2014, http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/canada/canada4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Second Ypres”, The War Museum, Accessed September 22, 2015, http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/second-ypres/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Ypres” 1915, Veterans Affairs Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Second Ypres”, The War Museum. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. J. Bradley Cruxton and W. Douglas Wilson, Spotlight Canada, 4th ed, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)