

Essay #1: What is History?

Due: 8/26 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy through Blackboard before class begins
Length: 600 word (c. 2 pages) minimum, 750 word (c. 2.5 pages) maximum

What am I supposed to Do?

The assignment for this essay is fairly straightforward: I want you to tell me what history is. Your essay should offer a definition, and defend your claim. Convince me why I should accept your definition.

Why? What's the point?

Over the course of the semester we will spend a fair amount of time thinking about the way that medieval people thought about history, and about how they crafted and used history for their own purposes. Before we get there, though, we need to spend a little time thinking about what we might actually mean when we talk about “history.” This essay should also serve as an introduction one of the primary purposes of essay writing: making an argument for your point of view, and winning your readers to your position.

How do I do this again?

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, size 12 pt., and in Time New Roman, Garamond or some other readable font
- You will need to cite any sources you use, and include them in a bibliography or Work Cited page
- Your paper must be at least 600 words long, not including a Works Cited page. Your essay should not exceed 750 words.
- You are encouraged to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your paper prior to the deadline if you have concerns about your progress, or you would like a second opinion about your work before you turn it in for a grade.

How am I getting graded?

This paper will be ungraded. You get full marks for turning it in (on time).

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- A clear definition for “history”
- A convincing argument in support of your definition
- Thoughtful consideration of the connections and intersections between the elements that you have chosen
- Appropriate use of textual evidence in support of your argument
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation

Essay #2: Bede's Imagined Community

Meeting with instructor: prior to 9/30

Draft due in class: 9/30 (Friday)

Final due: 10/7/2015 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy via Blackboard before class begins
Length: 1200 word (c. 4 pages) minimum

What am I supposed to do?

We began this semester by reading Benedict Anderson's introduction to *Imagined Communities*, which provides some useful terminology and ideas – most notably about communities of imagination – that can be useful to think with. More recently, we have moved on to look at Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. For this essay I would like you to put these two pieces together: I want you to use one of the two texts to explore the other.

There are two basic approaches that you can take here. You can take some of the ideas that Anderson is employing and use them to think about what Bede might be doing in his text. In this approach you might chose to write about the kinds of communities that Bede is working with, and use Anderson's terms as your guidepost. The other avenue that you might consider is to use Bede's text to make an assessment of Anderson's claims. This is a somewhat more complicated approach, and will require you to read further into *Imagined Communities*. In either event, your goal here is to use one of the books to make an argument about the other.

Why? What's the point?

There are several main goals for this essay. Firstly, this assignment is designed to help you gain proficiency in writing a compelling and persuasive piece of argumentative writing, supported by textual evidence. This is an important skill for people in all fields to master (not only history!). Secondly, this essay asks you to do the hard work of using one text to analyze another – to use one account of the past to ask critical questions of another, and to synthesize a reasonable hypothesis from the exercise. This skill, as much as any other, is key to both academic work and to living a considered life – with sovereignty of thought – in the modern world.

How do I do this again?

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian or Chicago citation style
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman, Garamond, or a similarly readable font, size 12 pt.
- Your paper must be at least 1200 words long, not including your Works Cited page. You may exceed this limit if you wish, but you do not need to do so
- The final essay should be submitted in hard copy in class, and electronically, in a MS Word file format, via Blackboard

How am I getting graded?

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- Participation in a pre-draft conference with the instructor
- Participation in peer evaluation

- A clear and convincing argument
- Thoughtful consideration of the connections and intersections between the two texts
- Appropriate use of textual evidence in support of your argument
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation

Essay #3: Identity and England

Draft due in class: 11/4 (Friday)

Final due: 11/11 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy via Blackboard before class begins
Length: 1500-1800 word (c. 5-6 pages)

What am I supposed to do?

While the story that Geoffrey of Monmouth told in his *History of the Kings of Britain* (*HRB*) raised questions in his own time, within one hundred years his book had secured a position alongside Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (*EH*) as one of the most important works of English history. Writers and chroniclers in the thirteenth century had to reconcile the very different histories told by Geoffrey and Bede...to use the two texts together to make sense of English history and identity. This, also, is your task.

For this essay you should argue for a unified idea of English identity based primarily on Bede's *EH* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB*. When you combine these two texts, what does kind of imagined community emerges? You can pick any area of focus you prefer; ethnicity, faith, or geography, for example, all present viable avenues to explore. I am *not* asking you to tell me what kinds of identity actually did spring from the running together of these two books. Rather, I am asking you to argue for an identity that potentially might have emerged.

Why? What's the point?

This essay owns a two-fold rationale. Firstly, it offers you an opportunity to hone an important writing skill. Where our previous essay asked you to use one text to assess another, in this essay you will need to use two books together in order to make a synthetic argument. Building a persuasive argument from multiple sources is an important part of college and post-college writing. You will need to be able to make these kind of arguments in later classes, and also in our final essay for this class. This paper offers a chance to practice the skill of weaving your own argument out of multiple textual threads in a controlled space with limited sources.

The second rationale ties closely with the broad themes of the course. Over the semester we have, and will continue to, think about the ways that writers assessed and constructed the ideas of England and Briton, Englishness and Britishness. They did not make these considerations in a vacuum, however. Rather, ideas of community accreted in sediments over time. This essay asks you to think closely about the ways that identity and history relies on interpreting past authors and events.

How do I do this again?

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian or Chicago citation style, with all materials properly cited
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman, Garamond, or a similarly readable font, size 12 pt.
- Your paper must be at least 1500 words long, and no longer than 1800 words. Please note that this does not include your Works Cited page.
- The final essay should be submitted in hard copy in class, and electronically, in a MS Word file format, via Blackboard

How am I getting graded?

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- Participation in peer evaluation
- A clear and convincing argument drawn from the *EH* and the *HRB*
- Thoughtful consideration of the connections and intersections between the two texts
- Proper citation
- Appropriate use of textual evidence in support of your argument
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation

Essay #4: A Blog Post Response

Final Paper Due: 11/23 (Wed.)

Post an electronic copy to BB Course Blog before you leave for Thanksgiving break
Length: 1500-1800 words (c. 5-6 pages)

What am I supposed to Do?

You have recently been thinking about the ways that the histories of Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth interact with each other, and about what kinds of ideas might spring from that intersection. In this essay, written as a blog post, you will continue to consider these questions. You will receive one of your classmate's recent essays, and your job is to write a response to it. Your essay should have 2 main components:

1. Summary of the essay to which you are responding. This summary should take up no more than 2 pages of your essay, and should serve to situate your audience within the original argument.
2. Suggest improvements to the original argument. This can take a variety of forms: if you agree with the original essay then your response may build on its argument. If you disagree with your peer's work, then your essay might make a different reading of the author's evidence.

Things to keep in mind:

- **DO NOT** simply rewrite your own original essay. Work with the argument that you have in front of you, and address it on its own terms.
- You must provide an argument of your own. It is not enough to simply agree or disagree with the original piece and then add evidence. Your argument, even if it complements the original, must provide a different way of thinking about or approaching the topic.

Why? What's the point?

There are three main reasons for this assignment. Firstly, this is the way that academic (and often professional) discourse works: ideas and projects move forward when different people come to tough questions with different approaches. Secondly, this assignment provides you with a space in which to work the process of assessing and critiquing developed arguments. Skill in this area will be useful to you both for peer editing, and for learning how to edit your own, more advanced, work. Thirdly, it allows you to experiment with a different style of writing – one which has been undervalued in academic discourse in the past, but which is of growing importance.

How do I do this again?

- Unlike in academic writing, in a blog post personal experience may count as evidence
 - it may **not**, however, account for all of your evidence
- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian citation style.
- Your hard copy should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman 12 pt. font
- Your paper must be at least 1500 words long, not including your Works Cited page. You may exceed this limit if you wish, but you do not need to do so.
- You are encouraged to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your paper prior to the deadline if you have concerns about your progress, or you would like a second opinion about your work before you turn it in for a grade.

How am I getting graded?

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- A clear, convincing, and original argument
- Appropriate use of evidence
- Conformity to basic standards of written English, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation
- NB: While the style of writing for blog posts is, generally speaking, much more relaxed than that for academic prose, you still need to write in lucid prose that are legible by, and accessible to, a wide audience.

Essay #5: Argumentative Research Essay

Meeting with instructor: prior to 11/11

Draft due in class: 11/30 (Friday)

Final due: 12/16 (Friday)

Electron copy only, via Blackboard before class begins

Length: 3000-3600 word (c. 10-12 pages)

What am I supposed to do?

Our essays to this point have asked you to address specific issues in the texts that we have looked at. For this essay, you get to choose the topic. I want you to pick an issue that we have covered in the class – either in the reading or in our class discussions – that you find interesting and worthy of further investigation. You will need to research the topic and to develop a clear, distinct and original argument with your materials. Your essay will rely on sources beyond what we have read for class, and will move beyond summary into actual analysis.

You must schedule a meeting with me prior to November 11 in order to discuss the directions that you wish to take your essay. You will need to do some legwork ahead of this meeting: you should come armed with a basic idea of your argument and a couple of external sources in hand.

Why? What's the point?

The ability to write an independent research paper is a necessary, but hard to master, skill. Regardless of your discipline, you will have to write well researched papers in college and in your post-collegiate careers. Sometimes you will have a topic handed to you, but often you will need to generate your own. The point of this essay, then is to provide practice in learning how to identify worthwhile questions and how to pursue them in a thoughtful, productive way.

This essay also acts as a culmination of many of the themes of the course. Because the essay asks you to tackle, in depth, an issue or topic raised over the course of the semester, you will need to demonstrate a degree of command over the materials at hand. Moreover, in writing an essay of this length you will need to employ many of the approaches to writing and the tactics that we have discussed over the semester. A long research paper allows you to demonstrate progress in your writing in a way that a shorter essay does not.

How do I do this again?

- You must include (and properly use) 7 sources beyond the materials we have looked at in class
- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian or Chicago citation style, and properly cite your sources
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Times New Roman, Garamond, or a similarly readable font, size 12 pt.
- Your paper must be at least 3000 and 3600 words long, not including your Works Cited page.
- The final essay should be submitted electronically, in MS Word file format, via Blackboard

How am I getting graded?

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- Participation in a pre-draft conference with the instructor
- Participation in peer evaluation
- A clear and convincing argument
- Thoughtful consideration of the connections and intersections between the two texts
- Appropriate use of textual evidence in support of your argument
- Appropriate length
- At least seven (7) sources external to those used in class
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation

Informal Paper #1: Histories of Home

Due: 9/2/2016 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class

Length: Roughly 300 word (c. 1 page)

What am I supposed to Do?

Over the course of the semester we will be spending time thinking about the ways that people understand and present their histories and their geographies. For this short (roughly one page) informal writing assignment, you should write your own such history. Instead of writing a national or ethnic story, however, I want you to focus on your hometown. Write a brief history for the place where you live. You have the freedom to write this paper as you see fit, and to pay attention to whichever parts of your hometown's past that you find important. This paper may require some light research on your part, so be sure to cite your sources. Beyond those guidelines, you may write this assignment in any style or level of formality you chose.

Except...

The whole paper should be written solely using "to be" in your sentences.

Why? What is the point?

The verb "to be", while wholly appropriate and useful in places, tends to be many writer's verb of choice in their work. Over-use of "to be" becomes tedious and uninformative; your writing will benefit greatly if you can employ a wide range of strong, interesting verbs. Having to write exclusively using "to be" should help to draw your attention to its regular use in your other writings, and help you to work towards greater verbal diversity.

How am I being graded?

As with our other informal writing assignments, your work here is graded on participation...do the work and get full credit.

We will take class time on Friday, 9/2 to work in groups to find better, more interesting verbs. We will also take time for you to tell the class about your experiences, and what you learned while you completed the assignment

Be sure to bring a hard copy of your paper to class, and be prepared to share your work with us.

Informal Paper #2: Elements of a Cornell Community

Due: 9/16 (Friday): Hard copy, in class

Length: 300 word minimum (roughly 1 page)

What am I supposed to do?

You have been given (by Fate) a location on campus to visit. Go to your assigned spot and experience it in whatever manner you deem appropriate. Write a brief (1 page or so) account of your trip. You may write in whatever style you deem appropriate, and focus on whichever aspects of the location or the trip that you wish. Pay attention to anything in the environment of your location that speaks to its history or its role in the Cornell community. Beyond that, there are no real boundaries on this assignment...write about the things that struck you as interesting.

Except...

The whole paper should be written solely using the passive voice.

Why? What is the point?

Cornell, like so many perceived communities, binds itself together through a range of means. Some elements tend towards the more imaginary, but some are distinctly physical. Cornell encompasses an accumulation of built spaces that both carry, and help create, institutional history and culture. We will be spending time this semester thinking about the ways that people use history, culture and space to think about and construct group identity, and we can start by paying attention to such elements close to home. One of the ways that people understand their perceived communities is to walk through them and experience them, and for this assignment you will do just that.

Regarding the passive voice component of the paper: the passive voice stands as one of the accursed enemies of historical writers. As practicing historians, we generally want to eliminate the passive voice from our writing; as much as possible it is to be avoided. To do so, you need to be aware of what the passive voice actually is, become adept at recognizing it in writing, and establish strategies for working around it.

How am I being graded?

As with our other informal writing assignments, your work here is graded on participation...do the work and get full credit.

We will take class time on Friday, 9/16 to work in groups to find better, more interesting verbs. We will also take time for you to tell the class about your experiences, and what you learned while you completed the assignment.