



A History essay is a piece of written work in response to a particular question or issue. It requires students to demonstrate a number of skills in combination, including knowledge and understanding of a specific topic; the ability to gather and deploy evidence and data; the ability to understand arguments advanced by other academics including methodological issues; the ability to produce reasoned and sustained historical arguments and to demonstrate coherently and imaginatively individual thought and judgement.

Essays may be long, reflecting depth of scholarship, or short, requiring precision of focus. They may be written to a target length, or under time. Essays written under exam conditions also afford safeguards against plagiarism and give students the opportunity to develop relevant life-skills, such as the ability to produce coherent, reasoned and supported arguments under pressure.

Because of the integrative high-order skills which they develop, essays are therefore an essential element of all History assessment at undergraduate and postgraduate

Reading and note taking

Get hold of the relevant texts and sources, and

The introduction can take various forms and depends on individual style. Some students, while carefully planning their essay, still find it useful to draft or edit their introduction at the end of the writing process.

The main body of the essay consists of the argument, which is developed and extended sequentially throughout.

- o Before writing, consider the order of your argument and the weight which different points require in the overall structure.
- o Make sure you have sufficient evidence and examples to demonstrate your point. You might also need to consider alternative points of view, or think how to counter them.
- o When processing your work electronically, you can of course alter the structure. As you write, remember always to ask yourself whether your writing proceeds in a logical order, and whether what you are writing helps to answer the question.

The final part of the essay (that is, the conclusion), should weigh up the key points of your argument and offer a judgement in relation to the set question and the work you have done in the essay itself. Do not introduce new material, arguments or ideas at this stage.

Sources

The essay is yours and should be written by you in your own words

Style

In order for your argument to be convincing, it needs to be well-researched, reasoned, and sustained with evidence and examples. In order to communicate your ideas, you must also strive to convey them with a fluent and coherent style.

This means that you need to pay attention to grammatical conventions. Make sure your sentences are complete, avoid cumbersome and lengthy sentences, and check your punctuation and spelling. Consolidate paragraphs, and learn to employ 'topic sentences' as signposts. It is normally best to write in the third person and to aim for conciseness and clarity. The first person can be used when setting out a distinctive position or argument in relation to existing work or historiography, especially at the outset of the essay. However, when asserting your own position in this way, make sure you are clear about the methods and evidence you are using.

Strive to be elegant without being pompous, and lively without being flippant. Clarity is more important than complexity. Avoid jargon, slang, bland generalisations, unsubstantiated arguments, and hackneyed phrases.

Make sure not to lose track of the argument and never turn your essay into a lengthy narrative of events. All History essays aim to be analytical and offer evidenced and reasoned critical discussions and conclusions, based on learning and research, rather than mere narratives or statements of personal opinion not backed by evidence.

Before submitting your essay, try to leave a day or two to re-read it and enter corrections. Many students benefit from asking a friend to go over their essay, spot weaknesses, and make sure their essay makes sense.

Presentation

All essays should be presented using a 12pt font, ~~and~~ double line spaced. Submit

You should start by contacting your seminar or module tutor.

Make use of the MAH School Academic Skills Advisors and their weekly drop-in advice sessions (see the [MAH School](#) internal website for details).

The University also offers a range of support services for students with specific needs. For more information, please contact the Student Support team on 01223 337777 or visit the Student Support website at [www.mah.ac.uk/student-support](#).