



ARGUMENTATION AND APEC PARAGRAPH CONSTRUCTION

Good writing is an indispensable skill in the discipline of history. There is no substitute for the clear and lucid expression of ideas in a lively and engaging manner. At the heart of such effective prose is *argumentation*--persuasive analysis supported by appropriate evidence. History is never an objective view of reality; it always reflects the historian's background, biases, and perspective. In a world of competing versions of history, therefore, one must be particularly attentive to the importance of "explaining" one's own historical vision. Such view cannot be sensationalistic if it is to be good scholarship, however; rather, research and logical analysis presented in an accessible manner is the foundation of good history.

Your prose style can be developed only through experience; there is no substitute. The more you read and write, the better your own written expression will become. The following **APEC** pattern is useful for paragraph construction in most forms of academic writing:

Assertion-**P**roof-**E**xplanation-**C**onnection

"A" - a statement of what you intend to prove

"P" - some evidence or examples that illustrate the assertion

"E" - an explanation of how the evidence proves the assertion

"C" - a statement connecting the assertion to the thesis of your paper

This formula provides you with the basic building blocks for sound paragraph construction. You are then left to refine your prose, using language thoughtfully to enhance the persuasiveness of your points. Be sure to develop the effectiveness of your argument through *editing* and *revising* your work, the chief tasks of any good writer.



Writing an History Essay

A history essay is not simply a list of facts. You must organize the facts into themes which support a central argument or thesis. This thesis should be introduced in the beginning of the paper and developed throughout the paper one step at a time. The stronger your thesis, the easier it will be for you to develop a strong argument. Use an outline to organize your thoughts in a clear, coherent and logical manner and to guide you in writing the essay. **Organizationally, the essay has three main parts:**

1. Introduction. Use the introduction to state your thesis. A **thesis** is an assertive, declarative, and direct sentence. It should be the very first thing your reader sees, so that he or she is guided from the very beginning of the essay to see things the way you want them seen. **If there are any terms in your opening statement that need to be defined, define them in this opening paragraph or paragraphs.**

2. Body. The body is the bulk of your paper, the place where you present your facts and develop your thoughts and arguments. The body can be developed chronologically, thematically, geographically, or in any number of ways, but you must make it clear how you are approaching and organizing the material. While you write the essay, keep in mind the following points:

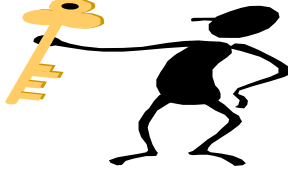
- Write in paragraphs, each organized in "**APEC**" form. A good essay will posit several important points in support of the thesis. There should be a new paragraph for each new "**APEC**" argument, and there should be a new "**APEC**" argument for each new idea. Each paragraph is a unit of thought limited to one major idea. Each paragraph should relate to and support your thesis or central argument. Use specific and concrete examples to support your general statements. Be sure your facts are correct and that they support your argument.
- Use good grammar. This includes writing in complete sentences, using past tense instead of present tense when appropriate, using active verbs instead of passive ones, varying your vocabulary, and avoiding sexist language (i.e.-- don't use the generic "he" or talk about the history of *man* when you mean the history of humans or people).
- Write analytically, not descriptively. Do not just explain *what* happened, but also try to explain *why* it happened and why it is significant. Facts are important, but without interpretation they become meaningless.

- Independent and original thought are excellent. Don't be afraid to give your opinions and interpretations of the material (this is your thesis!). Be critical of your readings and the lectures. Look for new ways of approaching the material.

3. Conclusion. The conclusion can be as simple as a restatement of your introduction. It should emphasize your thesis, and briefly summarize how you have proven it in the body of the paper. In this way, your paper is cyclical--you end up where you started. You can also use the conclusion to state your own interpretations, to assess and argue with the material you have read, and to point to gaps in our historical knowledge.

4. Some fundamentals of writing good history essays. All history essays should contain certain information: **who, what, when, where, why, and how** about whatever topic you are discussing:

- **Who** in question? means to identify key people; you must name names and not be vague by saying "they" or "we"
- **What** happened and **how**? **Action**. Means don't leave out important facts; memorize them all, know them all, and write them all into your essay
- **When** did it happen? **Time**. Means supply dates in your essay
- **Where** did it happen? **Location**. means you identify the geographic location of the events you are describing.
- **Why** did it happen? **Motivation**: You always must have a reason or list of reasons why something in history happened. For every action, there is a reaction; for every cause there is an effect. You must state causes and effects or otherwise state why or how an event occurred or you have missed the whole point of the exercise.



WRITING ESSAYS ON HISTORY TESTS

Consideration of the following reminders **should keep you from panicking** and enable you to produce your best work.

- **Think about the question.** Don't just dive in. The minute or two you spend considering the topic and planning your approach will result in a much better finished product.
 - **The Question**
 - Essential steps: select a question; identify the subject of the question; what are you being asked to do - that is, what kind of information wills you need to answer the question, and how will you have to treat it? Circling the key words in the question is sometimes a helpful first step in working out exactly what you need to do. It is useful to note that there is usually a natural way of structuring your answer: that is, a way of organizing an answer which follows naturally from the format of the question and which will put the fewest obstacles in the way of the reader
 - **'Explain' and 'why' questions** demand a list of reasons or one big reason; each reason will have to be explained - that is, clarified, expounded, and illustrated.
 - **'Assess', 'evaluate' and 'define-the-significance-of' questions** require judgments supported by reasons, explanation and evidence. You must show why your assessment is the best by considering its merits vis-à-vis alternative evaluations. It might be useful to define and defend the criteria on which your judgment depends. That is, to explain why they are the best criteria for judging the historical phenomenon at issue.
 - **'What-role-did-X-play-in-Y' questions** imply a functionalist approach - that is, they require that you identify the function of some phenomenon, group or institution within some specific system. Thus, the subject of the question is the 'Y' rather than the 'X' element. That is, the question requires a discussion of the system as a whole and the consideration of alternative explanations of how 'X' worked within it.
 - **'To-what-extent' questions** involve a judgment of measure. One way of answering the question would be set up a series of 'tests', as it were, that can be investigated in turn.
 - **'Quote-and-discuss' questions** require you to identify the issue at stake and to produce a reasoned response. You may respond, for example, by agreeing with the quotation in which case you will need to explain why agreement is the best response, why it would be wrong to disagree. You should consider the merits of a variety of responses. If possible you should always examine the book or article from which the quotation has been taken in order to discover what its author meant by it, to discover how the author has understood the issues.
 - **'Compare-and-contrast' questions** demand the identification of similarities and differences. One method of tackling such an essay would be to distinguish five or six areas of similarity and contrast, and to devote a section of the essay to each area - a section in which you

would assess the degree of similarity and reach a sub-conclusion. The conclusion would then require a summation of the various 'sub-conclusions'.

- It needs to be stressed that **none of these types of question calls for a narrative approach**. You will never be asked to produce a narrative of what happened. In rare circumstances, a few sentences of narrative may form part of the evidence cited in support of a point, but the essay as a whole should be organized according to a logical structure in which each paragraph functions as a premise in the argument. The analytical and expository voice will always prove more effective than the narrative mode of writing.

- **Write an outline**. Sacrifice a few minutes of actual writing. No matter how pressed for time you are, you should map out what you want to say in an orderly fashion on scrap paper. The outlining process will help you forge a more coherent and effective essay

- **Get right to the heart of the matter**. Make sure you answer the question directly. Avoid long-winded introductions, tangential issues, and irrelevant nonsense. Reliance on charming anecdotes and glittering generalities will make your ignorance of the topic at hand painfully obvious. Make sure that you are answering the question which is on the paper and not the question which you hoped would be on the paper! This is the commonest mistake made in examinations. It counts for half the marks lost by candidates in examinations.

- **Begin with a clear introductory paragraph**. Share with the reader at the outset the direction you intend to follow in your essay, highlighting your thesis and how you intend to defend it.

- **Use separate paragraphs for major points**. Remember to begin each one with a clear topic sentence.

- **Support your assertions with detail**. Data is always important to the historian. The "APEC" paragraph model is a structure that requires evidence to support your points. Because your time is limited, assume the reader's knowledge of your subject, but be sure to explain the connections between the evidence and your assertion and emphasize clearly the significance of your point. Use correct terminology and vocabulary

- **Do not preach**, moralize or be insensitive in your essay. This is an essay not an editorial. Remember that this is an international exam.

- **Using authors names** is not an advantage unless you can adequately state the gist of the author's stance

- **Don't forget a brief concluding** paragraph. One or two sentences will do.

- **Neatness counts**. If it can't be read, it won't help you. Double spacing always makes messy handwriting more legible.