

# A Guide to the Tutoring History Papers

To write in the field of History, students face the difficult task of synthesizing evidence in order to generate an original argument. Students writing in this discipline may respond to prompts requiring them justify how or why certain factors influenced historical events (i.e. Vietnam War, the Renaissance, or the spread of Islam). Students must write clearly, precisely, and with strong support. Tutors may facilitate improving these general writing conventions, but can also strengthen components of the essay specific to the field of history, such as posing an **original argument**, and utilizing important **historical context**. With that, this guide provides useful terminology unique to the history genre and provides tutors with 3 fundamental principles specific to the college-level History discipline.

<p><u>Essential terms:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Original argument:</b> a historical and contestable claim bringing together strands of evidence that exhibit a new perspective.</li> <li>❖ <b>Historical context:</b> highly relevant circumstance or factors surrounding historical movements, events, or eras (often political, cultural, or economic in nature).</li> <li>❖ <b>Primary</b> (original documents) vs. <b>Secondary</b> (scholarly responses) <b>Research.</b></li> </ul>	<p><u>Writers should:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Avoid the first-person unless granted consent from professor.</li> <li>❖ Introduce evidence with historical context and interpret such evidence in relation to one's argument.</li> <li>❖ Avoid making grandiose, unsupported claims</li> <li>❖ Do not write in the passive voice (unless done so intentionally).</li> <li>❖ Default to Chicago style citations; footnote citations.</li> </ul>
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**History papers require:** an original, historical argument.

**Writers need to:** create a nuanced argument by complicating or questioning presumptions behind established historical interpretations.

**Tutors can:** employ brainstorm exercises to generate counterarguments, ask writer to list connections within the paper, and discuss the implications behind the paper's claims.

**History papers require:** clear, structured organization that promotes the author's argument throughout the paper.

**Writers need to:** provide a roadmap in the introduction, strong topic sentences, and occasional reminders about how individual points relate to their argument

**Tutors can:** employ the "reverse outline" method to ensure that the writer has clearly mapped out their argument.

"Push your questions farther...[ask yourself] is this as far as I can go?"

—Lynn L. Sharp  
Associate Professor of History

"History is the discipline of context"

—Jack Percival  
Student, Class of '16

**History papers require:** a developed and insightful interpretation of the given texts.

**Writers need to:** interpret texts in a logical, supported, and well-articulated manner *while* grounding such analysis in a strong understanding of the given context.

**Tutors can:** ask students to distinguish between evidence and interpretation and challenge them to explicitly indicate why the context matters.

Works Cited:

"Teaching History.org, home of the National History Education Clearinghouse." *Glossary of Commonly Used Terms*. Natural History Education Clearinghouse, n.d. Web. 1 May 2014.  
<<http://teachinghistory.org/outreach/glossary>>.

In-person interviews with Jack Percival and Zack Wurtz (Whitman students) and Lynn L. Sharp (Associate Professor of History at Whitman College)