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CHAPTER

2

How to Read a History Assignment, Take Notes in Class, and Prepare for and Take Exams

HOW TO READ A HISTORY ASSIGNMENT

Reading history can be a satisfying experience, but to enjoy the landscape you must first know where you are: you must have a general sense of the subject and of the manner in which it is being presented. If you begin reading before you get your bearings, you may become lost in a forest of unfamiliar facts and interpretations. Before beginning any reading assignment, look it over carefully. If you are reading a book, read the preface or introduction. This should tell you something about the author and his or her purpose in writing the work. Then read the table of contents to get a sense of the way in which the author organized the subject. Next, skim the chapters themselves, reading subheadings and glancing at illustrations and graphed material. If you have the time, preread sections of the book (especially the introductory and concluding chapters) rapidly before reading the full work.

After scouting the ground, you will be ready to read. By this time, you should be familiar with the **topic** of the book (what aspects of history it covers), the background of the author (politician, journalist, historian, eyewitness, novelist, etc.), when the book was written (a hundred-year-old classic, the most recent book on the subject, etc.), how it is organized (chronologically, topically, etc.), and, most important of all, its **thesis** and conclusions. The thesis is the principal point that an author wishes to make on a subject: that the geography of Spain was a significant factor in that nation's failure to industrialize in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; that disagreement on moral issues between J. Robert Oppenheimer and Edward Teller delayed development of the hydrogen bomb. Most authors set out

their thesis in a preface or introduction. If you understand the principal point the author is trying to make, then the organization and conclusions of the work will become clear to you. The author will be organizing **evidence** and drawing conclusions to support the thesis. The ability to recognize and describe a weak thesis or unresponsive evidence is part of learning history too. (For a discussion of the difference between a **theme** and a thesis, see Chapter 4, pp. 78–83.)

Reading a Textbook

The most common history assignment is the reading of a textbook. Many students hope to get by with their lecture notes, and they put off reading the textbook until right before an exam. Reading the textbook week by week will give you the background knowledge necessary to understand the lectures and supplementary readings. In most courses the lectures embellish portions of the textbook, and lecturers assume that students are familiar with the textbook coverage. Sitting through a lecture on the economic aspects of the American Revolution may be confusing if you have not read the textbook discussion of the mercantilist theories behind many of the colonists' grievances.

Read textbook chapters in close conjunction with the lectures to which they are related. If particular passages are unclear, you might benefit from rereading the material. Underline or highlight the most prominent factual information. Also underline important generalizations, interpretations, and conclusions. In addition to underlining, look for passages emphasized by the author or passages that you feel reflect the author's viewpoint or with which you disagree, and write your reaction or a summary of these passages in the margin. All of this will come in handy when you prepare to take a test: you will be able to reread the underlined material and your comments and obtain a quick review of the chapter's contents. Before the exam, however, you may want to reread the textbook itself. Figure 2.1 (p. 21) shows an example of a textbook page with underlining and marginal annotations by a student.

Reading a Monograph

Another typical reading assignment is a **monograph**—a specialized history work on a particular subject. In addition to the procedures used in reading a textbook, you will want to pay special attention to the theme and point of view of monographs because your instructor may expect you to learn not only about the subject they deal with but also about the emphasis and methods of the work. Therefore, you will need to determine the author's assumptions and values, and to understand the book's theme and conclusions. Read this kind of work not only to absorb the facts but also to analyze, question, and criticize. If you own the book, you can again do your questioning and criticizing in the margins. If the book is not yours, or if

Civilizations in Sub-Saharan Africa

Under, Mansa Musa (1312–1337) Mali's authority reached into the middle Niger city-states of Timbuktu, Djenné, and Gao. He put Mali on the European world maps by performing a stunning gold-laden pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam's spiritual capital in the Middle East. Upon returning, Mansa Musa fostered the growth of Islam by constructing magnificent mosques in the major urban centers. With his seemingly inexhaustible supply of gold he commissioned Spanish and Middle Eastern scholars and architects to transform Malian cities into great seats of Islamic learning. Leading intellectuals were sent to Morocco and Egypt for higher studies, and at Timbuktu foundations were laid for a university at the famous Sankoré mosque. For decades after Musa, Mali enjoyed a reputation in the Muslim world for high standards of public morality and scholarship as well as for law, order, and security. People and goods flowed freely, enabling the cosmopolitan cities of Timbuktu, Djenné, and Gao to flower into major market centers. Through the leadership of Sungata and Mansa Musa Islam became more deeply implanted among the elite and spread widely in the important towns.

While Mansa Musa made great advances in establishing an efficient administrative bureaucracy, he neglected to develop a formula for succession. Court intrigue and factional disputes followed the death of each Mansa. Inevitably, central authority weakened. Gao seceded in 1375 and under Sunni Ali (1464–1492) it blossomed into an expansive territorial empire called Songhay.

As in Muslim India, it was not uncommon for slaves in Africa to assume considerable administrative and military responsibilities and on occasion usurp authority. This happened in Songhay in 1493 when a high-ranking Muslim slave, named Muhammad Touré, staged a brilliant palace coup. Lacking traditional legitimacy rooted in a pagan past, he promoted Islamic practices and found Islam an invaluable instrument for political and cultural control. Using the praise title of "Askia," Muhammad Touré (1493–1528) extended Songhay's frontiers deep into the strategic Saharan oases, across the Middle Niger to include Mali, and eastward to the emporiums of Hausaland. He then created a labyrinthine bureaucracy of ministries for the army, navy, fisheries, forests, and taxation. Songhay itself was decentralized into provinces, each ruled by a governor chosen from among the Askia's family or royal followers.

Leader of empire
of Mali—Mansa
Musa (1312–1337)

Growing influence of
Islam

Leader of empire
of Songhay—Sunni
Ali (1464–1492)

Important point

Expansion of
Songhay under
"Askia" Muhammad
Touré (1493–1528)

FIGURE 2.1 Example of an Underlined and Annotated Textbook Page.

SOURCE: Philip Ralph, Robert E. Lerner, et al., *World Civilizations*, 9th ed. Volume 1. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 605–06.

you wish to have an organized set of notes about it, summarize the contents and the author's theme on index cards or on a computer file. You can then review your underlinings or index cards before the exam. (For more on taking notes, see pp. 37–43.)

Reading an Anthology

Some courses also include an anthology—a book of readings, usually short excerpts from larger works or from **primary documents** that deal with a single subject. All of the suggestions concerning the reading of textbooks and monographs apply here as well, but this type of assignment often calls for a particular kind of reading. Each selection usually discusses a different aspect or interpretation of the subject, and some pieces are likely to be in serious disagreement. Instructors expect students to be able to assess the arguments of the various authors and on occasion to take a position in the debate. Therefore, you should read this particular kind of book with an eye to analyzing the arguments of the different authors or to comparing their different approaches to the subject. A good way to do this is to summarize briefly the argument or approach of each selection.

Reading a Historical Novel

A **historical novel** is a work of fiction based on actual occurrences and people. It is often more dramatic and more personal than a textbook or monograph and describes the feelings of those caught up in important historical events. Reading a historical novel gives you a feel for the times in which it is set and for the historical material it contains, but be cautious not to treat the text as historical truth. Nevertheless, a novelist who knows a historical period or event well can bring it to life in ways that scholarly works cannot.

Examples of Reading Assignments

To help you appreciate the differences among the four types of reading assignments, here are passages from each type. The subject is the policy of the United States toward the Greek civil war of the late 1940s. As you read these passages, note the different manner in which each deals with this subject.

TEXTBOOK The day before, 6 March, Truman had begun to prepare the ground. In a speech at Baylor University in Texas he explained that freedom was more important than peace and that freedom of worship and speech were dependent on freedom of enterprise. . . .

The State Department, meanwhile, was preparing a message for Truman to deliver to the full Congress. He was unhappy with the early drafts, for “I wanted no hedging in this speech. This was America’s answer to the surge of expansion of Communist tyranny. It had to be clear and free of hesitation or double talk.”

Truman told Acheson to have the speech toughened, simplified, and expanded to cover more than just Greece and Turkey. He then made further revisions in the draft. . . .

At 1 P.M. on 12 March 1947, Truman stepped to the rostrum in the hall of the House of Representatives to address the joint session of the Congress. The speech was also carried on nationwide radio. He asked for immediate aid for Greece and Turkey, then explained the reasoning. “I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”

The statement was all-encompassing. In a single sentence, Truman had defined American policy for the next twenty years. Whenever and wherever an anti-Communist government was threatened, by indigenous insurgents, foreign invasion, or even diplomatic pressure (as with Turkey), the United States would supply political, economic, and most of all, military aid. The Truman Doctrine came close to shutting the door against any revolution, since the terms “free peoples” and “anti-Communist” were assumed to be synonymous. All the Greek government, or any dictatorship, had to do to get American aid was to claim that its opponents were Communists. And the aid would be unilateral, as Truman never mentioned the United Nations, whose commission to investigate what was actually happening in Greece had not completed its study or made a report.

—From Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy, 1938–1976*, (New York, Penguin, 1976), 148, 150.

MONOGRAPH What was really on the mind of the president and his advisers was stated less in the Truman Doctrine speech than in private memos and in Truman’s March 6 address at Baylor University. Dealing with the world economic structure, the president attacked state-regulated trade, tariffs, and exchange controls—. . . the direction in which much of the world is headed at the present time.” “If this trend is not reversed,” he warned, “. . . the United States will be under pressure, sooner or later, to use these same devices in the fight for markets and for raw materials. . . . It is not the American way. It is not the way to peace.”¹⁶ . . .

The question of how best to sell the new crusade perplexed the administration, not the least because Greece was a paltry excuse for a vast undertaking of which it “was only a beginning,” and in the end it formulated diverse reasons as the need required.¹⁸ The many drafts that were drawn up before the final Truman Doctrine speech was delivered to Congress on March 12 are interesting in that they reveal more accurately than the speech itself the true concerns of Washington. Members of the cabinet and other top officials who considered the matter before the twelfth understood very clearly that the United States was now defining a strategy and budget appropriate to its new global commitments — interests that the collapse of British power had made even more exclusively American — and that far greater involvement in other countries was now pending, at least on the economic level.

Quite apart from the belligerent tone of the drafts were the references to “. . . a world-wide trend away from the system of free enterprise toward state-controlled

¹⁶ DSB, March 16, 1947, 484. See also Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 219; Jones, *Fifteen Weeks*, 139–42. . . .

¹⁸ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 221.

economies," which the State Department's speech writers thought "gravely threatened" American interests. No less significant was the mention of the "great natural resources" of the Middle East at stake.

—From Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 341.

ANTHOLOGY (EXCERPT FROM A SPEECH) The United States has received from the Greek government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance. Preliminary reports from the American Economic Mission now in Greece and reports from the American Ambassador in Greece corroborate the statement of the Greek Government that assistance is imperative if Greece is to survive as a free nation. . . .

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. . . .

It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the survival and integrity of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East.

Moreover, the disappearance of Greece as an independent state would have a profound effect upon those countries in Europe whose peoples are struggling against great difficulties to maintain their freedoms and their independence while they repair the damages of war. . . .

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms.

If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world — and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this Nation.

Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.

I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely.

—From an address delivered by President Harry Truman before a joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947.

HISTORICAL NOVEL Tzelekis was right: now it was 1949, and war was beautifully organized — things were done in an orderly fashion. Various specialists had come in, trained in "wars of movement": The British, the Americans, with a good deal of experience in such matters. They put things in their places, taught enemies and friends to recognize each other — you over here, them over there. Work with a system, no fooling around! Back in '46, you see, everything was topsy-turvy. The army was an indiscriminate herd, no organization whatever; everyone did as he

pleased, everything pell-mell, all mixed up together slaughtering: EAM-ites, EDES-ites, X-ites — you didn't know who was your enemy and who your friend. At night they sent out patrols — in the morning they came back in company with the others and cut up their captains. Other times when they fought at night with knives and bayonets it was like mother losing child and child losing mother: same clothes (all the rags of the world resemble each other), same appearance — you came face to face with the enemy, you went at him with a dagger to rip out his guts, and you saw — if you had time — that he was one of your own men, so you let him go and went for the one beside him. And don't forget, what mixed things up even worse was the language; since they were all spouting Greek, who could tell them apart? . . .

Later when foreign aid began to arrive, the army got new uniforms, munitions, wireless transmitters, codes of recognition. Things were put in order, names were given to the enemy, and the radio blared them out every day, they were written on the walls and in the newspapers; and finally, for the first time in their history, the Greeks began to kill each other systematically. The solution was a very simple one; and a considerable number of people couldn't understand why they had not thought of it before.

—From Aris Fakinos, *The Marked Men* (New York: Liveright, 1971), 92–93.

Note that the textbook is general in its coverage. It does not use **footnotes**. It tries to summarize the content and meaning of the event without too much detail and without extensive proof for its conclusions. The monograph, in contrast, covers a small portion of the topic, gives more detail, quotes from primary materials, and uses footnotes to record its sources of information. The selection from the anthology is a **primary source** — the Truman speech itself. The section from the historical novel is very different from the first three passages. The author gives us the imaginary thoughts of some of the soldiers who fought in the Greek civil war, far away from the formulation of foreign policy in Washington.

No matter what kind of reading assignment you may be given, the goal is to understand the author's meaning and to relate that understanding to the content of the course.

HOW TO "READ" NONWRITTEN MATERIALS

Many textbooks now come with CD-ROMs or with special-access Web sites. These discs and sites usually emphasize nonwritten sources. Depending on an assignment, you may need to interpret maps, videos, sound recordings, artwork, photographs, statistical data, and so forth. Some of these resources will be interactive so that you can pose or answer questions, organize evidence, and interpret sources, among other tasks. To use these kinds of resources effectively, you will need to learn how to understand the historical significance of a wide variety of nonwritten materials.

Interpreting Maps

Important aspects of the historical record can be displayed in maps. The landscape is one of history's fundamental settings. The rise and fall of empires, the course of wars, the growth of cities, the development of trade routes, and much more can be traced on maps of large areas. Figure 2.2 indicates the years in which parts of Africa came under European colonial rule. This map tells you which European countries controlled which parts

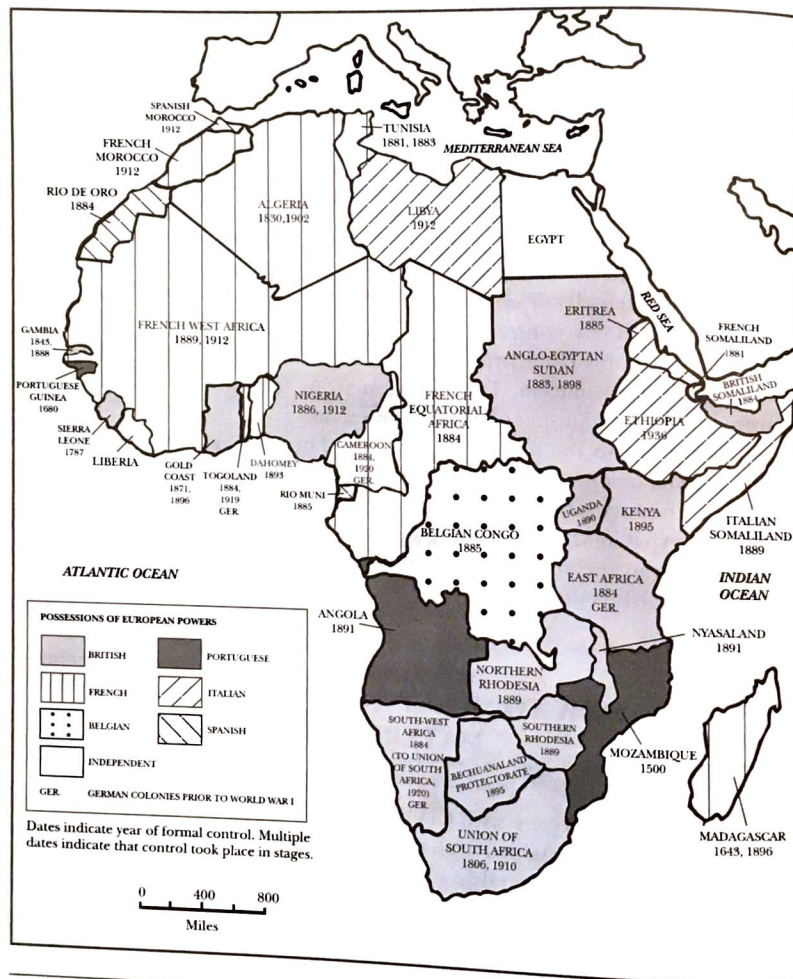


FIGURE 2.2 The March of Colonialism in Africa

of Africa and when this control was established. Analyzing the map, you can see that Britain and France had the largest colonial empires in Africa and that most of Africa was free of colonial rule before the 1880s. Figure 2.3 indicates the dates on which the nations of Africa became independent. By comparing this map with Figure 2.2, you can determine which countries changed their names upon achieving independence. Comparing the dates on the two maps, you can figure out how long colonial rule lasted in different countries. Note also that the first wave of independence

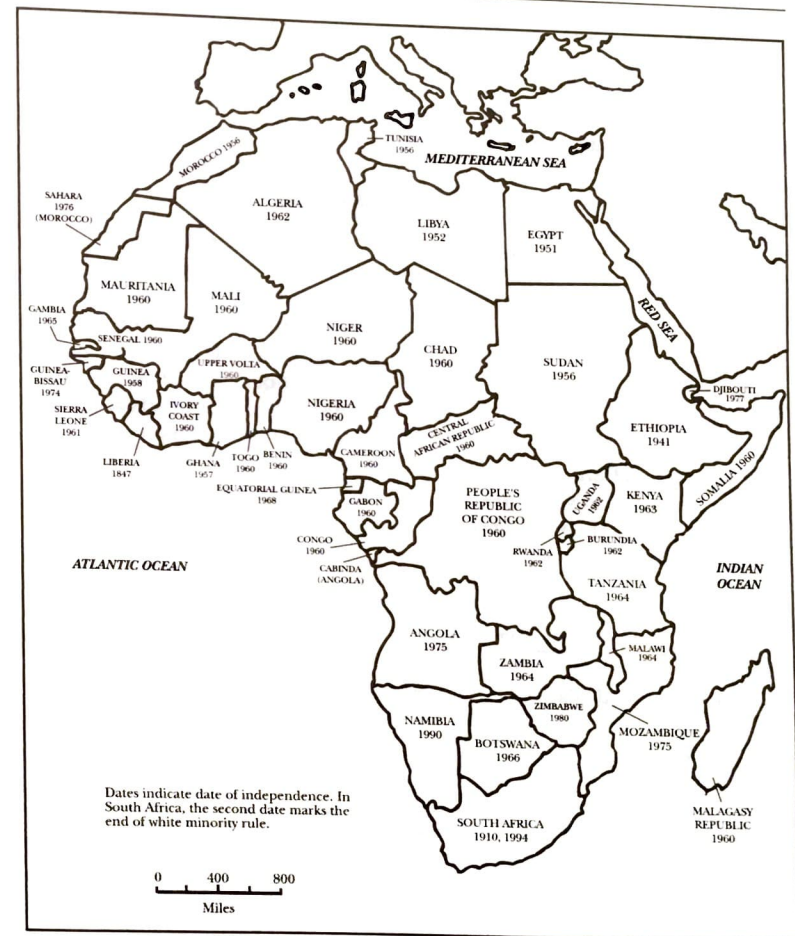


FIGURE 2.3 The March of African Independence

came in the 1960s and that the date for Namibian independence is 1990—less than two decades ago.

Small area maps can show the layout of villages, the outcome of battles, or the location of mines, canals, and railroads. To read a map, you must understand the *key*, which translates the symbols used on the map. A line on a map may be a road, a river, or a gas pipeline. The key tells you which it is. The *scale* of a map tells you the actual size of the area the map represents. Maps are an important aid in understanding history because they display the physical relationship between places. Never ignore maps in a textbook or other reading. It is also wise to put a good map of the area you are studying near your desk so that you can see the location of places mentioned in lectures and readings.

Old maps are primary documents. The way that old maps describe the territories they cover can give you clues as to what was going on in the mind of the mapmaker when the map was created.

Analyzing Statistical Data

In addition to maps, history resources often include statistical data arranged in **charts**, **graphs**, or **tables**. These data describe the amounts of something (such as warships, marriages, schools, bridges, or deaths from smallpox) at a specific time in the past, and usually they compare these amounts (such as the number of marriages in relation to the number of schools) or trace changes in amounts over time (such as the number of warships in 1820, 1830, and 1840). Figure 2.4 shows a tabular arrangement of statistical data with an explanation of how to read them. The table organizes population **statistics** from different regions of the earth and across more than three hundred years. Reading across the rows allows you to trace the changes in population of a particular region (Europe, Africa, Asia) over time. By doing so, you can follow the population of each region at hundred-year intervals

	1650	1750	1850	1900	1950	1980	1996
Europe	100	140	265	400	570	730	800
United States and Canada	2	2	25	80	165	252	295
Latin America	12	10	35	65	165	362	489
Africa	100	95	95	120	220	470	732
Asia	330	480	750	940	1370	2600	3430

FIGURE 2.4 Estimated World Population

Numbers represent millions of persons. These are rough estimates only. The figures for 1650 and 1750 in particular come from a time before it was common to conduct a periodic count (*census*) of populations. There is great debate about the size of the native populations of the Western Hemisphere before 1850.

SOURCE: Adapted from L. S. Stavrianos, *The World since 1500: A Global History*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), 181.

(the population of Latin America in 1650, 1750, 1850, and 1950). You can note the change for each region and the rate of change. For example, the population of the United States and Canada did not increase in the hundred years between 1650 and 1750, but it more than doubled in the fifty years between 1900 and 1950. Reading down the columns, you can examine the population of each region during the same period. This allows you to compare the populations of the different regions. In 1650 the populations of Europe and Africa were the same, but in 1950 the European population was more than two-and-one-half times that of Africa.

More complex comparisons can be made from Figure 2.4 by combining the differences between regions (reading down) and their rates of growth over time (reading across). For example, you can discover that whereas the population of Asia grew more than that of any other region in absolute terms, its *rate* of growth from 1850 to 1980 (750 million to 2600 million, or about 350 percent) was much less than that of Latin America (35 million to 362 million, or around 1,000 percent).

Even the cold statistics of a table can provide images of the great drama of history. The decrease in African population between 1650 and 1850 may tell us something of the impact of the slave trade, and the decrease in population in Latin America between 1650 and 1750 hints at the toll taken among Native Americans by the introduction of European diseases. The large increase in the U.S. population between 1850 and 1900 tells us something about the history of European emigration.

The information in the table can be presented differently in order to highlight different aspects of the data. In Figure 2.5, the numbers for each region are represented as percentages of the total world population. By changing the numbers from absolute amounts to percentages, the new table facilitates the comparing of populations and population growth.

Another way of presenting these population data is in the form of a graph. Note that Figure 2.6 makes more obvious the differences between numbers and thus makes comparisons easier. However, ease of comparison is traded for a loss in precision; the graph gives less specific numbers

	1650	1750	1850	1900	1950	1980	1996
Europe	18.4	19.3	22.8	25.0	23.2	16.5	13.9
United States and Canada	0.2	0.1	2.3	5.1	6.7	5.7	5.1
Latin America	2.2	1.5	2.8	3.9	6.3	8.2	8.5
Africa	18.4	13.2	8.1	7.4	8.8	10.6	12.7
Asia	60.8	65.9	64.0	58.6	55.0	58.9	59.7

FIGURE 2.5 Estimated World Population

Numbers represent percentages of the total world population.

SOURCE: Adapted from L. S. Stavrianos, *The World since 1500: A Global History*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), 181.

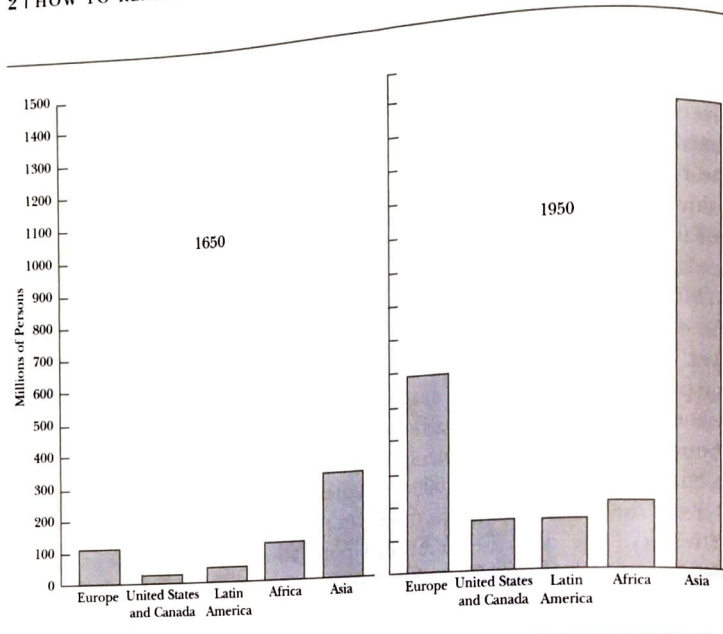


FIGURE 2.6 Estimated World Population

(reading along the vertical axis) than the table. A graph also often requires more space than a table to convey the same information. If Figure 2.6 included all of the time periods of the table, it would be very large.

The more detailed the data and their arrangement are, the more historical information that can be displayed and the more intricate the comparisons that can be made. Figure 2.7 (p. 31) presents a table that lists the percentage of the total vote and the number of deputies elected to the German parliament (the Reichstag) by each of the major political parties in each election from 1919 to 1933. (Note that in a parliamentary system, elections do not come at regular intervals.)

This table allows you to follow the changing fortunes of each political party. A wealth of information on German political history is contained in these figures. Between the lines one can also find pieces of the social and economic history of Germany. For example, the strength of the Communist and Social Democratic (Socialist) parties attests to the deep dissatisfaction of many German workers with the state of the economy during the period known as the Weimar Republic. Even more striking is the tremendous growth of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party after 1930. This development brought Adolf Hitler to power in 1933, and the results of that event would eventually reverberate around the world. As you can see, a table is more than just numbers.

Party	1919	1920	1924	1928	1930	1932	1933
Communist							
# of deputies	0	4	45	54	77	89	81
% of total votes		2.1	9.0	10.6	13.1	14.6	12.3
Social Democratic							
# of deputies	165	102	131	153	143	133	120
% of total votes	37.9	21.6	26.0	29.8	24.5	21.6	18.3
Democratic							
# of deputies	75	39	32	25	20	4	5
% of total votes	18.6	8.3	6.3	4.9	3.8	1.0	.8
Centrum							
# of deputies	91	64	69	62	68	75	74
% of total votes	19.7	13.6	13.6	12.1	11.8	12.5	11.7
Bavarian People's							
# of deputies	0	21	19	16	19	22	18
% of total votes		4.4	3.7	3.0	3.0	3.2	2.7
German People's							
# of deputies	19	65	51	45	30	7	2
% of total votes	4.4	13.9	10.1	8.7	4.5	1.2	1.1
National People's							
# of deputies	44	71	103	73	41	37	52
% of total votes	10.3	14.9	20.5	14.2	7.0	5.9	8.0
National Socialist							
# of deputies	0	0	14	12	107	230	288
% of total votes			3.0	2.6	18.3	37.4	43.9

FIGURE 2.7 Reichstag Elections, 1919–1933

Under the electoral system provided for in the Weimar Constitution, each party received approximately one representative for every sixty thousand popular votes cast for its candidates. Various small parties, not listed here, were underrepresented in the Reichstag.

SOURCE: L. S. Stavrianos, *The World since 1500: A Global History*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), 419.

Interpreting Illustrations, Photographs, and Other Visual Material

Visual material also can present historical information. Gathering information from old paintings, drawings, photographs, and films, however, can be surprisingly difficult. First, you need to recognize the actual information that they present—what Columbus's ships looked like, how Hiroshima appeared after the explosion of the atomic bomb, and so on. Then you need to interpret them. Interpreting requires an effort to understand what the artist or photographer was "saying" in the work. When an artist draws something and when a photographer takes a picture, he or she is not simply recording a visual image but is sending a message to everyone who

looks at the work. In this way, artists and photographers are like writers whose written work needs to be interpreted.

Figures 2.8 and 2.9 present two illustrations of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Look at them and see whether you can detect what they are saying.

Figure 2.8 is by a European artist and shows Hernán Cortés, who conquered Mexico for Spain, being offered young Indian women by a coastal tribe. The Indians seem happy to greet the Spaniards. Figure 2.9 was drawn by an Aztec Indian and shows Cortés's soldiers (having fought their way from the coast to the Aztec capital) massacring Indians in their main temple. Not all drawings have such obvious (and opposite) messages: the Spanish as friends of the Indians and the Spanish as murderers of the Indians. The interpretation of some visual material requires knowledge about the subject matter, the artist, the style, and the context in which the work appeared. Like written descriptions of past events, art does not simply "speak for itself."

Now look at Figure 2.10, a photograph of a clash in 1968 between Chicago police and demonstrators opposing the war in Vietnam. Like the illustrations in Figures 2.8 and 2.9, it too contains information. Even a casual glance shows confusion and violence. Examining it closely, you can see the kinds of weapons used by the police and the facial expressions of some of the demonstrators. The more difficult part, again, is interpreting



FIGURE 2.8 Indian Offerings to Cortés

SOURCE: Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



FIGURE 2.9 Massacre of the Aztec Indians

SOURCE: *The Broken Spears* by Miguel Leon-Portilla. Copyright © 1962, 1990 by Miguel Leon-Portilla. Expanded and Updated Edition © 1992 by Miguel Leon-Portilla. Reprinted by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.



FIGURE 2.10 Antiwar Demonstration at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago

SOURCE: Copyright © Bettmann/Corbis.

the photograph. Is this a scene of provocation by lawless demonstrators or an attack by the police? A careful look at the picture may help you answer this question. In any case, you need more evidence. While an unaltered photograph does show something that actually happened, another photograph — even one of the same event — might show something very different. In most cases, the person taking the photograph has made an effort to say something, and you need to take this motive into account, as well.

Not all pictures have controversial interpretations. Figure 2.11 (p. 35) is a photograph of a city street in Ithaca, New York, in the 1890s. There is a wealth of information here about nineteenth-century town life. Note that at this early date the town already had electric trolleys. Note also that the horses are pulling not wagons or carriages (“buggies,” as they were called) but sleighs (“cutters”). This simple fact opens up a window to farm life in winter. When roads were covered with snow and ice, the flat, smooth wheels of wagons could not navigate, but the sharp runners of the cutter dug into the ice and gave it stability.

Interpreting Artifacts

An **artifact** is a physical object from the past: a radio from the 1920s; a rifle from the U.S. Civil War; the ruins of a fourteenth-century church in Paris; a



FIGURE 2.11 Town Life in Ithaca, New York, during the 1890s

SOURCE: Courtesy of the History Center of Tompkins County, Ithaca, New York, General Photo Collection.

10,000-year-old arrowhead. If you have the opportunity to examine an artifact in a museum or in an attic or under the foundations of an old building, do so carefully. Try to figure out how old it is and how it might have been used. (In a museum this is done for you.) Suppose you find a heavy metal object half buried in the floor of an old wooden building. First, look around the building for clues to the age and purpose of the object. If you are lucky, you may find broken bricks on the floor. If you dig down, you may find a layer of ash. Where the old wooden walls are still intact, you may find bent or broken horseshoes nailed into the beams. A few more clues, such as hammers and other tools and a stone hitching post outside the door (for tying up horses securely), may lead you to guess that you are in the ruins of a blacksmith's shop. The heavy metal object you found is an anvil.

A blacksmith was someone who heated bars of iron and hammered them into horseshoes and other useful objects. A blacksmith used many tools to flatten, round off, bend, or work the hot metal, but his principal tool was the anvil—a block of iron or steel on which he shaped the metal. Figure 2.12 shows a nineteenth-century anvil. On the flat surface the blacksmith thinned out the heated bar of metal by pounding it with special hammers. The tapered, rounded end on the right was used to bend the thinned metal to the desired shape.

After you identify the object you found, the next step is to place it in its proper historical context—in this case, a nineteenth-century blacksmith's shop. If you wish to delve deeper, you can read about the work of blacksmiths, the many kinds of objects they made, and how their work with metal contributed to the village economy.

Visual materials are as vital to historians and history students as are written records. As our methods of creating and preserving visual images increase, more and more of our historical records take the form of pictures. Students need to learn to interpret these new kinds of evidence. (See also "Locating Primary Sources," pp. 92–95, and "Evaluating Primary Sources," pp. 102–05, in Chapter 4.)

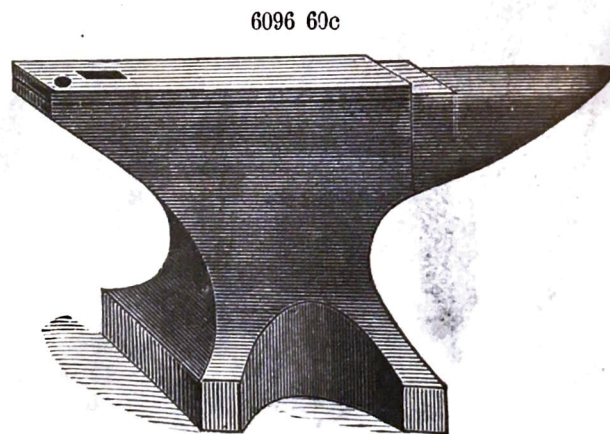


FIGURE 2.12 A Blacksmith's Anvil

SOURCE: Copyright © Bettmann/Corbis.

HOW TO TAKE NOTES IN CLASS

Your time in class is vital to your learning. True, you can learn on your own outside of class, but the interaction with your instructor and other students is most intense during class time. Learning to record that interaction in your notes is an important skill.

From Class Lectures

The first rule of note taking is simple: pay attention. Learn to concentrate on what is being said. Read assigned texts before going to class so you won't end up taking notes on the material in the book. If everything the instructor says is new to you, you will spend so much time writing that you may not be able to grasp the theme of the lecture. If you have obtained some basic information from outside readings, however, you will be able to concentrate on noting points in the lecture that are new or different.

An instructor is most likely to prepare exam questions from the material that he or she considers most important. It is therefore essential in preparing notes to determine which points in the lecture are given most prominent attention. Some instructors are very open about their preferences and clearly emphasize certain points, often writing them on the blackboard. Never fail to note something that the instructor indicates is important. Other instructors are less explicit about their biases and values, and you will have to try to figure them out. Listen closely, and make note of interpretations and generalizations that seem to be stressed, especially when they differ from the approach in the textbook. You should not feel obliged to parrot your instructor's interpretations in an exam, but ignorance of them could work against you.

Your notes should be written legibly and begin with the date and subject of the lecture. They should reflect a general outline of the material covered, with emphasis on major interpretations and important facts not covered in the textbook. It is often best to write on every other line or to leave a large margin on at least one side of the page. This will allow you to add material later and to underline your notes and write additional comments without cluttering the page.

If possible, reread your notes later in the day on which they were written. If your handwriting is poor or your notes are disorganized, it is best to rewrite them. Check the spelling and definitions of any unfamiliar words, and be sure that your notes are coherent. Remember, your notes are an important source of information in your studies.

Guidelines for Taking Lecture Notes

- Prepare for a lecture by reading all related course materials ahead of time.
- Write the course information, lecture subject, and date at the top of each page of notes.
- Be selective — don't try to write everything a lecturer says.
- Be sure to write anything that the instructor (a) puts on the board; (b) says is important; (c) emphasizes as he or she speaks.
- Leave room in your notes to add material later if necessary.
- Reread your notes later in the day on which they were written.
- Underline especially important points.
- Look up the meaning of any unfamiliar words.
- Rewrite any parts of your notes that are poorly organized.
- If something important in your notes is unclear to you, ask your instructor about it.

Examples of Note Taking

To illustrate some of the essentials of good note taking, here are portions of two sets of class notes taken from the same lecture. The first example illustrates many of the common errors of note takers; the second example is a well-written set of notes. The subject of the lecture was early European contact with Africa.

POOR NOTE TAKING Colonization of Africa — People were afraid to sail out. Afraid of sea monsters. But they liked the stories about gold in Africa. The Portuguese King Henry sailed south to find the gold mines and built a fort at Elmina.

England and France want to trade with Africa. They begin trading. Competing with Portugal. These countries got into wars. They wanted to control Africa.

China had spices. They traded with Cairo and Venice. The Asians wanted gold, but the Muslims stopped all trade. They fought wars about religion for hundreds of years. Fought over Jerusalem. The Pope called for a crusade. This was in the Middle Ages.

Spices came from Asia. In Europe they were valuable because the kings used them to become rich. They also ate them.

The Portuguese wanted to explore Africa and make a way to India. Their boats couldn't get around until Bartholomew Diaz discovered the Cape of Good Hope in 1487.

Most of all, the Portuguese wanted slaves. They shipped them back from Africa. Columbus took them after he discovered America (1492). The Pope made a line in the Atlantic Ocean so the Catholics wouldn't fight. The colonies needed slaves. They sent 15 million from 1502 to the 19th century. Slaves did the hard work. They got free later after the Civil War.

Immigrants go to Africa from Europe but they don't like the hot weather and they catch diseases. The Dutch set up their own country at the Cape. Then the English conquer them.

GOOD NOTE TAKING

Early European Contact with Africa
Why Did Europeans Come to Africa?

History 200
10/23/06

1. Desire for gold
 - Medieval legends about gold in Africa.
 - Prince Henry (Portuguese navigator) sent men down coast of Africa to find source of gold. (Also to gain direct access to gold trade controlled by Muslims.)
 - Portuguese built forts along the coast. Their ships carried gold and ivory back to Portugal (16th century).
 - Then the other European states came (England, Holland, France, Spain) to set up their own trading posts.
 - Competed with each other for African trade. (Will talk about rivalry next week.)
 2. Wanted to trade with Asia and weaken the Muslims
(The Muslims had created a large empire based on the religion of Islam.)
 - Religious conflict between Christianity and Islam. Fought a religious war in the 11th–12th centuries — the Crusades.
 - The Muslims had expanded their empire when Europe was weak. In 15th century they controlled North Africa and they dominated trade in the Mediterranean. They controlled the spices coming from Asia, which were in great demand in Europe. In Europe they were used to preserve meat. So valuable, sometimes used as money.
 - Portugal and Spain were ruled by Catholic monarchs. Very religious. The Catholic monarchs wanted to force the Muslims out of Europe. (They still held part of Spain.) Wanted to convert them to Christianity.
- [IMPORTANT] —The Muslims controlled North Africa and Mediterranean trade. If the Portuguese and Spanish could sail to the Indian Ocean directly, they could get goods from China and the Muslims couldn't stop them. The way to Asia was the sea route around Africa.
3. The Europeans wanted slaves
 - When the Portuguese explored West Africa (15th century), they sent back the first slaves (around 1440).
 - The Spanish conquered the New World (Mexico, Peru, etc.). (Columbus had made several trips for Queen Isabella I of Spain.)
 - In America (the name for the New World), they needed slaves. Most slaves were sent to America.
 - Native Americans died from diseases of white men. They were also killed in the wars. There was nobody to work the mines (gold and silver).
- [IMPORTANT] —Sugar plantations of the Caribbean (and Brazil) needed labor. Cotton and rice plantations in the south of U.S. also. It was hard work and nobody wanted to do it.
- 15 million slaves were brought to work the plantations starting in 1502 until mid-19th century.

Colonization of Africa

1. Immigration (why white people didn't come)
 - They couldn't take the climate.
 - There were a lot of tropical diseases.
 - The Europeans didn't want to live in Africa, only run it.
 - Only the Dutch settlers came. They set up the Boer states in South Africa. After them came British settlers.
 - Some French settled in Algeria.
 - Some English also moved to Rhodesia.
2. Dividing Africa
 - Whites began exploring the interior. (Will discuss exploration next week.)

Taking notes during a lecture is difficult, and even a good set of notes can be greatly improved by being rewritten. Here is a rewriting of these notes. Note how much clearer everything becomes.

REWRITTEN GOOD NOTES

Early European Contact with Africa

History 200

What Drew Europeans to Africa?

10/23/06

Gold

There were medieval legends that there was a lot of gold in West Africa. Access to the gold was controlled by non-Christian powers (Muslims—believers in Islamic religion). Tales of gold lured the Portuguese (led by Prince Henry) to explore the coast of West Africa in the late 15th century. By the 16th century, the Portuguese had built several trading posts and forts along the West African coast and were bringing back gold, ivory, and pepper.

By the 17th century, English, Dutch, French, and Spanish ships challenged the Portuguese trading monopoly and set up their own trading posts. This was the beginning of rivalry between European countries over the wealth of Africa.

Desire to weaken the power of the Islamic Empire (Muslims) and expand trade with Asia

Conflict between Christianity and Islam was an old religious conflict (the Crusades as an example in 11th and 12th centuries). The Muslims controlled North Africa and the Mediterranean. They also controlled the spice trade from Asia. Spices were important in Europe because they were the only known way to preserve meat.

The Catholic states of Portugal and Spain wanted to fight with the Muslims. They wanted to drive them out of Spain and challenge the large Muslim empire in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. They hoped to convert them to Christianity. *The Muslims were strong in North Africa, but if European powers could discover a way around Africa into the Indian Ocean, they could outflank the Muslims and obtain direct access to the trade with India and Asia.*

Slaves

Portuguese trading posts in Africa had sent a small number of slaves to Europe starting in the late 15th century. With the discovery and conquest of America at the turn of the 16th century, a new and larger slave trade began to European colonies in the New World (America).

The Native Americans died (they were killed in war and by European diseases in great numbers). There was a shortage of labor. In the 17th and 18th centuries, large sugar plantations were set up in the Caribbean and Brazil and rice and cotton plantations in the southern United States. *The need for laborers to do the hard agricultural work led to the importing of millions of slaves from Africa.* Approximately 15 million Africans were sent to America as slaves between 1502 and the mid-19th century. This slave trade made Africa valuable to the European powers.

The Colonization of Africa

Immigration

Because of the unsatisfactory climate and tropical diseases, there was no major European immigration to Africa. The only significant white colony was set up in South Africa by the Boers (Dutch) and later the English. There were smaller European settlements in Rhodesia (English) and Algeria (French).

Dividing up the continent

Exploration

If you reread the poor notes now, you can easily see how little of the lecture material is recorded in them and how confusing and even erroneous a picture you get from them. What is there about the poor notes that makes them inferior? First, they are not well organized. They do not even record the title of the lecture, the course number, or the date—omissions that could be problematic if the notes get out of order. They are little more than a series of sentences about gold, trade, spices, Portugal, and slaves. The sentences are not in any particular order and do not say much of anything important. Even the factual information does not cover the major points of the lecture. By paying too much attention to trivial points about sea monsters, China, Jerusalem, Bartholomew Diaz, and Columbus, the note taker missed or did not have time to record the principal theme of the lecture—the relationship between European-Asian trade and the religious struggle between Islam and Christianity. The note taker also missed another major point—the connection between the enslavement of Africans and the need for plantation labor in the New World. Without these two points, this student cannot write a good exam essay on this subject.

The good notes, in contrast, follow the organization of the lecture and touch on the major points made in class. The notes make sense and can serve as the basis for reviewing the content of the lecture when the note taker studies for exams. These notes have a wide margin for extra comments and the marking of important passages. Notice the sections marked "important." The instructor had emphasized these points in class, and by specifically identifying them, the student will be sure to master them.

The rewritten version, which eliminates unimportant or repetitious phrases and smoothes the language into connected sentences, is even better as a study guide. The greatest value of rewriting, however, is that re-creating the lecture material in essay form helps it to become part of the note taker's own thinking. The mental effort that goes into revising lecture notes serves

to impress the material and its meaning upon the mind. This makes it much easier to review the material at exam time.

From Slides and Films

Some instructors present slide lectures or show videotapes. Note taking in these instances presents special problems. If a lecture is accompanied by slides, you will need to include in your notes information about what the slides illustrated (for example, the Pyramid of Cheops, the novels of Willa Cather, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the dances of Martha Graham) and anything of importance your instructor said about the slides.

Taking notes on films or videotapes also presents the unusual problem of dim lighting. The greatest problem, however, may be the film itself. In our culture, films are a medium of entertainment rather than education. Your natural response may be to sit back and relax your mind, but you will need to fight this response and learn to probe a film as you would a lecture. If a film is essentially factual (*Walled Cities of the Middle Ages*), note the major facts and interpretations as you would in a lecture. If a film is dramatic rather than documentary (*Hotel Rwanda*, *Citizen Kane*, or *Schindler's List*), examine the emotional message and artistic content as well as any historical facts it describes (or claims to describe). Ask yourself, What is the movie director trying to say, and what dramatic and technical devices does he or she use to say it? Your notes should record important narration and dialogue that illustrate the theme of the film. Finally, you will need to take note of cinematic elements (camera angles, sets, lighting, gestures and movements, facial expressions) because the impact of a dramatic film is essentially visual. Taking notes on slides and films takes practice, but the effort is worthwhile because photographs, films, videotapes, and DVDs are used increasingly in history courses.

Taking Notes in a "Wired" Classroom

A newer form of class presentation is the multimedia lecture, which usually combines traditional lecturing and questions with material in video or audio form from CD-ROMs or the **World Wide Web**. The use of nonprint material requires a looser form of note taking, one that will help you to recall a mixed-media presentation.

In this kind of class, your instructor's comments will be complemented by various visual and aural materials, such as outlines, charts, artwork, photographs, video recordings, and audio recordings. The key to note taking here is to follow carefully the ways in which the use of new media complements the instructor's lecture. In general, the purpose of incorporating new media is to present you with a richer and more dramatic exposure to a wide variety of historical sources. This material helps to get across the main points that the instructor is covering. Ask yourself, How do the photographs, or timelines, or audio tapes complement the theme

of the lecture? Be sure to take notes not only on the media themselves but also on their relation to the topic under discussion. Perhaps your instructor will use media to reinforce a fact—how something looked or sounded. Most likely he or she will also explain the "meaning" of an image or recording: the way it represents nineteenth-century European romanticism, or the popular culture of a large city in the twentieth century, or the connection between rice paddies and villages in twelfth-century China. Don't fill your notes with long descriptions of images or sounds. Instead, focus on the aspects of the topic that the new media bring to life. If the media are part of a CD-ROM that comes with the textbook, be sure to understand the organization of the disc so that you can carry out assignments and research effectively.

CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION

The modern classroom is a place where students are expected to actively participate in their own learning. This section discusses some ways of doing so.

Classroom Discussions

Many instructors encourage class participation. Some base a portion of the final grade on it. Come to class prepared to answer (and to ask) questions. Follow the discussion as it develops. If you are called on, contribute what you know. If some part of an instructor's presentation or a classmate's comments is unclear to you, don't hesitate to ask a question. If class ends and something remains unclear, raise your question with your instructor after class or during your instructor's office hours.

Guidelines for Speaking in Class

- Be familiar with the subject under discussion.
- If you are unclear about something the instructor or another student has said, compose and ask your question.
- If you disagree with something said, make your point clearly and constructively.
- If you don't have a chance to raise a question in class, ask your instructor after class.

Giving an Oral Presentation

Some instructors require students to give an oral presentation in class. Eloquence and effectiveness in public speaking cannot be mastered in a

week or two, but you can make a start by taking such an assignment seriously and adequately preparing yourself for it. If you are allowed the option, reading from a prepared text is often the safest procedure. However, this type of delivery can lead to a dull presentation. It is usually better to speak from notes: your presentation will be livelier and more enjoyable for the class. To do a good job, you need to be fully familiar with your subject and pay close attention to getting your points across. Prepare your presentation outline as you would that of a short paper (see "Writing Short Essays" in Chapter 3, pp. 73–74). Be sure to cover all the important points and to present them in a logical manner.

Use short phrases rather than sentences in your presentation notes. Suppose you intend to tell the class the following: "Before 1848, most of the large landowners in California were Mexicans. In the decades after the United States annexed California, these Californios, as they were called, lost most of their lands to migrants from the eastern states." Your notes need only say: "(a) Until 1848 big landowners Californios. (b) Cal. annexed in 1848. (c) Lost land to easterners." Once you are fully prepared, do a dry run of your presentation before a relative, friend, or roommate (or even in front of a mirror). Be sure that you exhibit knowledge of your subject because this is most likely to determine your grade. Effective public speaking is one of the most important tools for success in many fields of work, and giving a talk in class is a good opportunity to develop your skills in this area.

Guidelines for Giving an Oral Presentation

- Use 3-by-5 note cards, each with one or (at most) two major points on it.
- Write neatly and use phrases, not whole sentences.
- Put a number in the corner of each note card so that the cards will not get out of order.
- If you have a time limit, rehearse your talk beforehand so that you won't need to rush. Pare down your notes to fit the time needed to present the material clearly.
- Visual aids (such as overhead projections, slides, or videos) can make your presentation much more interesting. Make sure, however, that you have the resources you need beforehand and that you know how to integrate them easily and smoothly into your verbal remarks.
- Relax! Speak slowly and clearly, and make eye contact with your audience every few sentences.

Giving a PowerPoint Presentation

PowerPoint, as you probably know, is a software program that enables you to make a presentation to the class in the form of a digital "slide show." You

can use several toolbars to create screens that will appear as a series of "slides." These slides allow you to make a series of points about your assigned (or chosen) topic. Screens can contain text in various fonts and colors, data organized into tables and graphs, artwork from a variety of sources, and much more. You also can animate and sequence your screens.

Don't underuse or overuse PowerPoint. If screen after screen is merely a series of bulleted lines, you might as well write them on the blackboard. At the other extreme, don't turn your presentation into a Hollywood-style extravaganza — even if you know the program well enough to do so. Know what points you want to get across; then create just enough screens with just enough visual elements to do so clearly and effectively.

Be sure to **proofread** your screens to keep errors out of your presentation. Preview the screens for both content and sequence. Rehearse the presentation to make sure it fits into the time allotted. Make sure that the classroom has the necessary hardware for you to run your PowerPoint presentation.

Don't expect the screens to do all of the work for you. Assist the class with each screen by explaining how the text, data, and images illustrate and advance your main points.

Group Work

Your instructor may ask you to be part of a small group and carry out an assignment working with members of that group. Instead of an individual oral presentation, your group may be asked to make a presentation to the class. Conducting research and preparing a group presentation can be tricky but also rewarding. The key to success is to clarify who in the group is to do what part of the assignment and to be sure that each member is prepared when the time comes.

Another kind of group work takes place outside the classroom. Known as **peer reviewing** or peer editing, this type of work requires you to evaluate the work of a classmate. For example, you may be asked to read and comment on a student's **rough draft** of an assignment. Your peer review may take the form of an informal one-on-one review in which you go through the paper with the author point by point. Some instructors may ask you to write your evaluation; others may want your review in the form of a class presentation. No matter what the format is, remember to provide *constructive* criticism that will help your classmates develop their papers. Be sure to point out a paper's strengths in addition to any weaknesses.

If you are asked to peer-edit the work of a classmate, remember also to pay particular attention to the theme and thesis of the paper. Ask yourself whether the theme and thesis are stated clearly and whether there is sufficient evidence to support them. Additionally, you should consider whether the information has been presented in an organized manner, such that your classmate's conclusions are justified.

Guidelines for Peer Reviewing

- Don't be overly critical. Your goal is to assist your classmate in seeing the strengths and weaknesses in her or his draft. Your ability to do this comes from your outsider status: you have not been submerged in the research and are able to take a fresh look at the essay.
- Pay special attention to the thesis of the essay. Is it stated in clear terms?
- Does the body of the paper provide important evidence to support the thesis?
- Are the points made in support of the thesis well organized, and are they clear to you as a reader?
- Are the paper's conclusions justified by its arguments and documentation?
- Whether your comments to your classmate are written or oral, be supportive. Give the writer the kind of help you hope to get from your own peer reviewer.

You also can share your comments with classmates either through e-mail or through a course Web page. You can send drafts of your work to other students or exchange peer-review drafts directly online. Computer technology also allows you to extend your learning beyond the classroom. You can talk to students at other schools in chat rooms or e-mail questions to authors of course materials. Learning to work collaboratively will be of use when you leave school and enter a working environment in which these kinds of personal and digital interactions are common.

COMMUNICATING ONLINE

Your professor may post the course syllabus and assignments online. Some professors and students also use the Web as a means of expanding their academic experience. There are several ways of communicating online that you can use as educational tools. Online tools help you to gain control of course material, avoid dangerous pitfalls, make connections to relevant material, and understand the larger framework of your course. They allow you to communicate with scholars, archivists, and Web masters in your field, find important and underexploited resources for your research, and broaden your knowledge of the theories surrounding a particular period or aspect of history. You will likely find e-mail, **listservs**, **chat rooms**, e-conferences, and e-seminars especially useful.

E-mail, Listservs, and Chat Rooms

The speed of e-mail interaction varies according to how quickly the participants initiate and respond to messages. Listservs (list servers) are a way of managing e-mail lists of people interested in a particular topic. Instead of allowing one-to-one or one-to-many communication — as with e-mail — listservs send out everyone's messages to everyone else on the list. Listservs are especially valuable in settings that emphasize group-oriented work. Chat rooms allow users to communicate with others who are in a specific "room." Your Internet service provider (ISP) may give you access to chat rooms. You may also find chat rooms by surfing for them on the Web. Chat-room communication may be either one-to-one or one-to-many; however, unless you are in a "private" chat room—just you and the recipient—your messages can be read by others. Chat rooms provide users with immediate communication, but unlike e-mail or listservs they do not provide users with any tangible record of the dialogue.

For educational purposes, you can use these tools to varying degrees. You may decide to pose a question to a classmate by e-mail or in a chat room: "What was Professor Smith's advice about reading this document?" You can work out difficult concepts in a chat room. Perhaps you are dealing with a complex topic. You know you need to understand the material because it forms the basis for future lessons. By communicating with others, you can work through that material and master it in much the same way as you would in a study group.

If you subscribe to a listserv for your class, you might post the following message:

I understand Prof. Smith's discussion of the factors that led to an anticommunist belief/paranoia in the U.S. during the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, I'm confused about which groups expressed these fears. From the readings it appears that only the Republicans did; however, Prof. Smith's lecture leads me to believe that both Republicans and Democrats did. Can anyone help me with this point?

By posting this message, you are assessing what you know and what you don't know and trying to deepen your understanding. Your message may stimulate another student's thinking. A classmate might offer the following reply:

I think that is exactly Prof. Smith's intention. As I understand it, both Republicans and Democrats expressed these fears; however, they employed different means to achieve the same ends. Because the Democrats' activities were less dramatic, the Republicans charged them with being "soft" on communism.

Responding gives the student an opportunity to think about the material, understand the connections, and see how the material works.

Despite the advantages of e-mail, listservs, and chat rooms, there are dangers as well. Most of this kind of communication is unmediated or

unedited. This means that anyone can say anything at any time. Perhaps someone with whom you are communicating tells you that the Holocaust was a Hollywood creation. Although it is important to give credit to new theories, it is equally important to read electronic communication with a skeptical eye. If someone says something with which you are unfamiliar, it is perfectly acceptable to ask for references where you could find more information on that topic. The best advice is to know the individuals with whom you communicate, read messages critically, and don't be afraid to challenge someone if you have reason to believe that he or she is wrong.

The cooperative learning fostered through communicating over the Web is of great value. Too often at the undergraduate level students look at learning from a competitive rather than a cooperative viewpoint. Some students never study or work with others. They believe that if they do so they will lose their "edge." Historians, however, do not work in a vacuum; historical research relies on access to the discoveries, interpretations, and analyses of others. Seminar-type classes often rely on cooperative learning, but you can have a similar experience in any class by communicating with classmates and others by means of the Web. By sharing information, you are not losing any competitive advantage; you are increasing and solidifying your knowledge, pointing out errors, and sharing important findings.

E-conferences and E-seminars

E-conferences and e-seminars are becoming important interactive means of scholarly discussion. Both make possible the online presentation, discussion, and criticism of scholarly papers; however, e-conferences present several papers and e-seminars deal with only one. You may find it difficult to locate these forums on the Web. Most are either sponsored by or affiliated with universities. If you do find one, check the participation requirements. Some are open only to scholars; others allow both students and scholars to participate.

There are important things to keep in mind when joining and participating in these online scholarly activities. Both assume a high level of knowledge and waste little time with introductions and background material. They assume that participants are thoroughly familiar with the topic of the conference or seminar and are able to read and write on a sophisticated level.

Web Communication and Advanced Research

Web communication can help students doing advanced course work to locate important resources. If you decide to tackle an obscure topic, you can use the Web to contact scholars who have done research in that area. If possible, contact more than one scholar so that you have more than one interpretation of the topic. The scholars, archivists, and Web masters with whom you would communicate are busy individuals. When contacting

them, introduce yourself, describe your research, and outline your reason for contacting them. Be sure that you are knowledgeable about your topic, that your contact can actually help you, and that you ask specific questions.

In communicating online, you are "talking" with others who can increase your understanding and whom you may be able to help as well. You will improve your grasp of the material about which you have questions. You will see the pitfalls to avoid by pointing out errors in other people's interpretations. This experience will give you insight into an important principle of the humanistic disciplines: your best work results from dialogue with other researchers. (For information about conducting research on the Web, see Chapter 4, pp. 95–100.)

HOW TO STUDY FOR AND TAKE EXAMS

When a test is announced, try to find out what kind of exam it will be: essay, short answer, multiple choice, or a combination of those formats. Determine what topics will be covered and what portions of the reading material and lectures deal with those topics. If you have not done all of the necessary reading, do so immediately and record the important facts and interpretations as indicated in the "How to Read a History Assignment" section of this chapter (pp. 19–25). If you missed any lectures, try to obtain lecture notes from someone who knows the rules of good note taking. Then gather together all the materials to be covered in the exam. Reread the parts of the texts that you underlined (or otherwise marked) as being important. Reread all of the relevant lecture notes, paying special attention to any points emphasized by the instructor. Sometimes it helps to do your rereading aloud. If an exam will cover visual materials — slides, films, maps — be sure to go over this information, even if you have to watch a video a second time.

If the test is to be an **essay exam**, compose sample questions based on the important topics and themes in the readings and lectures. Many textbooks contain sample exam questions or topics for discussion at the end of each chapter. If you do not know how to answer any portion of the sample question, go over your study materials again and look for the information needed. If you are preparing for an **objective exam** — that is, one requiring short factual answers — pay special attention to the important facts (persons, places, events, changes) and key terms in your study materials. You must be precise in order to get credit for your answer. Make a list of outstanding people, events, and historical developments, and be sure that you can adequately identify them and explain their importance. Again, your textbook may help you by providing sample short-answer questions.

Take the time you need to prepare adequately. If tests make you nervous, keep on studying until you master your sample questions and until the material to be covered makes sense to you.

Objective and Short-Answer Exams

Objective exams call for short, factual answers. The three most common objective exams are (1) **short answer**, (2) **identification**, and (3) **multiple choice** or true/false. Read each question carefully, and don't jump to conclusions. Answer short-answer and identification questions briefly (there is usually a time and space limit) and directly. Don't put anything in your answer that wastes space or time. If you are asked to identify John F. Kennedy, don't mention how he was killed (unless that is part of the question); instead talk about some aspect of his presidency that was stressed in class or in course readings. When you have so little room to show what you know, answers that stray from the core of the subject are as bad as wrong answers.

Example of a Short-Answer Question

QUESTION Describe one of the motives that caused the European powers to explore Africa beginning in the late fifteenth century.

INCORRECT ANSWER They wanted to dominate Africa and get all the gold for themselves. Columbus wanted to take slaves from Africa, but the Pope said it would start a war. But the war didn't start and the Europeans dominated Africa anyway because they were stronger.

CORRECT ANSWER The wars between Christianity and Islam were an important factor. The Christian states wanted to weaken the hold of the Muslim religion on Africa and to convert the natives. They also hoped to break Muslim control of trade with Asia by finding a sea route around Africa.

(Check these two answers against the example of good note taking on pp. 39–40. The notes presented there make clear why the second answer is satisfactory and the first one is not.)

Example of an Identification Question

QUESTION Identify the “progressive” philosophy of historical interpretation.

INCORRECT ANSWER Historians who believed that our country was always making progress because Americans were very hardworking people.

CORRECT ANSWER The interpretation of history that holds that human beings and their condition are continually improving as each generation builds on the foundation laid by previous ones.

(See the “Philosophies of History” section in Chapter 1 on pp. 5–6 to find the basis for the correct answer.)

Example of a Multiple-Choice Question

The British monarch at the time of the American Revolution was:

- a. George II
- b. Charles I
- c. James II
- d. George III
- e. Henry I

If you look up the reign dates of these monarchs, you will discover that George III (who was king from 1760 to 1820) was the ruler of England at the time of the American Revolution.

Preparing for In-Class Essay Exams — Composing Sample Questions

Of course, the best preparation for an essay exam is to be given the question in advance. Some instructors do this (usually in the form of a **take-home essay exam**), but many give in-class essay exams and hand out in advance a number of possible topics or questions from which they will choose when making up the exam. (For more on take-home exams, see pp. 53–56.) If you face an essay exam without *any* questions presented in advance, the key to successful preparation is to come up with potential questions on your own.

As your instructor probably will tell you, the essay questions will deal with the major topics covered in the course so far. Using your textbooks, lecture notes, and other course materials, determine what these topics are. Then compose your own questions.

For example, if the material to be covered in the exam is reasons for the decline of the Roman Empire, list the major reasons mentioned in the course work. Among them may be civil war, military insubordination, the cost of defending distant frontiers, declining agricultural output, “barbarian” invasion, heavy tax burdens on the peasantry, the growth of central bureaucracy, the decline of the Senate, the cult of the Emperor, the rise of Christianity, and the rise of Islam. The exam question is likely to focus on one or more of these explanations. Be prepared to write about *each* of these factors and how they relate to one another.

If the course has covered the rise of industrialization in New England, study carefully the major social and technological changes and how people responded to them. Think about the aspects of industrialization that you might be asked about. One question might ask you to describe the ways in which factory production was different from the 1workshop production that it displaced. Other questions might be “How did industrialization affect family life?” “What were the major technological innovations behind early industrialization?” “How did the rise of the textile industry affect the lives of young women?”

Don't prepare for an essay exam by composing questions that are too broad. If the class spent six weeks examining the decline of the Roman Empire, don't expect a broad question such as “Discuss the decline of the Roman Empire.” Don't prepare questions that are too narrow either. For example, “Who owned the biggest textile mill in New England in the 1830s?” is a question for a short-answer or an identification exam.

Writing a Good In-Class Essay Exam

Even if you have prepared properly for an essay exam, you must stay calm enough to remember what you studied, you must understand the questions, you must answer them directly and fully, and you must not run out of time. None of this is easy, but here are a few pointers to follow until you gain the experience to overcome these problems.

Read over the exam slowly. Given the length and complexity of the questions asked, allot the proper amount of time to answer each question. Think about the central points you wish to make in your answer, and create a brief outline of these points in the margin of the exam booklet. Directly address the questions asked. If the questions are very specific, for example, respond to them with the amount of detail required. Support the points you make with facts, but avoid composing an answer that is

Guidelines for Writing In-Class Essay Exams

- When you are given the exam, don't panic. Read the entire exam slowly, including all of the instructions. Gauge the amount of time you will need to answer each question. Then choose the question you know most about to answer first.
- Don't write the first thing that comes to mind. Read the question slowly, and be sure you understand it.
- Determine how you will answer the question and the central points you wish to make.
- Write these central points or even a full outline in the margin of the exam booklet. As you compose each sentence of your answer, make sure that it relates to one of these points.
- Model your answer on the question. Be as specific or general, as concrete or reflective, as the question suggests. Never allow your answer to wander away from the focus of the question. If the question asks you to "describe" or "trace" or "compare" or "explain," be sure that that is what you do.
- Don't repeat yourself. Each sentence should add new material or advance a line of argument.
- Where necessary, refer to the facts that support the points you are making. But the mere relation of a series of facts is not enough. You must also give evidence that you have thought about the question in broad terms.
- Toward the end of your answer, you may wish to include your own opinion. This is fine, even desirable, but be sure that your answer as a whole supports this opinion.
- If there is time, reread and correct an answer after it is finished. The pressure of an exam can often cause you to write sentences that are not clear.

merely a series of facts. Think about the questions asked in broad terms, and pursue your central points. As you write, refer back to your outline and be careful not to repeat yourself. Each sentence should add new material to your answer or advance its line of argument. Finally, try to leave a few minutes to proofread your answers.

Writing Take-Home Essay Exams

When you are writing take-home essay exam answers, all of the points made earlier in this chapter about clarity and continuity apply. A take-home essay exam question requires you to write an original essay of usually two to five pages. **Documentation** (footnotes and a **bibliography**) is not usually required. Of course, if your instructor asks for a specific length, topic, approach, or format, you need to follow those requirements even when they differ from the information provided here.

First, note the length requirements of the exam and the due date. Obviously, you will need more time to prepare a six-page essay answer than a three-page one. If your instructor allows you access to sources (which is common), you will need to review all course material that relates to the exam question. If you have not yet outlined or taken notes on this material, do so now. Focusing on the portion of the course material that relates to the question, make a list of the most important points. Try to find from two to six main points for each essay, depending on the length of the essay. Compose your answer by introducing and then supporting these points in logical order. Like all essays, your answer should have a clear, central **theme**. In this case, your theme is determined by the exam question. Be sure that your essay directly addresses the question. (See the section on writing in-class essay exams on pp. 52–53.)

The goal of any essay exam is to demonstrate (1) adequate knowledge of the subject, (2) clear thinking about the points covered, (3) clear and connected writing, and (4) clear understanding of the question. Read the following two answers to an exam question on Chinese history. Do they meet those four requirements?

QUESTION Explain the origins of the Chinese civil war of 1945–1949. How did the differing political programs of the two contenders affect the outcome of that conflict?

POOR ANSWER The Guo Mindang (Kuoimintang) had a stronger army than the Communists, but the Communists won the civil war and took over the country. Their political program, communism, was liked by the peasants because they didn't own any land and paid high taxes.

China was based on the Confucian system, which was very rigid and led to the Manchu dynasty being overthrown. The Chinese didn't like being dominated by foreigners, and Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) founded the Guo Mindang to unite China. He believed in the Three People's Principles. At first he cooperated with the Chinese Communists, but later Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) tried

to destroy communism because he was against it. Communism was not in favor of the wealthy people.

The Communists wanted a revolution of the peasants and gave them land. They also killed the landlords. Jiang Jieshi worried more about the Communists than about the Japanese invasion. The Japanese looked to conquer China and make it a part of their empire. Jiang Jieshi wanted to fight the Communists first.

After World War II the Chinese Communists attacked Manchuria and took over a lot of weapons. They fought the Guo Mindang army. The Guo Mindang army lost the battles, and Jiang Jieshi was chased to Taiwan, where he made a new government. The Communists set up their own country, and their capital was Beijing (Peking). That way the Communists won the Chinese civil war.

GOOD ANSWER The origins of the 1945–1949 civil war can be traced back to the rise of Chinese nationalism in the late nineteenth century. Out of the confusion of the Warlord period that followed the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, two powerful nationalist movements arose — one reformist and the other revolutionary. The reformist movement was the Guo Mindang (Kuomintang), founded by Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen). It was based on a mixture of republican, Christian, and moderate socialist ideals and inspired by opposition to foreign domination. The revolutionary movement was that of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), founded in 1921, whose goal was a communist society but whose immediate program was to organize the working class to protect its interests and to work for the removal of foreign “imperialist” control.

Although these two movements shared certain immediate goals (suppression of the Warlords and resistance to foreign influence), they eventually fell out over such questions as land reform, relations with the Soviet Union, the role of the working class, and the internal structure of the Guo Mindang. (The CCP operated within the framework of the more powerful Guo Mindang during the 1920s.)

By the 1930s, when Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) succeeded Sun, the CCP was forced out of the Guo Mindang. By that time the CCP had turned to a program of peasant revolution inspired by Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung). A four-year military struggle (1930–1934) between the two movements for control of the peasantry of Jiangxi (Kiangsi) Province ended in the defeat but not destruction of the CCP.

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931) and central China (1936–1938) helped salvage the fortunes of the CCP. By carrying out an active guerrilla resistance against the Japanese, in contrast to the more passive role of the Guo Mindang, which was saving its army for a future battle with the Communists, the CCP gained the leading position in the nationalist cause.

In the post-World War II period, the CCP's land reform program won strong peasant support, whereas the landlord-backed Guo Mindang was faced with runaway corruption and inflation, which eroded its middle-class following. The military struggle between 1945 and 1949 led to the defeat of the demoralized Guo Mindang army and the coming to power of the CCP.

Let's compare how well the two essays meet the requirements for a well-written answer.

1. Adequate knowledge of the subject. The writer of the poor answer fails to indicate adequate knowledge in several ways. The answer omits many important facts. It describes the political programs of the two contending

parties in vague terms. It refers to the CCP only as the Chinese Communists, leaving the impression that they were a loose grouping of like-minded individuals rather than a strong, well-disciplined political organization. It does not even mention the name of the most famous leader of the CCP — Mao Zedong. Jiang Jieshi, the leader of the Guo Mindang, is mentioned, but there is no discussion of his political program or beliefs, other than that he was opposed to communism. Another serious defect is chronological confusion. The answer jumps back and forth between earlier and later periods, and no dates are given for major events.

The well-written answer illustrates good knowledge of the subject matter. The origins, philosophies, leaders, and relationship of the two contending parties are clearly described. This answer brings in related issues such as nationalism, Warlords, guerrilla warfare against Japan, corruption, and inflation, thus indicating knowledge of the historical **context** in which the Chinese civil war developed. The chronology is clear: events are mentioned in proper time sequence, and the dates of all major events are given.

2. Clear thinking about the points covered. The poor answer is not well organized. The paragraphs do not make separate points, and each succeeding paragraph does not further develop the theme of the essay. The first paragraph is a conclusion rather than an introduction. The second paragraph goes back to the founding of the Guo Mindang but, instead of discussing the origins of the hostility between it and the CCP, merely states that hostility came into existence. Paragraph three begins by introducing the CCP (though not by name). However, it does not expand on the CCP's programs and points of conflict with the Guo Mindang. Instead, it abruptly changes the focus of events and the time frame by introducing the Japanese invasion of China, which the last sentence of the paragraph only vaguely relates to the question. Instead of drawing conclusions about the causes of the Communist victory in the civil war, the last paragraph merely states that it occurred.

The well-written answer uses each paragraph to make a separate important point, and each succeeding paragraph further develops the theme of the essay. The first paragraph sets out the political programs of the two groups and the historical context in which the movements originated. The second paragraph explains the beginning of the conflict in the 1920s. Paragraph three discusses that conflict in relation to the Chinese peasantry during the early 1930s. The fourth paragraph relates the development of the conflict to the Japanese invasion of the late 1930s. The final paragraph summarizes the effects of the conflicts and of postwar developments on the outcome of the civil war.

3. Clear and connected writing. Many sentences in the poor answer are badly constructed: they are awkward, or what they say adds nothing to the answer. Some of the awkward phrases are “the Communists won the civil war and *took over* the country”; “communism was *liked by* the peasants”; “China was *based on* the Confucian system”; “communism was not *in favor*

of the wealthy people"; "the Japanese *looked* to conquer China"; "the Communists *set up their own country*." These phrases cause the sentences to be unclear, and they keep the student from getting his or her point across. The other major defect in sentence structure is repetitious or irrelevant sentences and phrases. These are "Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) tried to destroy communism *because he was against it*"; "they *fought the Guo Mindang army*"; "that way *the Communists won the Chinese civil war*." The sentences of the well-written answer are clear, and each adds new material to the essay.

4. *Clear understanding of the question.* The poor answer does not deal with the central issue of the question — the political programs of the Guo Mindang and the CCP. It notes that the Guo Mindang was founded on the Three People's Principles, but it does not explain what these were. Of the CCP, it says that there was a belief in communism (which is obvious) and peasant revolution (which is vague). These are the only references to political programs in the entire answer! It is obvious that the writer of this answer failed to understand that the central focus of the question was on political philosophy.

The well-written answer is directed to the central issue of political programs and begins on that very point. The remainder of the answer makes clear the relationship of political programs to the origins and course of the Chinese civil war as called for in the first sentence of the question.

The Dangers of Plagiarism. A problem that sometimes arises with take-home exams is plagiarism. Your instructor may allow you to paraphrase the sources you use in preparing your essay. Be sure, however, that you write these paraphrases totally in your own words. If you use sentences or even phrases from another source, you are plagiarizing whether you realize it or not. Most schools require instructors to penalize students severely for plagiarizing. This is a very serious matter. If you still have questions, turn now to the longer discussion of plagiarism and paraphrasing in Chapter 4 (pp. 115–18).

Studying history provides you with a variety of skills. Reading effectively, taking class notes, and understanding what you need to know for an exam are three primary skills. These prepare the way for more advanced goals: clear writing, adequate research, and the presentation of a well-prepared thesis. The next chapters turn your attention to these additional skills.

CHAPTER

3

How to Write History Assignments: The Importance of Writing Skills

WHY CLEAR WRITING IS IMPORTANT

The most important tasks in a history course often are the written assignments. You may be asked to write a short book review or a lengthy research paper. Whatever the writing assignment, you must take the time and care to make it your best work. Every instructor has had the experience of reading a poorly written paper from a student who did not take the trouble to do his or her best. If you hand in sloppy or thoughtless work, you will earn a poor grade and indicate that you are not aware of the importance of good writing. Writing is a task of great significance. You will be judged not only by your history instructor but also by everyone else who reads your words. Your writing skills tell the reader a lot about your ability to think clearly, whether you are writing a student paper or a proposal to your boss. As this chapter emphasizes, clear thinking is the source of clear writing. Two years after graduating, you may no longer remember the causes of World War I, but if you sharpened your writing skills in history assignments, you will have acquired a skill and an asset that will last a lifetime.

Clear writing accomplishes two important goals. First, it demonstrates that your thinking about a subject is logical. You cannot write clearly about something that you do not understand clearly. Second, it enables you to convey to your readers in a convincing way exactly what you want them to understand. Clear writing is persuasive.