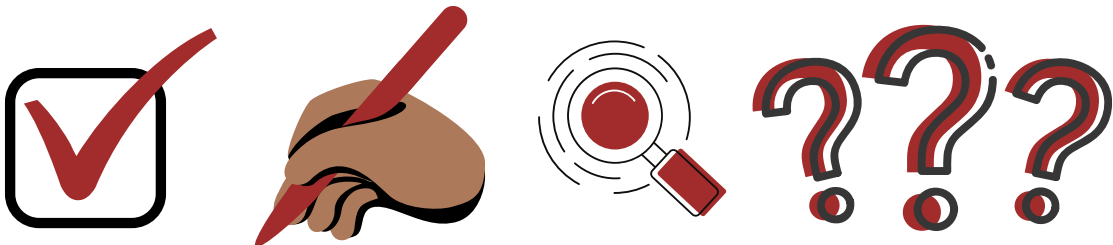




South African History Online
towards a people's history

History Skills Pack

Based on the CAPS curriculum



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Essay Writing



General

When writing history essays, never use the personal pronoun. Historians avoid placing themselves and their personal opinions in a debate. Instead of using 'I' or 'we', rather use 'one'. "One could argue that..."

You can also avoid personal pronouns by making the argument or source the subject of the sentence. Statements like 'Evidence supports the claim' or 'Arguments suggest that' will remove a personal presence from your debate. Make the content the focus, not your opinion.

Where to start

1. Some topics naturally lend themselves to essay questions. Study these topics and learn as many points of information as possible.
2. Students then need to look at the question being asked. There will be a stand that markers want students to take, as well as a counter argument.
3. A rough page can be used to write out all of the studied points. These points need to be placed in an order that best fits the question. In some cases chronology is effective, whereas in other cases it may be best to look at which points are stronger/weaker.



Essay Writing



Structure

Introduction

The introduction should set the scene for the essay debate. The following pieces of information need to be established:

- When
- Where
- Who
- How

This information should take up 2 to 3 sentences in the beginning of the introduction. Once this information has been added, students need to refer to the essay question. The essay question then needs to be paraphrased at the end of the introduction. A clear stand must be indicated. Students can also include a brief mention of a counter argument. Here is an example:

“While some sources claim ... , one could argue that there is a more evidence to support the claim that

Counter-Argument

Depending on the essay, a counter argument may provide balance. If students have points that are not in favour of the stand, they can include them as a counter argument. The counter argument should not be more than one paragraph (point), and should be located near the end of the essay.

Body

Ideally, the stand should be approached from various angles. Each point should tackle a new angle. For example, if an essay asks students to examine the causes of an event, students would then tackle the categories of political, social, economic, etc. A strong essay has at least 5 different points to make on an argument. It is advised that students study at least 10 facts/ points ahead of time. Students can then choose the points that are the most applicable to the question.

Essay Writing



Every paragraph should use the PEAL structure. This structure has 4 sentences that each do the following.

P = Point

E = Evidence/ Explanation

A = Argument

L = Link

Point - The first sentence should introduce the point that the paragraph is trying to make. It should include a certain aspect of the overall argument.

Evidence/ Explain - Your point will need to be contextualized. The following sentence needs to support the point that you have made. It should elaborate on your claim, and provide facts. If you can incorporate some of your own studied knowledge here, you will get more marks.

Argument - This sentence needs to reference your stand. How do the point and evidence link to the greater argument? Is the point in support of the stand or the counter argument? This sentence needs to clearly indicate which aspect of the argument the point tackles. This sentence also needs to show why your stand is supported by this point.

***TIP:** Markers use the 'PERFQ' criteria for essays.*

P = Own knowledge and evidence of studying. How info from class is used.

E = Evidence

R = Relevance and repetition. Students should avoid repetition.

Q = Question is referenced.

Essay Writing



Link

The final sentence in a paragraph should conclude the argument. It can either link the paragraph back to the stand, or it can introduce what the next paragraph is going to argue.

- **Here are some examples:**
- One could argue that ... played a role in ...
- Further sources will elaborate on the debate about ...

Supporting Phrases

Tone plays an important role in strengthening your argument. You can use supporting phrases at the beginning of your paragraph.

Here are some examples:

- "One important reason"
- "Another reason"
- "It could be argued that"
- "Perhaps if"
- "Whilst one shouldn't ignore"
- "An important underlying cause"
- "There is evidence to suggest that"
- "It is doubtful whether"
- "If one considers that"
- "When examining this event, one should bear in mind that"
- "If X and Y hadn't happened, then possibly"
- "Although some evidence suggests that . . . there is enough to counter such an argument because"

When introducing evidence, supporting phrases like 'evidence suggests that' or 'it is evident that' can help soften your sentence. They will help create a smoother flow in your paragraph.

References

1. Fox-Martin, A. "How to Write an Essay", Class Notes from Vanessa Du Toit, 2015.

