

Modern World History (H)

Ms. Bal

Essay Samples, "Theories of History" Assignment

Directions:

Over the course of the year, we'll be examining various models (drawn from past students) to help you strengthen your writing. Some are top-notch "exemplars" to show you what a really good thesis looks like, for example. Other samples I'll give you may be strong in some respects, but could be improved in others. In this writing exercise, you are to examine each of the following essay excerpts with your groups.

In the space below each one, briefly state: A) *its strengths* and B) *anything you'd change and why*.

Introduction:

1) Opening Sentence in an Introduction:

- a. "The lay of the land is what creates and destroys economies, starts wars over territories and makes or breaks an empire."

- b. "Over the course of history the destinies of the many have been guided and shaped by the will and doctrine of a few great men."

2) "Setting the Stage" in an Introduction:

- a. "While historians would like to believe that their study is an objective topic, it is a historian's job to sort through the past, and, in doing so, "create" history. In order to complete this task, a historian must consider patterns that have impacted the course of history, understanding why societies have developed in the way they have. When studying the past, geography typically has a significant impact on the progress and success of a society."

3) Dealing with Counter-Arguments, Considering Alternative Views/Competing Theses:

- a. "While these great men need a following to change the world, large masses of people cannot alone change the world without leaders. Geography, economics, cyclic patterns, and progress can affect the rise and fall of nations and social classes, but it is great men that take advantage of these opportunities, and, thus, create history."

- 4) Briefly discuss the evidence to be used in the essay
- a. "Clearly, Rome's and Ghana's favorable geographic conditions are responsible for their greatness; whereas New Guinea's poor geographic conditions are responsible for its lack of development."
- 5) Thesis Statements:
- a. "This is true because throughout history civilizations have risen and fallen but those that make a lasting imprint on the world, for example the Roman Empire and the Islamic Empire, are the civilizations that emerged in a resource rich location or a naturally well defended location."
 - b. "Thus, the Great Man Theory of history is the most accurate because great men and the absence of them are the driving forces to the creation, flourishing, and failure of civilization."
 - c. "From struggles in the Roman Empire, to the Crusades in the Late Middle Ages, it is shown that every major event that has made its mark on history was caused by the economic self-interests of the people of its time, which is why **I believe** the Marxist Theory of history is the most accurate."
 - d. "[T]he most accurate theory of history is the linear theory, as shown through the Scientific Revolution and Protestant Reformation."

Conclusion:

5) Extending the Argument, Considering the "So What?"

a. "From this evidence, it is clear that geography is a major factor in the rise and fall of empires. It provides civilizations with the money to increase their power, and if they lose whatever geographic advantage they have their power will often fade quickly.. However, it is interesting to note that the impact of geography on civilization has become much less important in the modern era. With the invention of powered flight, geography's ability to impede trade has been reduced dramatically, and the most important aspects of the modern economy no longer rely on the sale of local resources."

b. "In conclusion it is the leaders, not the followers, who write history. As historians we can look at what actions leaders took and what beliefs leaders had in a society to study the events that took place there. This approach to looking at groups of people shows us why things happened because we can study the leaders' reasoning behind certain decisions they made that had a large impact on the society as a whole. For better or worse one person in the world can make a difference."

c. "The Cyclical Theory is relevant today because some would say that the USA is entering the "Old Dynasty" portion of the cycle. Infrastructure such as bridges and highways are declining, and injustices such as the NSA's surveillance of American citizens have upset the American people. If this continues, and the people become angry enough, they could decide to revolt and overthrow the government and start a new one. The people who coordinated the revolts and planned the new government would say that they are doing something completely new, but it would be just another repeat of the same old pattern."