Writing in the Field of History Study Sheet

Goals for this Study Sheet

The goals of this study sheet are to go over what a history paper is and the things to keep in mind while writing a history paper.

What is a History Paper?

Typical history papers are driven by some form of argument. Even if you are not writing a paper based on outside research or sources there, will be some form of an argument. While some assignments might seem straightforward and the purpose might be to find the correct answer, you need to argue how and why the answer you selected is right based off of historical evidence. This could involve comparing and contrasting main points based of consequences of actions, geographical factors, politics, or a combination of these to argue your point.

Steps to Writing a History Paper

The common elements to writing a great history paper include:

1. **Getting off to a good start.** This involves giving a clear introduction with a straightforward explanation of what you are writing about.

2. **State a clear thesis.** A thesis statement for a history paper does not involve simply restating the assignment or writing down what you know on the subject. A thesis statement is your take on the subject which involves your perspective and explanation. This will be the basis for the rest of your paper.

3. **Analyze.** Many students when writing a history paper will summarize the events of the topic instead of giving their analysis. While some summarizing of the topic might be necessary to give a sufficient amount of background information, your analysis of the topic is the important part of your paper. Historical analysis
involves evaluating sources, assigning significance to causes, and weighing competing explanations. Think of summarizing as answering the who, what, when, and where of the topic, while analyzing involves the how, why, and to what effect.

4. **Use evidence critically.** When writing a history paper you need to be skeptical and critical of the sources you use. There is not one historical truth to a significant event and there will always be conflicting interpretations of the evidence. By using many sources with various opinions on the topic you can provide a sound historical judgement.

5. **Be precise.** It is always important to be abundantly clear about who, when, and what you are talking about. Using vague statements or over generalizations can be confusing and may suggest you do not have a grasp on the subject. Be careful using abstractions like people, society, or government, or pronouns like they or it. It might not always be clear to the reader what or who you are referring to if you do not use proper names.

**Sources Referenced**