

HIST 240: War in the Modern World

Generously shared with colleagues by Professor Alex Dracoby

Critical Thinking

Students will develop the skills and habits of mind necessary for the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events in the evaluation and formulation of opinions and conclusions. Critical thinking requires students to question critically, think logically and reason effectively in the context of discipline-specific methodologies.

Course will engage students in developing at least half of the following:

1. Explanation of issues, assumptions, or hypotheses.
2. Using relevant and credible evidence, information, or hypotheses to describe, investigate or analyze a situation, or draw a conclusion.
3. Facility with methods of reasoning appropriate to the discipline (such as inductive, deductive, scientific, or esthetic reasoning, or statistical inference).
4. Modeling: capturing the essentials of a situation in language or symbolism suitable for deriving conclusions about it.
5. Influence of context and assumptions.
6. Logical conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences).

<p>Which criterion? (must address 3 of 6)</p>	<p>Please describe how this course has been designed to fulfill the selected core education criterion: What kinds of activities, assignments, experiences allow students to practice and/or demonstrate attainment of the criterion? Please provide specific examples of activities, assignments, or experiences from the syllabus. You are also welcome to upload additional course materials as illustrations. (Add rows to the table as needed)</p>
<p>2,3,4</p>	<p>The first major writing assignment (5-6 pages) gives students a set of 46 documents, letters between Napoleon and his staff and one of his corps commanders (Davout), and between Davout and his subordinate commanders. These documents date from a single week from a single campaign and in a period when Davout’s corps did not engage in combat. Students are asked to use these documents to write a paper about the “responsibilities of a subordinate commander on campaign.”</p> <p>To help students succeed: In the first instance, this assignment requires that students select and employ (2) “relevant and credible evidence to describe and investigate” a particular question (role of subordinate commander) and (6) “to draw informed, logical conclusions.” Second, students need to (3) “employ methods of reasoning appropriate to a discipline”: the elementary move in history, the basis of all history, is to base claims on primary source materials. Finally, (6) it requires them to draw informed, logical conclusions, and articulate the implications or outcomes of those conclusions. The entire point of the paper is to draw some conclusions regarding the kinds of issues that subordinate commanders had to worry about on campaign based on a significant body of primary source materials. I translated the documents, so students have no choice but to draw their conclusions from these materials (they won’t find the answers on the internet).</p>
<p>1,2,6,</p>	<p>For second major writing assignment students are assigned to groups of six or seven; each group is assigned a topic related to the history of World War II; and over a period of three weeks each student has to post five discussion board posts. Three of them report</p>

	<p>research on their topic: one post on “preliminary” research, two posts on some more specific aspect of their topic; one post is in response to another student’s research; and the last post is an evaluation of the works the student has used for the assignment as well as an explanation of what they would read next if they were to continue research on this topic.</p> <p>In contrast the assignment described above, which is a primary source assignment, this assignment focuses on secondary materials. Students have to locate and (2) “use relevant and credible” secondary sources “to describe, investigate, or analyze” a historical situation, event, or thing. The assignment also requires students to (1) “explain issues, assumptions” - establish the context of their topic (orient the reader) and explain its significance (answer the “so what” question). Finally, they are expected to (6) draw informed, logical conclusions, articulate the implications or outcomes of those conclusions” for the topic in question. For instance, last year I assigned campaigns, so students had to explain how and why one or another belligerent achieved its campaign objectives (terrain, equipment, weather, commanders, quality of troops, luck, numbers, etc.); why this campaign did or didn’t matter to broader strategic objectives; and how it contributed to broader strategic outcomes (as in, how might campaign x help us to understand why Germany lost WWII?).</p> <p>To help students succeed: All of this is discussed in class before and during the assignment (it lasts for three weeks). The discussion boards are also moderated, so we (the graders and I) respond to posts after each of the three weeks and offer suggestions, comments, or whatever else is needed.</p>
2	<p>This course has an on-line midterm with two essays (typically 400-800 words) that are exercises in historical analysis. For instance, one essay last fall was on the following topic: In class I argued that Napoleon's operational methods were ill-suited to his grand strategic ambitions (or put inversely, that his grand strategic ambitions were not suited to his operational methods). How so?</p> <p>To help students succeed: This essay topic addresses issues that we look at in class over the previous two weeks. The major paper on the role of the subordinate commander also helps to focus their attention on and familiarize them with Napoleon’s operational methods. As I explain in class, answering the question requires identifying 1) the key characteristic(s) of Napoleon's operational methods; 2) Napoleon's grand strategic ambitions; and then 3) an explanation why the two clashed. This requires students to use about half of the categories listed above but here I’ll just stick with (2): “Use relevant and credible evidence, information, or hypotheses to describe, investigate, or analyze a situation, or to draw informed, logical conclusions.”</p>

Written Communication

Through iterative experiences across the curriculum, students will develop the capacity to develop and express ideas in writing, to work in different genres and styles, work with different writing technologies, and mix texts, data, and images to effectively communicate to different audiences.

Course will engage students in developing at least half of the following:

1. Context of and purpose for writing: considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).
2. Content development.

3. Genre and disciplinary conventions: formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields.
4. Sources and evidence.
5. Control of syntax and mechanics.

Which criterion? (must address 3 of 5)	Please describe <i>how</i> this course has been designed to fulfill the selected core education criterion: What kinds of activities, assignments, experiences allow students to practice and/or demonstrate attainment of the criterion? Please <i>provide specific examples</i> of activities, assignments, or experiences from the syllabus. You are also welcome to upload additional course materials as illustrations. (Add rows to the table as needed)
1,2,3,4,5	<p>The first major writing assignment described above (using letters between Napoleon and his staff and one of his corps commanders (Davout), and between Davout and his subordinate commanders) is a 5-6-page paper using a unique set of documents translated for the purposes of this assignment. The assignment requires them to address a particular question and to construct a coherent paper using those materials.</p> <p>To help students succeed: I talk about this assignment over a period of three class days. Those days address the wider context within which the assignment’s materials were produced (European warfare at the time of Napoleon; the specific campaign of 1805; Napoleon’s own campaigning style); I also devote time on each of those days explaining the assignment, introducing them to the materials, showing them an interactive map I built for this purpose, and, especially, talking about procedures: how to go about doing this assignment (starting with reading the documentary, then thinking about what themes they want to highlight, how to integrate material from the documents into their papers, both at a paragraph level and at a sentence – I talk a lot about the use of quotation, so (5) “control of syntax and mechanics” of quotation. Last fall I also organized two workshops where students were walked through some of the basics of selecting material and connecting specific examples in the documents to a wider argument, what conforms to (4) “Skillfully use high-quality, credible, relevant sources of evidence.”</p> <p>The paper itself cannot be done without (1) “understand[ing] the audience, purpose, and context surrounding writing tasks – this is not the kind of assignment that can be done at the last minute or without some guidance (the assignment amount to several pages). It requires students to (2) “develop appropriate, relevant, and compelling written content for demonstrating their understanding” – that’s a pretty good description of the grading rubrics – and the entire paper can be understood in part as helping students grasp some of the (3) “formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields,” in particular in the use of primary source evidence and the diverse ways that one can integrate such material into one’s one prose.</p>
1,2,3,4	<p>For second major writing assignment (described above: the “discussion group” research project on World War II), students are required to post five times. The guidelines suggest that each post should be a minimum of 200 words and formally written out – most students write quite a bit more than that. The audience is a combination of each other and the grader but the main point is that there is an in-built audience of peers that they are addressing.</p> <p>To help students succeed: As explained above I discuss this assignment quite a bit in class and then give students direct feedback on their posts on three separate occasions. The assignment contains an expectation that their peers will be reading their work, there is</p>

	<p>thus a specific (1) “audience, purpose, and context surrounding writing tasks.” The task of the group as a whole is to come to a fuller understanding of some aspect of World War II of which most of them have no prior knowledge (I assign the topics and make sure of that). Most of the first posts aren’t very good, so the idea is to get them to elevate their work so as to (2) “develop appropriate, relevant, and compelling written content for demonstrating their understanding.” The test is whether they convince their discussion board peers of their positions. This is an exercise in the identification and use of appropriate secondary source material, thus (4) “skillfully use high-quality, credible, relevant sources of evidence.” Finally, they must use and cite that material in ways that conform to the norms of historical argumentation: (3) “Discern formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields.”</p>
2	<p>In the second above, I described the first essay on the on-line midterm. The second essay asks students to analyze international developments with respect to military power over the course of the nineteenth century and requires them to employ the conceptual language of our textbook and the distinction between “technique” and “technology.”</p> <p>This question is conceptually difficult and it requires students to identify appropriate examples to illustrate their arguments. It probably best fits (2): “Develop appropriate, relevant, and compelling written content for demonstrating their understanding.”</p>