

# Contemporary Issues

Mr. Toney

2009–20010

*If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.*  
- John F. Kennedy

## ***Course Overview:***

This one-semester elective course will focus heavily on the events of contemporary American society. The intent of the course is to provide the student with the basic background and foundational information to help one understand the world that we live in today. It will examine various social, political, economic, religious, and cultural events in different countries and regions in order to better comprehend multiple perspectives on the world today. There will be a major focus on studying current events (their origins and causes) and trying to come up with solutions or predicting outcomes to those events.

This course will utilize an interdisciplinary approach in that it will require critical reading, thinking, and writing skills. Students will be immersed in a daily lesson framework that encompasses higher order thinking. The lesson framework involves extension beyond the text through various activities that might include debate, discussion, writing, reorganizing, or otherwise manipulating the ideas that were confronted in the reading. Students will meet in small groups and as a whole class to construct meaning from the text. The teacher acts as a facilitator for the higher order thinking that will allow students to perform synthesis of information with what they already knew before the lesson, analysis of new ideas, application-level thinking as to how what they have learned might work in the real world or under other circumstances, or even evaluation of the authors' underlying intent. It is through such higher order thinking that students develop more complete understandings about new content. It is also through such practice in higher order thinking that students develop the skills and abilities to perform these tasks on their own as independent life-long learners.

## ***Essential Supplies:***

1. Pen/Pencil: a writing utensil is required **EVERYDAY**, ALL assignments are required to be in pencil, typed, or in **BLUE** or **BLACK** ink
2. Notebook: a notebook used exclusively for assignments and notes is required
3. “Question of the Day” Notebook: a notebook used exclusively for the Question of the Day is required
4. Student Planner: used for keeping track of assignments, due dates, projects, tests, etc.

## ***Grading Procedure:***

*The goal of this grading procedure is to reduce the number and percent of students who fail the course and are thereby not ready for work at the next level.*

Student grades will be based on a “standards-based” educational model. This is defined as creating an atmosphere of high expectations as meeting grade-level standards or above and requiring students to meet (or exceed) those standards.

Grades will be determined by each student’s demonstration of mastering the course material.

I will not assign a grade below a “C”; students are required to redo/revise work to get it at least to the “basic” or “C” level. Students will not receive a “zero” in lieu of a grade when work is not turned in; there is no option not to turn in work.

Students will receive an “I” on any assignment not turned in, and ONE or more “I”s will result in an “I” grade for any report period.

If the student simply never makes up the assignments after the semester then the “I” turns into a grade of “F” (just as it would in a college course or on the job).

Students can complete work, even if it is late (as defined as past the assigned due date) but they cannot receive an “A” on any assignment that is late or turned in incomplete, and students NEVER receive an “F” if the assignment is completed within the quarter.

This course is tiered in the sense that there is a grade differential between formative and summative assessments.

Formative assessments (quizzes, homework, and class work) will be afforded more frequently to students.

Summative assessments, as they measure the sum of a learning experience, carry more weight than other, more minor or formative evaluations.

The course will therefore use the following standard:

Formative Assessments – 10%

Summative Assessments – 70% (35% for exams, 35% for projects)

Finals (Quarter/Semester Exams) – 20%

- All summative assessments will include a scoring guide/rubric that students will receive when the assessment is given. Students will have the benefit of knowing exactly what the requirements/standards are before beginning any summative assessment.
- Students will have the option to retake exams to raise test scores to a “C” by coming in during extra help times (P.A.S.S.).

### ***Educational Philosophy of Course:***

I believe each student can succeed in this or any other course. The Social Studies is a dynamic and interesting subject. It, more than any other discipline, is about you and I. This course will include a variety of teaching styles. Students will work in groups, listen to lectures, generate their own notes, discuss ideas, create graphic organizers, speak in front of the class, utilize the internet, write constructed responses, read at least two books and complete Reading Workshop responses, and read an extensive amount of primary and secondary source material. I work very hard at making the material interesting and engaging for each student.

### ***Course Syllabus and Quarterly Objectives:***

The following topics are a tentative schedule of areas of study we will be discussing during the course of the year.

#### Governmental Issues...

- Separation of church and state
- Gun control
- Death penalty
- Bill of Rights
- War on terror
- US role in the world community

#### Social/Cultural Issues...

- Immigration
- Abortion
- Obesity
- Drugs
- Teen sex/pregnancy

Racism/stereotypes/discrimination ...and others selected by the students

### ***Major Course Goals:***

Students will successfully:

- Utilize prediction as an effective reading strategy
- Assess given historical problems and use comprehensive analysis to determine effective resolutions
- Evaluate the accuracy of information and reliability of sources
- Recognize and practice academic honesty and integrity in academic work

- Analyze the evolution of American democracy, its ideas, institutions, and political process
- Describe the purposes and structure of laws and government

***Major Course Projects:***

**This course will emphasize writing, research, and the delivery of information.**

Assignments will be very specific as to how students should respond to each question. Most questions require paragraph responses utilizing complete sentences and correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Students will be required to write down and answer a “Question of the Day” each class period at the beginning of the hour.

Students will be required to create a research paper that delineates a theme discussed in class. This will be an expository paper. The expected length is eight to ten pages.

***Extra Help:***

My conference period is 5<sup>th</sup> hour. I usually arrive at school around 7:00 a.m. Please schedule either of these times to meet with me. I can be reached at [jtoney@centralr3.org](mailto:jtoney@centralr3.org). E-mail is the easiest way for parents/guardians to reach me. I can also be reached at 431-2616, extension 4155. Please leave a and I will return your call as soon as possible.

***Required/Recommended Reading List:***

Students are required to read one book per quarter for a Reading Workshop response. The list of books available for class can be accessed through the Central High School webpage. Click on Learning Resource Center, then Core Class Reading for a list of books for Social Studies.

# The Writing of a Historical Essay or Research Paper

Whether you are writing an in-class essay exam or a 20-page research paper, there are some basic guidelines which you should keep in mind. The first part of this handout gives general information which is relevant to the writing of any historical essay. The second part gives tips which you should utilize in writing take-home essays, exams, and research papers.

## Writing an Essay

An essay is not simply a list of facts. You must organize the facts into themes which support a central argument or thesis. This thesis should be introduced in the beginning of the paper and developed throughout the paper one step at a time. The stronger your thesis, the easier it will be for you to develop a strong argument. Use an outline to organize your thoughts in a clear, coherent and logical manner and to guide you in writing the essay. Organizationally, the essay has three main parts:

1. **Introduction.** Use the introduction to state your thesis, outline the main points you will make in the essay, and describe the conclusions which you will draw in the essay. History essays are not mystery papers; the reader should know from the beginning what your conclusions are. Use the introduction to draw the reader into the essay. Often it is easier to write your introduction *last*, after you clearly know what arguments you develop in the essay.
2. **Body.** The body is the bulk of your paper, the place where you present your facts and develop your thoughts and arguments. The body can be developed chronologically, thematically, geographically, or in any number of ways, but you must make it clear how you are approaching and organizing the material. While you write the essay, keep in mind the following points:
  - Write in paragraphs. Each paragraph is a unit of thought limited to one major idea. Each paragraph should relate to and support your thesis or central argument. Use specific and concrete examples to support your general statements. Be sure your facts are correct and that they support your argument.
  - Use good grammar. This includes writing in complete sentences, using past tense instead of present tense when appropriate, using active verbs instead of passive ones, varying your vocabulary, and avoiding sexist language (i.e.--don't use the generic "he" or talk about the history of *man* when you mean the history of humans or people). If you have taken an English composition class, bring those skills into your essay.
  - Write analytically, not descriptively. Do not just explain *what* happened, but also try to explain *why* it happened and why it is significant. Facts are important, but without interpretation they become meaningless.

- I am not looking for any "correct" answers. Rather, it is more important that you are able to use the material to develop an argument which supports your point of view.
  - You will be rewarded for independent and original thought. Don't be afraid to give your opinions and interpretations of the material (this is your thesis!). Be critical of your readings and the lectures. Look for new ways of approaching the material. When you disagree with an author's views, say so.
  - Be creative. Make your essay interesting to read. Don't assume that I as the instructor know everything that there is to know on your topic. Write as if you are teaching someone something that is new and interesting. This will automatically make your paper a better one.
3. Conclusion. The conclusion can be as simple as a restatement of your introduction. It should emphasize your thesis, and briefly summarize how you have proven it in the body of the paper. In this way, your paper is cyclical--you end up where you started. You can also use the conclusion to state your own interpretations, to assess and argue with the material you have read, and to point to gaps in our historical knowledge.

If your assignment is to write a three-page paper, you may find it most useful to follow the five-paragraph model where the first paragraph is the introduction, the next three form the body, and the final paragraph is the conclusion. The introduction and conclusion frame your essay, and the body presents the information necessary to support your thesis. Each of the three paragraphs should concern one specific issue which supports your main argument. For example, if your assignment is to write a paper on the consequences of Independence in Latin America, these three paragraphs might touch on social, economic, and political aspects which demonstrate that Independence resulted in either profound or minimal changes (your thesis). This format, of course, can be modified as necessary to meet the specific needs of your topic. If you are writing a 20-page research paper, the introduction might be several paragraphs long.

## **The Form of the Research Paper**

Your essay should follow the MLA style format. Briefly, the following are important elements you should keep in mind when writing a research paper:

1. The Title Page. The first page of the paper should contain only the title of your paper, your name, the name and/or number of this class, and the date.
2. The Text. The text should contain an Introduction, Body, and Conclusion (as laid out above).
3. References In any formal essay or research paper (including three-page papers) you must document the information you use in the writing of the paper. This is to let the reader know the sources of the information you use and is accomplished through a system of citations and a bibliography. You must include both; failure to do so will result in a lower grade for your paper.

- Citations.

Citations document material which you use in your paper. You must use a citation to give the source of a direct quotation or paraphrase of someone else's writings or ideas, statistical information, historical descriptions and events, or a date. Any information which is not general knowledge must carry a citation. Failure to do so is plagiarism, which is cheating and will result in an "F" for the paper.

Citations and bibliographies are always single-spaced. Underline titles of books and journal articles if your typewriter or computer can not easily do italics. Consult with me or the Turabian manual for more examples or occurrences which do not conform with the examples. You are not required to use this form; if you are more comfortable with another style (such as MLA), use it. But you must be consistent with whatever style you choose.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of others without giving credit where credit is due. If you use the exact words of another person (no matter what the length), you *must* put those words in quotation marks and include a citation to indicate their source. If you use someone else's ideas or paraphrase someone's words, you must also cite that. You must also indicate the source of specific facts you use in a paper. Failure to do so is plagiarism and will result in an automatic "F" for the assignment.

The Modern Language Association's MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers defines plagiarism as follows:

- repeating another's sentences as your own,
- adopting a particularly apt phrase as your own,
- paraphrasing someone else's argument as your own,
- presenting someone else's line of thinking in the development of a thesis as though it were your own.

In short, to plagiarize is to give the impression that you have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from another. Writers may use another person's words and thoughts but must acknowledge them.

## Appearance

All take-home essays, exams, and research papers should follow these standards:

1. The paper must be neatly typed, double-spaced on white paper with a one-inch margin on the top, bottom, and sides of each page. Be sure to use a dark, clear ink (no worn-out dot-matrix ribbons run on draft quality). If it is hard to read your essay, it will also be hard to follow your argument. All pages, except for the title page, should be numbered.
2. Please number the pages of your essay (except for the title page). If you can not figure out how to make your word processor do this automatically, add the numbers by hand.
3. You *must* proofread your paper. Papers with numerous misspelled words and grammatical mistakes will be penalized. Read over your paper before handing it in and make corrections as necessary. Often it is advantageous to have a friend proofread your paper for obvious errors. Handwritten corrections are preferable to uncorrected mistakes. If you use a computer, you are expected to use a spell-checker; failure to do so indicates a lack of effort on your part and you can expect your grade to suffer accordingly.
4. Use a standard 10 to 12 point (10 to 12 characters per inch) typeface. Smaller or compressed type and papers with small margins or single-spacing are hard to read. It is better to let your essay run over the recommended number of pages than to try to compress it into fewer pages. Likewise, large type, large margins, large indentations, triple-spacing, increased leading (space between lines), increased kerning (space between letters), and any other such attempts at "padding" to increase the length of a paper are unacceptable, wasteful of trees, and will not fool your instructor.
5. Staple your paper in the upper left-hand corner. Alternatively, use a binder or paper clip. Please do not put your essay in a special folder or plastic binder as these make it more difficult to read and grade your paper and will be confiscated

Contemporary Issues  
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Research Paper

Name:  
Date:  
Hour:

**CLEs: 3a. Knowledge of continuity and change in the history of Missouri and the United States**

A. Understand the migrations of people from many regions to North America  
Describe the migrations of people from many regions of the world and the interactions of cultures and religious traditions that have contributed to America's history from Reconstruction to the present.

- a. motivations for immigration
- b. challenges to immigrants

DOK 3

SS3; 1.6; 1.9

**Directions: Your task is to write a research paper. Your research paper must concern itself with a topic you feel is important in today's society.**

**Your topic must be cleared with the instructor before you begin any research.**

**Follow the directions given in the "Writing a Historical Essay or Paper"**

Picking a topic is perhaps the most important step in writing a research paper. To do it well requires several steps of refinement. First you have to determine a general area in which you have an interest (if you aren't interested, your readers won't be either). You do not write a paper "about the Civil War," however, for that is such a large and vague concept that the paper will be too shallow or you will be swamped with information. The next step is to narrow your topic. Are you interested in comparison? Battles? Social change? Politics? Causes? Biography? Once you reach this stage try to formulate your research topic as a question.

**Your writing must follow the writing process:**

**A. Outline:**

Write a preliminary thesis statement, expressing what you believe your major argument(s) will be. Sketch out a broad outline that indicates the structure - main points and subpoints or your argument as it seems at this time.

**B. The First Draft:**

On the basis of this thesis statement and outline, start writing, even pieces, as soon as you have enough information to start. Do not wait until you have filled all the research gaps. Keep on writing. If you run into smaller research questions just mark the text with a searchable symbol. It is important that you try to get to the end point of this writing as soon as possible, even if you leave pieces still in outline form at first and then fill the gaps after you get to the end.

Critical advice for larger papers:

It is often more effective not to start at the point where the beginning of your paper will be. Especially the introductory paragraph is often best left until later, when you feel ready and inspired.

### **C. The Second Draft:**

The "second draft" is a fully re-thought and rewritten version of your paper. It is at the heart of the writing process.

First, lay your first draft aside for a day or so to gain distance from it. After that break, read it over with a critical eye as you would somebody else's paper (well, almost!). You will probably find that your first draft is still quite descriptive, rather than argumentative. It is likely to wander; your perspective and usually even the thesis seemed to change/develop as you wrote. Don't despair. That is perfectly normal even for experienced writers (even after 40 years and a good deal of published work!). You will be frustrated. But keep questioning your paper along the following lines: What precisely are my key questions? What parts of my evidence here are really pertinent to those questions (that is, does it help me answer them)? How or in what order can I structure my paper most effectively to answer those questions most clearly and efficiently for my reader?

At this point you must outline your paper freshly. Mark up your first draft, ask tough questions whether your argument is clear and whether the order in which you present your points is effective! You must write conceptually a new paper at this point, even if you can use paragraphs and especially quotes, factual data in the new draft.

It is critical that in your new draft your paragraphs start with topic sentences that identify the argument you will be making in the particular paragraph (sometimes this can be strings of two or three paragraphs). The individual steps in your argument must be clearly reflected in the topic sentences of your paragraphs (or a couple of them linked).

### **D. The Third or Final Draft:**

You are now ready to check for basic rules of good writing. This is when you need to check the diction, that is, the accuracy and suitability of words. Eliminate unnecessary passive or awkward noun constructions (active-voice, verbal constructions are usually more effective); improve the flow of your transitions; avoid repetitions or split infinitives; correct apostrophes in possessives and such. Make the style clear and smooth. Check that the start of your paper is interesting for the reader. Last but not least, cut out unnecessary verbiage and wordiness. Spell-check and proof-read.