

DAVE'S TIPS FOR AN ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS HISTORY ESSAY (Version 4.0)

1. INTRODUCTION

- Introduce the historical problem (this is usually implicit in your essay question).
- Sketch out the historical context (a few sentences).
- **STATEMENT** – sum up for me (preferably in one sentence) what you intend to achieve or demonstrate in your essay. This is basically what **YOU** think about the historical problem confronting you.
- **Methodology** – tell me how you are going to do this (for example, make a structured comparison between France with England, or interrogate contemporary printed sources)
- Discuss the existing historiography (i.e., write a brief critical review of what historians have written about the problem). Point out areas where historians agree and disagree. Make sure that your discussion is relevant to your **STATEMENT**. Considering the historiography will help you answer two questions: 'why is your essay relevant to the overall historiography?', and 'why should we care about this topic?'
- Use what you have written in the introduction to inform and structure the rest of your essay.
- Start strongly, but not melodramatically. A well planned introduction will give you direction and help you produce much better work.

2. THE BODY OF THE ESSAY

- Arrange your sub-arguments in a logical order – usually a paragraph (occasionally more) for each major point. Use these paragraphs to build up your overall argument (the one you have declared in your **STATEMENT**). Think of them as little streams feeding water into a big river (your big idea or focus).
- There are usually some items (which you might have mentioned whilst discussing the relevant historiography in your introduction) which don't support your **STATEMENT**. Deal with these, treating them like a chess opponent that your **STATEMENT** has to defeat. Explain why you are right and they are wrong. Don't wait until the end of the essay to deal with these points, discuss them as they become relevant.
- **Keep the essay 'on track', by reminding yourself of what you said you intended to do in your introduction, particularly the STATEMENT**

3. CONCLUSION

- Give yourself plenty of time to write the introduction and body of the essay – then put the draft essay to one side for a couple of days. When you come back and re-read your work, you will see all manner of mistakes and contradictions. You will also have recovered some 'puff to write a good conclusion.
- The conclusion will give symmetry to your essay. So briefly summarise your arguments and methodology and explain how you've proved the case you set out to prove in your **STATEMENT**. You might indicate areas for future research. Above all tell me what you think the whole thing means.
- **It's vital to finish your essay well. COME TO A DECISIVE CONCLUSION.**