

## Instructions for Article Reviews

Over the course of the semester I ask you to write two relatively short article reviews. The idea is to allow you to explore particular issues in European history in somewhat greater depth, especially those that you find interesting, and to promote careful and analytical reading. The way to approach this exercise is to think of a problem or a question that comes out of the reading, lectures, and discussions – or conceivably one that you feel has not been addressed but that might be of interest. You should then seek out two articles (by two different authors) that actually address the issue in question. These will usually take the form of journal articles or book chapters, and their selection will of course depend upon the issue that you have decided to investigate. Bitter and aggravating experience demands that I require you to approve all articles with me before writing your essay.

The central idea of the exercise is to consider how two different authors deal with a particular historical problem or question. In some cases, it may be difficult to find two articles on the precisely same issue. Most often the two articles will be on related issues, ones that can logically be discussed in one paper. You should seek first of all to define the problem that the two articles address. Then recount how each of the articles addresses that problem, with particular reference to the argument(s) or main proposition(s) that the author is offering. Consider whether the two authors are asking the same or (somewhat) different questions. Pay attention to when the articles were written and consider how this may have affected their interpretations. Note also what kinds of sources they use to make their cases, to the extent that you can comprehend this matter. Consider, also, the implications of the author's decision to approach the problem in one way as opposed to another. You might also contemplate which approach or argument(s) you find most convincing. Where relevant, you can relate the articles you read to the required reading for the course. In short, exploit the resources that you have at your disposal. And remember that I am here to help you.

Article reviews are due at two different points in the semester, and each should accordingly deal with a question relevant to that portion of the course. Do not write about World War I at the end of the course. Likewise, do not write about the early twenty-first century in the first essay.

Where can you find good articles? The library has a fairly good collection of journals on line, though in some cases book chapters in one or both cases may be the best bet. Sometimes, the best way to start the process is to go up to the stacks and browse through print versions of the journals (where and when we still have those). Recall that the good selection of sources is crucial, as this will make your task both less complicated and more interesting. The following journals are good places to look for articles but do not even begin to exhaust the possibilities.

*Kritika; Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*  
*American Historical Review*  
*Journal of Modern History*  
*Comparative Studies in Society and History*  
*Social History*  
*Journal of Contemporary History*  
*Historical Journal*  
*Past & Present*

How precisely should you go about finding articles? The library actually has a number of quite good resources for precisely this task. Combined with the advice presented here, you should have

comparatively little difficulty finding good articles, though note that a little persistence at the outset may go a long way in identifying the best possible articles. Note also that librarians are prepared to aid you and get a real kick out of doing so. Here are a few databases that seem especially useful, though note that each has certain limitations that should be kept in mind. These can be found by going to the library webpage (<http://www.library.unlv.edu/>), clicking on "Journal Article and Databases," and then finding the appropriate database in alphabetical order.

**Project Muse.** This is a powerful search engine that allows for a wide range of search possibilities in journals. It allows you to download articles directly to your desktop. This database covers only those journals to which we have subscriptions. It covers a wide range of journals and a wider range of disciplines than Historical Abstracts below.

**J-STOR.** Allows extensive search of journals, though with coverage for some journals only up until the last 3-5 years. This database actually searches Project Muse as well (as we have many journal subscriptions through Muse), although there may be things that you will find only in Muse and not in J-STOR. This database also allows downloads directly to your desktop and covers journals in different disciplines.

**Historical Abstracts.** This database allows you to search abstracts (or brief content descriptions) of an insane number of journal articles. When and if the library has an electronic subscription to that journal, the database allows you to go directly to that article and to download it. If we do not have a subscription to the journal – and you desperately want that article – you can order it through interlibrary loan and receive it as little as three days, though sometimes rather more. This database allows you to see some information on articles in journals to which we have no subscription and in journals to which we have only print subscriptions. But the database only involves core history journals and thus is less interdisciplinary than the others above.

When searching, it is important to give yourself time. There may be a temptation to take the first two articles that seem remotely connected using a database search so that you can get on with reading the articles and writing the paper. But you will almost surely be better off if you are a bit more discerning at the outset. I would devote at least an hour to my search, downloading as many as 10-12 articles that seem potentially relevant. Then, based on a perusal of those articles, I would determine which two of them would make for the most interesting and logical comparison. It needs to be stressed that by doing this work at the outset, you will probably simplify your task at the stage of writing, so you should not minimize the importance of doing a good search. For help with searching, see me or else consult with Priscilla Finley (at the library), who is an excellent resource and will be happy to help you master searching skills: (702) 895-2132, [priscilla.finley@unlv.edu](mailto:priscilla.finley@unlv.edu).

**Do not choose book reviews of any sort or texts that represent comments or reactions to other essays in the same issue of the given journal.** Such essays simply do not work well for this exercise. The articles should also be *at least* 20 pages each in length. Shorter articles are acceptable only under unusual circumstances. *I require that you approve all articles with me before proceeding with your essays.* Student essays that ignore this requirement will be returned to their authors as inadequate.

Your paper should be at least three pages and not more than five pages in length. The two articles you are addressing should be cited at the top of the paper, just under the title, fully and in single space. Thereafter, you should simply cite the articles by author and page number in parentheses, like this (Johnson, 225). An ideal paper might include a) an introduction identifying clearly the historical problem (or the cluster of problems) that the two articles address; b) a recapping of the argument of each article (with perhaps a paragraph devoted to each); c) a discussion of the similarities and differences between the approaches and arguments of the two articles; d) some element of evaluation – an indication as to which argument or

article seems more compelling, informative, and convincing, and why. Note that recapping the argument is a difficult task, and you need to be sure that what you recount is indeed the argument of the article – its main point. I can help you with this if you are having trouble.

The basic requirements of the exercise can be summarized in the following fashion:

- Papers must be at least 3-5 pages in length (neither less than three nor more than five)
- Use double-space, 12-point, and 1-inch margins.
- Both articles *must* receive prior approval from the instructor, preferably in person.
- The two articles must be by two different authors.
- Each article must be at least 20 pages in length, with 50-60 pages as the ideal for the two articles combined.
- The two articles must be cited in full at the top of the paper (and because they are cited in full at the top, they need not be cited in full anywhere else in the paper; just refer to the authors).
- All papers must have a title.
- Papers should be submitted electronically to [werthp@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:werthp@unlv.nevada.edu), with your last name as the name of the document and "History 464 paper" in the subject line. Use MS WORD with .doc extension (not .docx). Please address me in the letter (as opposed to writing “Hey, here it is!” as if I know who you are and what you are talking about) and sign off at the end.
- On your paper include your name and your e-mail address. All other information (date, course, etc.) is superfluous and utterly unnecessary.
- I reserve the right to reject any paper that does not conform to these basic requirements.

The basic standards by which your papers will be assessed are as follows;

<p>A = excellent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The paper is well organized with clear structure and organization.</li> <li>• The prose is lucid and precise, with clear topic sentences.</li> <li>• The paper clearly and fairly recounts the arguments of at least two articles, which are properly cited.</li> <li>• The paper compares the findings of the two articles.</li> <li>• The paper uses required readings from the course, where relevant, in its analysis and critique.</li> <li>• The paper evaluates the two articles critically, identifying (where relevant) both positive and negative dimensions of the articles.</li> <li>• The two articles under review are cited at the top of the paper.</li> </ul>
<p>B = good</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization and structure are good, but also exhibit certain deficiencies.</li> <li>• The prose is intelligible (with good topic sentences) but at points imprecise or not clear.</li> <li>• The paper recounts the arguments of at least two articles, which are properly cited.</li> <li>• The paper engages in at least some comparison of the two articles.</li> <li>• The arguments of the articles have been only partially or somewhat inaccurately presented</li> <li>• The paper engages in some critical analysis, as described above.</li> <li>• The paper deploys required course readings where relevant.</li> <li>• The two articles under review are cited at the top of the paper.</li> </ul>

<p>C = marginally adequate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More serious deficiencies in organization, structure, and prose that begin to compromise the intelligibility of the essay.</li> <li>• A clear absence of proofreading.</li> <li>• Arguments of the article are presented, but crudely and without clarity.</li> <li>• Major aspects of the articles are simply ignored.</li> <li>• Each article is presented largely in isolation from the other.</li> <li>• The paper ignores course readings that would be relevant to the analysis.</li> <li>• The two articles under review are not cited at the top of the paper.</li> </ul>
<p>D = seriously deficient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very poor organization and prose.</li> <li>• No effort to offer any propositions, assertions, or arguments.</li> <li>• Bad or no topic sentences.</li> <li>• Evidence that articles have not actually been read.</li> <li>• Only one article discussed in substance.</li> <li>• No comparison between the two texts</li> <li>• Articles are not properly cited or even listed at the outset.</li> </ul>
<p>F = horrible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any paper not actually turned in or turned in too late.</li> <li>• Any paper exhibiting any clear signs of plagiarism (if you don't know what that means, then ask).</li> <li>• The writing is senseless, incomprehensible, and/or bizarre.</li> <li>• Absolutely no signs of proofreading.</li> <li>• No articles identified.</li> </ul>

**What's the point?** There are several points to this exercise. First, it induces students to become more familiar with searching tools and databases, which allows them to identify the most relevant and useful information. Given the current state of "infoglut" – which will only become worse in the future – this ability to search effectively and find reliable information is critical to every single person who has access to the internet. Second, the exercise requires careful reading, which will allow students to identify and extract the argument(s) from an article and to think about the ways in which an author has formulated and presented this. Third, the exercise demands comparative analysis or thinking about one argument in relation to another. This kind of comparison is also crucial to making sense of the astonishing amounts of information to which we are exposed daily. Finally, the exercise allows students to dig deeper into a topic that they themselves find interesting. The idea is to build on an innate sense of curiosity with which all of us have been endowed and which hopefully has not yet been extinguished in students by cynicism or ideology.