

## Prompt for Paragraph #1 | Skill or attribute: Title

Our first paragraph will focus on John Hirst's book, *The Shortest History of Europe*. Note that its first two chapters attempt to tell the story of European civilization over some 2500 years in just 40 pages or so. The goal of the first paragraph is to recount Hirst's main argument concisely and effectively. *How does Hirst account for the course of European history all the way from the classical period to the modern one?* You may use any and all of the book in making your case, but the goal is to present the basic story that Hirst provides in the first two chapters.

How to do this? There is, after all, a lot to recount, and you have only a paragraph in which to do it. It obviously requires that you focus above all on what is most important and then construct your paragraph around that. You will also need to see if you can reduce his main propositions to a single assertion that can serve as your topic sentence. You can probably already sense that this might not be the easiest thing in the world, but it is the same problem that confronts anyone who has to make sense of a lot of information. And many of us are faced with this constantly.

The main skill or attribute of this paragraph is the title. If your essay has no title, I will return it without a grade, as if you had chosen not to submit a paragraph in this round. The same is true if your title is something like "Hirst" or "Paragraph #1." Think hard about the main point you wish to make in the paragraph and how a brief title can convey that.

A few general ground rules and pieces of advice:

- The issue of a title is the key skill or attribute for paragraph #1, so be sure that your essay has a brief title that summarizes the main point you wish to make. If your paragraph has no title or an exceptionally lame one, I will return the text to you as if you had not done the exercise.
- Since the question is about Hirst's book, you need to refer to the author somewhere, probably in the topic sentence. You need not cite the book, since I know which one it is. Your citations can take the form of just parentheses, for example (25). Do not use "p." or "pg."
- Use the handout "Effective Paragraphs" as well as "The Paragraph Manifesto" as beneficial guides, paying close attention in particular to the rules for submission.
- Evidence from the book should probably take the form mostly of paraphrasing, with direct citation of a few key words and phrases. Given that you only have a paragraph at your disposal, quotations need to be short—after all, you want this to be *your* paragraph. Under no circumstances should you have a bloc quotation. Double- and triple-check when you quote to be sure that you have done so accurately (including italics and other such things).
- Hirst has diagrams in his book, but your own paragraph should not. The point is to rely on your ability to recount the story *in words*.
- In double-space, your paragraph should presumably be a half page at an absolute minimum and a full page at a maximum. Half is too short, and I would have doubts about whether you can do the argument justice. Much beyond one page suggests that you do not really have a handle on the material. Quite possibly, your first draft will be too long, but that is in part what the stage of revision is for.
- Be sure to give yourself time to write *and then revise* the paragraph. Without revision, the paragraph will probably be no good.