

### Prompt for Paragraph #3 | Skill or Attribute: Evidence

Now that we know what triads are, we can work further with this delightful intellectual exercise, this time applying it to the question of the state. I remind you that a **triad** is a list of three items (people, places, ideas, or concepts) that are connected in a fundamental way in the context of the history that we are studying. The basic goal of any paragraph that you write on a triad is to identify and explore the historical relationship(s) among the three items. Focus above all on *the connections*, rather than addressing each item in isolation: How are the items *related* to one another? Do not simply say *that* they are related; rather use all three items in your first sentence (your thesis or topic sentence) to tell us *how* they are related. I emphasize that the most effective paragraphs will use all three items in the very first sentence, which then sets the agenda for the entire paragraph. Instead of giving you a choice of triads that are already assembled, I am asking you now to assemble your own. Consider the items listed below, and then choose three of these nine items, which then become your triad and basis for your paragraph. The choice is entirely yours.

sovereignty	absolutism	Cardinal Richelieu
mercantilism	divine right monarchy	Parliament
Louis XIV	English civil war	English Bill of Rights

The main skill or attribute is **evidence**. Here two principal points are in order. First, every essay of this kind needs to include evidence. The key question is this: on what basis are you making the claims that you are making? If you provide no evidence, then there is no reason why the reader should believe what you say. Thus an essay without evidence is unacceptable and will be returned to you as such.

Second, in the study of history we make a key distinction between primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources are writings by those people who lived well after the events written about—for example historians. These writers have the benefit of hindsight, but did not themselves experience the events about which they write. Primary sources are those written by people who experienced the events. The “most primary” sources are those texts written at the time in question, though sources written later (for example, memoirs) can also count (because their authors participated in the events that they describe). Both primary and secondary sources are indispensable, but for making an argument about the past, primary sources are ultimately more important. Thus in providing evidence, you should focus above all on primary sources.

In your reader, you will see that some texts are labeled **[P]** for “primary.” Generally, the secondary sources are there to offer background; they create the context in which we can better understand the primary sources. The point is that the secondary sources are there to orient you; the primary sources should serve as the principal source of evidence for your essay. Therefore, your paragraph should contain at least two “pieces” of evidence from primary sources, preferably from two different primary sources. There is of course no reason why your essay cannot use more than two pieces of evidence and more than two different sources. Indeed, it should.

Below I offer some ground rules and advice:

- Previous skills and attributes—title and topic sentence—are as important for this paragraph as for previous ones.
- Be certain that your essay includes evidence, above all from primary sources. Using secondary sources for evidence is by no means prohibited, but evidence from secondary sources should not take the place of primary sources. Be certain that your paragraph includes at least two pieces of evidence from primary sources. Essays that fail to fulfill this condition will be returned to authors as if they had not submitted paragraphs in this round.
- Evidence from sources should take the form mostly of paraphrasing, with only limited direct citation. If one quote is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your paragraph, then that is problematic—after all, you want this to be *your* paragraph. Under no circumstances should you have a block quotation. Double- and triple-check when you quote to be sure that you have done so accurately.
- Underline or **make bold** the three items of your triad in the first sentence. Unless you identify the three, I may not be able to tell which three you are addressing.
- Use the handout “Effective Paragraphs” as well as “The Paragraph Manifesto” as beneficial guides, paying close attention in particular to the rules for submission.
- The best triad-paragraphs are the ones in which the author includes all three items in the first sentence, which becomes the thesis. Read that sentence again. Then again. And once more.
- On the matter of citation, simply use this system: (Hirst, 25) or (Reader, 7) or (Lecture 2/13). But in the case of the reader, be sure that the author of what you cite is clear.
- Our second paragraphs confirmed that a half-page is not enough to make an effective case. At the same time, I myself would try very hard to ensure that the paragraph does not go onto a second page, since that will likely be too long. Three-quarters to one full page = the Goldilocks zone.
- Be sure to give yourself time to write *and then revise* the paragraph. Without revision, the paragraph will be rubbish.
- Avoid the passive voice, contractions, “would” as a weird form of past tense, the word “led” (which usually tells little), and anything else that I have identified as undesirable.