Cita Cook

DIRECTIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS' BOOK REVIEW

FIRST, READ CAREFULLY THE DIRECTIONS ON BOTH SIDES OF THIS PAPER. I subtract points if you do not follow any of the directions. Be sure to ask me if you have any questions about anything connected with this essay.

1. The essay will involve a comparison of how different historians have approached a similar topic by analyzing the comparative strengths and weaknesses of at least three different works by at least three different authors (books, articles, and/or clear segments of books), totaling at least 500 pages.
2. Each work must be written by a professional scholar (usually a historian) primarily for a scholarly audience and must include endnotes or footnotes. You must have permission from me to use each of them. You do not, however, have to choose all the works you will read at the same time. Sometimes what you read in one work will lead you to reconsider what the other readings should be.
3. Follow the directions from the handouts on reading secondary sources, focusing on whichever questions help you evaluate each work most effectively. As preparation for writing, summarize in a list the answers to any questions you find most helpful.
4. As soon as you have finished a work (or possibly one or more chapters in a book), hand in for feedback a statement about it in which you answer the questions required for graduate student comments about weekly readings. Add any thoughts or questions you have about how you might discuss it in your essay. Do not forget to summarize as concisely as possible the basic thesis of each work (the main point[s] you think the author was trying to make), the kinds of sources used by the author, and your evaluation of the use of these sources. Part of your participation grade for the course will be based on the quality of these preliminary statements and how soon and regularly you hand them in. Do not wait until the last month to hand one in, but also do not try to do too many too quickly.
5. In your final essay, keep the focus on the strengths and weaknesses of each work in the context of your main interest. You are writing about how the historians approached a particular topic rather than about the topic itself; but you do need to include enough of a summation of what each author covers and enough specifics about the topic for a reader to be able to understand the issues you discuss and how you reached your conclusions. Imagine that you are writing it for another graduate student who knows the general history covered in the class but has not read the works you are reviewing.
6. Consider how what you have studied in this class is relevant to your thoughts about the book. Let me know if you need any help in developing a general knowledge of the broader context for your primary focus.
7. It is fine to give personal reactions to the material as long as you also discuss it as a historian.
8. At the top of the first page, list the names of the works you are discussing, using the proper bibliographical form. Add a separate bibliography of any works you found that you did not include in the essay (whether or not you actually read them), with a short annotation for each indicating what the work seems to cover and any other relevant information that might be useful if you do more work on this topic in later years.
TECHNICAL GUIDELINES
1. The paper should be 12-15 pages long, typed or printed double-spaced (unless you have special permission to write it by hand). I will not accept papers sent by email or on a computer disk unless you have a special reason to do so and have received permission from me. Use an average size font and one inch margins and do not skip a line between paragraphs. Cover pages are optional, but you do need page numbers (not used on a cover page). Please do not put the paper in a folder. Considering my tendency to go overboard with comments and the possibility of papers getting lost, you should make a photocopy and keep a draft in a computer so that you can have a clean copy to keep. If you are planning to do a History M. A. degree without writing a thesis, you may want to use this paper as part of your writing portfolio.
2. The assignment should be written in good essay form, with an introduction, a coherent discussion of the issues, and a conclusion. Make a list of the basic points you want to make, put them in the most logical order, and then use a revised version of that list as an outline for writing. If you have trouble getting started, try writing a casual email to yourself about your thoughts about the topic. It is usually best not to try to write the introductory paragraph before you have written much or all of the rest of the essay, but do what works best for you.
3. Make it clear in your introductory paragraph what basic focus unites the works you are discussing and the general approach you are taking in comparing them. Decide what the thesis (the main point) of your review will be and plan to introduce it in your first paragraph and to keep it central to the entire essay (without repeating the same words over and over).
4. Back up all of your generalizations with specific evidence from the books and essays.
5. Put all direct quotes in quotation marks, but avoid using a lot of direct quotes. Paraphrase unless you have a special point that requires the exact words. Include endnotes or footnotes where appropriate (for any direct quotes, paraphrasing, or specific information that is not generally known), using the format required in history (Turabian/Chicago Style) or in your major discipline.
6. If I find any evidence that you have plagiarized (used someone else's words without quotation marks and a page number and/or paraphrased someone else's ideas and/or specific information without crediting them), whether from a published or an unpublished source, you will receive a zero (after a meeting with me in which you may defend yourself so that I do not let any incorrect charges stand) and will not have a chance to redo the paper. If you are uncertain about whether something is plagiarism, check with me. It is probably better for you to avoid reading reviews written by other historians so you may develop your own ideas more freely, but include a reference with appropriate page number(s) whenever your ideas and/or your use of specific facts that are not generally known are influenced by specific statements by a historian. This also means that you may not ask someone to correct your grammar or other writing problems (different from someone telling you that you have those problems).
7. Your paper will always be better if you start writing soon enough to ask for help if you discover you need it and do several drafts. Rewriting helps!
8. Don’t forget to proof your essay for any grammar, punctuation, or syntax problems. You may contact the Writing Center by phone, email, or in person for advice about basic writing problems. They have vowed to be supportive of students who cannot be on campus during the daytime, but be realistic about what they can and cannot do. They will let you know what kinds of mistakes you are making but will not rewrite those segments for you. Instead, they will help you learn how to do it yourself.
9. Contact me by phone, email, or in person about any problems. I will not do a detailed reading of a rough draft, but you may show me something you have written or discuss with me the approach you are taking to gain reassurance that you are headed in the right direction.