# Prewriting

## **Understand the assignment**

In your essay, you will describe a historic event. This is similar to a writing task you might need to do for a history class. You can focus on describing the event itself or its causes/effects.

You can choose to either write a more formal essay about the event or write more creatively about it.

Your essay should be 1-2 pages long, double-spaced. This is **not** a traditional five-paragraph essay. The goal of this writing task is to provide as much description as possible in a limited amount of space. For this assignment focus on quality, not quantity. It is actually much harder to write in a shorter amount of space, so this is good practice for learning to write with academic concision.

## **Research**

Remember that after you do enough preliminary research to brainstorm and choose your focus, you should do more detailed research about your topic so that you can make your outline.Encyclopedias can be an excellent place to begin looking for information on a specific event.

### Interviews

If you chose an event in living memory (meaning someone is still alive who remembers it because lived through that event), then you have the bonus research option of doing a personal interview. Personal interviews are considered primary sources You should still consider the trustworthiness of primary sources, but usually, primary sources are considered excellent sources.

If you know someone or of someone who lived through the event you are writing about, you can contact them and ask them about their experience. If you choose to contact someone to interview them, you should be polite and respectful. Ask if you can interview them. Be prepared with questions for when you meet, call, or email, and thank them for their time or for meeting with you afterward.

You can cite a personal interview in APA style with in-text citations but does not need a reference page entry. See this webpage for more information on how to cite personal interviews: <https://www.scribbr.com/apa-examples/interview/>

## **Brainstorm**

A Google search for "important events" might be  good place to start if you aren't sure what you want to write about.

### Example topics could include the following:

* The [Any Country] Revolution (ie. The French Revolution)
* The moon landing
* The discovery of DNA
* The translation of the Bible
* The fall of the Berlin Wall
* The Montgomery Bus Boycott
* The sinking of the Titanic
* The Renaissance
* The invention of penicillin
* The invention of instant ramen

You can choose any historically important event from around the world. Think back to events you learned about in elementary and secondary school. Think of events that you still celebrate or hold remembrances for.

You can also do a basic internet search for important events in world history and see if any of the search responses seem interesting to you.

## **Chooseyourfocus**

Because this essay will be a maximum of 2 pages long, make sure to focus in your description on one aspect of the event you will describe. You will not be able to describe every single detail about such an important event in just 2 pages, so instead focus on describing one aspect really well.  Do not attempt to include more than one of the following in an essay of this length.

### Aspects to Focus On

* a climactic moment of the event
* a short vignette or scene of the event
* an emotion attached to the event and why that emotion was/is there
* why is the event so impactful. What made it significant?
* If there were people, what specific actions did they do leading up to, during, or after the event? Why are those actions significant?
* If there were specific words spoken, such as at a famous speech, what made those words so impactful?

## **Outline**

Start with your thesis. What is the most important information you want to share about this event? Then consider how many paragraphs you will write (about 3 paragraphs total will fit in 2 pages double-spaced). What descriptions best support your thesis? Use those descriptions as your topic sentences.

Add questions or quotes to help you develop each of your ideas. Think specifically about how to introduce your audience to an event they do not know.  Even if you chose a well-known event as your topic, approach your descriptive piece as if you know your audience has never heard of that event. Pretend that your descriptive piece is the first they have heard about it.

## **Introduction**

Your introduction should start immediately with a thick description. A thick description means that rather than saying a simple fact with basic words, you will create an image with your words. You can paint a picture in the minds of the readers with the words you use to describe the event.

**Simple:** "In 1851, General Washington crossed the Delaware River."

**Think Description:** "On the stormy Christmas night of 1851, General Washington lead his brave soldiers across the icy Delaware river in secret to secure America's first victory.

Do not attempt to tell every single detail of the event in your short descriptive piece.

You will need to give some background information on the topic in the introduction. However, keep the word count limit in mind and keep the background information general, so you have more room to describe the topic in detail in the body paragraphs.

At the end of your introduction paragraph, you should give your thesis. The thesis should describe the event in very specific terms.

Example:

The Great Depression was a time of great economic and political uncertainty.

### Effective Thesis Statement Review

An effective descriptive thesis statement...

* addresses the **prompt**if there is one\* (i.e., answers the question).
* is usually at the **end**of the introduction paragraph.
* controls the content of **all**of the body paragraphs.
* is a **complete**sentence.
* does **not announce**the topic (e.g., "I'm going to talk about Genghis Khan Unifying the tribes of Mongolia.").
* should **not**simply be a **fact**(e.g., "Sugar plantations were in Hawaii.").
* should **not**be **too general**(e.g., "World War 1 had a large impact on history.").
* should **not**be **too specific**(e.g., "In 1867,  Alaska was purchased to much derision from the press from Russia by the United States for around 7 million dollars which was about 2 cents an acre.").
* may **state**or **imply**main points (e.g., "The Chernobyl accident caused irreparable environmental and social damage, but this gave the people an opportunity to become stronger in their unity and courage to serve no matter what. " vs. " The Chernobyl accident caused irreparable damage, but this gave the people an opportunity to become stronger.").

## **Body**

Your body paragraphs should give reasons and evidence to support your thesis. As you outline your body paragraphs, make sure you include clear topic sentences that support your thesis.

Shorter essays may only need 1-3 body paragraphs. Longer essays may need more body paragraphs.

**Consider the following example:**

* Thesis Statement: The Great Depression was a time of great economic uncertainty.  
  + - Topic sentence: Unemployment was devastatingly high during the Great Depression in many US cities.
    - Topic sentence: Many banks were dangerously unstable during the Great Depression.

This short essay only has two body paragraphs. When you have a fewer number of body paragraphs it is especially important that they are well developed with detail. For an essay that needs to fit a short page limit, writing about one or two topics deeply is better than writing about many topics only shallowly.

As you plan each of your body paragraphs, remember that using sources will make your writing more credible and interesting. Use sources properly so that you do not plagiarize.

## **Conclusion**

Your conclusion paragraph should start by restating your thesis. Then, you should write about the event in more general terms and apply their situation to the world more generally. End with a concluding statement.

## Exercises

### Exercise 1: Analyze the Prompt

**Prompt:**Describe an impactful event in history. Your essay should be 1 page double spaced.

Answer the following questions to fully understand the prompt above.

1. What verbs are being used? What task is this prompt asking you to do?

2. How narrow or general is the content that this prompt is asking you to write?

3. What are the constraints of this prompt?

### Exercise 2: Evaluate thesis statements

How effective are each of these thesis statements?

1. The biggest influence that America had after the Vietnam war are many: the big damage of the economy, the big change of the thoughts among the american people, and the permitted age to vote and the end of draft.
2. Renaissance have been knowing as a cultural movement started in italy, making that the people felt the curiosity of an awakening mind which developed the basic science that nowadays we have been developing more and more through to the years.
3. All these elements marked Russia's history, and to understand it in a broad way it would be necessary to learn about three outstanding aspects: Who ruled the last dynasty in Russia, what were the reasons that fueled the violence in the Russian Revolution of 1917, and what was the result of this revolution in Russia's history.
4. The Great Migration involved a lot of people; they were courageous; they left the South to look for work and when they arrived, they found difficult conditions, but they worked to overcome them.

### Exercise 3: Short Essay Focus

Read the following prompt and brainstormed ideas. Then choose the best body paragraph idea(s) to include in the essay outline.

**Prompt:**Describe an impactful event in history. Your essay should be 1 page double spaced.

**Brainstormed Ideas in No Particular Order:**

* "Bohemian Rhapsody" is the rarest song for many reasons.
* The initial reaction to "Bohemian Rhapsody" was mixed.
* Nowadays, Queens' song have different recognitions.
* "Bohemian Rhapsody" had an enormous musical impact when it was released.
* The famous rock band, Queen, was formed in London in 1970.
* "Bohemian Rhapsody" combines multiple music genres including rock, opera, and pop.
* "Bohemian Rhapsody" has a heavy theme as it discusses murder.
* This song by Queen continues to impact music today.

**Outline:**

### Exercise 4: Restate a thesis

Restate each thesis.

1. Thesis: The invention of the lightbulb was a work of perseverance and ingenuity.
2. Thesis: The sinking of the Titanic was as tragic as it was preventable.

### Exercise 5: Write a thesis

Three students wrote about Quin Shi Huang's Terracotta Army. Each focused on a different aspect of the event of finding the terracotta army. Use the topic sentences to complete each outline. Write the missing thesis statements and restated thesis statements for each essay.

**Essay 1:**

TH:

* + TS: The discovery of the warriors was completely accidental.

RTH:

**Essay 2:**

TH:

* + TS: Finding the army was exciting because a discovery of similar magnitude had not been made for many years.
  + TS: Archaeologists were thrilled by this discovery because it helped to shed light on unknown aspects of Chinese life under the reign of the first emperor.

RTH:

**Essay 3:**

TH:

* + TS: The discovery of the army created many unanswerable questions for archaeologists.
  + TS: Some scholars have differing opinions as to possible influences from other ancient cultures.
  + TS: The emperor whose tomb the terracotta warriors guard remains sealed.

RTH:

TH = Thesis Statement, TS = Topic Sentence, RTH = Restated Thesis Statement

### Exercise 6: Peer Review

Give advice to the author of this student outline.

TH: The Independence's day of Mexico has been the best achievement in their history due to the fact they achieved the freedom.

* TS: Freedom was always really wanted by slaves
  + SD: The conspiracy of Queretaro.
  + SD: The "Grito de Dolores" (speech of dolores)
* TS: The huge territory
  + SD: The Spaniards' domain over slaves.
  + SD: The lack of equipment.

TH = Thesis Statement, TS = Topic Sentence, SD = Supporting Detail

## References:

Caulfield, J. (2022, June 17). How to cite an interview in Apa style. Scribbr. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from https://www.scribbr.com/apa-examples/interview/ Originally published 2020, November 6

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