**Memorandum**

To: Professor Margot Volem

From: Todd Carter

Date: May 16th, 2025

Subject: Project 1

I have completed the requested analysis of an example of my previous nonfiction writing. I chose a research essay from my History 101 class the previous semester titled “The Occurrence of Religion Under Oppression.” Following the specified guidelines, I explain my findings in the next sections.

**Be Concise**: To “Be Concise” means to be brief yet comprehensive.

**Unnecessary Repetition**: There was more than one example of unnecessarily repeated words in my essay. In the first example shown here, I referred to “ancient India” in two sentences in a row rather than providing a more concise phrasing.

“In ancient India as far back as 1500 B.C.E., there was the organization of a system of oppression that intertwined religion and social values. This was a slow process that took centuries and was recorded in the very long history of ancient India through texts such as the *Rig Vedas* and the Laws of Manu.”

This would have been better without repeatedly indicating that this was “ancient India,” such as by writing, “This was a slow process in the region that took centuries and was recorded through texts such as…”

In the next example, I re-used the phrase “as a means of control” in a way that only restates the same idea.

“The *Rig Vedas* lays out the religious structure that was meant as a means of control through organization, forcing certain parts of the populace into specific groups from which they couldn’t escape in life.1 Utilizing religious values as a means of control over the population began with the idea of “varna,” which formed the roots for a class-based social structure that stratified the different levels of economic success.2”

This passage could have eliminated most of the beginning of the second sentence as it repeats what was said in the first sentence, such as by writing “This began with the idea of “varna,”…”

**Redundant Words and Phrases**: Redundant words and phrases were applied throughout the essay. In the first example, I use the term “higher divine.”

“Throughout human history, there has been a frequency of organized groups to attribute aspects of the natural world to a higher divine order.”

This could have eliminated “higher” and carried the same information.

In the next example, I use “first arose,” “pure austerity,” and “total pacifism,” which are all redundant phrases.

“Jainism first arose and pushed back against the Brahmins of the caste system with the concept of asceticism, which focused on a life of pure austerity and spartan living and total pacifism, though these aspects hindered its spread during the relatively wealthy and peaceful times of ancient India.”

This passage could have eliminated “first,” “pure,” and “total.”

**Dead Phrases**: More than one example of dead phrases were found. In this example, I used the term “it can be argued.”

“Religion has been common for governance in many cultures otherwise, though it can be argued that this is directly related to the influence the religion has on the people being governed and their socioeconomic status.”

This phrase could be eliminated for the sake of conciseness.

In the next example, I used the term “it can further be said.”

“It can further be said that religions that preach goodwill often result in wider spread popularity with those caught under harsher systems, such as the rise of Christianity and Islam despite systemic oppression.”

This also carries a pompous tone and could be eliminated for conciseness.

**Unnecessary modifiers**: More than one use of unnecessary modifiers was found. In this example, I used the term “very long history.”

This was a slow process that took centuries and was recorded in the very long history of ancient India through texts such as the *Rig Vedas* and the Laws of Manu.

This passage could eliminate “very.”

In this next example, I used “entirely different.”

“Though in entirely different times and places, this messaging was not dissimilar to that of the Buddha, encouraging personal faith and development of the individual over the oppressive demands of the currently dominant religions.”

In this case, “entirely” was an unnecessary modifier that could have been eliminated.

**Be Precise**: To “Be Precise” means exact and accurate as based on the audience.

**Audience Levels of Technical Expertise**: My audience for this paper was the professor for the course and teaching assistants that may have participated in grading. I attempted to write for a high enough level of expertise that assumes the audience knows the places and eras I am referencing, such as “Mesoamerica.”

“Though much of Mesoamerican history was passed on by oral traditions with infrequent and unspecific writing systems, the demand for blood was documented as late as the invasion of the Spanish conquistadors centuries later.”

I do not explain where Mesoamerica is or which cultures are specifically being referred to. This would be common knowledge within the context of the class and this essay.

**Consistent Terminology**: I lacked consistency in how I addressed the “caste system/jati system” of Vedic Age India. This example shows one instance of using “jati system” in place of the “caste system.”

“In further contrast to the relatively peaceful religious revolutions seen in response to establishments like the jati system and the Romanic pantheon, the often brutal and harsh religions of Mesoamerica saw fewer documented attempts to move towards models more supportive of individual growth.”

Throughout the document, I used the term “caste system” more commonly than “jati system,” and though they refer to the same thing, they did not need to be interchanged.

**Level of Specifics and Detail**: Details varied in their level of specificity throughout the document. While describing Mesoamerican religions, I did not get into detail about the rituals that could be considered violent.

“During times of great prosperity such as the height of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan and its twin of Tlatelolco, there was a continued evolution of human sacrifice, and the pressure of religion was as an added means of control of the populace.”

This passage and those around it would have benefitted from explaining how the sacrifices applied the pressure of religion and why those pressures existed.

**Be Direct**: To “Be Direct” means to get to the point without embellishment and free from ambiguity.

**Active vs Lazy Verbs**: My essay made use of lazy verbs while organizing descriptions. One such example needlessly uses “there was.”

“In ancient India as far back as 1500 B.C.E., there was the organization of a system of oppression that intertwined religion and social values.”

This would have been better phrased more actively, such as by writing, “In ancient India as far back as 1500 B.C.E. existed an organized system of oppression that intertwined religion and social values.”

**Active vs Passive Voice**: My essay uses passive voice, as it was meant to inform and relate events from history while guiding the reader along a specific topic of discussion. The following example shows how passive voice is used to introduce facts and provide context.

“Starting around mid-500 B.C.E, India started undergoing shifts in their religious appeals, likely due to stresses put on the populace by the caste system.”

In this sentence, “India” is the subject and “started undergoing” is the action. The “by zombies” test fails, which indicates this is in passive voice.

**Topic Position**: My essay used strong topic positions to establish the information a reader needs for context. An example of a useful topic position follows.

“However, ancient India saw a slow revolution come about in response to this strict system of religious governance.”

This starting sentence is used to establish a paragraph which discusses the changes to religions in the region of ancient India, in the context of the current essay.

**Stress Position**: Stress positions were used effectively in this essay. I ended sentences appropriately where needed, and paragraphs built towards a specific purpose made clear in the final sentence. Here is an example of a strong stress position.

“Centuries later after the world political stage had changed, a new religion arose in the Middle East in Palestine that also preached spirituality and fairer treatment.”

The purpose of this sentence was to emphasize the importance of the spirituality and fairer treatment in the context of this new religion.

**Noticeable Error(s)**: There were a number of errors in the finished essay, as pertaining to the five errors that workplace readers are most likely to notice.

1. **Run-On Sentences**: Defined as the connection of two complete sentences with a conjunction but without the use of a comma before the conjunction. I did not find issues with run-on sentences while analyzing my essay.
2. **Comma-splices**: Defined as the connection of two complete sentences using a comma instead of a correct conjunction. I did not find issues with comma-splicing while analyzing my essay.
3. **Introductory Element Punctuation**: Defined as the usage of punctuation after an introductory word or phrase. I correctly used introductory element punctuation throughout the document. Here is an example of correct usage:

“However, other cultures retained violence as a continued system of control, such as the long era of cultures that utilized human sacrifice in Mesoamerica.”

1. **Faulty Parallel Structure**: Defined as not using the same grammatical form of words in a pairing or series of related words or phrases. In one example, I had significantly broken parallel structure, which was also technically a run on sentence.

“This time saw the rise of several new religions, both of which rejected the caste system in its own way, which were Jainism and Buddhism, though eventually the rise of Hinduism re-embraced social stratification.”

In this case, “several” should refer to more than two religions, whereas “both” should refer to only two. This could be fixed by changing “both” to “each.”

1. **Incorrect contractions, spelling, typos**: Defined as the improper usage of words, phrases, and punctuation in a document. I did not find issues with contractions, spelling, or typos while analyzing my essay.

**Conclusion**:

This analysis was a useful look at how I could have otherwise written my final exam essay. I had frequent issues with being concise, though a certain amount of lard was expected by the assignment. Further, my usage of dead phrases was specifically required by the assignment itself. A number of weaknesses in my essay were revealed, such as my usage of lazy verbs, my lack of consistency, my repetitive usage of certain words, and frequent redundant words and phrases.