HIST 101 Spring 2025: Assignment 2

This assignment builds off Assignment 1 and focuses on your interpretative and argumentative skills. Your exams will have two parts, a primary source section and an essay. These assignments help you prepare for both. You need to submit this assignment to Canvas by 11:59pm on the due date.

# Part I: Interpret

*For each of the following sources, answer each of these:*

1. **Explain what the passage means.** This should include both specifically what the passage is discussing but also explain why it is important. The latter is what we call significance. You are explaining why someone reading the passage should care about what they are reading. That can include explaining why it is strong evidence for a certain topic; what it reveals about their society; how it shows a distinct change from something else; what is at stake for the person writing the passage; etc.
2. **Explain the author’s position and biases.** This means looking at both the editor’s introductory section to the source AND the relevant sections on that society in the textbook to determine what might have influenced the author. That can include things such as their social class, position in relation to power, marital status, social position relative to the class they were born into (i.e. did the move up or down socially with marriage or occupation), occupation, education, gender, and major events that might have influenced them. Many times, we do not know who wrote the text, but that does not mean we cannot extrapolate this type of information. Use your deductive skills to make a case for what type of person would have written that source. Similarly, you can do the same types of deductive reasoning for a non-textual source of evidence, like an artifact.
3. **Explain the context.** This means looking at when the source was written to consider what types of social issues it may or may not have addressed or precipitated. Or what cultural value it defends, establishes, undermines, etc. Or how it may or may not respond to a specific historical event or crisis. You are essentially combining the first two parts (explain the passage and explain the author) to establish what we can learn about the specific moment and cultural worldview of the author, specifically, but also the society more broadly.

Source 3.3, The Laws of Manu

“Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare. Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards…Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one’s control. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.”

Source 4.6, Thucydides, The Peloponnesian Wars

“Our institutions do not emulate the laws of others. We do not copy our neighbors: rather, we are an example to them. Our system is called a democracy, for it respects the majority and not the few; but while the law secures equality to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is generally preferred to the public service, not in rotation, but for merit. Nor again is there any bar in poverty and obscurity of rank to a man who can do the state some service. It is as free men that we conduct our public life, and in our daily occupations we avoid mutual suspicions; we are not angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes; we do not put on sour looks at him which, though harmless, are not pleasant.”

Source: Astronomical Stele of Asurnasirpal II (British Museum), in “Lives and Livelihoods, Mesopotamian Astronomers”, Chapter 4, page 139.



Source 5.5, Advice on Proper Behavior, Confucius

“The Master said, Govern the people by regulations, keep order among them by chastisements, and they will flee from you, and lose all self-respect. Govern them by moral force, keep order among them by ritual, and they will keep their self-respect and come to you of their own accord…Chi K’ang-tzu asked whether there were any form of encouragement by which he could induce the common people to be respectful and loyal. The Master said, Approach them with dignity, and they will respect you. Show piety towards your parents and kindness towards your children, and they will be loyal to you. Promote those who are worthy, train those who are incompetent; that is the best form of encouragement.”

# Part II: Identify

For the essay component of your midterm and final, you will need to write a short argumentative essay. In this section you will work on building that type of essay and be introduced to some of the key things I am looking for as I grade them.

## Identify Themes Across Different Cultures

Skim through Chapters 1-5 and identify four transhistorical themes. A transhistorical theme is one that applies to more than one place at more than one time.

## Identify Systems and Cultures

In this class, we are defining a system as “a set of things working together, an interconnected network, a prevailing order, and/or a set of principles and procedures.”

First, explain what you think that definition means.

Second, using the definition, skim through the first five chapters of the textbook and identify four potential systems.

Third, identify two to three cultures that you think would make good case studies for those systems and explain why.

# Part III: Building an Argumentative Essay

## Narrative vs. Argument

When writing a history paper, it can be easy to fall into the trap of reporting rather than analyzing. It can be hard to tell the difference between when you are simply telling a story and when you are actually making a claim. In particular, students often think that they are only making a claim if they use a direct quote, which is not the case. Look at the following passages and identify whether they are narrative or analysis and justify your answer.

1. One of the Persians’ most effective administrative measures was the introduction of a coinage. Coins provided an economic standard that simplified trade because they were an official form of legal tender and were small and portable. In their capacity as official legal tender, they also offered Achaemenid kings the opportunity to spread ideological messages. Persian coins were frequently stamped with images that advertised the king’s martial prowess with weapons and his control over animals, especially lions and bulls.
2. At Persepolis, Darius constructed a magnificent city where he annually celebrated the delivery of tribute. He did so through imperial imagery various subject peoples bringing him offers of gifts that identified their homelands.
3. Because communication was of utmost importance in administering their colossal empire, Persian kings developed an extension road system to connect the capital to the provinces. The most famous road, the Royal Road, stretched from Susa in western Iran to Sardis, a satrapal capital in western Turkey.
4. In order to defend his right to the throne, which was in question since he was not a direct descendant of the Achaemenids, Darius I developed a language of power, both visual and textual, that was ideologically charged. Darius sought to combine religious symbolism, such as the symbol of the god Ahura Mazda, and ethnic diversity in the form of tribute groups to demonstrate to the Iranian people that he had been chosen by their god to rule over a vast empire.

## Supporting with Evidence

For each of the passages in the previous section, find one piece of primary evidence and one piece of secondary evidence from the textbook, a video, or other course materials (ONLY materials on Perusall). For each piece of primary evidence, explain how you would use it.

## Framing the Argument

Perhaps the most critical part of any history essay is the introduction, because it establishes 1) the scope and context of the argument, 2) why that argument is significant, 3) how the essay will explore the topic, and 4) what that argument is. Writing an effective introduction is quite difficult and typically takes numerous drafts. Below you will practice some of the components of that thesis.

## Historical Questions

One of the biggest hurdles for students is figuring out how to write a thesis that isn’t simply a statement, either of fact or intent. They do not make a claim.

Example: *This paper will explore the ideological motivations of Darius I.*

This is a **statement of intent**, telling me what you are going to do. It does not make a claim.

Example: *Women were not considered fit to be independent in Vedic India.*

This is a **statement of fact**. It is just providing information about women in India, it does not make a claim.

One way to set yourself up to avoid these pitfalls is to start with a historical question framed around “why” or “how.”

Example: In the statement of intent thesis, if that were flipped into a question, the question would be a “what” question, i.e. *“What will this paper do?”*

* A better question to ask would be: *“why did Darius I employ ideology in his inscriptions and state art?”*
* A potentially more effective question would be: *“how did Darius I’s ideology change Persian conceptions of power?”*

Example: In the statement of fact thesis, if flipped into a question, that question would be something like “did men think women could have independence?”

* A better question would be: *“why did men think women were unfit for independence?”*
* A potentially more effective question would be, *“how did men use Hinduism to justify their control of women in Vedic India?”*

Writing a Claim Thesis

Even with how and why questions, you can still end up with a statement of intent or fact. So, for each of the sample questions (the better and more effective ones), write an argumentative thesis that makes a clear claim.

**Tips**:

* Words like despite, nevertheless, although, and even can help signal a claim if you are struggling.
* If possible, avoid a listing thesis, such as “men in Vedic India felt that women were unfit for independence because the gods expected women to be dependent, because women had no control over their sexual desires, and because men needed to honor women.” This is better than a simple statement of fact, but still does not make a strong, provocative claim.
* Try to have your thesis be a narrow claim. You do not need to cover everything about a topic to do well, but rather pick something that is narrow enough to be focused but not so narrow that you will run out of things to say.

The Introduction

Now that you have practiced writing a thesis in response to a historical question, I want you to go back to the other primary sources in Part 1 of this assignment and write a historical question and, using what you compiled in Part 1, write a practice introduction. This introduction should, in 4-7 sentences, establish 1) the scope and context of the argument, such as what the topic is and the parts of the author’s context or historical context that are important for establishing the significance of the argument. 2) Why the argument is significant, i.e. what does it teach us, how does it shine a new light on things, or how does it make us question our assumptions, things like that. 3) How the essay will explore the topic. This is like a little roadmap of what you are going to do to establish your point. and 4) what that argument is. That is, what is the provocative claim you are making.