

# Historiography Framework Cheat Sheet (HIST 101/102)

**Purpose:** This is a quick reference for the core “engines of change” (conceptual frameworks) we use to interpret the past. You can use this sheet all semester for discussion posts, quizzes, and essays.

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## 1) Agency (Human Choice)

### Core idea

History is driven by **human decision-making** (choices, leadership, strategy).

### What to look for in a historical account

- individual leaders making decisions
- pivotal moments / turning points
- motivations, intentions, calculations
- contingency (“things could have gone differently”)

### Useful sentence starters

- “A major turning point was when \_\_\_\_ decided to \_\_\_\_.”
- “This outcome depended on the choices of \_\_\_\_.”
- “If \_\_\_\_ had not , *then* might have happened instead.”

### Example (U.S. History)

Lincoln’s decisions during the Civil War and emancipation debates.

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## 2) Great Man Theory (Extreme Agency)

### Core idea

History is made primarily by **exceptional individuals** (“great men” / heroic leaders).

### What to look for

- hero-centered narratives (“only one person could do this”)
- the crowd becomes background
- “genius,” “destiny,” “extraordinary leadership”

### Quick critique question

- “If we remove the hero, what other forces still explain the change?”

### Example (World History)

Napoleon as the explanation for major European transformation.

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## 3) Determinism (Forces Beyond Individual Agency)

### Core idea

History is shaped by **forces larger than individuals**. People act within constraints.

### Common deterministic forces

- economic systems
- class structure
- institutions (laws, governments, corporations)

- geography / environment
- technology
- unconscious drives / psychology (Freud)

#### What to look for

- patterns across time
- “inevitable” language
- people as products of systems
- structural pressures limiting options

#### Useful sentence starters

- “Even if individuals wanted change, \_\_\_\_ constrained their choices.”
- “The larger system of \_\_\_\_ shaped outcomes more than any single person.”
- “This conflict was rooted in structural pressures like \_\_\_\_.”

#### Example (U.S. History)

Industrial capitalism shaping labor conflict and working conditions.

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### 4) Ideology (Belief Systems as an Engine of Change)

#### Core idea

People act based on **belief systems** (ideas about truth, morality, legitimacy, identity).

#### What ideology can do

- justify power (“this is natural / correct / deserved”)
- create enemies and outsiders
- normalize inequality
- shape what counts as “common sense”

#### What to look for

- moral language (“freedom,” “civilization,” “tradition,” “order”)
- claims about what is “natural,” “right,” or “inevitable”
- rhetoric that divides groups into good/evil

#### Useful sentence starters

- “This policy seemed justified because they believed \_\_\_\_.”
- “The ideology of \_\_\_\_ shaped how people interpreted \_\_\_\_.”
- “The author frames \_\_\_\_ as legitimate by using language like \_\_\_\_.”

#### Example (U.S. History)

Pro-slavery ideology and racial hierarchy arguments in the 1800s.

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### 5) Marxism (Class Conflict + Material Conditions)

#### Core idea

History is driven by **material conditions** and **class struggle**.

## What to look for

- owners vs workers
- exploitation, inequality, profit incentives
- labor conflict, wages, property
- who benefits economically from the system

## Useful sentence starters

- “A Marxist interpretation would emphasize \_\_\_\_.”
- “The real conflict was rooted in control of \_\_\_\_ (labor/property/wealth).”
- “This reform movement threatened the economic interests of \_\_\_\_.”

## Example (U.S. History)

Labor strikes (1877, 1894) interpreted through class conflict.

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## 6) Nationalism (Nation as Identity + Loyalty)

### Core idea

People understand themselves as part of a **nation**, and act in the name of national loyalty.

### What nationalism does

- mobilizes sacrifice (“for the nation”)
- creates myths, heroes, and shared memory
- defines insiders vs outsiders
- strengthens the nation-state

## What to look for

- national myths and heroic narratives
- patriotic symbols
- “unity” language
- historical memory (celebrating or silencing certain stories)

## Useful sentence starters

- “National identity shaped how people interpreted \_\_\_\_.”
- “This narrative creates unity by emphasizing \_\_\_\_ and minimizing \_\_\_\_.”
- “Nationalism turns history into a story of \_\_\_\_.”

## Example (Global History)

WWI propaganda and national mobilization efforts.

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## 7) Evidence Check (How to Read Like a Historian)

### Core idea

A historical argument is not “true” because it sounds convincing. It must be supported by **evidence**.

### Key questions

- What evidence is used? What is left out?
- Are statistics framed selectively?
- Are sources quoted fairly?
- Is rhetoric being used to push a moral conclusion?

### Useful sentence starters

- “The author supports this by citing , *but does not address* .”
  - “This statistic is persuasive, but it may leave out \_\_\_\_.”
  - “The author’s wording (‘\_\_\_\_’) signals a specific interpretation.”
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### Cheat Code for Essays (High-Scoring Move)

In your writing, try to do **two things at once**: 1) Explain the event  
2) Identify the framework

### Example sentence

“Although the textbook highlights individual leadership (agency), the deeper cause was structural—economic pressures and class conflict (determinism/Marxist lens).”