

HIS-223: Medieval England

Paper Assignments & Paper Guidelines

Fall Term 2007

In this handout, you will find two things: the paper assignments, and the guidelines and grading criteria that I apply to papers in my courses. Please note these expectations:

- **Purpose:** The papers for this course are **analytical**. An analytical paper always, above all, must make an **argument**. Therefore, each paper will begin with a brief introduction, setting up the argument and containing a **thesis statement**. The thesis statement does not simply state the topic of your paper; it gives your answer to the question(s) on which you are making an argument. The thesis is a roadmap to your entire paper; it tells readers briefly where you are going and how you will get us there.
- **Audience:** I may be the only person who reads your essay, but you should write for an intelligent reader who may be unfamiliar with the material of the course. A good test for whether or not you have done this is to have a friend or roommate read your essay. If it's not clear to her/him, then you need to revise.
- **Format:** Papers will be 1200-1500 words in length (4-5 standard pages) as a general rule; they may be slightly longer but should generally adhere to that range, as part of the assignment is to make an efficient argument, which is a useful skill. The following format expectations apply:
 1. Papers are to be typed—never handwritten—with 1" margins and double spacing.
 2. Use a standard 12 point font, such as Times New Roman or Arial.
 3. Number every page in the upper right hand corner. (All word processing programs will do this for you automatically with a simple menu selection.)
 4. Staple your paper together. Never fold the corners together.
 5. Do not produce a separate title page.
 6. At the top of your first page, on the left side, provide the following information:
Your Name (You may single-space this heading.)
HIS-223 Medieval England
Professor Carlson
The Date, 2007
- **Citing sources:** You must cite your sources for *all quotations and borrowed ideas*. The format you will use for this class is the MLA in-text citation method, not footnotes or endnotes. In this format, you do not use a comma or a 'p.'. The parentheses go outside of quotation marks, but inside the period at the end of the sentence. *Example:* According to Carlson, "Historians should make more money than heart surgeons" (Carlson 45). You should provide a list of works cited at the end of the paper; it may be on a separate page, but doesn't need to be. Failing to cite your sources adequately is plagiarism. You may receive an F on the paper for plagiarism. Please ask me if you have any doubts/questions about source citation. (For details on the MLA format see <http://gustavus.edu/academics/library/Documentation.html>. For what is and isn't plagiarism: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/> is very helpful.)
- **Language:** All papers for this course should be written in standard, grammatical English. In particular, that means you will not use:

1. Contractions (e.g. didn't, can't)
2. Writing in the first person (e.g., "I believe that..." or "it seems to me...")
3. Addressing the reader directly (e.g., "As you will see...")
4. Slang, vulgarity, obscenity, colloquialism, or any words that a reasonable person would construe as offensive (except when quoting a source).

[Here's an example of a sentence that might be fine conversation but will provoke a flood of editorial ink from me in a formal essay: "As you might guess, I think that it's really cool that King John didn't like spinach."]

- **Proofreading:** Never turn in a paper that has not been carefully reviewed for errors in sentence style, sentence grammar, spelling and punctuation. *The Everyday Writer* has extensive advice on all of these issues. You might find particularly useful the section called "The Twenty Most Common Errors".
- **Due dates and extensions:** Since you have ample opportunity to plan ahead, I expect papers to be turned in on time. I do grant extensions in exceptional cases (e.g., serious illness, a death in the family, tornado), but you need to request (not *assume*) them. If your paper will be late without a reason that warrants an extension, I will accept it for up to 3 days beyond the due date (with a grade penalty), but after that you will get an F.

I return papers with extensive comments. For your **first essay**, you have the option to use those comments in order to **revise** your paper **and resubmit** it. If you resubmit, the grade on the revised paper is the one I use in calculating your grade for the course. While you will not be able to revise your second essay, I am happy to meet with you before you submit it. I am also happy to look over and discuss drafts and outlines submitted via e-mail and even to talk over general ideas with you before you start writing.

For the general criteria that I apply when grading papers, please see the next page of this handout. Please don't be afraid of the paper-writing process. The requirements and guidelines that I have spelled out here are not intended to intimidate you, but to make assignments clear, so that you will know what is expected of you and won't be anxious about that. I want you to succeed. Let me know how I can help!

Here is a description of **what each letter grade means to me**. These are the guidelines that I have in front of me when assessing papers. If you read them over, you will see that while an A is hard-earned in my class, it is quite easy to get a B with some care and thought.

The **F** paper is very rare. This grade is usually only for cases of plagiarism or excessive lateness. However, exceptional failure to comply with the terms of an assignment might also result in an F. The **D** paper, in some significant way, doesn't answer the question that was asked. It lacks a thesis or an argument, or it has a thesis which is inappropriate to the assignment. It may answer the question but have so many errors in grammar and/or spelling that it becomes incoherent. Paragraphs may not hold together; ideas may not develop from sentence to sentence. This paper may repeat the same thoughts over and over, with no development of evidence. It is usually rambling and directionless.

The **C** paper has a thesis which is vague and broad or answers only part of the question(s) asked; or, it may make a decent argument without offering a thesis statement in the introduction. It usually doesn't use enough evidence or uses it ineffectively. Even with a clear and interesting thesis, a paper with insufficient supporting evidence is a C paper. A paper with a good deal of evidence, but with an argument that is difficult to follow is a C paper. These papers often have mechanical faults, but papers without any grammatical or spelling errors may be C papers if the thesis, argument and evidence are not effective.

The **B** paper makes sense throughout. It has a thesis that is appropriate, complete and worth arguing—and it follows through on the thesis as the paper develops. The reader knows where the paper is going and what the author wants to say. The paper presents interesting ideas, supported with sound evidence that is both to the point and properly cited. It is well organized and although some sentences may not be elegant, the ideas in them flow well and logically. Paragraphs may be unwieldy now and then, but they are organized around one main idea. The reader does not have to read a paragraph two or three times to figure out what the writer is trying to convey. This paper may have occasional spelling and grammar errors, but these are few in number and do not prevent the reader from following the ideas in the paper.

The **A** paper is very rare. It has the qualities of the B paper, but is also lively, well paced, interesting, even exciting. Everything in it fits together. The sure mark of an A paper is that the reader continues to think about it after reading it, even wanting to tell others about it. It may have a proofreading error or two, occasional misspelled words or a minor error in grammar, but these are the consequence of the normal accidents all good writers encounter.

PAPER #1

Objective: Interpret and critique primary sources; construct an argument using historical evidence.

Means: An analytical essay following the criteria described above on pp. 1-2.

Sources: The following texts on the Battle of Hastings:

- *Medieval England 1000-1500: A Reader*, pp. 55-73
- Some texts from *The Normans in Europe*, ed. and trans. by Elisabeth van Houts, listed below. This source is available through Manchester Medieval Sources (<http://www.medievalsources.co.uk/normans.htm>), a resource available through the Gustavus library homepage. You will need access to the library databases and Adobe Acrobat to view these.
 - 33. William of Poitiers, *Deeds of Duke William* (pp. 118-25)
 - 43. John of Worcester, *Chronicle* (pp. 142-6)
 - 45. Henry of Huntington, *History of the English People* (pp. 150-6)
- The Bayeux Tapestry: <http://hastings1066.com/baythumb.shtml>. This site breaks the Tapestry down into 35 thumbnails. By clicking on the first one, you can start to view larger images and move through the tapestry by clicking on "next image". The Latin texts that appear on the tapestry are translated just below the image.

FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE, THERE ARE LINKS TO THE ELECTRONIC SOURCES IN THE ON-LINE SYLLABUS.

Due date: Monday, September 24.

Specific topic and question for analysis:

Surviving primary sources do not consistently tell the same story about the battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest. Analyze all of the sources assigned above and answer one of the following:

1. What are the major differences among these sources in the way that they describe the Norman Conquest generally and the Battle of Hastings specifically? As an historian, how do you account for those differences? Which account(s) do you find most credible and convincing? Why?
2. Did Harold or William have the superior legal claim to the English throne after the death of King Edward? In other words, was William the lawful heir, claiming his rights by force or was his simply king on the basis of defeating the previous king (Harold) in battle? In the process of making your argument, use all of the sources as relevant and be attentive to their biases; explain why you find some sources more or less credible and persuasive than others.

Source citation note: When citing the web version of the Bayeux Tapestry, use the frame number in place of a page number. All other sources should be cited by page number in either Amt's or Van Houts's book.

PAPER #2

Objective: Interpret and analyze primary sources; construct a research question and identify resources to make an historical argument.

Means: An analytical essay following the criteria described above on pp. 1-2.

Sources: You will select a primary source from *Medieval England 1000-1500: A Reader*. Almost any source in Sections I through IV is acceptable and appropriate, including ones that we discuss in class. (There is a very small number of the sources that I would prefer that you not use, for various logistical reasons, so you *must* get my formal okay on your source choice.)

Due date: If you select a source from Section I or Section II, the paper is due no later than **Nov. 12**. If you select a source from Section III or Section IV, it is due by **Dec. 19**.

Specific task for analysis:

You will take the source that you have selected (once it is approved) and read it very closely. Use it as the starting point to form a question about one of the topics addressed in the source, and then (working with me) go to the historical literature that will help you to answer your question. (For example, if you chose Magna Carta as your source, one question that you might want to ask is "What was the role of widows in medieval England during the period before and after Magna Carta?") The source itself will occupy a central place in your analysis, both as the inspiration of your inquiry and as a crucial piece of evidence. It will however be contextualized and supported by secondary literature (book chapters, journal articles, etc.), which I will help you to identify.

Plan:

1. Select your source and get it approved. (Approval can be done by e-mail.)
2. Read it closely and think of a question that you want to explore.
3. Meet with me to discuss how to do that, esp. to identify appropriate secondary sources.

Note:

In some cases, due to a lack of accessible material, I may have to suggest that you move to a Plan B (or even Plan C) for your paper—so you might want to have more than one question in mind. However, my goal is to help you develop a project that you will be interested in pursuing. I will steer you to alternate questions only if my professional judgment leads me to believe that what you are seeking to do is not feasible. ***The sooner you get started, the greater the likelihood of being able to carry out your project if Interlibrary Loan is necessary.***

It is hard to make a universal statement about the amount of additional reading that you will do in order to answer your question. I will do all I can to make sure that it is relatively consistent with that being done by the others in the class, and I will also keep in mind the reasonable expectations for a paper of this length and contribution to the final grade in the class. Fairness and reasonableness are very important to me.