

## History in Practice

### Week 12: The Writing Workshop

#### Preparation: Week 11

Ask your students to prepare the following for the seminar next week:

1. Choose your essay question.
2. Answer ONE of the following questions in response to the essay question and write down some thoughts:
  - What are the main ideas that your essay will engage with?
  - What examples would you like to use to illustrate your ideas in the essay?
  - Which historians do you think you will need to engage with when writing your essay?
  - How will you structure your argument? How will the essay unfold?

Students do not need to answer ALL of these questions. They should pick ONE and prepare the answer for next week. This may involve doing some reading from the reading list at the back. Or they can try drawing on all the information they have gathered this term. They should make notes and bring them to next week's class.

**If they want to bring a laptop next week – they should.**

During class next week:

- Put the students into pairs and look over the preparation they did for the week.
- Using that material, ask them to come up with a realistic WRITING GOAL and agree on this goal with their partner. This is a task that they think they can accomplish in 30 minutes. It could be:
  1. Free writing – they brainstorm, bullet point, mind map etc all of their ideas in response to question of their choice.
  2. Essay plan – write a fully detailed essay plan which provides a thesis statement and paragraph structures.
  3. An introduction to, or section of their essay.
- Give them 30 minutes to write. You can go around and provide quiet one-to-one guidance (as can the PASS student if you have one.)
- At the end of 30 minutes silent writing, stop them. Ask them to discuss their work with their partner. Did they accomplish what they wanted? What did they find easy or difficult?

- Now have them set a second realistic WRITING GOAL that they can accomplish in 30 minutes. It could be:
  1. Take their free writing and work it up into a plan and a thesis statement.
  2. Take the plan and write an introductory paragraph or section of the essay. (One solid example to illustrate their thesis.)
  3. Edit their paragraph.
  4. Make a list/mind map of points they wanted to write about but didn't know how to because they didn't have enough information yet.
- At the end of the 30 minutes – have them swap their work with their partner. They should read it over for each other – and provide some feedback. This can be on ideas, structure, argument or style. Have them discuss how they will plan the next step of their writing.

The idea behind this kind of structured writing is:

- a) to show students how much they already know and of course what they don't know and need to research more thoroughly
- b) to get them used to an approach to writing that breaks up the whole task into more manageable pieces
- c) to introduce them to the idea of peer feedback

This is also an opportunity for you to help them work on these essays before they go off to do so on their own. You can recommend readings, help with structure and argument and suggest ways to approach the writing and research.

If students want to continue this cycle with the PASS mentor or on their own at the end of this process – they can. But I would stop here, thank them for their work and wish them a happy and productive festive season!

Document designed by Dr Jo Cohen, School of History, QMUL 3/12/2012