History 200 serves as the foundation for a student’s career as a history major at Rhode Island College. Its goal focuses on exposing him/her to the profession and its best practices—history as interpretation and analysis, not factoids, based on research of creditable sources expressed in well-written formats appropriate to the discipline, e.g. précis, book reviews, scholarly articles and the like. Students are then expected to try to emulate these examples.

The final project required for History 200 is a 10 to 12 page research paper, created through integration and analysis of primary and secondary sources. Students learn to develop a historical narrative as well as the historical argument so critical to a good paper. Assignments spread throughout the semester expose students to the different forms of historical writing. They are then asked to respond to such materials in various written formats. Every piece of prose students hand in is carefully graded and returned to them. To enhance their critical eye concerning common mistakes, students are required to keep an “Error Diary” which they will hand in at mid-semester and at the end of the term. In it they are to record their responses to that various corrections/editorial comments that I have made on their papers—in the hope that they come to recognize their writing weaknesses and address them.

Their written efforts also get reviewed during the course of group work, which occurs periodically in class. Students also meet one-on-one with me twice during the semester. At those times, their research projects are discussed as well as their progress in improving their writing.

History 200 offers a time-line process of exposure to various historical materials and asks students to familiarize themselves with them and also write responses to them. What follows outlines the assignments students do in my History 200 class:

1. Read an article from a mass market periodical, aimed at a more sophisticated audience than your general newsmagazines. Have students write a synopsis of that article.
2. Read articles in chapters of an anthology assigned as course reading and write outlines of those chapters.
3. Read essays by prominent historians which interpret an historical event and write an outline.
4. Read several primary sources and then find a secondary source with which to contextualize the primaries—and then write a setting the historical stage essay.
5. Read about taking notes, documenting sources, then write a short “research paper” based on secondary and primary sources read so far during the course of the semester.
6. Read six academic book reviews and then write an **assessment** of how those reviews match up with the guidelines for writing a scholarly review.  
7. Read an article from a scholarly journal, then write a **précis** of the article.  
8. Write a 10-12 page **term paper** based upon scholarly research in primary and secondary sources. In addition to turning the paper, students hand in all their **note cards**. The paper contains such features as a **Table of Contents** and an **Annotated Bibliography**.

During the course of the semester, students also read two books Richard Marius and Melvin Page, *A Short Guide to Writing About History*, 8th ed. and Jenny Presnell, *The Information Literate Historian*. Subsequent to reading the chapters from these books, class time is dedicated to discussing the main points from each. Leitmotivs to all discussions include writing effectively and ascertaining what constitutes a well-written history essay. Students are especially encouraged to read scholarly journal articles, which of all the academic work produced by historians, most closely resemble students’ research papers.

During the course of the semester, I continually remind students that they are developing three critical skills that lead to being a successful history student: the art of research, the art of writing, and the art of editing.

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