

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND EARLY NATIONAL PERIOD, 1763-1848
History 3430 • Section 11 (30745) • Fall 2021
T/TH, 11:00-12:15, 213 PLAZA BLDG.

Dr. Shelby M. Balik
sbalik@msudenver.edu

office: 211 Central Classroom
office hours: T/Th, 12:30-3:00 p.m.,
or by appt. on Teams

The American Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution were arguably the most important events in American history – they created an independent nation and established a unified polity that would become the longest-lived constitutional republic in modern history. But as of 1787, the future of the republic remained very much in question. In fact, the Constitution and its framers left many dilemmas unresolved. How would Americans balance individual liberties with governmental authority? How would they define citizenship, and whom would they empower with political rights and privileges? When (and how) would the nation decide the proper extent of democracy in a republic, the roles women might assume among the citizenry, and the fate of slavery in a “free” nation? Most importantly, would the Constitution prove strong enough to hold the nation together, even as economic, social, and political change tugged the United States farther and farther away from the founding era? In this class, we will take up these questions as we discover how the generation during and after the Revolution addressed the continuing challenges of independence and unity.

Required Readings: The following books will be available at the Auraria Bookstore (bargain-hunters should also try the selection of used books on Amazon.com and Bookfinder.com, but make sure you get the right editions). I have also placed copies on reserve at the library.

Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (2004)

James Crisp, *Sleuthing the Alamo: Davy Crockett’s Last Stand and Other Mysteries of the Texas Revolution* (2005)

Gerald Leonard and Saul Cornell, *The Partisan Republic: Democracy, Exclusion, and the Fall of the Founders’ Constitution, 1780s-1830s* (2009)

Norman Risjord, *Jefferson’s America, 1760-1815* (2009)

Sean Wilentz et al., *Major Problems in the Early Republic, Second Edition* (2008)

Assignments, Grading, and Course Policies: The course requirements and their value toward your grade are as follows. *You must complete all of these components in order to pass.*

Attendance/participation: 15%

Midterm exam: 25%

Online discussion forums: 10%

Two papers: 20% (10% each)

Final exam (cumulative): 30%

Mask policy: Students are required to adhere to MSU Denver's mask guidelines. As of the beginning of this semester, University policy requires everyone to wear masks indoors, with the exception of vaccinated instructors in class who can distance from students while teaching (which I will try to do). If the mandatory indoor mask policy changes, those who still wish to wear a mask indoors are encouraged to do so. On a related point, those who have not yet gotten vaccinated are strongly encouraged to do so.

Attendance policy: I expect regular attendance and will take roll. Everyone is allowed two “byes” – unexplained absences – in the class. After that, any absences – except in the case of legitimate and

documented emergencies, medical or otherwise – will detract from the attendance/participation portion of your grade. You are responsible for making up the work you miss during any absence, excused or otherwise.

Classes will generally include a combination of lecture and discussion. Your level of preparation and participation will both improve the quality of class meetings and boost your participation grade. It should go without saying (but often doesn't) that when you attend class, you will refrain from disruptive behavior, including (but not limited to) talking amongst yourselves, reading the newspaper, or texting. If you have a laptop, please use it only for purposes relevant to the class. **Please turn off all cell phones and before you enter the classroom and use them only for the purposes of the class.**

Papers: You will write two papers (6 pages each), in which you will respond to assigned questions based on the readings and lectures. You will have a choice of topics, but you must write at least one of the papers assigned before the midterm, and at least one assigned after the midterm. More information (including essay questions) will follow. *All papers should be submitted on Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on the days they are due.*

The Writing Center, located in King Center 415, can help you with any aspect of your writing. For the current schedule or to make an appointment, visit the Writing Center's website at <https://www.msudenver.edu/writectr/> or call 303-556-6070.

Midterm and final exams: The midterm will cover all material taught and reading assigned up to the exam; the final will be cumulative but weighted toward the second half of the semester. Both exams will include shorter identification questions and essay questions (no multiple choice), covering lectures and readings. More information will follow.

Online discussions: I will post one introductory forum and seven discussion questions on Canvas throughout the semester. You need to participate in the **introductory forum, plus five discussions**. Except for the introductory forum (which will involve the whole class), you will participate within smaller groups of 5-7 people. On discussion weeks, I will post a question on Friday night (prior to the discussion week). All members of the group will then have until *Tuesday* of that week to make an initial post to contribute to the discussion, which should bring in concrete references to the readings to make your points. You will then have until the following *Friday night* to make a follow-up post that addresses some point that another participant has made in his or her initial post. Any subsequent posts are welcome and up to you. Your grade on these discussions will take into account both the quantity (at least two) and quality of these posts. ***If you post only once, you will not score higher than 50% for that week. If you skip it, your score will be a zero. Please note that due to the nature of discussions (which require you to interact with each other), you may not make them up or submit late responses under any circumstance.***

Deadlines and exam attendance: All papers are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise noted, and all students are expected to take exams on the specified dates. Late papers will be graded down one-third of a grade (A to A-, etc.) for every day they are late, starting after the beginning of class. Papers will not be accepted late or via e-mail, except with a valid excuse (medical or family emergency, etc.) AND prior approval from me. No-shows for exams will receive an F. Make-up exams will not be allowed, except for students who have a valid excuse and have made prior arrangements with me.

Special Needs: Students who need accommodations – for disability, religious observance, or any other reason – should let me know within the first two weeks of class. Those with a documented disability should contact the Access Center to arrange for accommodations. A full statement on accommodations covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act is available on Blackboard, in the “Syllabus and Policies” folder.

Cheating and plagiarism: Either offense is grounds for a zero on the assignment and failure in the course. If you are unsure of what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, I strongly encourage you to check with me *before* you hand in your assignment. Please also note that any student who cannot or will not produce the notes, outlines, and other preparatory work for his or her paper will be considered guilty of cheating or plagiarism and subject to the same penalties. The policy in this class is quite simple and is as follows. In the first documented instance of academic dishonesty (as described in the University guidelines, linked below), the student will receive a zero on the assignment. In the second instance, the student will fail the class. All code of conduct violations will be reported.

Metro State's Academic Integrity Statement: "As students, faculty, staff and administrators of Metropolitan State University of Denver, it is our responsibility to uphold and maintain an academic environment that furthers scholarly inquiry, creative activity and the application of knowledge. We will not tolerate academic dishonesty. We will demonstrate honesty and integrity in all activities related to our learning and scholarship. We will not plagiarize, fabricate information or data, cheat on tests or exams, steal academic material, or submit work to more than one class without full disclosure."

For more information on academic dishonesty, see

<https://www.msudenver.edu/deanofstudents/studentconduct/academicintegrity/academicdishonesty/>

Students are responsible for full knowledge of the provisions and regulations pertaining to all aspects of their attendance at MSU Denver, and should familiarize themselves with the policies found in the MSU Denver Catalog: [MSU Denver Catalog](#). For more information and recent updates, go to the CLAS website: <https://msudenver.edu/las/studentinformation/forms/>

The College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences is committed to, and cares about, all students. To help you manage personal challenges and basic needs security, the university offer several resources. Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students (303-615-0220 or 303-615-0423), the Gender Institute for Teaching and Advocacy (303-615-2052), or our CLAS office (303-615-0995 or 303-615-1301) for support.

For more information, please see the information on LAS policies and deadlines posted in the "Syllabus and Policies" folder on Blackboard.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE
(subject to change)

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on Canvas.

WEEK ONE: August 23-27

Readings: Jefferson's America, preface, prelude, and chapter 1

- * Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does it Mean to Think Historically?"
- * Patrick Stokes, "No, You're Not Entitled to Your Opinion"
- * Karin Wulf, "What Naomi Wolf and Cokie Roberts Teach Us about the Need for Historians"
- * Daniel Immerwahr, "History Isn't Just for Patriots," *Washington Post* (December 2020)

August 24: Introductions

August 26: Empires and Confederations: Eighteenth-Century North America

WEEK TWO: August 30 - September 3

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapter 2-3

- * "Explaining the Value of France's American Colonies"
- * Selected documents on British North America in 1763

August 31: Colonial Social and Political Structures

September 2: The Seven Years' War and Imperial Reform (*document discussion*)

***** POST IN INTRODUCTORY FORUM BY FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 3 *****

WEEK THREE: September 6-10

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapters 4-5

- * Alfred F. Young, "Ebenezer Mackintosh: Boston's Captain General of the Liberty Tree," from Young, et al., *Revolutionary Founders* (Vintage Books, 2012)
- * Selected documents on the imperial crisis

September 7: Taxes and Troubles

September 9: Declaring Independence

***** ONLINE DISCUSSION #1 CLOSING FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10 *****

WEEK FOUR: September 13-17

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapters 6-7

- * Selected documents on the American Revolution
- * Corey Kilgannon, "Crossing the Delaware, More Accurately" (optional, but really interesting)
- * "The American Revolution on Facebook" (optional, obviously)

September 14: The War in New England and the Mid-Atlantic

September 16: Civilians in Wartime

***** PAPER OPTION 1 DUE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17 *****

WEEK FIVE: September 20-24

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapter 8

Major Problems, chapter 2 (read alongside study guide for Constitutional readings posted in "Exams and Study Guides" folder)

September 21: The War on the Frontier and in the South

September 23: "The Critical Period"

***** ONLINE DISCUSSION #2 CLOSSES FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 24 *****

WEEK SIX: September 27 - October 1

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapter 9

The Partisan Republic, introduction and chapter 1

* Wythe Holt, "The New Jerusalem: Herman Husband's Egalitarian Alternative to the United States Constitution," from Young, et al., *Revolutionary Founders*

* Seth Cotlar, "'Every Man Should Have Property': Robert Coram and the American Revolution's Legacy of Economic Populism," from Young, *Revolutionary Founders*

* Review (skim) docs for discussion on competing visions of the republic and bring them to class on Tuesday (we will look at these docs more closely in class).

September 28: Competing Visions of the Republic

September 30: In-class Constitutional debate (bring *Major Problems*, having read the ch. 2 docs)

***** ONLINE DISCUSSION #3 CLOSSES FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1 *****

WEEK SEVEN: October 4-8

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapters 11-12

The Partisan Republic, chapter 2

Major Problems, chapter 3

October 5: The First Party System (*discussion of docs in Major Problems*)

October 7: The United States in the World (*discussion of docs in Major Problems*)

***** PAPER OPTION 2 DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8 (If you did not write Paper #1, you must write this one.). *****

WEEK EIGHT: October 11-15

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapter 10

* Historical memory folder on Blackboard: choose any FOUR of the following for Tuesday:

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Declaration of Sentiments" (1848)

Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" (1852)

South Carolina Secession Declaration (1860)

Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address (1863)

FDR's Fourth of July Address (1941)

John F. Kennedy's Address at Independence Hall (1962)

Schoolhouse Rock, "No More Kings" (video, 1975)

Craig Fehrman, "The Party of Anti-History" (2010)

Mark Charles, "The Declaration of Independence: It's Not What You Think" (2016)

Excerpt from the 1776 Commission Report (2021)

October 12: The Historical Myth and Memory of the American Revolution: Why it Matters

October 14: MIDTERM

WEEK NINE: October 18-22

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapters 13-15

The Partisan Republic, chapter 3

Major Problems, chapter 4

* Sheila Skemp, "America's Mary Wollstonecraft: Judith Sargent Murray's Case for the Equal Rights of Women," from Young, et al., *Revolutionary Founders*

October 19: Liberty, Equality, and Citizenship in the New United States

October 21: The "Revolution of 1800" and the Jeffersonian Vision (*discussion: Major Problems 4.2-3*)

***** ONLINE DISCUSSION #4 CLOSING FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22 *****

WEEK TEN: October 25-29

Readings: Jefferson's America, chapters 16-17

Major Problems, chapter 5, 10

The Partisan Republic, chapter 4

* Abigail Tucker, "The Great New England Vampire Panic" (Vampires!)

* Kirstin Fawcett, "Mercury in Latrines Helped Historians Follow Lewis and Clark"

Closer the Freedom, Introduction and chapter 1

October 26: Science, Nature, and National Identity (*discussion: Major Problems 4.6*)

October 28: Entering the International Fray: The War of 1812 and its Aftermath

***** ONLINE DISCUSSION #5 CLOSING FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29 *****

WEEK ELEVEN: November 1-5

Readings: Major Problems, chapters 7 and 11, and chapter 1, essay 1 (“The Market Revolution”)
Closer to Freedom, chapters 2-3

- * Rachel Swarns, “Insurance Policies on Slaves: New York Life’s Complicated Past”
- * Matthew Desmond, “In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have to Start on the Plantation”

October 29: The Era of Good and Bad Feelings (*discussion: Missouri Compromise readings in Major Problems*)

October 31: The Market Economy and Social Status in America

***** PAPER OPTION 3 DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5 *****

WEEK TWELVE: November 8-12

Readings: Major Problems, chapter 8.3-5, 7-8; Walter Johnson, “The Chattel Principle”

Closer to Freedom, chapters 4-5 and Postscript

The Partisan Republic, chapter 5

- * Zeba Blay, “‘Underground Railroad’ Photo Series Powerfully Tracks Trail of Runaway Slaves”

November 9: Andrew Jackson, the Bank, and The Second Party System (*discussion: Major Problems 11.3-4*)

November 11: Slavery: Repression and Resistance (*discussion: Closer to Freedom and Major Problems docs in chapter 8*)

***** ONLINE DISCUSSION #6 CLOSSES FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12 *****

WEEK THIRTEEN: November 15-19

Readings: Major Problems, chapter 9, documents 1-6, and chapter 6

The Partisan Republic, chapter 6

November 12: Indian Removal (*document discussion on Major Problems docs in chapter 9*)

November 14: The Second Great Awakening, Perfectionism, and New Religious Movements

***** PAPER OPTION 4 DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19 *****

WEEK FOURTEEN: November 22-26 – No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

WEEK FIFTEEN: November 29 - December 3

Readings: Major Problems, chapter 12, 13.1-5

Sleuthing the Alamo, Prologue, chapters 1-3

November 30: From Revivalism to Reform

December 2: Domesticity and the American Family (*discussion: Major Problems 6.7, 12.2, 13.5*)

***** ONLINE DISCUSSION #7 CLOSSES FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3 *****

WEEK SIXTEEN: December 6-10

Readings: Major Problems, chapters 8.6, 9, 10; 9.7-11; 13.8-10; Stephanie McCurry, “Gender and Proslavery in South Carolina”

The Partisan Republic, conclusion

Sleuthing the Alamo, chapter 4, afterword

* Matt Novak, “Oregon Was Founded as a Racist Utopia”

December 7: Antebellum Southern Society (*discussion of readings on slavery in Major Problems*)

December 9: Slavery, Expansion, and War (*discussion of Sleuthing the Alamo and assigned readings in Major Problems, chapter 9*)

***** PAPER OPTION 5 DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10 (If you did not write papers 3 or 4, you must write this one). *****

***** FINAL EXAM: DATE AND TIME TBA (Based on prior experience, the exam *should* be on Tuesday, December 14, from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., but stay tuned for confirmation.) *****

HISTORY 3430 • THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND EARLY NATIONAL PERIOD PAPER TOPICS

- You must respond to TWO of these questions, distributed as follows:

Everyone must do topic one OR two.

Everyone must do topic three, four, OR five.

- Responses should be 6 pages each, typed in 12-point font and double-spaced, with 1" margins. Use fonts typical for academic papers (i.e., Times New Roman), not novelty fonts or exceptionally large fonts (like Courier).
- All papers should be submitted to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on the day they are due.
- For more tips, see the "Paper Guidelines," following this page.

Topic One (due September 17): Did the French and Indian War and its immediate aftermath knit the British Empire closer together, or did it expose divisions that the British government and its colonies now had to confront? In crafting your argument, it is not enough to simply take one side or another; you must also suggest *why* (right from the beginning of your paper) the French and Indian War had these consequences.

Topic Two (due October 8): In characterizing the eighteenth century, John Adams said that it was an "age of political experiments." Using Adams's comment as a starting point, write an essay in which you make your own argument about the extent to which Americans reconfigured the theory and practice of politics between the 1760s and 1789. *Note: This essay should neither be a narrative of the revolutionary period, nor a list of the "greatest hits" of political milestones. You should think about the tensions that resulted in political change, and the major political strategies, rhetoric, and institutions that Americans developed to navigate the era.*

Topic Three (due November 5): In his farewell address, George Washington warned of the dangers of political factions. Considering the political divisions and alliances that formed between (roughly) 1790 and 1820, assess the validity of Washington's concerns. To what extent did these early political parties foster or weaken nationalism? On the whole, which dynamic would you say the first party system encouraged more: fragmentation or unity?

Topic Four (due November 19): Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that he had observed in the United States a "general equality of condition among the people." Writing about the same period, New York merchant Philip Hone stated "the two extremes of costly luxury in living ... are presented in daily and hourly contrast with squalid misery and hopeless destitution." These very different observations depict a nation in social transition. Which do you think was more accurate? During the early nineteenth century, do you think social equality was, on the whole, expanding or contracting? How did the rise of the market economy and/or other forces drive these trends?

Topic Five (due December 10): What was the "chattel principle," and how did it shape the culture of slavery in the antebellum United States? To answer this question, in addition to defining the core concept of the chattel principle (read the essay by Walter Johnson in *Major Problems*), you should show how it worked by focusing on elements of the culture of slavery that were essential to the institution, including (but not limited to) the economics of slavery, the politics surrounding the institution, the gendered experience of slavery (by blacks and whites), and cultures of resistance. I recommend that you choose no more than three of these or similar categories to analyze the concept of the chattel principle.

**HISTORY 3430 • THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND EARLY NATIONAL PERIOD
PAPER GUIDELINES**

Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to write two (5-6-page) papers, based on course readings. Grades will be based on the following components:

Argument: Your paper must have a clear, analytical argument, in the form of a thesis statement and sustained throughout the paper. Your thesis statement should appear toward the end of your introduction. It must make some sort of historical argument, which you will then support with evidence in the rest of your paper. Think of your thesis statement as answering a “how” or “why” question rather than a “what” or “who” question – in other words, it should suggest an interpretation rather than a description. Some examples:

Weak thesis (C or D paper): "This paper will discuss how African Americans' legal status changed in the decades after World War II." [*Describes the topic but makes no argument.*]

Somewhat better (B paper): "African Americans' legal status improved dramatically in the decades after World War II." [*Suggests an argument but not the reasoning behind it.*]

Much better (A paper): "African Americans' legal status improved dramatically in the decades after World War II, partly due to improved economic opportunities and growing sympathy among whites, but even more due to mounting activism by blacks themselves." [*States a clear argument, and summarizes the reasoning behind it.*]

Beyond the thesis statement, you should use your topic sentences to reinforce and support your argument. Think of each topic sentence as a mini-thesis statement that makes an analytical point about some piece of your overall argument.

Organization and structure: Develop your argument with clearly stated points, each of which builds logically on the points that preceded it and contributes a crucial piece to the overall argument. Prior to writing, develop an outline that breaks the overall argument down into two or three building-block points that work logically together. These building blocks will be the basis for your paragraphs.

Weak organization (C or D paper): Paragraphs have no logical organization or relationship to each other and lack topic sentences that support the overall argument. Paragraphs have no apparent arguments or topics holding them together, but rather seem to start and stop at random points. There may be not true topic or concluding sentences.

Somewhat better (B paper): Paragraphs have clear topics, but the sequencing of topics may not make sense (for example – random chronological order, when the topic suggests an analysis of change over time), and topic sentences do not offer analytical points to support the main argument. Transitions may be lacking, abrupt, or unclear. Paragraphs may lack concluding sentences.

Much better (A paper): Each paragraph has an analytical topic sentence that supports the thesis statement, evidence and analysis that supports the topic sentence, and a clear concluding sentence that wraps up the main idea. Transitions (which appear with the topic sentences, not the concluding sentences) as smooth and logical. Paragraph topics build logically from one to the next.

Primary and secondary evidence: I cannot stress enough that these papers are intended to give you a chance to think and write like historians – and that means that you *must use evidence*. You must include *primary evidence* (evidence from the time or events you're discussing) and *secondary evidence* (writings based on primary research) to establish *historical context* (background information) in order to craft and present a historical argument. Without evidence, the paper is not a historical analysis – it's just an opinion piece. Evidence can include quotes (brief quotes from primary sources only, please), facts, statistics, anecdotes – anything that helps support your argument AND that you can document. Using primary evidence involves careful reading *and* writing, so leave yourself plenty of time for these tasks.

Reading: To use evidence effectively, you should read your documents (along with assigned reading in *Of the People*) with the following questions in mind:

- What is the subject of core issue of the documents?
- Who created the documents, when were they created, and under what circumstances? How did the creators relate to the events or people being discussed (as an eyewitness, secondhand source of information, etc.)?
- What was the documents' wider historical *context*? How might that context have influenced the author(s)?
- What do you know (or what can you infer) about the authors' social positions (class, race, gender, level of education, occupation, etc.). What about the authors' political orientations or biases? How might this background have shaped their perspectives?
- Who was the intended audience for the documents?
- Why did the authors create these documents – did they intend to persuade people? If so, of what?
- Based on all of the above, how reliable are these primary sources? What can we accept as fact, and what must we be suspicious of? Keep in mind that even a very biased source can be a valuable one, but we have to be aware of that bias as we analyze it.

Writing: Part of using evidence effectively means incorporating it into your writing in ways that strengthen your argument rather than distracting (or detracting) from it.

- **Quoting:** When you quote from a source, you must use quotation marks to indicate those portions that you are quoting. You should reproduce the words exactly and use citations to indicate from where they came. **Quote ONLY primary sources** (that is, sources from the time you are writing about that serve as evidence in your paper). You may quote from a secondary book or article, but only if the portion you are quoting comes from a primary source (so you might, for instance, use a quote from George Washington that appears in a book, but you should not quote the author of that book, who is writing about George Washington.). The reason: when you quote the author of a secondary source, you are letting that person do the historical thinking and analysis for you. In these assignments, *you* must do that work yourself. (There is an exception to this rule: when you are directly engaging a historian's argument, you may quote the historian to advance your point. But you should still rely on primary evidence to critique that argument, and you should not use secondary quotes as a stand-in for your own analysis.)
- **Paraphrasing:** When you paraphrase, you use someone else's idea but explain it in your own words. You must indicate whose idea it is, just as you would for a direct quotation. You should not, though, use the original author's words; you must rephrase it in your own words. If you are paraphrasing, you

may use ideas or arguments that historians present in their secondary works, as long as you give credit and synthesize these points in your own argument.

- *Citing your sources:* You should cite all evidence that is not common knowledge. This includes quotes, little-known facts and anecdotes, and statistics, along with any paraphrasing or reference to someone else's ideas. You will not be penalized for excessive citation, so if you are in doubt, cite it. Either footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical citations (author and page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence) will do. You need not include a bibliography unless you use a source outside of class material (which is not expected). Citing sources properly is an important matter of academic integrity. If you paraphrase or quote another person's ideas without acknowledgment, you are plagiarizing. This is illegal, unethical, and grounds for a failing grade. Don't do it.

What should all of this look like in your paper? I will consider use of evidence as follows:

Weak (or no) use of evidence (C, D, or F paper): The paper includes no primary evidence and little or no reference to the assigned primary documents. The paper might mention or even quote the primary documents, but because there is no historical context, the author inaccurately misinterprets the meaning or significance of the evidence, or misses key pieces of information. Papers that include plagiarized text receive an automatic zero.

Somewhat better (B paper): The paper includes insufficient primary evidence. Some of the primary evidence supports the argument, but other examples may be poorly chosen, or the paper might simply rely on quotes with little context or analysis (letting quotes stand for themselves with no further discussion, for example). Formatting of quotes is awkward or grammatically incorrect (for example, floating quotes with no transitional phrases to link prose to quotes). The paper might have entire paragraphs without primary evidence.

Much better (A paper): Every paragraph (possibly except the introduction and conclusion) contains primary evidence. Primary documents are properly quoted, so that quotes and prose combine to form complete sentences. Quotes support but do not replace analysis; rather, analysis explains the quotes in proper context (derived from secondary evidence). Secondary evidence is paraphrased rather than quoted. All evidence works to support the broader argument as well as the points in each paragraph.

Style: I will not grade you on style alone, but good writing is necessary to communicate your ideas. Therefore, quality of writing will figure into your grade. Get to the point, use clear wording, and avoid awkward phrases and sentences. Steer clear of overly formal or informal prose (for example, unnecessarily complicated or elaborate language, colloquialisms or slang, contractions, etc.). Use correct grammar and spelling. I highly recommend that you read your prose aloud to catch awkward or incorrect phrasing.

Weak writing (C or D paper): The paper either uses slang and inappropriately informal language, or it uses overly formal and unnecessarily wordy language. There are numerous problems with word choice, conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and awkward phrasing. The mechanical problems are significant enough to obscure the paper's argument and distract the reader.

Somewhat better (B paper): This paper has many of the same problems as a C paper, but they will not be significant enough to distract from the overall argument. The weaknesses in writing are less universal and easier to fix than in a C paper, but the prose overall is not as polished as an A paper.

Much better (A paper): The prose is polished with good word choice, proper grammar and punctuation, few (if any) instances of awkward phrasing, and no nagging or repetitive problems.