**Writing Exams in History**

**General**

* This is **not** primarily an exercise in **memorization**. It is an exercise in **understanding**
* Historians impose a logical, plausible narrative or argument on the mass of historical events . You want to understand the key themes and questions for the topic you are studying and be able to marshall evidence (names, dates, places, people as well as causes and sequences of events) to answer these
* In other words: in studying, identify the main themes & issues raised in the course. Assemble the evidence that clarifies those themes
* Lectures are the framework of the course. Lecture material is the basic material you need to know
* Readings and discussions let you examine specific topics in more detail
* Assuming you’ve been coming to lectures, keeping up on readings you should have a good general sense of major developments
* Then: review the syllabus, lectures, and reading notes. Identify key themes, issues, and questions. Assemble evidence that clarifies those themes and answers those questions
* Keep a list of key significant people, places, events, and concepts along with brief notes on why they are important
* Then: try to imagine what questions I might ask and answer these questions. The study sheet is obviously useful here. Old exams are invaluable as well

**Identify Questions**

* These are designed to test your basic understanding of course material
* Read the directions *carefully*
* A common mistake is not *identifying* the term. Instead, students sometime supply information about the term without every clearly stating what the person, place, or idea is. Make sure you *identify* the term
* Do not write too much. Do stick to prescribed length. I will dock marks

**Essay Questions**

* These ask you to make an argument and support it with evidence
* The argument is important. You must have some sort of thesis statement, or you will end up just presenting a mass of facts that do not demonstrate that you understand **how and why** historical events happened.
* However, don’t forget that I also want to see how much you know. Organize your answer around a thesis stmt and support that statement with as much evidence as you can muster
* Start by thinking about the question carefully. Then write an outline, including a thesis statement, major points, notes on evidence you will use to support those points. How much detail is up to you, but don’t just start writing

**Mechanics**

* There is no set length for essays on exams. It depends on how much time you have and what sort of questions you’ve been asked. Better to plan to use up all of your available time to get down as much material as you can.
* Please double-space and don’t write in pencil. It is in your interest for me to be able to understand what you have written.