

**HSTEU 210 – “History of Paris”**  
**Autumn 1998**  
**Suggestions for the Writing Assignment**

by  
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I have designed this handout to explain the expectations for your essay assignment, and to provide some general guidelines on how to meet them. You can receive additional help by making an appointment with a tutor in the History Writing Center (Smith 204c; 543-5692) and by consulting one of their several useful handouts which cover in greater detail many of the issues I deal with here. If you have any questions about the assignment and how to complete it successfully, consult me.

**Grades**

No simple formula exists for evaluating and grading essays. Generally, however, I will be looking for, and grading, several aspects of your work:

- A general understanding of your chosen topic.
- A sharply-defined, well-defended thesis.
- Coherent and effective organization.
- Sufficient use of supporting evidence.
- Prose style which is clear and free of grammatical errors.

**The Topics**

You have a choice of one of three deliberately broad topics:

1. Compare and analyze at least two “tableaux” of the city of Paris from your reading. What do they tell you about the author’s perceptions of and anxieties about the city? For example, how does the Paris of Baudelaire differ from that of Mercier or Breton? How do these differences reflect the historical and cultural context in which the authors wrote?
2. Write about a Parisian site. The site can be specific (Louvre, Eiffel Tower) or generic (the boulevard, the café, the salon). Discuss the importance or the symbolism of the individual site in its relation to the history of Paris.
3. Choose a historical or cultural Parisian “moment” (i.e., the book trade, the storming of the Bastille, the Universal Exposition, May ’68) and discuss its representation in a painting, engraving, caricature, or text. You must first give a brief explanation of the “event”

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\*Note we are asking you to explain how differences in the portrayal of Paris “reflect the historical and cultural context in which the authors wrote.” This means that you *have* to do additional research in order to elicit those contexts; sorry, but merely having done the assigned reading is *not* sufficient.

Inevitably, the broader your thesis the more vague your essay. There are several advantages to narrowing your focus. It will make the process of selecting what to include in your essay easier, and the writing more manageable. You will have a better opportunity to express your insights instead of falling back on generic arguments in order to cover impossibly broad terrain. There is *no way* in a ten-page essay that you could explore all the multifarious and profound ways which “the Paris of Mercier differed from that of Zola.” Without a more specific focus, your essay invariably would turn out bloated and fuzzy. You could discuss fruitfully, however, the thesis that “because of the social and economic changes of the industrial revolution, the nature of class conflict in Paris changed dramatically from Mercier’s time to Zola’s.”

### **Organization**

Think of the organization of your essay as a journey from point A (your thesis) to point B (convincing the reader of your thesis). You want to make the trip with as little meandering as possible. The particular path you take, however, depends on the terrain you plan to cover. You must determine which arguments you need to support your thesis, and what evidence you have to bolster those arguments. You should include nothing that does not help prove your thesis. You should find it helpful to start by making an outline.

Some general points to keep in mind: You want to express your thesis explicitly early in the essay, preferably in the introductory paragraph. As I said, you want to lead the reader to your thesis; readers tend to follow more readily when they know from the start where they are going. All paragraphs must support the thesis, be internally consistent, and flow logically one to another.

### **Evidence**

No matter how sagacious your thesis or how compelling your arguments, your essay will disintegrate as assuredly as a sand castle at high tide if you do not solidify it with convincing, specific evidence. Your thesis is nothing unless fortified by good arguments, and your arguments are terminally frail unless supported by solid facts taken directly from your reading. If your thesis provides meaning to the essay, your evidence provides its substance. Back up every point you make by consulting your notes to find specific parts of your texts to quote or paraphrase. For example, you could say accurately that “Rousseau believed eighteenth-century Parisian society did not obligate the philosopher to reconcile his writings with his conduct,” but this assertion will topple over if left standing alone. You would need to prop it up with a specific reference from a source (in this case, pp 46-52 in *Eloisa*).

Remember that you must properly cite (with a footnote, endnote or parenthetical-reference) the sources for your facts and quotations, and for ideas not your own. (Lecture content is the exception). Failure to do so represents plagiarism, a *serious* academic offense. If you are unsure about how to cite, see Kate L. Turabian’s *Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, available at Suzzallo Ready Reference and the Undergraduate Library Reference under call number LB 2369 .T8 1987; or consult handouts on citation available from both Suzzallo and the History Writing Center. *No*

You will find it useful to read your work out loud. When something sounds awkward, unclear or silly when spoken, you can bet it also reads poorly. If you can convince, dupe or blackmail someone else into critically reading your essay, all the better. (Keep in mind that the History Department is paying the grad students in the History Writing Center the big bucks to help you with your essay, so take advantage of the service).

### **Final Considerations**

The assignment asks for seven to ten pages, which means a range of 2,500 to 4,000 words (excluding bibliography and notes). You must double-space and use either a 10- or 12-point font. Here's an insider's tip: graders are *never* fooled by gigantic fonts and spacious margins used to bloat the length of an underdeveloped essay, and we tend to be rather insulted by the effort. A four-page essay is a four-page essay, even if you abuse a 16-point font to make it fill seven sheets of paper. So please don't bother. Similarly, if you go over ten pages and simply can't bring yourself to cut anything, don't exacerbate the situation by forcing me to squint at microscopic fonts and write comments in pinched margins.

One final thing. For those of you who've been keeping count, I've use the word "specific" six times. I have done so consciously, with a very *specific* purpose: I want strongly to encourage you to write a detailed, precise, definite and explicit essay. Reading a vague, ill-defined essay is like ordering a beer and getting a pint glass full of foam.

I encourage you to raise any lingering questions with me, and to take advantage of the History Writing Center.

Good luck!

## Découvertes Gallimard

1/ L'Égypte oubliée • 2/ Les baleines • 3/ La saga de l'espace • 4/ Picasso • 5/ Le Mont-Blanc • 6/ La Longue Marche • 7/ Goya • 8/ La Vendée déchirée • 9/ Verdi • 10/ Galilée • 11/ Esclaves et négriers • 12/ Alexandre Dumas • 13/ Les Vikings • 14/ Les Peaux-Rouges • 15/ Le défi des pôles • 16/ Pompéi • 17/ Van Gogh • 18/ Malraux • 19/ Les fossiles • 20/ Les Mayas • 21/ Sur des mers inconnues • 22/ Mahomet • 23/ Montaigne • 24/ L'écriture • 25/ Vers l'Ouest • 26/ Le ciel • 27/ Alexandre le Grand • 28/ Le Mont-Saint-Michel • 29/ Brésil, épopée métisse • 30/ Les galères • 31/ L'homme réparé • 32/ Le sang • 33/ Les Aztèques • 34/ La fièvre de l'or • 35/ Le cinématographe • 36/ Degas • 37/ Les Incas • 38/ L'île de Pâques • 39/ Wagner • 40/ L'Amazone • 41/ Mozart • 42/ À vos plumes, citoyens ! • 43/ La Bounty • 44/ Rodin • 45/ Pirates et filibustiers • 46/ David • 47/ Les architectes de la liberté • 48/ La révolution des savants • 49/ Gauguin • 50/ Gandhi • 51/ Berlioz • 52/ Comment la terre • 53/ Marco Polo • 54/ Villa, Zapata et le Mexique en feu • 55/ Cézanne • 56/ La Rome antique • 57/ Les sorcières • 58/ Le siècle de Louis XIV • 59/ Le triomphe des arcs • 60/ Mémoires du Louvre • 61/ Versailles • 62/ La tour Eiffel • 63/ Les Gallo-Romains • 64/ Angkor • 65/ Voltaire • 66/ Rousseau • 67/ Le langage des signes • 68/ Carpeaux • 69/ Les dinosaures • 70/ Chopin • 71/ Bagnes et forçats • 72/ La presse • 73/ Velázquez • 74/ Des guerres de Religion à la Fronde • 75/ Les paquebots • 76/ Rembrandt • 77/ Les temples de l'opéra • 78/ Dans la nuit des abysses • 79/ Freud • 80/ La Renaissance • 81/ Le Tour de France • 82/ Les sports américains • 83/ Le football • 84/ La Grèce antique • 85/ La Nouvelle-Calédonie • 86/ Naissance de la Grèce • 87/ Le chef d'orchestre • 88/ La Bibliothèque nationale • 89/ Les Etrusques • 90/ William Penn et les quakers • 91/ Newton • 92/ La grenouille • 93/ Les éléphants • 94/ Le faucon • 95/ Le rêve cistercien • 96/ Champollion • 97/ De l'Indochine au Viêt-Nam • 98/ Le Néolithique • 99/ Le Japon • 100/ L'Encyclopédie • 101/ De Gaulle • 102/ Rimbaud • 103/ La Gaule retrouvée • 104/ Byzance • 105/ Le chat • 106/ Beethoven • 107/ L'escrime • 108/ Seurat • 109/ Les surréalistes • 110/ Les missions jésuites • 111/ Le sel • 112/ Le tennis • 113/ Les volcans • 114/ L'épopée du jazz /1 • 115/ L'épopée du jazz /2 • 116/ Bach • 117/ Les sources du Nil • 118/ Les momies • 119/ Jules Verne • 120/ Christophe Colomb • 121/ Le fer • 122/ L'électricité • 123/ La poste • 124/ Les loups • 125/ Les abeilles • 126/ Shakespeare • 127/ Les sports d'hiver • 128/ Rollermania • 129/ Les Croisades • 130/ Les Scythes • 131/ Monet • 132/ Toulouse-Lautrec • 133/ Les jeux olympiques • 134/ Le cirque • 135/ Le carnaval • 136/ Guimard • 137/ Stendhal • 138/ La perspective • 139/ Le crime à l'écran • 140/ Hollywood • 141/ L'histoire au cinéma • 142/ Barcelone • 143/ L'Afrique du Sud • 144/ La tauromachie • 145/ Les Arts déco • 146/ Marianne • 147/ L'école • 148/ Sissi • 149/ Rossini • 150/ Balzac • 151/ l'univers • 152/ La sirène • 153/ Le Douanier Rousseau • 154/ Géricault • 155/ Lawrence d'Arabie • 156/ Vivre sous l'Occupation • 157/ La guerre de Sécession • 158/ Les Celtes • 159/ Darius • 160/ Le rock • 161/ Les vampires • 162/ Le billard • 163/ La loi du ring • 164/ Le rugby • 165/ Matisse • 166/ La bourse • 167/ Le suffrage universel • 168/ La police • 169/ Titien • 170/ Jésus • 171/ La mort • 172/ Carthage • 173/ Pont-Aven • 174/ Compostelle • 175/ Cnossos • 176/ Bergman • 177/ Renoir • 178/ Vuillard • 179/ Le Corbusier • 180/ Les cathédrales • 181/ Rabelais • 182/ L'homme et la Forêt • 183/ Cléopâtre • 184/ La mine de charbon • 185/ Les camps • 186/ Miró • 187/ L'invention des musées • 188/ Les divas • 189/ Les premiers chrétiens • 190/ Le Vaudou • 191/ La Mésopotamie • 192/ Le téléphone • 193/ Einstein • 194/ Bouddha • 195/ Le palais de la Découverte • 196/ Soliman • 197/ Charles-Quint • 198/ Jeanne la Pucelle • 199/ Humboldt • 200/ Les utopies • 201/ Les Palestiniens • 202/ Le débarquement • 203/ Manet • 204/ New York • 205/ Saint-Petersbourg • 206/ Femmes et religions • 207/ Les jardins • 208/ Le tunnel sous la Manche • 209/ Jean Renoir • 210/ Les acteurs français 1929 1959 • 211/ La franc-maçonnerie • 212/ Les émigrants • 213/ L'affaire Dreyfus • 214/ La Libération de Paris • 215/ L'homme avant l'homme • 216/ Tombouctou • 217/ Périclès • 218/ Les Tsiganes • 219/ L'Assemblée nationale • 220/ Laurès • 221/ L'École normale supérieure • 222/ Le Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers • 223/ Au temps de l'impressionnisme • 224/ La Gaumont • 225/ Schubert • 226/ Le défi humanitaire • 227/ La météo • 228/ A table • 229/ La peste • 230/ Babylone • 231/ Derain • 232/ Le cheval • 233/ Poussin • 234/ La radio • 235/ Louis Pasteur • 236/ La Shoah • 237/ Les Réformes • 238/ Le Palais de justice • 239/ La mode • 240/ La Fontaine • 241/ Chagall • 242/ L'architecture de la Renaissance • 243/ Brancusi • 244/ La Seconde Guerre mondiale • 245/ Charles Chaplin • 246/ Les ateliers du 7<sup>e</sup> Art /1 • 247/ Les ateliers du 7<sup>e</sup> Art /2 • 248/ La bombe atomique • 249/ Le Museum d'histoire naturelle • 250/ Schliemann • 251/ L'O. N. U.

This series of books provides an excellent source of information for your topics. There are dozen of books which provide superb information and illustrations of Parisian sites and "moments". There are, unfortunately, two catches. First, you have read French. Second, our library doesn't carry most of these titles. You can, however, easily obtain any which interests you through Interlibrary Loan in Suzzallo Library. The list to the left is not complete: Gallimard has subsequently added more than 50 additional titles (including such relevant works as *Lutèce: Paris ville romaine*). You can get access to the most up-to-date list at: <http://www.gallimard.fr> and clicking on the "Découvertes Gallimard" icon.

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