

## **HIST 316: Russian Revolution(s) From Peter to Putin** **Writing Handout**

### ***Basics:***

- **Length: 1200 words** (maximum 200 words deviation) plus Bibliography on a separate page. Use 12-point font and double-spacing. Please number your pages. Don't forget to put your name on the first page and give your paper a snappy title!  
Please submit your paper as a **Word Document**. If you don't have Microsoft Word, you can download it for free from the Reed website:  
<http://downloads.reed.edu/apps/show/105> or use Reed computer.
- **Citations and Bibliography:** Please follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which you can access for free via the Library website (<https://tinyurl.com/yc3jpue8>). In the body of the paper, please use **footnotes**. If you don't have the complete bibliographic information for a source, you can find it on **WorldCat**, which is also available on the Library website.  
For web sources, you must give the URL and date of access. This applies only to sources published on the web, not to journals that you access through a library database.  
For the Midterm Paper, your Bibliography may be as short as one item. You are not required to do any outside research! But you do need to place your primary source in historical context, so you may want to use a secondary source to help you do that.
- **Spelling and grammar:** They count! Why? Consider the following examples:  
Example 1: Let's eat, Grandma!  
Let's eat Grandma!  
Example 2: You know your shit.  
You know you're shit.

DO use the spell-checker, but DO NOT rely on it exclusively. Neither of these mistakes would be caught by a spell-checker.

- Submit your paper **via Moodle** by **Friday, October 13 at 10:00pm**  
\*Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

### ***Writing Style:***

- Please employ a **formal** writing style. You may not use the first person, slang, or contractions. That being said, keep in mind that the primary goal of scholarly writing is always CLARITY. Often, this means writing simply. Avoid convoluted sentences, as well as vocabulary words that seem impressive, but might not mean what you want them to. Here are some examples of mistakes resulting from the effort to write impressively:

Example 1: "One can easily see that a kicking situation is taking place between Bill and Jim."

Example 2: “My argument is that the subordination of economic questions of cost and profitability to the political imperative of “building socialism” created through the interaction and conflict between political authorities, workers, and management a set of social relations, both formally sanctioned and informally practiced, which granted workers the means of pursuing, within limits, a way of life which was compatible with Soviet ideals of dignity, self-improvement, and creative labor.”

What is wrong with each of these examples? How can we fix them?

- Be careful to avoid broad generalizations. Structures like, “Since the dawn of time, humankind has always...” are not useful to us as scholars. We only know a small portion of human history, and we’ve studied even less than that in this class. Stick to what you can say with assurance about Russian history between the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and today.
- Also be careful to avoid filler. If you find yourself including something that doesn’t support your thesis, just to fill up space, get rid of it.

***Structure:***

A formal history paper consists of three basic parts:

**The Introduction** sets up the subject, or problem, on which the paper will focus. It also presents the **thesis statement** and a roadmap for the argument. It does not include contextualizing background information. Save that for the body.

**The Body** presents your argument step by step, employing a logical flow. If the paragraphs can be shuffled and make as much sense as before, then you haven’t achieved logical flow. Your reader needs to understand why A comes first, B second, C third, etc.

Strive for balance in your body section. Don’t let any one point take over, and don’t let your final point get squished for lack of space.

\*Remember to tie *every point* back to your thesis. This is not the same as tying every paragraph back to your thesis!

**The Conclusion** sums up your argument and leaves the reader feeling satisfied. The information here is quite similar to the introduction, but it is not the same thing. The Introduction is the start of the story, while the Conclusion is the end of it. Avoid the urge to connect to broader themes you haven’t discussed elsewhere in the paper. The conclusion should not contain any new information or arguments.

Sometimes, by the time you get to writing your conclusion, your thesis has shifted away from where you began. That’s okay! Remember to revise your Introduction and Body sections so the whole paper fits together smoothly.

**Structural Pro Tip:**

Tell a story! All (traditional) stories follow the Introduction-Body-Conclusion model, and the more you think of your work here as a story, the more naturally it will flow.

### ***Thesis Statement:***

Remember that you need to make a historical *argument* about the source you've chosen to analyze. That argument should be encapsulated in your **thesis statement**.

This is the key to your paper. In your thesis statement, you present your argument in one sentence. It must be a debatable claim, not a statement of fact or an opinion.

Your claim must be specific.

Your claim should arrive in the first paragraph of your paper.

Which one of these examples is a good thesis statement, and why?

1. Stalinism was a major period in Soviet history.
2. Stalinism was very bad.
3. Stalinism was complicated and had many features.
4. While Stalinism enabled many short-term successes, it ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union through its detrimental effects on Soviet society.

### ***Evidence:***

An argument won't stand up unless you prove it, and to do that, you need evidence. Here are some tips for working with primary and secondary sources:

1) Think like a historian! Whether working with textual or multimedia sources, remember to place them in their historical context and think about how that context affects the actors, their creative outcomes, and critical response.

Also keep in mind that your job is not simply to master information, but to make a critical assessment of the interaction of various factors. How do these historical factors fit together? How does Situation A lead to the development of Situation B? What are the implications of that development?

2) Be creative with primary sources: What clues does the source give you? What are the author's perspective and assumptions? What rhetorical strategies is she employing? How has the author been influenced by her time, place, and objectives?

3) Quotations: Weave the quote into your text, and make sure you explain what it means and how that helps you prove your argument.

Make sure your quote is long enough to fully express the author's idea, but not so long it takes up a ton of space. Avoid long block quotations – figure out the essence of what you want to use for your argument. Make sure you copy is accurately and give a **proper citation** (*Chicago Manual of Style* footnotes).

### ***Rules for Citation and Plagiarism:***

- Direct quotations must be in quotation marks, followed by a footnote.
- Summaries or paraphrases of ideas unique to the source must also have a citation. Ask yourself, "Is this the author's idea or mine?" Err on the side of caution.

- **Plagiarism:** any time you use another author's words or ideas without citing them, you are **stealing** them. **If you plagiarize, you will automatically fail my class.** You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. "I didn't mean to" or "I didn't know" are not valid excuses. If you're not sure, email me! Again, err on the side of caution. Better to over-cite than plagiarize.

If you plagiarize, I am obligated to report you to the Dean of Students, and then it's out of my hands. Please, let's not start down that road.

### ***Other Useful Tips:***

1) Write an outline! You don't have to stick to it in the end, but the process of writing an outline will help you:

- a) Organize your thoughts
- b) Figure out your main points, what evidence you'll use to support each point, and how each point ties back to your thesis
- c) Develop the logical flow necessary for a coherent, persuasive historical essay

2) Stick to the sources and engage with them directly. Be creative, but also be honest in your assessment of what type of argument they will actually support. Avoid blanket statements or broad generalizations.

3) Be generous to the author. Give her arguments full consideration, even when you're refuting them. Watch out for your own assumptions, in regard to your sources and to broader historical questions.

4) Read carefully. Don't attribute to the author something she did not actually say. Watch out for when the author may use sarcasm, or quote somebody else's argument she plans to refute.

### ***More Resources and Writing Help:***

- The Writing Center in the DoJo: <http://www.reed.edu/writing/>
- Paper-writing guides in the folder on Moodle
- Me! My office hours are at the top of this handout. Outside of those hours, you can always reach me by email.