

GUIDE TO WRITING A NARRATIVE HISTORY PAPER

Narrative historiography uses logical analysis of main events in history, acknowledges the influence of preceding events and understands the chronological and/or rational order of events that follow specific characters or key issues (Fulda, 2014).

“History is not a burden on the memory but an illumination of the soul.” – John Dalberg-Acton

THE TWO STEP PROCESS: BEGINNING TO END

1. DRAMATURGICAL MODEL

The dramaturgical model looks at history through the lens of understanding who are the main characters (protagonists, antagonists) and what are the key motives and circumstances that shape these main characters actions (Wood, 2004).

To use this model, you should ask yourself these following questions:

1. What is the background information or lead-in information?
2. Who are my characters? Why are these characters important?
3. Who is/are the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s)?
4. What are key words or phrases that would help the reader understand the context and mindset of those involved in the history? What is the conclusion based on this information?

2. ORGANIZATION

The organization of your paper should try to follow a rational and/or chronological pattern.

You should organize your paper into the following parts:

1. Introduction/Background:

- ✿ Preceding events leading up to main interactions between figures in history.
- ✿ Thesis statement that demonstrates main interpretation and a clear set of organizing principles (topic points) that support your interpretation of events.

2. Body:

- ⊙ Discuss the main and supporting character(s) and their significance.
- ⊙ Describe emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological states of being with characters or countries based on the information gathered.
- ⊙ Use primary sources, such as firsthand accounts of events, letters, journal entries, and novels from the time period to understand the mind of characters.
- ⊙ If discussing a specific location, include topography and describe why this makes the land significant.
- ⊙ Describe how the events or people involved were influenced by their past and how they influenced their present time and future time.

3. Conclusion:

- ⊙ Restate your main interpretation of historical facts, the organizing principles, and key events or people.
- ⊙ Re-emphasize the present situation of characters' influences, the past that led characters to act as they did, and how their actions set-up future events in history.

EXAMPLE — EXCERPT TAKEN FROM *A HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE: FROM 1815 TO THE PRESENT*

Once the immediate crisis presented by Napoleon's escape had been dealt with, the delegates of Vienna continued to grapple with a number of unresolved issues. One of the most vexing was what to do about Poland, a country that could plausibly claim the title of "the Christ among nations" for the suffering that its population endured. That title in 1815 had to do with a previously mentioned point: Poland's borders on all sides remained unresolved and contested, with few natural markers. A century earlier the Polish Commonwealth had encompassed more territory than France, but, in a series of invasions by its neighbors in 1772, 1793, and 1795, Poland was completely devoured by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, ceasing to exist as an independent sovereign state until 1919. In the years immediately following the 1795 partition, matters were further complicated, in that Napoleon briefly restored Poland as a grand duchy, though with only a fraction of the territory that had been in the earlier Commonwealth (Lindemann, 2013, p. 35).

BREAKING DOWN THE EXCERPT: USING THE DRAMATURGICAL MODEL

Introduction/Background:

1. What is the background information or lead-in information?

Once the immediate crisis presented by Napoleon's escape had been dealt with, the delegates of Vienna continued to grapple with a number of unresolved issues. **One of the most vexing was what to do about Poland***, a country that could plausibly claim the title of "the Christ among nations" for the suffering that its population endured.

*This is **the key issue** for this author to frame and address

Body:

2. Who are my characters (in this case, countries)? Why are these characters important?

That title in 1815 had to do with a previously mentioned point: Poland's borders on all sides remained unresolved and contested, with few natural markers. A century earlier the Polish Commonwealth had encompassed more territory than France, but, in a series of invasions by its neighbors in 1772, 1793, and 1795, Poland was completely devoured by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, ceasing to exist as an independent sovereign state until 1919.

3. Who is/are the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s)?

Protagonist(s): Poland and France

Antagonist(s): Russia, Prussia, and Austria

Conclusion:

4. What are key words or phrases that would help the reader understand the context and mindset of those involved in the history?

- "the Christ among nations"
- Polish Commonwealth
- ceasing to exist as an independent sovereign state until 1919

5. What is the conclusion based on this information?

In the years immediately following the 1795 partition, matters were further complicated, in that Napoleon briefly restored Poland as a grand duchy, though with only a fraction of the territory that had been in the earlier Commonwealth.

PRACTICE NOW