

Rewriting the Thematic Essay

Directions: In order to help you to improve your writing and your grade, I am allowing you to do a rewrite of your Decline of the Roman Empire essay. For those who scored lower than a 90, this is a requirement. Using the Major Common Issues and Abbreviations listed below, review your essay and my feedback, and use this information to rewrite your essay. I will not be re-grading your essay from scratch. Rather, I will give you up to ten points back on your essay based on how well you address the feedback and improve your essay. You must submit your original essay with my feedback stapled to the back of your rewrite. See the rubric below for clarification. If you do not understand my comments or have other questions, email me directly at pcasey@maspethhighschool.org.

Essay Rewrite Rubric

10	8	6	4	2	0
Addressed all teacher feedback on essay. Dramatically improved essay in terms of addressing of the task, clarity, organization, use and explanation of key vocabulary, support, and mechanics.	Addressed almost all teacher feedback on essay. Significantly improved essay in terms of addressing of the task, clarity, organization, use and explanation of key vocabulary, support, and mechanics.	Addressed most teacher feedback on essay. Somewhat improved essay in terms of addressing of the task, clarity, organization, use and explanation of key vocabulary, support, and mechanics.	Addressed some teacher feedback on essay. Partially improved essay in terms of addressing of the task, clarity, organization, use and explanation of key vocabulary, support, and mechanics.	Did not address most teacher feedback on essay. Slightly improved essay in terms of addressing of the task, clarity, organization, use and explanation of key vocabulary, support, and mechanics.	Addressed almost none or none of the teacher feedback on essay. Improved essay negligibly if at all in terms of addressing of the task, clarity, organization, use and explanation of key vocabulary, support, and mechanics.

Major Common Issues

First of all, the number one thing you should do is look back to the original instruction sheet that was given to you for this essay as well as the original organizer, because many people did not follow those initial instructions. Instead of repeating them here, I have redistributed them to you to review again, so my further comments will go beyond that.

According to Tradition: Please remember to clearly distinguish between historical fact and religious belief. As this is a history paper, you should be careful not to conflate (mix up together) religious beliefs with historically verifiable facts. For example, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) receiving enlightenment or Prophet Muhammad receiving revelation from God are matters of religious belief, so they should be prefaced by saying something like "according to Buddhist tradition..." or "Muslims believe that..."

Don't Ignore TTT: TTT is a problem for many students. Please actually correct this and stop making this mistake. Every time you choose to ignore this feedback, you set yourself up to make the same mistake in the next essay and lose points because of it. For details, see the introduction directions on the original instruction sheet.

Parentheses and Definitions: Never use parentheses to define a term. Just give the definition between commas, preceded by the word "or." Wrong way: "The concept of nirvana (release from the cycle of rebirth) is an important part of Buddhist faith." Right way: "The concept of nirvana, or the release from the cycle of rebirth, is an important part of Buddhist faith."

Topic Sentences: Make sure your topic sentence (TS), the first sentence in each paragraph, sets the topic for the rest of the paragraph. The sentence must be broad enough to relate to everything included in your paragraph. For example, if you start your second body paragraph by saying that Buddhism spread to China, but then you talk about it spreading to other places as well, then you need to fix your TS. Instead, it should start by saying that Buddhism spread to many regions, and then in the next sentence you can mention China as one of those regions.

Origins: Keep the details of the origins in the intro, and keep them relatively brief, but still cover all the basics (who what where when why how). You can make reference to the origins in the beginning of the second body paragraph, but only as a transition into the spread to other regions. In your intro, DO NOT go into the beliefs and practices. That belongs in the first body paragraph.

Central Principle in Paragraph #1: Many people did not clearly identify a central principle at the start of the first paragraph. They may have either gone straight into the beliefs and practices, or claimed that the beliefs and practices ARE the central principle. This was an issue for both topics, but more an issue for Buddhism. Remember, the central principle is a single idea. The beliefs and practices of the religion are an extension of that central principle, so you have to not only say what they are, but explain how they connect back to the central principle. There is no exact wording for the central principle so it is ok if they vary, but they should have the same idea. For example, the **CP for Islam** could be said to be the teaching that there is no god other than the One God, and God should be worshipped and obeyed. Everything else, like the Five Pillars and teachings of the Quran, reflect that. Similarly, the **CP for Buddhism** could be said to be the teaching that the way to overcome the suffering of life is to reject all desire and want, which will ultimately lead to nirvana. Everything else, like the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, reflect that.

Improving Your Three Locations in Paragraph #2: Firstly, make sure your information is accurate. For example, Islam did not spread to the Byzantine Empire. For another example, Mansa Musa is from Mali in West Africa, and while he may have visited Egypt on the way to Hajj, he has absolutely nothing to do with the spread of Islam to Egypt, which began hundreds of years earlier. Secondly, make sure you are talking about a region and not a continent. Saying Islam spread to “Africa” or Buddhism spread to “Asia” is too broad. You should instead talk about regions, like “West Africa” or “Southeast Asia.” The more diverse the better, and try to go in chronological order. Thirdly, make sure that one of the three is the same region you use for your third paragraph on the impact.

The Cause Cannot Be the Effect in Paragraph #3: A number of people, in their third paragraphs, made the mistake of saying that the impact of the spread of the religion was that the religion spread. Of course, that’s not actually a separate effect. It’s just the cause itself. You need to discuss the way the introduction of the religion had an impact on the society, the economy, the political life, or the culture generally. Remember to also explain HOW the religion led to those changes (correlation does not equal causation). Ashoka and Mansa Musa both work well here.

Use My Materials: Too often, students went straight to Google, and wound up confusing themselves, when pretty much all the information you need is in the materials I’ve given you. They are all in links on the PupilPath assignment and MrCaseyHistory.com. I made them just for you, so save time and energy by going to them first before Google.

Essay Feedback Abbreviations

TNA = Task Not Addressed. This is a comment that applies to the body paragraph as a whole. It means that the required task for that paragraph, as outlined in the bullet points, was either partially or completely left unaddressed. In other words, you never actually explained the main thing you were supposed to explain. Make sure you fully address all aspects of the task.

OT = Off Task. Similar to TNA but for a specific point in the paragraph, OT means you are not responding to the task outlined in the bullet points. You are writing about something other than what this paragraph is supposed to be about. Check your bullet points and get back on track!

IR = Irrelevant. Similar to OT, but usually for smaller cases where you have just inserted an idea that does not belong because it does not connect to the overall goal of the paragraph. Any details you provide should be supporting details, not just random facts.

IA = Inaccurate. You have your facts wrong. What you said is not correct.

WP = Wrong Paragraph. What you are discussing belongs in this essay, but you are addressing the task for a different paragraph, so move this to the correct paragraph.

How? Why? = How? Why? Pretty straightforward. You made a statement or claim but you never explained it further, particularly how or why it is the case.

C/E = Cause and Effect. Very similar to “How? Why?” but used in more general cases to mean that you need to explain how one thing leads to another rather than just listing events in the order they happen. You may also see this written next to two connected events, meaning you have to explain the connection.

+ = Say More. You brought up something good, but you moved on without discussing it fully. Go further, explain in more depth, or finish the thought.

SD = Supporting Details. You may have made a good point, but you need to back it up with more relevant examples and details. Make sure they actually support your point!

UC = Unclear. You are being too vague, or you are not explaining things fully, or for some other reason your meaning is not coming across. Write with the reader in mind, and make sure they understand you.

? = What? I am confused. Either what you wrote does not make sense, or I can't figure out what you are trying to say, or I just don't know what is going on.

WC = Word Choice. You used a word, or you used wording, that needs to be changed. It may be inappropriate, unprofessional in tone, unclear, or inaccurate. You need to reword this.

V = Vocabulary. A more specific version of WC above, this means that you should have used a vocabulary term that we learned in class to describe something.

D = Define. You mentioned a good vocabulary term, but you need to explain what it means to the reader,

OR = Order/Organization. Your information may be all fine, but it seems to be out of order or in some way unorganized. Reread this part and fix the order to be clearer and more organized.

R = Repetition. You just said that, and now you're saying it again.

DAQ = Don't Ask Questions. Posing a question can be an interesting attention grabber, but it does not belong in your History paper. Find more professional phrasing for the same idea.

SP = Spelling. You spelled something wrong.

M = Mechanics. Any problems other than spelling, including grammatical, punctuation, and capitalization errors, use of contractions, or use of inappropriate symbols such as parentheses, slashes, bold, underline, italics, or in the case of thematic essays, quotation marks.

TTT = Theme, Topic, Task. Used only for the introduction and conclusion, a reminder to make sure you are addressing in some way all three necessary aspects of the thematic essay introduction and conclusion. You may not be missing all of them, but you are at least missing one of them.

US = Unsupported. You are making a claim that you never support or mentioning some information as if it has already been mentioned when it has not. Used often in the introduction and conclusion when something that was never addressed in the body paragraphs is presented as a key point of the essay.

✓ = Good! You explained something very well, brought up a great example, or I just really liked what you wrote here!

X = Not Good. If something has an X through it, it means there must be something wrong with it.

UPT = Unprofessional Tone. The way you are writing, or some of the words or expressions you are using, are not appropriate for a historical essay. Use more professional and mature language and style.

MKI = Missing Key Information. You may be addressing the task somewhat, but there are major points or examples that you are leaving out of your essay that should be there.

CTT = Connect to Task. You may be including very important and relevant examples, but you have to show why they are important and relevant in terms of the task. Make sure the reader understands how the information you are presenting relates to the bullet point you are addressing in the paragraph.

WAYQ = Why Are You Quoting? This is a Regents-style essay. There should be no quoting in this essay except for official DBQ documents. You can get information from outside sources but you need to write entirely in your own words.

DCI = Document Cited Improperly. You cited from the correct documents, but made some mistake in format.

LC = Lacking Context. You brought up some information without explaining to the reader what it is or why it is significant. You need to add some clarification and context so the reader will understand your reference.

AT = Abrupt Transition. You jumped from one topic to another, suddenly changing focus, usually without completing the first thought and/or without clearly introducing the second. There may or may not be a need for C/E, or perhaps you may be MKI.

TS = Topic Sentence. When starting your body paragraph, you probably jumped right into an example or your first point. Instead, you should begin with a broad sentence that covers the full content of the paragraph before going into specifics.

WHYC = What Have You Concluded? This one is usually used for the conclusion of the essay, but it can sometimes also apply to the end of a paragraph that ends abruptly. After a whole essay on your topic, what have you come to understand about the theme in general, especially things that can be applied to other similar situations? In other words, what **conclusions** have you drawn? The same could be true of a paragraph if you are not ending by summing up the point of the paragraph at the end. If you know the "CCEEJ" model used in English, this is basically saying you are missing the J.