

## Post-Secondary History Test Skills: Identifications

The first part of your exams will consist of a number of key terms. These will be important people (i.e. "Hernan Cortés"), places (i.e. "Jamestown"), events (i.e. "Bacon's Rebellion"), and other phenomenon (i.e. "indentured servitude"). There will be several listed, out of which you will have the option to choose a specified number. To do well on these, you will need to make sure you cover all your bases:

- **Who** or **what** in question? **Name**
- **What** happened and **how**? **Action**
- **When** did it happen? **Time**
- **Where** did it happen? **Location**
- **Why** did it happen? **Motivation**

You can construct an acronym such as **NATLoM** or some other mnemonic device to help you remember the elements of a good answer. A useful and pertinent historical identification is thorough in answering the above questions and also explains the **historical significance** of the name, term, or concept at hand. Identifying **historical significance** is a way of answering the question, **SO WHAT?** A complete identification, then, always includes the important impact or effect of the person, event, or idea in history.

A helpful formula for structuring your answers to these "ID" questions is:

In [date], [person] did [what action] to [whomever], in [what place]. The event was caused by . . . The event resulted in . . . The event was important because . . .

The following is an example of a frighteningly thorough definition:

The Board of Trade, created by the King in 1696, was a London-based group of senior royal appointees. It was the supervisory body responsible for recommending all colonial political policy to the King and for implementing routine orders from the Crown regarding the colonies' governance. It nominated governors and other high officials and reviewed all laws passed by colonial assemblies. It served as an intermediary for colonial governments seeking to influence the King and Parliament.

The Board was not effective in creating a centralized government or policy for the colonies. It did generate suspicion and resentment among the colonists, however, because of its powers to review laws.

## Post-Secondary History Test Skills: Essay Answers

The second part of your exams will consist of a number of essay questions from which you will choose a specified number (usually 1-2). Writing an essay as part of an exam is basically the same as writing one as a take-home assignment; one should adhere to the tried-and-true empirical essay format and use "APEC"<sup>1</sup> paragraph construction to build a persuasive argument. The pressures of time in a test situation, however, sometimes can turn even the most gifted student writers into blithering idiots. Consideration of the following reminders should keep you from panicking and enable you to produce your best work.

**Think about the question.** Don't just dive in. The minute or two you spend considering the topic and planning your approach will result in a much better finished product.

**Write an outline.** Sacrifice a few minutes of actual writing. No matter how pressed for time you are, you should map out what you want to say in an orderly fashion on scrap paper. The outlining process will help you forge a more coherent and effective essay.

**Get right to the heart of the matter.** Make sure you answer the question directly. Avoid long-winded introductions, tangential issues, and irrelevant nonsense. Reliance on charming anecdotes and glittering generalities will make your ignorance of the topic at hand painfully obvious.

**Begin with a clear introductory paragraph.** Share with the reader at the outset the direction you intend to follow in your essay, highlighting your thesis and how you intend to defend it.

**Use separate paragraphs for major points.** Remember to begin each one with a clear topic sentence.

**Support your assertions with detail.** Data is always important to the historian. The "APEC" paragraph model is a structure that requires evidence to support your points. Because your time is limited, assume the reader's knowledge of your subject, but be sure to explain the connections between the evidence and your assertion and emphasize clearly the significance of your point.

**Don't forget a brief concluding paragraph.** One or two sentences will do.

**Neatness counts.** If it can't be read, it won't help you. Double spacing always makes messy handwriting more legible.

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<sup>1</sup> **A**ssertion-**P**roof-**E**xplanation-**C**onnection

"**A**" - a statement of what you intend to prove

"**P**" - some evidence or examples that illustrate the assertion

"**E**" - an explanation of how the evidence proves the assertion

"**C**" - a statement connecting the assertion to the thesis of your paper