

# Practical Questions to Help You Answer the Broader Questions of Why History? Why Evidence? And How Does Evidence Affect Your Grade?

You can answer questions 1, 2, and 3 (shown below) by examining the What questions provided. There is no magic answer to each one, but if you don't see the answer, then ask.

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## Question 1

The WCJC catalog lists this requirement for an AA degree:  
"HIST 1301 and 1302"

*Why is history required? (See Course Orientation for the rest of this answer.)*

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## Question 2

Can history pay off for you (beyond getting that degree)?

*How can history pay off for you?(See Course Orientation for the rest of this answer.)*

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## Question 3

What is history? What is evidence?

*Why do they both matter—including to your grade? (See Good Habits for Evidence for the rest of this answer.)*

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## What's the Difference in These Two Views of History as Essential for Analysis of Today's Challenges?

Dietrich Dörner, cognitive psychologist. "...[W]e face an array of closely—though often subtly—linked problems. **The modern world is made up of innumerable interrelated subsystems, and we need to think in terms of these interrelations.** In the past, such considerations were less important. What did the growth of Los Angeles matter to a Sacramento Valley farmer a hundred years ago? Nothing. Today, however aqueducts running the length of the state make northern and southern Californians bitter competitors for water. Of what concern to us were religious differences in Islam forty years ago? Apparently none. The global interrelations of today make such dissension important everywhere....

**"[In the past], [t]he need to see a problem embedded in the context of other problems rarely arose. For us, however, this is the rule, not the exception."** *[Bold added]*

*The Logic of Failure* (1996)

Henry Ford (1863–1947), U.S. industrialist. "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today."

Interview in the *Chicago Tribune* (May 25, 1916)

## What's the Difference These Two Views of Human Life?

Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), English demographer. "The perpetual struggle for room and food."

*On Population*, chap. iii. p. 48 (1798).

John Winthrop (1588-1649), Governor in Massachusetts Bay. ". . . [W]ee must be knitt together in this worke as one man, . . . wee must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities, wee must uphold a familiar Commerce together in all meekenes, gentlenes, patience and liberallity, wee must delight in eache other, make others Condicions our owne rejoyce together, mourne together, labour, and suffer together, allwayes haveing before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, . . . that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a byword through the world . . ."

City upon a Hill, 1630

## What's in Common with These Two Events?

- The Black Death (a disease) in England (1347)
- West Nile (a disease) in New York State (2002+) and in Texas (2003+)

## What Do These Pairs of Names Reveal about History and about Assumptions?

- **Old World** and **New World**
- Age of **Jackson** and Age of the **Common Man**
  
- Federalists and **Anti-Federalists**
- **Pro-Choice** and **Anti-Abortion**

## What's the Role of Evidence in Civilization (or Safe Places for Ordinary People to Live)?

“Quoting other writers and citing the places where their words are to be found are by now such common practices that it is pardonable to look upon the habit as natural, not to say instinctive. It is of course nothing of the kind, but a very sophisticated act, **peculiar to a civilization that uses printed books** [and other documents], **believes in evidence**, and makes a point of assigning credit or blame in a **detailed, verifiable way.**” [Bold added]

Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 273.

### Sources for Quotations

*Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* for Thomas Malthus

*The Chicago Manual of Style* (p. 356) for Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff

*The Columbia World of Quotations* for Henry Ford

Dietrich Dorner. *The Logic of Failure: Why Things Go Wrong and What We Can Do to Make Them Right*.  
Translated by Rita and Robert Kimber. New York, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996.

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/winthrop.htm> for John Winthrop

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