Essays in Advanced Placement History are **Expository Essays**, that is, they are arguments whose purpose is to convince the Reader. They are not exercises in creative writing or self-expression. For that reason, some of the writing techniques which you may use in your Language Arts classes are not appropriate for History. Your Language Arts teacher will tell you that you should always pay attention to your audience, and adjust your style to that audience. In this case, your audience is a Reader who wants to be swayed by your fact-based logic. The most important stylistic qualities therefore are **Clarity** (This is not “Mystery History”), followed by **Analysis** and **Specific Factual Information (SFI)**. Creativity is expressed through the organization of ideas, not through cleverness of style.

**Rule Number 1:** *Answer the question that has been asked!!!!!!* (As opposed to the question you wish they had asked!!!!) Any essay, however excellent intrinsically, that does not address the question as asked, will not be satisfactory! If the question asks you to evaluate something, but you only list, or if you describe where the question requires you to compare, you cannot write a satisfactory answer.

A starting point for making sure that you answer the question as asked is to *copy the question in full at the top of your answer.* That way, I know that you have at least read every word of the question.

**Rule Number 2:** *Make sure you understand what the question requires of you!* Note the use of key terms:

*Analyze:* determine their component parts; examine their nature and relationship.

Ex.: “Analyze the major social and technological changes that took place in European warfare between 1789 and 1871.”

*Assess / Evaluate:* judge the value or character of something; appraise; evaluate the positive points and the negative ones; give an opinion regarding the value of; discuss the advantages and disadvantages of.

Ex.: “'Luther was both a revolutionary and a conservative.’ Evaluate this statement with respect to Luther’s responses to the political and social questions of his day.”

*Compare:* Examine for the purpose of noting similarities and differences.

Ex.: “Compare the rise to power of fascism in Italy and in Germany.”

*Contrast:* examine in order to show dissimilarities or points of difference.
Ex.: “Contrast the ways in which European skilled artisans of the mid-eighteenth century and European factory workers of the late nineteenth century differed in their work behavior and in their attitudes toward work.”

**Describe:** to give an account of; to tell about; give a word picture of.

Ex.: “Describe the steps taken between 1832 and 1918 to extend the suffrage in England. What groups and movements contributed to the extension of the vote?”

**Discuss:** talk over; write about; consider or examine by argument or from various points of view; debate; present the different sides of.

Ex.: Discuss the extent to which nineteenth-century Romanticism was or was not a conservative cultural and intellectual movement.”

**Explain:** make clear or plain; make clear the causes or reasons for; make known in detail; tell the meaning of.

Ex.: “Explain how economic, political, and religious factors promoted European explorations from about 1450 to about 1525.”

**Rule Number 3:** *Note the time frame of the question!* Stay within the time frame, and attempt to discuss the entire time frame! Please remember the difference between the nineteenth century and the 1900's.

**Rule Number 4:** *Organize your answer!* Pre-writing is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Outlines and / or clusters are very useful. Jot down your sub-topics; jot down and arrange the **Specific Factual Information (SFI)** that will support your argument. Where appropriate, use the **Five Paragraph Format**

1. Thesis Paragraph, including sub-topics A, B, and C
2. Sub-Topic A
3. Sub-Topic B
4. Sub-Topic C
5. Summary

**Rule Number 5:** *Provide a clear, well developed thesis within a Thesis Paragraph that lays out the major sub-topics in your essay.* This is not Mystery History. Tell the Reader what you intend to prove, and how you intend to prove it.

Some teachers prefer an Inductive approach, that is, where the Thesis Paragraph begins with the various sub-topics and concludes with the thesis as the last sentence of the essay. As an IB Examiner and an AP Reader, I **strongly** prefer the opposite approach, that is, a Deductive
approach, where the thesis is provided in the first sentence, and elaborated by sub-topics in the following sentences of the paragraph.

AP Readers *average* 150 essays per day for 9 days. I have read as many as 250 essays in a single day, and overall I expect to read at least 1,000 essays in 7 days each examination session. I will spend two or three minutes on each essay, and I will make no marks whatsoever to guide my thoughts on the essay. I am marking *holistically*, that is, I am evaluating the essay as a whole. My first decision is to place the essay within one of the markbands as described in the rubric, and only then will I refine it (example, first to determine if the essay falls within the range 17 - 20, 14-16, 8 - 13, or less than 8, then to decide if the paper is, say, a 15 rather than a 14 or a 16).

This is not Mystery History! As a Reader, I want to know exactly what to look for from the start. First impressions count! Make me think to myself, “This paper is pretty good, maybe 14 +” I might become disillusioned later on if there is no substance, but isn’t it better for me to start thinking up at the top of the rubric? *Clarity* is always the prime stylistic virtue in expository essays; this is doubly true with holistic grading.

The **first** thing I look for in any essay is the thesis.

Many questions will tell you which sub-topics you must discuss. For example:

“Analyze the major **social** and **technological** changes that took place in European warfare between 1789 and 1871.”

“Explain how **economic**, **political**, and **religious** factors promoted European explorations from about 1450 to about 1525.”

“Contrast the ways in which European skilled artisans of the mid-eighteenth century and European factory workers of the late nineteenth century differed in their **work behavior** and in their **attitudes toward work**.”

Some questions, however, are relatively open-ended, and require you to provide the sub-topics yourself. For example:

“To what extent is the term “Renaissance” a valid concept for a distinct period in early modern European history?” AP 1985

“How did the disintegration of the medieval church and the coming of the Reformation contribute to the development of nation-states in Western Europe between 1450 and 1648?” AP 1980

In such cases, think of the mnemonic device **PERSIA**:
P: political
E economic
R religious
S social
I intellectual
A aesthetic

Decide whether the question has a political dimension, an economic dimension, a religious
dimension, etc. You will not have time to cover every dimension with a question, but the device
will help you organize your thoughts and decide the most fruitful sub-topics.

Rule Number 6: _The paragraphs of the body of your essay must relate directly to the
question!_ Each paragraph should have its own topic sentence and that topic sentence should
refer to the original question. Transitional devices (such as “therefore,” “as a result of” etc.)
Help to give your answer organic unity (as opposed to unconnected paragraphs).

There is no single way to organize the body of your essay. For example, with the question

“Compare the rise to power of fascism in Italy and in Germany.”

You could choose to compare Political, Economic, or Intellectual dimensions, or Political,
Social, and Economic, or Political, Intellectual and Social (the Religious and Aesthetic
dimensions would not be the wisest choice for this question). You could organize your essay as
follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan “A”</th>
<th>Plan “B”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong> Thesis Paragraph</td>
<td><strong>I</strong> Thesis Paragraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Italy</td>
<td>A. Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Germany</td>
<td>B. Economic</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>II</strong> Italy</td>
<td><strong>II</strong> Political</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Political</td>
<td>A. Italy</td>
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<td>B. Economic</td>
<td>B. Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Social</td>
<td>C. Social</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>III</strong> Germany</td>
<td><strong>III</strong> Economic</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Political</td>
<td>A. Italy</td>
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<td>B. Economic</td>
<td>B. Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Social</td>
<td>C. Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IV</strong> Summary</td>
<td><strong>IV</strong> Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Italy</td>
<td>A. Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Germany</td>
<td>B. Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>V</strong> Summary</td>
<td><strong>V</strong> Summary</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Either outline, if well executed and supported by SFI will produce a satisfactory essay. However, the second outline, Plan “B,” is more analytical and therefore to be preferred.

Rule Number 7: **Each paragraph must be supported by Specific Factual Detail (SFI)!!!!**

Without SFI, your essay is nothing more than a collection of mere generalities without proof, and therefore cannot be satisfactory. My rule-of-thumb is at least three examples of SFI per paragraph in the body. SFI must be accurate and relevant to the question. The identifications I will make you memorize are examples of SFI—a date, person, event, thing, historical term, etc. It is not possible to have too much SFI in an essay.

Rule Number 8: **Be conscious of Change Over Time (COT).** Most questions in history are going to deal with COT in some manner, and usually require a discussion of causation. Awareness of COT is often the difference between a “C” and a “B” or an “A.”

Rule Number 9: **Conclude with a strong summary paragraph.** Last impressions count, too, although not as much as the first impression. First, you tell the Reader what you are going to tell him; then tell the Reader what you intend to tell him; then tell the Reader what you just told him.

Rule Number 10: **Write legibly!!!!** It is your responsibility to write in such a manner as to allow the Reader to understand what you are saying. The Reader will make every effort to decipher your hand-writing. However, there is no doubt that the mark for papers that must be deciphered suffer as a direct consequence. A Reader whose entire attention in taken up in deciphering the letters on the page is paying less attention to the merits of your argument. In the last analysis, if your mark is poor because the Reader couldn’t make out what you were trying to say, the fault is yours, not the Reader’s.