

## The skills of a history class

### 1. Note-taking and remembering

1. Learning to follow a lecture, take notes, study those notes in order to have a base to move beyond recall of information.
2. Learning to read material and incorporate the material into lecture notes to further the base to move beyond recall of information.

### 2. Developing questions

1. Using the base set up by the notes and readings to ask good historical questions.
2. Using the *Six Key Historical Concepts*
  1. Cause
  2. Consequence
  3. Change over time
  4. Continuity
  5. Perspective
  6. Significance
3. Asking questions with these six concepts as a jumping off point
  1. What *caused* this event to happen at this time and not some other time before or after?
  2. What *changed over time* due to this event?
  3. What remained the same over time (*continuity*) due to this event, or could have changed but did not?
  4. What were the *consequences* of this change over time, or the *consequences* of the continuity?
  5. Am I focusing on this from one *perspective* (The perspective of the elite rather than the lower classes, the king versus the nobles, the 21st century historian versus the contemporary people)? Are there other *perspectives* that would change the way I see the *changes, causes, or consequences*?
  6. (*Significance* is the glue that holds all of the answers to these previous questions together.)
4. Asking these questions with the course syllabus in mind.
  1. All courses have objectives to them. One cannot look at every event that occurred in a time period; so, one must begin with the lecture notes and readings that give a jumping off point and also look at the course objectives when they are available.
  2. (For example, the IB syllabus for the History of Europe course has a bullet point dealing with “*Administration and Interpretation of Law.*” One would begin with the lecture notes on Charlemagne’s governmental structure and ask questions about how that structure was different from previous Carolingian or Merovingian structures (*change over time vs continuity*) and look for the *causes* from Charlemagne’s *perspective* as to why he would use the structure that he used. One could also ask about the consequences of that government structure (specifically, the eventual development of feudalism, as discussed in the lecture). One could ask how feudalism *changed over time* and seek to find the connection with Charlemagne’s administrative structure. One should look at this from the *perspective* of Charlemagne, but also from the nobles, the peasants, the Church, and from the standpoint of a modern historian who sees the conclusion of these events.)

### 3. Doing historical research

1. One must find sources that are credible.
2. One must realize that the sources are going to give both factual information and analysis.
3. One must recognize the limitations of the sources for the questions that are being asked.
4. One must use the factual information to add to the lecture and reading notes, to develop a stronger base of factual information.

### 4. Doing historical analysis

1. Answering these questions requires a two-fold process. First, one must discover more detail in order to begin to develop stronger answers.
2. Secondly, one must incorporate all of the information into an idea in order to fully develop an answer.

3. The analysis is the connection of factual information to an overall, arguable idea.
4. Ideas should be able to be clearly stated, arguable, provable, and specific to the topic.

**5. Presentation of the argument**

1. A historical argument can be presented in a number of ways (here are a few).
  1. Essay
  2. Documentary
  3. Presentation
  4. historical reenactment (skits)
  5. Museum exhibits
2. The skill of presenting the argument is most often the skill of essay writing.
  1. One can do well at all of the other parts of historical skills and then struggle with the assessments due to lack of writing.
  2. However, even the best writers will struggle when they do not have proper analysis.
  3. Proper analysis cannot be done without proper research through academic sources.
  4. Proper research cannot be done without good historical questions.
  5. Good historical questions cannot begin without knowledge of some minimal background information.