

JAP2508 History of Japan

Guidelines for the essay

The essay for this course is defined as follows:

A final paper of some 10 pages (around 2300 characters per page without spaces). You are free to choose a topic of your liking, from any period up until 1989. Please focus on one limited question or one primary (translated) source, and build your argument on the basis of recent and/or prominent secondary sources.

The essay needs to have references and a bibliography. The reference system and the format of the bibliography are up to you, as long as you follow an established system. See these resources for guidance on such things as referencing, using sources, and more:

- [University of Oslo Library resource page in English](#)
- [University of Oslo Library resource page in Norwegian](#)

It is not allowed to use AI in the writing of this essay, nor in any of the preliminary steps leading up to the final essay (essay proposal, first draft, comments on the others' drafts).

In this document, we explain what we will be looking for when we mark your essay.

As the above description states, you can approach the essay in two ways.

1. Either you start with a "limited question" that you try to answer in the essay (plus for using a primary source as part of your discussion), or
2. you start with a particular source and discuss one or two questions about that source.

About 1:

What does "limited" mean? This word implies that you should try to make the essay as concrete as possible, in the sense that it must focus on a limited time span and a well-defined event, group of people, or problem.

Not: "What was bushido through the ages?" but rather: "How was bushido reinvented in the Meiji period, and what was it used for at that time?"

Not: "How did events from Meiji onwards push Japan into WW2?" but rather "Who decided to attack Pearl Harbor in 1941, and why?"

Not: "What was the difference between the Muromachi and Edo periods?" but rather: "Why did Toyotomi Hideyoshi decide to invade Korea in the 1590s?"

In other words: try to be as specific as you can!

The main thing is to avoid essays that span a very long period of time and make an overly abstract argument.

You can base your analysis primarily on secondary sources; make sure that such sources exist! A primary source, however, may be useful, and using such a source will make your essay more convincing and colourful.

About 2:

In this type of essay, you start with a primary source and analyse it from a particular perspective. You can use the PAPER method that Mark introduced in the first lecture (see “How to read primary sources” in Canvas). You can, for example, focus on one or two of the following questions:

What does the source reveal about the worldview, ways of thinking, and attitudes of the author and his/her time?

How reliable is the source; what does it emphasize or ignore, and why?

How was the source perceived in its own time, and how has it been interpreted in modern times?

What message is the source trying to convey, and in what ways?

Also for this type of essay, you will need to consult secondary sources as well to understand more about the historical period when the source of your choice was written. You can then also point out where the tale told by your source fits with our present understanding of life in a particular period, and where it diverges, or where it sheds a different light on received understandings.

The primary source (or sources) that you use does not have to be very long; it may just be a few pages, or an extract from a larger text. The main goal of this kind of essay is that you listen in on a voice from a different age, and try to figure out what that voice is trying to tell you.

Each academic paper should have a valid research question, an intelligible structure and content, and a conclusion. Moreover, the information in the text should be backed up by notes telling us exactly where the related information can be found. A paper that lacks most or all of these basics qualifies for F. A paper that completely or almost completely lacks notes also qualifies for F. A paper that is substantially shorter or longer than the above-specified 10 pages also qualifies for F. A paper where considerable parts of the paper are presented as the student’s own views (no notes, no quotation marks) but appear to be the view of someone else qualifies for F or worse.

On the other hand, a paper that includes most or all of these basics may easily qualify for E or even D. To the extent that the paper also includes a structured presentation and analysis of the academic (and or social) debate related to the research question, the mark may go further up to C or even B.

One qualification for B or A is that the best available (most prominent and/or most recent) academic sources have been used.