

# Good Practice Guide



## FIRST YEAR HISTORY 2015

**Authors:**

Jennifer Clark, Adrian Jones, Pamela Allen, Bronwyn Cole, Jill Lawrence, Lynette Sheridan Burns, Theda Thomas, Joy Wallace

# Good Practice Guide



*Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views in this project do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.*

With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, and where otherwise noted, all material presented in this document is provided under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.



The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>.

**Requests and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to:**

Office for Learning and Teaching  
Department of Education

GPO Box 9880,  
Location code N255EL10  
Sydney NSW 2001

[learningandteaching@education.gov.au](mailto:learningandteaching@education.gov.au)

2015

ISBN 978-1-76028-580-7 PRINT  
ISBN 978-1-76028-581-4 PDF

# Good Practice Guide

## BACKGROUND



This good practice guide was developed as part of the OLT project “Renewing first year curricula for social sciences and humanities in the context of discipline threshold standards”. The project investigated what we need to do in first year in order to prepare our students to meet the Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) for the discipline by the time they graduate.

The TLOs for History were developed through the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) project in 2010. Professor Iain Hay, as discipline scholar for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, led the project with a History discipline reference group representing academics, employers and professional bodies. The TLOs for History can be found at URL: [http://www.olt.gov.au/system/files/resources/altc\\_standards\\_HISTORY\\_080211\\_v2\\_0.pdf](http://www.olt.gov.au/system/files/resources/altc_standards_HISTORY_080211_v2_0.pdf)

The intersection of the graduate Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs), signature pedagogies and the first-year pedagogy principles involves an approach that is both transitional (including both curricular and co-curricular elements) and discipline specific—and

these are intertwined. The approach is based on an expectation that students learn and are able to demonstrate, at a level appropriate to first year, knowledge and understanding of certain disciplinary concepts, methods, terminology etc, and the kinds of skills that enable them to apply or express this knowledge—and these learning outcomes must be assessable.

At the same time, the approach suggests that curriculum and assessment design, and other aspects of pedagogical practice are organised around the challenges of transition to university study, the diversity of students’ backgrounds and prior learning, and the need to scaffold first year students’ learning in order to set them on their way to meeting the TLOs in their final year.

The challenges—or possible barriers to maximising learning—are similarly both transitional and discipline specific, and are experienced very differently by different students.

Our teaching strategies must also, therefore, involve both transitional and “signature” (or disciplinary) pedagogies. We need to design and teach in ways that will engage and motivate student learning. To cater for student diversity, creativity and agency, we need to make the disciplinary discourses accessible, design assessment that is challenging yet achievable, and make our criteria and standards explicit. We must scaffold and support students, at the level of individual assessment items and, more broadly and in the longer term, to help them become efficacious and independent learners. We need to focus our curricula design on student learning rather than discipline content, yet at the same time ensure that, at the end of first year, all students who have met the minimum requirements are—and feel that they are—well-equipped to continue their studies in the discipline and meet the TLOs at the end of their degrees.

This guide was developed to complement the website for the project that contains more detail [www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au](http://www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au). The website and the guide were developed in consultation with the history academics who attended our workshop in June 2013.

### The guide is organised around the TLOs and focuses on:

1. What do first year **students need to know and do** in order to set them on their way to meet the TLOs by the time they graduate?
2. What are the **barriers to students learning?**
3. What **teaching strategies** can we use?

A few specific examples are included in the document but there are more examples available on the website at [www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au](http://www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au).

## HISTORICAL 'FACTS'

### What students need to know and do

Students need to understand the complexities of supposed historical 'facts', such as, narratives and points of view of historians are constrained by what they know about a past. Students need to grasp how **historical understandings are based on 'data'**. Some historians may call these data sets 'facts', even when they also concede that 'facts' are matters of interrogation and interpretation, but they don't just make things up.

### Student barriers to learning

**'Facts' never speak for themselves.**

Students who only learn 'facts' often engage in 'surface learning'. The misconception is that the student who collects the most 'facts' must also understand them best. Students (and staff!) may become so focussed on learning (and expounding) 'facts' they neglect the process of how to put meaning on the facts they have learned about that past.

### Our teaching strategies

1. We can assist students by displacing their certainties and by telling them that **they don't have to know everything about the topic**. Complete coverage is neither possible nor essential. We should re-configure lectures and seminars so that they are no longer a 'data dump'. The more enduring role for lectures and seminars is to stimulate wonder and to model explicitly the contingent and provisional nature of historical interpretations.
2. We can also assist students by first **exploring student preconceptions** about the topic when commencing classroom dialogues about the 'facts'. Some academics have a deficit model of student learning, choosing to "tut-tut" about what students don't know. It is better to build a discussion around what the students may already think they know, even if it is wrong.

## PERIODISATION

### What students need to know and do

Students need to understand the way historians frame the past in constructed 'periods' which are seldom a past people's view of their own times. **Explicit engagement with the interpretive choices involved in periodisation** enables students eventually to accept that writing history entails the constructing of 'periods' of their own devising.

### Student barriers to learning

Students struggle to understand what constitutes an historical 'period'. Students tend to think of 'periods' uni-dimensionally: i.e., as shaped by one concept, whether it's politics or war or economic change etc. **A 'period' usually comprises overlapping and contrasting events and developments**. Students may also presume the chronology of events is the same as their causation. This is because they are still thinking about the past in uni-dimensional and mono-conceptual terms.

### Our teaching strategies

Charts, timelines and other visualisations scaffold teacher and student discussion of evidence and events, trends and processes. This approach reduces the possibilities of glossing over influential historical events or of letting important events 'float' without chronological context. **A timeline allows students to 'see' how overlapping and interlocking historical events can co-exist**. Very little in history is chronologically clear-cut.

### Example 1: How to nuance the idea of history being a collection of 'facts' influenced by what the historian knows.

#### Voting in class

Provide students with **red** (opinion) and **green** (fact) cards or use appropriate audience participation software (such as <http://www.polleverywhere.com>). Consider presenting a narrative, or asking students to read one, in a lecture or seminar context. At crucial points in the narrative invite the students to vote (with their cards, or via their mobile phones), according to their view of that point in the narrative as either fact or opinion. The chosen places to pause should be contentious so as to provoke a discussion on the origin and reliability of the information, and history as an evidenced-based construct made by historians.

### Example 2: How to teach periodisation as a construct.

#### Self-generated timelines

Most secondary sources used in history classes provide students with a pithy potted history of some kind. Individually or in groups ask students to divide that history into periods. Come together and identify similarities or differences in their choices. What were the key features that determined the periodisation? Now ask students to divide the same history into periods based on a different set of criteria such as political change, social movements or major events. Plot the different periods on a 'whole-of-class' timeline for analysis and discuss the variations or similarities that emerge.

# Demonstrate an understanding of a variety of conceptual approaches to interpreting the past

# TLO 2



## COMING TO GRIPS WITH APPROACHES TO HISTORY

### What students need to know and do

In the first year, students should engage with the idea that **there are a variety of approaches to history**. They could then be invited to study the application and implication of at least one approach in depth.

### Student barriers to learning

What is a recoverable past? Students may know, in principle, that there are many approaches to history, but still not understand the impact an approach can have, or how to recognise when it is being applied. Students often see the past as a single 'thing' that's 'out there': an unproblematic recoverable past that is uni-dimensional, truthful and accurate. They don't necessarily see that **different conceptual approaches to history determine what and whose pasts are recovered**.

### Our teaching strategies

Give students the opportunity to see how **using different conceptual approaches result in different histories**.

A case study approach is useful. Compare the same historical event approached from different perspectives.

Does the approach create a different history?

## INTERPRETATION

### What students need to know and do

Students need to appreciate the importance of the different second-order concepts they can apply to their first-order factual knowledge of the past. **Second-order concepts are essential tools in helping historians interpret periods and cultures of the past**. They also help generate different historical perspectives on the same period.

### Student barriers to learning

Students often err in thinking of the past as ready to be tripped over and 'found' like a nugget. Students can also have trouble understanding 'the bigger picture(s)', over-emphasising the personal in history, and accounting for events by privileging 'Great Men', whether heroes or villains. **It is more difficult to think in the abstract, or to think about the effects of context**. These impersonal perspectives require capacities not only to comprehend, but to relativise, the source at hand. Second-order concepts and wider reading (and lecturing) are needed to stimulate students' capacities to put things in context, thereby to enrich their reading of historical sources.

### Our teaching strategies

**We should explicitly model how historians use concepts to help construct meaning about the past**. This means explaining jargon.

Historians in academe often forget to impart the discipline's secret codes (like the clever conceptual "isms" and the footnote fetishes): things so familiar they've long been taken for granted by these experts, and yet they're still so baffling to novices.

### Example 1: How to introduce different approaches to history.

#### Guided Student Debates

Students are set the task of preparing for a debate. Students are allocated theories historians have used to explain the set event or development. Students must research that allocated theory and use that as their argument in a debate. In other words, they must adapt what they know so as to advocate for 'their' historian's position.

### Example 2: How to present history as interpretation.

#### Jigsaw narratives

Students are presented with cards on which are marked bits and pieces of an historical narrative. They are like jigsaw pieces waiting to be joined. They can be joined in many ways to make a range of coherent stories. Students put the various parts of the story together by applying various weightings, making linkages, joining dots and ultimately arriving at different histories using the same 'facts'. This is, after all, what historians routinely have to do.

### What students need to know and do

Students need to recognise that **history is constructed in the present time by historians**. It is not the same thing as 'the past'. We need to discuss how historians influence the communities in which they operate. They do this because of how they interpret the past. Historians are custodians and creators of collective memory.

### Student barriers to learning

Students have difficulty thinking like historians. They may find it difficult to separate 'the past' from history, the actual skill-set they are being invited to research and write/present at university. **The student may have to be coaxed and coached to accept their part in the making of historical knowledge.**

### Our teaching strategies

Teachers could adopt a cognitive apprenticeship model to demonstrate historical thinking processes. As a normal part of history teaching, academics should explore explicitly with students the different contexts in which history is written. **Contrasting histories on the same topic can be used to explain the subjectivities and orientations produced by contexts.**

### Example 1: How do you teach students to understand that history is what historians write?

#### Think-alouds

Model historical practice for students by working through a short unseen document in the way a professional historian would do. Instead of 'thinking' the actions, the teacher should 'think-aloud', voicing the questions, the uncertainties, the dead-ends and the beliefs that underpin interpretation. Re-think the tutorial as a safe time and place for students to venture their own 'think-alouds', abandoning notions of the tutorial as a mini-lecture.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

### What students need to know and do

First-year students must learn to work with sources. **Students need to differentiate between primary and secondary sources** in order to make judgements about them and their use.

### Student barriers to learning

Primary and Secondary: What is the difference? Students often have difficulty determining the difference between primary and secondary sources. Sometimes the categories are blurred.

**The vehicles delivering the sources may not conform to student preconceptions.** Edited volumes of documents and documents delivered online, for example, may present particular complications. Students working with contemporary history topics may also be easily confused. Another barrier to learning may arise even when students are able to differentiate between the two kinds of sources. Some students will still prefer to privilege secondary sources. They may therefore not appreciate that their academics have set a different agenda: not fact collection per se, but source interpretation and criticism. These students still don't grasp that they are actually being invited to begin to make knowledge, not just to parrot knowledge.

### Our teaching strategies

Students should be given the opportunity to explore a range of primary and secondary sources, not just for the information they contain, but also as an exercise in identification and discussion about how they serve as the raw material for the historian at work. Take the time to explain, furthermore, why the students are being invited to tackle this tricky material. **This is research training.**

### Example 1: How to differentiate between primary and secondary sources.

#### Excursion

Sometimes history classes can be 'strange-text' heavy. Use an excursion to an historic building or precinct or museum to explore the different types of primary sources. Use discussion of secondary sources as part of the excursion preparation. Encourage students to think about sources as broadly as possible.

### Example 2: How to teach students to evaluate sources

#### Interrogating primary sources by using dice

Try rolling mock dice in the middle of a discussion about a document or a physical source. The dice could be labelled: Who? When? What? Where? With whom? How? Alternatively, the dice could be labelled appropriately for other approaches you may wish to take to the sources, e.g. concepts, groups, gender etc. When interrogating a source, tricks such as this help to identify an evaluative process for students to follow. The modelling and performing of thinking tricks and questioning strategies like these help students to begin to discern distinctions, enabling them to make judgments about sources.

## EVALUATE SOURCES

### What students need to know and do

Students should be introduced to the ways in which historians make judgements about the sources they use. Students often have limited exposure to a variety of primary and secondary source types. Students are therefore often not aware of what sources are available to the historian. Students in the first year must realise that sources are always problematic; they carry an agenda and were created for a purpose. **Discussion of the nature of sources should accompany any student use of them.** When beginning to analyse primary sources in the first year, students should be encouraged to undertake a careful reading of the texts and to discuss their historical contexts. At the same time they should apply the same techniques to reading secondary sources. In this way they will be encouraged to look at all sources with a more critical eye.

### Student barriers to learning

Students coming to the study of history for the first time, indeed coming to university study as new students, find making any sort of judgement difficult. They feel insecure in analysing, assessing and commenting because they often believe they do not have enough knowledge to make informed judgements. As a consequence they focus on receiving knowledge, trying hard to avoid actually practising how to make knowledge. They'll turn to the academic or to the textbook for 'the answers' instead. **Primary sources can be difficult to understand because the language is archaic or the concepts unfamiliar.** Students may respond by tending to gloss over difficult passages, or even by ignoring the primary sources altogether as simply too difficult to use. An added dimension of difficulty may arise if the primary sources are translations from a foreign language. How do different translations change the meaning of the text? For some or all of these reasons, first-year students will often prefer to read secondary sources.

### Our teaching strategies

We should explicitly model how we use primary and secondary sources as artefacts of interpretation in themselves and **not simply as repositories of information for students to mine.**

# Examine historical issues by undertaking research according to the methodological and ethical conventions of the discipline

# TLO 5a



## EXPOSURE TO DIFFERENT HISTORICAL RESEARCH AGENDAS AND METHODS

### What students need to know and do

Students in their first year need to be exposed to different ways and purposes of 'doing history'. The focus of their learning should be as much on the activity of research as the subject or outcomes of that research. **Students at university are actually learning how to make knowledge, not just how to receive it.**

### Student barriers to learning

Many students are unaware of the transferable skills they develop when they study history. These students are therefore less able to articulate the wider 'worth' of their studies. They are more likely simply to say to a prospective employer, for instance, that they have studied American and Chinese history, missing the chance to demonstrate how their different studies of histories also show their development of self-sustaining skills of research, analysis and exposition. **Students sometimes even resent their academics' emphasis on interpretation.** These students still want their academics to concentrate on the 'history', meaning facts, events and the narrative. These students may think of their history studies solely in terms of the accumulation of subject matter.

### Our teaching strategies

We need to discuss explicitly how historians pursue different agendas and employ different methods. **There is no 'right' way of research, writing, and presenting history.** Teaching strategies must accommodate diversity of historical practice.

## PUTTING SOURCES IN CONTEXT

### What students need to know and do

Students in their first year need to practise the skills of putting the sources in context. First-year students need to recognise how sources reflect the views of their time. In higher education, students need to realise that **reading is more than mere comprehension; it requires critical engagement.**

### Student barriers to learning

'Research' may not mean the same thing to every student. Think of the students who come to class with a photocopy, perhaps with a modicum of highlighting (or too much!), more rarely with a few annotations, very seldom with notes (written or electronic) that try to frame understandings. Just having a photocopy may be seen as tantamount to learning. **Research really requires engagement with the 'information'; merely to identify it is not enough.**

When students are asked to undertake 'research', some are also prone simply to dismiss the surprises in sources as 'biased'. They do not yet realise that most standpoints can offer things of value to an historian's interpretation. Another barrier is that they read too literally. Relativisms may also dismay some first-year students. They may presume truths are fixed and certain. Confronted with sources that surprise or disconcert, these students may respond with a discussion-blocker such as, 'It all depends on the individual'. Such students may then consider the tasks of having to 'research' and to frame an 'argument' as simply requiring an articulation of their preconceptions, thence only to collect evidence consistent with those preconceptions, ignoring whatever doesn't 'fit'. They may also expect every question to have a single right answer.

### Our teaching strategies

We need to help students appreciate relativities. The key challenge for us is to re-position first-year students to relativise their sources, and thereby themselves. They must learn to fashion evidence-based and balanced outcomes of study and learning even as they confront inconsistencies, contradictions and relativisms. **This is meta-learning: the capacity to think about your thinking, and about others' thinking, without surrendering to either.** Starting with the first year, the learning activities teachers facilitate should raise these challenges. In a first-year history class relativities of standpoint are modelled by teachers, are discussed (informally, and always feeling safe enough to risk error) in classes, and are then practised (on a simpler-scale) in research-writing challenges.

<http://www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au>

### Example 1: How do you expose students to different research agendas?

#### Approach-focused research tasks

Subvert the tendency of students always to privilege content over methodology in their reading. Ask students to research a topic in small groups. Instead of concentrating on information about the topic, ask them to focus on different approaches to the topic, e.g.: political history, oral history, religious history, history-from-below, organisational history etc., in order to demonstrate how different approaches can lead to different histories.

### Example 2: How do you teach students about sub-texts in sources?

#### The use of history

Before they attempt to interrogate a difficult past, ask students to articulate what is unspoken and seems obvious within their own world. Students could be asked, for example, to sit for the Australian citizenship test, available online [http://www.citizenship.gov.au/learn/cit\\_test/](http://www.citizenship.gov.au/learn/cit_test/)

#### practice/

Discuss the sub-texts in the test as is evident in the questions chosen.

## ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF HISTORIANS

### What students need to know and do

Students in first year should be introduced to principles of ethical research. Students should discuss what ethical research means, how to treat sources and subjects honestly and fairly. We need to model how professionalism is practised from the very beginning. **In its simplest form, ethical practice in the first year involves understandings about plagiarism and referencing.** Higher learning is an honest and open dialogue with the sources of our knowledge.

### Student barriers to learning

Though students may not wish to behave unethically, they can still struggle to work out what is ethical practice in the context of tertiary study. **It cannot be assumed that students will know what ethical practice means in the context of studies of history.** Students often can't grasp why their history academics are such 'sticklers' for footnotes and bibliographies. These students are still too dependent, presuming that their role is just to receive knowledge. These students may consider that 'study' requires copying and/or unacknowledged paraphrasing. These students may also simply lack confidence, so they draw the inappropriate conclusion that it's best to copy and/or paraphrase (without acknowledgment) someone who at least seems authoritative.

### Our teaching strategies

Assessments should be more about learning how to make, not just receive, knowledge. Teachers at the university level are modelling (in lectures and tutorial activities) and scaffolding (in essay topics and the like) opportunities and capacities for students themselves to expound and explain about a historical topic. This is the making of knowledge, not just receiving: active learning, not passive. Teachers at first year will need to explain that new knowledge is framed as an open and acknowledged conversation with existing knowledge. **At present, plagiarism is more often a resort of those who are yet to master academic literacies.**

Teachers can also demonstrate ethical practice through the use of case studies. For example, oral history case studies invite discussion around confidentiality, slander, respect and honest representation. Indigenous history case studies invite discussion around working with people from different cultural backgrounds, respect for traditional practice, cultural sensitivity and ideas of ownership.

### Example 3: How to induct students into the mysteries of referencing.

#### Wearing your 'undies' on the outside

Higher learning is an honest and open dialogue with the sources of our knowledge. Choose any example of well-referenced work and unpack with the class how the referencing reflects that dialogue. A useful metaphor is the way superheroes always seem to wear their underpants on the outside. As foundation garments are exposed, so too should the fundamentals of higher learning and professional practice be obvious in referencing.

## HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

### What students need to know and do

Students in the first year should understand the difference between a source and evidence. They should appreciate that **evidence is whatever is drawn from a source in order to answer a specific question** that has been posed or that they are posing.

### Student barriers to learning

What amounts to evidence? Students are likely to have difficulty working with evidence. This is because they are not skilled in interrogating what they read. They may still think of reading only in terms of comprehension. It is impossible to find 'evidence' unless a question is posed or a problem needs to be addressed. **Students experience barriers to analysing historical evidence because they don't know what evidence is**, or how to find it, or how to ask important questions.

### Our teaching strategies

**We can help students understand the importance of evidence by modelling the questioning of readings.** It is possible, for instance, for different historians to read the same primary source, and depending on the questions asked of it, and depending on the purposes for reading it, discover different evidence to use.

## INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PAST CHANGE OVER TIME

### What students need to know and do

In the first year students must recognise that historians are the ones who actually derive meaning from and impose meaning on the past. **Pasts don't turn themselves into history.** Like pop stars, 'pasts' have an agent. Historians look at the past through their own lens. As a consequence they see the past refracted in a variety of ways. Sometimes these different refractions generate conflict between historians.

### Student barriers to learning

Students have difficulty recognising that historians interpret the past differently. **Groups of historians working in similar eras and responding to similar political, social or intellectual circumstances may still think differently about the past from other groups of historians writing at a different time.** The problem stems from the way in which different histories may then appear to students to tell contradictory stories. Students can become confused when those stories can appear even to be diametrically opposed. When students ask for the 'right answer' to a question, it is because they do not believe (as yet) that history is an interpretive art.

### Our teaching strategies

Some historians think historiography and 'theory' should be taught in the final year. Certainly it can be conceptually difficult for some students to come to grips with even a sampling, let alone a survey, of historiographical trends on a given topic, past or current. By introducing students to the concept of historical scholarship in the first year, however, students will be better prepared to understand how historiographical debates develop. **We need to start students in the first year understanding that history is about interpreting the past;** that means there are different interpretations from historian to historian, and from period to period.

### Example 1: How do you teach students to find evidence?

#### The Big Question

Evidence answers questions. Ask students to work in groups. Each group is given the same primary source, but different big questions. Discuss how different evidence is revealed.

### Example 2: How do you teach students to interpret the past and to recognise historical interpretation?

#### a. Role play

Allocate to students an historian who has taken a particularly identifiable view on an historical topic. Students assume the persona of that historian. They present and defend his or her view in a role play.

#### b. Emphasise the colourful turn of phrase

Historical interpretations are often built on the stimulus of a surprise. Give students a passage from a source. Ask students to identify the unusual or colourful phrases. Use the surprises in the phrasing as a way to provoke and then to explore interpretations.

#### c. Subvert authority in the classroom

Give a lecture and arrange for a colleague to dispute pre-arranged points by interjecting. Certainly the students are shocked, but it demonstrates dramatically how historians debate the past to move knowledge forward.

## ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF HISTORIANS

### What students need to know and do

Students routinely already know history is indeed 'one damn thing after another'. At first year, students need (and want) to know that history is so much more than that. A key thing first-year students must grasp is that **history always involves evidence-based explaining**. Students should be able to look for (explicit and implicit) lines of argument in their readings, and they'll need to be practising finding them and discussing them in seminars. Students need to be able to demonstrate that there is more than one way of looking at the matter in question. Students need to know that they are being tasked to chart a course with and through different interpretations of an historical event or development. They must assess the best way(s), in the light of the evidence they've found, of accounting for the past in question. If a student can actually accomplish all this, they are beginning to make knowledge, and not just receive it.

### Student barriers to learning

**A common barrier to learning is students' tendency to neglect the 'how' and 'why' aspects of analyses of an historical question or event.** Some students still think the 'facts speak for themselves'. Accordingly, these students may think research is merely fact collecting. They may also consider that framing a line of argument is nothing more than fact arranging by discrete themes. They will tend to privilege 'who', 'what' and 'when' aspects of events. They may ignore the problematic in the things they read. The key barrier is that these students are not yet reading for meaning. They are not yet conceiving their task as having to 'account for' the past as well as to order it, to back it up with evidence, thence to re-describe it. Description per se is not the problem; the inadequacy is likely to be that the themes and events the student describes aren't also systematically substantiated, accounted for and connected.

### Our teaching strategies

Teachers will need to help students understand the difference between evidence-based analysis and mere arrangement and criticism. There is no substitute for explicit modelling in lectures and seminars. Locate lines of argument and topic sentences. Show how these things are also present in the writing of successful students. Examples drawn from anonymous student work are more appreciated by your student target audience than examples drawn from academics' writings. Reading for yourself in search of others' meanings is often difficult when you have just left the kind of schooling in which a teacher might always have first chewed over every reading for you. Frame exercises that model and teach students how to analyse what they are reading, and how to **accept there's more than one way of looking at something**.

### Example 3: How do you teach ethical practice?

#### Dilemmas posed by the absent reference

To reach a wider market, some publishers dictate that books must be published without referencing. Identify a passage in such a book for discussion. Ask students to explore the implications of writing without referencing. What questions are left unanswered?

## THE VOICE AND STANDPOINT OF HISTORIANS

### What students need to know and do

Tertiary-level studies of history, like most Humanities subjects, develop higher-order communication skills. Tertiary agendas set students to consider things more deeply. **Depth usually means more emphasis on evidence, coherence and reflection.** In history's particular case, the expository skills relate to framing and substantiating lines of argument that are clear and fair, sound and coherent. Academics want their students to combine distanced and even-handed disinterest with the selection and substantiation of points of historical importance and interest. Openness and something approaching neutrality must join with saying and writing something sound and interesting. These are subtle distinctions and major challenges.

### Student barriers to learning

Students often find essay writing difficult. The key barrier to learning is often simply that many students still don't realise historians construct meanings out of the past and transmit that 'meaning' as 'history'. **The student may still think learning is simply a fact-collection or accumulation exercise.** This is called 'surface' learning. Students commonly misconceive the 'deep' task of having to form a line of argument as simply a task to comprehend, collect and report back. Their essays just re-arrange some of their readings. Struggling students may also err in thinking the essay task of having to express a viewpoint is only a summons for their opinions, pure and simple. They may thereby overlook the 'deep learning' agendas of the task.

### Our teaching strategies

**Teachers need to learn not to neglect the signals sent by the most common errors made by students in writing essays.** A student, quite capable of writing well in one genre, may be less capable in another. Student errors are more often not literacy problems per se, but rather problems of adjusting to the more complex and unfamiliar tasks associated with tertiary studies in history. Essay-writing techniques and models of good practice need to be discussed to help students master unfamiliar academic discourse.

### Example 1: How can we encourage students to present history in different ways?

#### Being asked to go to the heart of the matter in an oral presentation

PechaKuchas ([www.pechakucha.org](http://www.pechakucha.org)) help students frame interesting informal talks. Ask students to frame a talk and display, using a PechaKucha powerpoint template of 10 blank slides with an automatic 20-second change over. Students have 3 minutes 20 seconds to get to the heart of an historical issue or question and make the audience care about it. PechaKuchas can also function well as a preliminary step to the framing of an essay.

## COMMUNICATING HISTORY

### What students need to know and do

History can be communicated in a variety of innovative ways. Scholars privilege the essay, seeking rigour in research and coherence, and in exposition and substantiation. But historical imaginations may be evocative as well as argumentative. **The genres of the lines of argument (and evocation) are actually unimportant.** They can be written, oral, or employ multi-media as well.

### Student barriers to learning

It is a mistake to assume that because students find essay writing difficult they will necessarily find other modes of presentation easier. When set an assessment task, some students may research too little, too late. They may also not expect to have to draft and re-draft the things they write. Some students are also less aware of the different forms historical writing and presentation can take. **Students need to be helped to focus on the same goals of rigour, coherence and evidence in exposition when presenting history in traditional and other forms e.g.: blog, role-play, debate, whole-class exhibition.**

### Our teaching strategies

Teachers need to allow students to present history in different ways. Teachers might consider creating and enabling more student opportunities to present their knowledge of history through a range of formats such a web-page/blog, an in-house and on-line journal, or even an exhibition in a whole-of-class festival of historical learning. Teamwork is also often neglected in history classrooms. There is considerable scope for peer critique of student work and indeed for group research and presentation tasks. History is presented in a variety of ways within the community, but traditionally in the tertiary classroom these forms have been under-explored. **There is potential to help students develop historical thinking skills by using different formats** for the presentation of history and the demonstration of those skills.

## UNDERSTANDING THE DISCIPLINE

### What students need to know and do

Beyond all the “edu-stuff” about skills and outcomes, the thing that first-year students really need to know and to do is to **get passionate about their studies of history**. There’s got to be some joy to be found in the learning and teaching, and some scope to unleash student creativity. Students need to glimpse the nature, breadth and potential of the discipline. Similarly, they need to appreciate what they have learned in their studies beyond the ‘facts’ about the past.

### Student barriers to learning

Students are often shackled by teacher-centrism. With respect to history passions and interests, **the real drivers of lifelong learning, the key barrier to student learning is the timidity of teachers**.

Some teaching methods and agendas ensure that students remain far too passive. Why do academics tend to think about their research in ways so much more active, indeed exciting, than they make their teaching?

### Our teaching strategies

Our teaching strategies should provide students with opportunities for genuine engagement with the characteristics of the discipline. As much as possible they should **‘do’ history rather than be told about it** and learn through doing. The pleasures and pearls in history studies are more often found when students create knowledge rather than receive it.

## REFLECT ON THEIR LEARNING

### What students need to know and do

Students in the first year should be introduced to reflective practice as commonplace. It is **no longer adequate for students simply to absorb ‘factual’ knowledge that can be regurgitated** in an examination or reproduced in an essay that privileges content. Students need to think and write reflectively so that they can become more engaged with the subject matter of their studies and with learning itself as a lifelong skill. At all stages of learning students should be encouraged and have the opportunity to internalise and then articulate what they are doing as students of history.

### Student barriers to learning

Unaware of the reflective foundations of professional practice, **students sometimes find reflection silly, pointless and superficial**. It is often seen as a ‘Mickey Mouse’ activity to be done quickly and without deep engagement.

### Our teaching strategies

We should encourage students to develop a reflective disposition and a reflective approach to their discipline and their studies. **Allow time for reflection**. Model good reflective practice and value the results of genuine contemplation.

### Example 1: How can we teach students to ‘recognise’ what they can do?

#### Real world history

Ask students to undertake a research task, or to engage in a history-based activity, that has meaning and importance for the local community e.g.: build a display, write a newsletter, volunteer at the museum etc. in order to encourage a genuine sense of involvement in professional activity.

### Example 2: How can we encourage reflective practice?

#### Letters to next year’s students

Ask this year’s students to write a letter to next year’s students reflecting on what they have learned as students of history. This should not be an empty task, but one that carries over from year to year.