

HISTORY WORDS

History, like many disciplines, has its own distinctive styles of writing. While learning to think about the past, history students must also learn to write history in a clear and convincing manner. Those who are already strong writers will relish this challenge but others may find it confronting.

This page contains several lists of 'history words' to provide you with a head start in writing history. You will encounter many of these words when reading history while others are useful descriptive words you can use in your own writing. These lists are not comprehensive or exhaustive but may prove useful for inexperienced writers.

If you are new to history, or have difficulty finding the right words, save or print off these lists and keep them to hand. If you would like to suggest words for these lists, please make contact with your ideas.

Sections or groups in society

academia	People who work in schools and universities, teaching or undertaking research
agrarian	People involved in producing crops and livestock through farming
aristocracy	People who possess noble titles and privileges, often with wealth and power
artisans	People involved in the manufacture or repair of items, such as mechanics
<i>bourgeoisie</i>	People who own capital, such as land, factories and raw materials
capitalist	As for <i>bourgeoisie</i> (above), people who own capital and the means of production
clergy	People ordained by the church to carry out its functions, such as priests, monks and nuns
commercial	People involved in trade, such as importing and exporting, buying and selling
economic	People, institutions and activities that produce society's wants and needs
establishment	The political, social and economic elites who wield power in a society
gender	Refers to the rights, roles and conditions of men and women in a society
industrial	The mass production of wants and needs, particularly on a large scale
intelligentsia	People who develop ideas, theories and policies in a society
middle class	The social classes who own some property and enjoy safe and stable standards of living
military	A state's defence forces, such as the army, navy and air force
monarchy	The institution of hereditary royalty, led by a king, queen or emperor
nobility	People who possess noble titles, either from birth, royal grant or venality
peasantry	People who work the land, usually as tenant farmers and often in impoverished conditions
<i>philosophes</i>	Intellectuals and writers who engage in critical study of society, beliefs and ideas

political	The people, bodies and processes that govern and make decisions in a society
proletariat	People who work for wages in a society, particularly in the industrial sector
provincial	The areas of a nation outside major cities, such as lesser towns, rural areas or colonies
upper class	The upper levels of a society, such as royalty, aristocracy and the very wealthy
urban	The people, actions and conditions in large cities
village	A small agricultural community, usually in a rural area
working class	The lower levels of society, whose members must work to survive

Political systems

absolutism	Any political system where the ruler or government wields absolute power
anarchism	A political system that seeks to abolish the state and create a communal society
autocracy	A system where political power is concentrated in the hands of a single person
capitalism	An economic system where most companies, land and other resources are privately owned
colonialism	A system of claiming, settling, ruling and maintaining one or more colonies (see imperialism)
communism	A political-economic system with no state, minimal class differences and economic equality
constitutional monarchy	A political system with a monarch whose power is limited and shared with the people
democracy	A political system where the government or parts of it are selected by the people
divine right	A form of political authority where power is said to be ordained by God
fascism	A political system marked by authoritarian rule, nationalism, state and military power
feudalism	A medieval socio-political system with a hierarchy of kings, lords, knights and vassals
imperialism	A system where a powerful state conquers territories (colonies) for its own gain
Marxism	A system or world view based on material factors, inequalities of wealth and class struggle
mercantilism	An economic system designed to increase national power by increasing wealth and trade
militarism	A system where military needs are prioritised and the military exerts political influence
nationalism	An ideology urging loyalty to one's own country; to put your country first
popular sovereignty	A form of political authority where power is derived from the consent of the people
socialism	A system where the government rules in the interests of the workers or common people
syndicalism	A form of socialism where the workers collectively control their factories or workplaces
theocracy	A system where government and laws are determined by religious leaders and teaching
totalitarianism	A political system where the power of the state often overrides the rights of individuals

Political concepts

assembly	A body of people, elected or appointed to form government or make decisions
autocracy	A form of government where one person is responsible for decision making
constitution	A document defining systems of government and the limits of government power
democracy	A political system where government is formed by popular elections
divine right	The idea that governments and autocrats derive their power and authority from God
elections	The process of voting to select others, usually to form a representative government
executive	The branch of government responsible for leadership and day to day decision making
government	A system responsible for leadership, making decisions and making laws in a society
ideology	A system of ideas and beliefs that shapes one's views about politics and government
legislature	An assembly that exists to pass new laws or review, amend or abolish existing laws
parliament	An elected legislature from which an executive government is also formed
participation	The involvement of ordinary people in selecting government and in political discourse
popular sovereignty	The idea that governments derive their power and authority from the consent of the people
representation	A political concept where some individuals act, speak or make decisions on behalf of others
sovereignty	The supreme authority of a government, the basis for its power and autonomy
state	'The state' describes an organised society and the political system that governs it

Economic concepts

capital	The resources needed to produce things, such as land, raw materials and equipment
commerce	The business of buying and selling, particularly on a large scale
debt	Money owed to another party, usually because it has been previously borrowed
deficit	The shortfall that exists when spending is greater than income
exports	Resources or goods sold and shipped to another country, which boosts national income
finance	Describes the sections of an economy concerned with managing money, such as banking
imports	Resources or goods bought and shipped in from another country, depleting national income
industry	The production of raw materials and manufactured goods within an economy
inflation	An increase in prices for goods and services, reducing the purchasing power of money
labour	The people who provide work to enable production or delivery of services; the workers

laissez-faire	French for "let it be"; an economy free of trade regulations, tariffs or costs
manufacturing	The process of making or producing goods, particularly on a large scale
production	The process of making things, particularly things that have additional value
profit	Financial reward obtained from business or investment, where income exceeds costs
revenue	Money received for normal activities, such as sales (business) or taxation (government)
taxation	Money collected from individuals and groups by the government to fund the state
trade	The buying or selling of goods, usually in exchange for money

Words for describing historical cause

agitated	aroused	awakened	brought about	catalyst
developed	deteriorated	encouraged	exacerbated	fuelled
generated	incited	inflamed	instigated	kindled
led to	long term	motivated	popularised	propagandised
prompted	promoted	protested	provoked	radicalised
reformed	rocked	roused	set off	short term
solicited	sparked	spurred	stimulated	stirred up
transformed	triggered	urged	whipped up	worsened

Words for describing historical effect or consequence

boosted	catastrophic	consolidated	crippled	decimated
demoralised	depleted	disastrous	disbanded	disoriented
dispersed	dissolved	divided	drained	elevated
emboldened	enriched	exhausted	fatigued	hardened
heartened	improved	inspired	mobilised	prospered
punished	restored	sapped	scattered	separated
stimulated	strained	strengthened	stretched	unified
united	unsettled	uplifted	upset	wearied

Words for describing historical continuity

blocked	calmed	censored	clamped down	concealed
conservative	contained	curbed	deterring	dispersed

froze	halted	held back	limited	mollified
pacified	oppressed	overpowered	prohibited	quashed
quelled	reactionary	regressed	repressed	resisted
restored	restrained	restricted	smothered	stabilised
stemmed	stunted	subdued	suppressed	wound back

Words for describing historical significance

adverse	calamitous	catastrophic	destabilising	destructive
devastating	dire	disastrous	essential	expedient
far reaching	far sighted	fateful	forerunner	ground breaking
healing	important	innovative	meaningful	modernising
negative	ominous	opportunistic	profound	pivotal
positive	revolutionary	ruinous	serious	shaking
shattering	significant	spearheading	timely	trailblazing
transforming	tumultuous	unsettling	uprooting	vital

Words for evaluating historical sources

balanced	baseless	biased	convincing	credible
deceptive	dishonest	distorted	doubtful	dubious
emotive	exaggerated	fallacious	far fetched	flawed
honest	imbalanced	impossible	inflated	limited
misleading	one sided	overwrought	persuasive	phony
plausible	propagandist	realistic	reasonable	selective
sensationalist	skewed	sound	spurious	unrealistic
unreliable	untenable	useful	valid	vivid

Command words for history tasks and activities

analyse	Examine and discuss the important structure or parts of something
annotate	Record written questions, comments or explanations on a document or visual source
annotated bibliography	A list of books that contains a note about the content and usefulness of each book

argue	Present a case, to express and explain a particular reason or theory
brainstorm	Gather and record thoughts and ideas spontaneously, without sorting or evaluating them
cite	Refer to an authority or trusted source, as evidence of your information or idea
compare	Examine two or more propositions and identify and discuss similarities between them
concept map	A visual chart or diagram, using shapes and lines to organise and connect topics or ideas
conclusion	The last paragraph in sustained writing, it restates the contention and 'rounds off' the text
contrast	Examine two or more propositions and identify and discuss differences between them
critically analyse	Analyse something and offer views and judgements about the merit or value of its parts
define	Provide precise meanings and explanations about something
describe	Provide a detailed and graphic account of something
discuss	Provide a balanced commentary about something, mentioning arguments for and against
evaluate	Analyse something and form final conclusions about its value, credibility or merit
explain	Provide a clear, straightforward and detailed account of something
historiographical activity	A task requiring discussion of historians and their interpretations of a particular topic
interpret	Examine something to extract its meaning and express it in your own words
introduction	The first paragraph in sustained writing, offering a contention and an outline of the text
issue	A topic or question that is open to discussion, debate or dispute
justify	Provide clear reasons, grounds and evidence for a particular argument or conclusion
outline	Provide a basic overview of something, describing only its main features
paraphrase	To describe someone else's words, statement or meaning, in your own words
review	Read or examine something and offer your own thoughts and judgements about it
signpost	Use phrases and sentences outlining the direction or structure your writing will take
summarise	Briefly describe the main points or attributes of something, without going into much detail

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