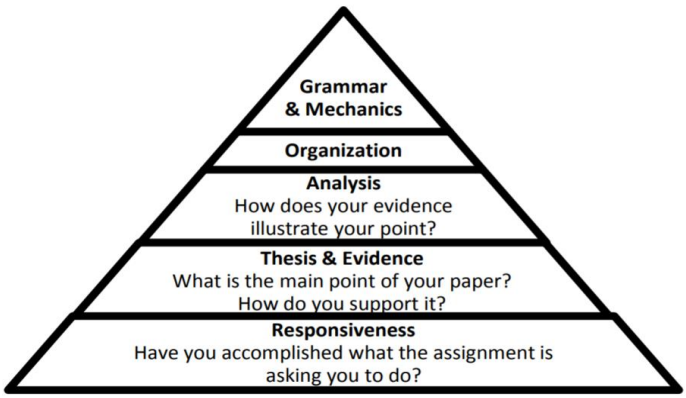
First lesson:

Writing in Civilization: Quote analysis.

Along the study years, students are faced with the task of analyzing quotes that the majority of them fail to do. Whether it is to write an essay on the exam day, or to use it within the written material as a support, students find it difficult to explain a quote. Furthermore, they find difficulties knowing how to relate the quote to specific elements from the lessons studied without writing the whole lecture down. Consequently, and after teaching you how to analyze an authentic document during the first Semester, I found it crucial to teach you how to analyze quotes and be selective in terms of the materials given during the lecture.

In a Culture and Civilization class, it is paramount for students to learn how to analyze quotes. Especially that students deal with many imported facts and pieces of information. History, as a matter of fact, is a collection of materials brought to us by historians throughout the years. Since students need to learn how to develop their critical thinking, they are encouraged to read between the lines and see beyond the surface images.



Starting from the base of the pyramid, one should know what Responsiveness is. First of all, it includes the following steps:

- Read the question or the quote carefully.
- Find what is being asked of you (agreement, explanation, exposing the causes and effects, defining and illustrating, defending using arguments, narrating by using certain historical events).
- Identify who said it (give a hint about him or where he mentioned this book, article, speech) and try to locate time and space (during which period and the place if you know it)
- Detect the different parts of the quote (sometimes the quote has got a setting, an opinion, a disagreement or an agreement, an event description…)
- Identify the key words (topic pillars) explain the ones that necessitate clarification.
- Paraphrase the quote in your own words. (what you have understood)
- Extract the hidden messages where a defragmentation and explanation of different figures of speech are obligatory.
- Avoid personal opinion using I or We. It is more appropriate to use the passive voice.

After the analysis process, students should draft their essays starting with an introduction where they would better include a Thesis statement. A strong thesis is "specific, focused, defensible, stated with conviction, and revised over the course of your writing process. It should be interpretive rather than descriptive. This means providing the reader with not-so obvious insight about the topic rather than offering a mere description or restatement of information."

In the body of your essay, they can write their evidences and analysis in an organized way. At this part, they should not seek perfection; it can slow their thinking process. Besides, during the correction and edition phase, they can check their grammar and spelling mistakes, reorder sentences or even paragraphs.

*Here are some pieces of advice from a booklet entitled "How to write a good History paper" written by a number of historians and university teachers

1-Get off to a good start: Avoid pretentious, vapid beginnings. If you are writing a paper on, say, British responses to the rebellion in India in 1857, don't open with a statement like this: "Throughout human history people in all cultures everywhere in the world have engaged in many and long-running conflicts about numerous aspects of government policy and diplomatic issues, which have much interested historians and generated historical theories in many areas." This is pure garbage, bores the reader, and is a sure sign that you have nothing substantive to say. Get to the point. Here's a better start: "The rebellion in 1857 compelled the British to rethink their colonial administration in India." This sentence tells the reader what your paper is actually about and clears the way for you to state your thesis in the rest of the opening paragraph. For example, you might go on to argue that greater British sensitivity to Indian customs was hypocritical.

2- State a clear thesis. Whether you are writing an exam essay or a senior thesis, you need to have a thesis. Don't just repeat the assignment or start writing down everything that you know about the subject. Ask yourself, "What exactly am I trying to prove?" Your thesis is your take on the subject, your perspective, your explanation—that is, the case that you're going to argue. "Famine struck Ireland in the 1840s" is a true statement, but it is not a thesis. "The English were responsible for famine in Ireland in the 1840s" is a thesis (whether defensible or not is another matter). A good thesis answers an important research question about how or why something happened. ("Who was responsible for the famine in Ireland in the 1840s?") Once you have laid out your thesis, don't forget about it. Develop your thesis logically from paragraph to paragraph. Your reader should always know where your argument has come from, where it is now, and where it is going.

3- Be sure to analyze. Students are often puzzled when their professors mark them down for summarizing or merely narrating rather than analyzing. What does it mean to analyze? In the narrow sense, to analyze means to break down into parts and to study the interrelationships of those parts. If you analyze water, you break it down into hydrogen and oxygen. In a broader sense, historical analysis explains the origins and significance of events. Historical analysis digs beneath the surface to see 2 relationships or distinctions that are not immediately obvious. Historical analysis is critical; it evaluates sources, assigns significance to causes, and weighs competing explanations. Don't push the

distinction too far, but you might think of summary and analysis this way: Who, what, when, and where are the stuff of summary; how, why, and to what effect are the stuff of analysis. Many students think that they have to give a long summary (to show the professor that they know the facts) before they get to their analysis. Try instead to begin your analysis as soon as possible, sometimes without any summary at all. The facts will "shine through" a good analysis. You can't do an analysis unless you know the facts, but you can summarize the facts without being able to do an analysis. Summary is easier and less sophisticated than analysis—that's why summary alone never earns an "A."

4-Use evidence critically. Like good detectives, historians are critical of their sources and cross-check them for reliability. You wouldn't think much of a detective who relied solely on a suspect's archenemy to check an alibi. Likewise, you wouldn't think much of a historian who relied solely on the French to explain the origins of World War I. Consider the following two statements on the origin of World War I: 1) "For the catastrophe of 1914 the Germans are responsible. Only a professional liar would deny this..." 2) "It is not true that Germany is guilty of having caused this war. Neither the people, the government, nor the Kaiser wanted war...." They can't both be right, so you have to do some detective work. As always, the best approach is to ask: Who wrote the source? Why? When? Under what circumstances? For whom? The first statement comes from a book by the French politician Georges Clemenceau, which he wrote in 1929 at the very end of his life. In 1871, Clemenceau had vowed revenge against Germany for its defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War. As premier of France from 1917 to 1920, he represented France at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. He was obviously not a disinterested observer. The second statement comes from a manifesto published by ninety-three prominent German intellectuals in the fall of 1914. They were defending Germany against charges of aggression and brutality. They too were obviously not disinterested observers. Now, rarely do you encounter such extreme bias and passionate disagreement, but the principle of criticizing and cross-checking sources always applies. In general, the more sources you can use, and the more varied they are, the more likely you are to make a sound historical judgment, especially when passions and self-interests are engaged. You don't need 3 to be cynical as a historian (self-interest does not explain everything), but you do need to be critical and skeptical. Competent historians may offer different interpretations of the same evidence or choose to stress different evidence. You will not find a single historical Truth with a capital "T" on any matter of significance. You can, however, learn to discriminate among conflicting interpretations, not all of which are created equal. (See also the section on Analyzing a Historical Document.)

5-Be precise. Vague statements and empty generalizations suggest that you haven't put in the time to learn the material. Consider these two sentences: "During the French Revolution, the government was overthrown by the people. The Revolution is important because it shows that people need freedom." What people? Landless peasants? Urban journeymen? Wealthy lawyers? Which government? When? How? Who exactly needed freedom, and what did they mean by freedom? Here is a more precise statement about the French Revolution: "Threatened by rising prices and food shortages in 1793, the Parisian sans-culottes pressured the Convention to institute price controls." This statement is more limited than the grandiose generalizations about the Revolution, but unlike them, it can open the door to a real analysis of the Revolution. Be careful when you use grand abstractions like people, society, freedom, and government, especially when you further distance

yourself from the concrete by using these words as the apparent antecedents for the pronouns they and it.

6-Always pay attention to cause and effect. Abstractions do not cause or need anything; particular people or particular groups of people cause or need things. Avoid grandiose trans-historical generalizations that you can't support. When in doubt about the appropriate level of precision or detail, err on the side of adding "too much" precision and detail.

7-Watch the chronology. Anchor your thesis in a clear chronological framework and don't jump around confusingly. Take care to avoid both anachronisms and vagueness about dates. If you write, "Napoleon abandoned his Grand Army in Russia and caught the redeye back to Paris," the problem is obvious. If you write, "Despite the Watergate scandal, Nixon easily won reelection in 1972," the problem is more subtle, but still serious. (The scandal did not become public until after the election.) If you write, "The revolution in China finally succeeded in the twentieth century," your professor may suspect that you haven't studied. Which revolution? When in the twentieth century? Remember that chronology is the backbone of history. What would you think of a biographer who wrote that you graduated from Hamilton in the 1950s?

Tasks:

Read these Quotes carefully then apply the steps we've discussed above:

*"A prison becomes a home when you have the key."
— George Sterling
*"The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all."
— G.K. Chesterton
*"When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in a society, over the course of time they create for themselves a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it."
— Frédéric Bastiat
*"Politics: the art of using euphemisms, lies, emotionalism and fear-mongering to dupe average people into accepting--or even demanding--their own enslavement"
— Larken Rose