
Historical Recounts: Understanding the Past through “Muslims in Australia”

1. What is a Historical Recount?

A **historical recount** is a non-fiction text that retells **real past events** in **chronological order**. It is written to **inform, educate, and preserve memory**.

A good historical recount answers:

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it occur?
- **Where** did it take place?
- **Why** was it important?
- **How** did it shape the present?

Historical recounts rely on **accurate evidence**, such as artefacts, photographs, letters, oral histories, maps, and official records. They help readers **connect personal stories** to **broader social and cultural change**.

2. Purpose of a Historical Recount

Historical recounts aim to:

- **Preserve knowledge** about people and communities.
- **Explain cause and effect** — how events led to later developments.
- **Honour contributions** and struggles of individuals or groups.
- **Develop understanding** of diversity and heritage.
- **Encourage empathy** by seeing events from multiple perspectives.

For example, recounting the story of *Muslims in Australia* helps us understand how migration, faith, and cooperation shaped the nation’s multicultural identity.

3. Structure of a Historical Recount

Section	Description	Example (Muslims in Australia)
Orientation	Introduces topic, setting, and key participants.	Muslims have been part of Australia's story for over two centuries, beginning long before British colonisation.
Sequence of Events	Presents events in time order, explaining causes and effects.	From Macassan trade before 1788 to the arrival of Afghan cameleers and post-war migrants.
Reorientation (Conclusion)	Summarises overall impact or legacy.	Muslim communities helped build Australia's transport routes, cultural diversity, and sense of shared identity.

4. Language Features

Feature	Explanation	Example
Past tense	Describes completed actions.	<i>Muslims settled in outback towns during the 19th century.</i>
Third person	Objective and factual.	<i>They travelled across the desert with camels.</i>
Chronological connectives	Link events by time order.	<i>First, after that, during the 1860s, by the 1970s...</i>
Action verbs	Show what people did.	<i>traded, explored, built, migrated, contributed.</i>
Technical/historical nouns	Give precision.	<i>migration, settlement, exploration, trade routes, telegraph line.</i>
Passive voice	Focuses on the event or result.	<i>Mosques were built in remote towns.</i>
Factual tone	Avoids exaggeration or opinion.	<i>The first purpose-built mosque was completed in Marree in 1882.</i>
Adverbial phrases	Add detail of time, place, and manner.	<i>In the late 1800s, across the harsh interior, Muslim cameleers transported supplies tirelessly.</i>

5. Example Historical Recount: Muslims in Australia

Orientation

Muslims have contributed to Australian life for over two hundred years. Long before British colonisation, Muslim seafarers made peaceful contact with Aboriginal peoples in northern Australia. Later, Muslim cameleers, migrants, and families from around the world played vital roles in exploration, transport, and community building.

Sequence of Events

Before 1788: Macassan Traders

Centuries before European settlement, Muslim fishermen and traders from the Indonesian archipelago—known as *Macassans*—visited the northern coastline of Australia, particularly Arnhem Land. They traded sea cucumbers (*trepang*) with Aboriginal Yolngu communities. The contact fostered mutual respect, sharing of words, tools, and beliefs. Some Yolngu rock art even depicts Macassan boats and Islamic prayer gestures, revealing early intercultural understanding.

1800s: Afghan Cameleers and Exploration

When European settlers struggled to explore the desert, the government brought experienced camel drivers—mainly from Afghanistan, Baluchistan, and northern India. These *Afghan cameleers* (often simply called “Ghans”) transported supplies, built telegraph lines, and guided explorers such as Ernest Giles and Burke and Wills. They established camps and prayer sites along trade routes that later became railways and highways. Towns like Marree, Broken Hill, and Coolgardie became hubs of Muslim life.

Late 1800s–Early 1900s: Establishing Faith and Community

Small but significant Muslim communities formed. They built Australia’s first mosques, including the **Marree Mosque (1882)** and **Adelaide Mosque (1888)**. These mosques became spiritual, social, and educational centres. Despite discrimination and isolation, Muslims were respected for their honesty and reliability. Their hard work made inland travel and communication possible.

Post–World War II Migration (1940s–1970s)

After the war, Australia opened its borders to new migrants. Muslim families arrived from Turkey, Lebanon, Bosnia, and Albania, drawn by employment opportunities and the government’s “Populate or Perish” policy. They settled in urban areas, building mosques, schools, and community organisations that still thrive today.

Modern Era (1980s–Present)

Today, more than a million Muslims live in Australia, representing more than 70 ethnic backgrounds. They are doctors, engineers, teachers, athletes, and community leaders. From Dr Abdul Khalil’s work in medicine to Yassmin Abdel-Magied’s advocacy for diversity, Muslim Australians continue to strengthen national life. Their stories remind us that Australia’s identity has always been shaped by many faiths and cultures working together.

Reorientation (Conclusion)

From the Macassan traders' voyages to the Afghan cameleers' journeys across deserts, Muslims have helped shape Australia's social, cultural, and economic landscape. Their endurance, cooperation, and faith reflect universal human values—resilience, respect, and service. Understanding this history deepens our appreciation for Australia's diversity and shared future.

6. Writing Your Own Historical Recount

Use the scaffold below to plan and draft your recount.

Paragraph	Focus	Guiding Questions	Example Sentences
1. Orientation	Introduce who, where, and when.	Who is the recount about? What time period?	<i>Muslims have been part of Australia's history since before British settlement in 1788.</i>
2. Sequence 1	Describe the first event.	What happened first? What caused it?	<i>Before European arrival, Macassan traders visited the north coast to trade and share culture with Aboriginal people.</i>
3. Sequence 2	Next key development.	What happened next? Who was involved?	<i>In the 1800s, Afghan cameleers supported exploration and opened inland trade routes.</i>
4. Sequence 3	Later developments or outcomes.	How did society change?	<i>After World War II, Muslim migrants from Lebanon and Turkey established new communities across Australia.</i>
5. Reorientation	Conclude significance.	Why does this story matter today?	<i>These contributions helped shape Australia into a multicultural nation built on cooperation and diversity.</i>

7. Language Toolbox

A. Time Connectives (Chronological Sequencers)

- *First, at first, initially, soon after, during the 1800s, in the following years, afterwards, subsequently, by the time, later on, meanwhile, eventually, finally, in recent decades, today.*

B. Action Verbs

- *arrived, travelled, explored, built, traded, transported, migrated, established, contributed, developed, discovered, assisted, guided, constructed, influenced, cooperated, endured, settled.*

C. Historical / Technical Nouns

- *migration, settlement, exploration, colonisation, trade, expedition, telegraph line, frontier, heritage, community, faith, contribution, perseverance, legacy, generation, diversity.*

D. Descriptive Adjectives

- *historic, pioneering, resilient, multicultural, remote, harsh, significant, enduring, resourceful, devoted, peaceful, intercultural, cooperative, thriving, influential.*

E. Adverbs

- *peacefully, faithfully, tirelessly, courageously, significantly, respectfully, collaboratively, historically, continuously.*

F. Sentence Starters for Recounts

- *In the early years of...*
- *During this period...*
- *As a result of...*
- *Over time, ...*
- *This led to...*
- *By the end of the century...*
- *In modern Australia, ...*

G. Causal and Linking Connectives

- *because, therefore, as a result, consequently, due to, this caused, this led to, which resulted in, in response to, following this, as a consequence.*

H. Evaluative and Academic Vocabulary

- *significance, impact, legacy, transformation, contribution, resilience, intercultural exchange, societal change, collective identity, national development.*

I. Sample Sentences Using the Toolbox

- *Because of the harsh conditions, the cameleers became essential to inland transport.*
 - *As a result of migration after World War II, Australian cities became more culturally diverse.*
 - *The legacy of the Macassan traders can still be seen in Aboriginal language and art.*
 - *Over time, Muslim Australians established institutions that strengthened community life.*
-

8. Discussion and Reflection

1. Why do we include multiple cultural perspectives when writing history?
 2. How do recounts preserve voices that might otherwise be forgotten?
 3. What qualities do you notice in the stories of early Muslim Australians?
 4. How can historical recounts challenge stereotypes and promote understanding?
 5. Which part of this history do you find most inspiring, and why?
-

9. Extension Activities

Timeline Task

Create a detailed timeline showing key events from pre-1788 to the present day. Include dates, locations, and brief notes.

Mapping Task

On a map of Australia, mark:

- Northern coastline (Macassan trade)
- Marree and Adelaide (first mosques)
- Sydney and Melbourne (modern communities)

Research Challenge

Choose one figure and write a 100-word biographical recount of their achievements.

Creative Extension

Write a diary entry as if you were an Afghan cameleer crossing the desert in 1890. Describe your challenges, hopes, and faith.

10. Key Vocabulary and Meanings

Word	Meaning
Recount	A retelling of real past events.
Chronological	Ordered by time sequence.
Contribution	Something valuable given or added by someone.
Cameleer	A person who drives or tends camels.
Migration	The movement of people from one place to another.
Heritage	Traditions and achievements passed down from the past.
Resilience	The ability to recover from hardship.
Diversity	Variety in culture, background, and identity.
Legacy	What is left behind for future generations.
Significance	Importance or deeper meaning of an event.
