

HIS 103 World Civilizations I

FAQs on FQs

What are FQs?

FQs are the essential ingredient of this class. They serve multiple functions such as increasing the likelihood students complete the assigned reading, reinforcing fundamental concepts, challenging students to engage with the material analytically and critically, providing ammunition to contribute to in-class discussions, and practicing the kind of writing required on the Midterm and Final Exams.

How are they assessed?

FQs are assessed according to a “completion grade” system. Students receive full, half, or zero credit. Here is what the Syllabus says about assessing FQs:

To receive credit, the student must submit the completed FQs (saved as a PDF) to the appropriate Moodle folder by noon of the class period to which they correspond. As no electronic devices will be permitted during class, students are advised to bring a printout of their FQs in class. Students choosing to write out the FQs by hand may submit them to Moodle as photographed images. Handwritten FQs must be neat and legible.

FQs may receive one of three grades: (1) 1 point = full credit for addressing each question with reasonable degree of diligence and thoroughness; (2) 0.5 point = for partial completion (must fully answer at least one question); or (3) 0 = for failing to fully answer at least one question.

Remember, there is no such thing as late FQs. That is, the student will not receive credit unless they submit the FQs by the deadline (noon before the class to which they relate). This rule will be strictly enforced starting on 9/3.

What recommendations can you give on how to complete high quality FQs?

Because FQs are assessed using a “completion grade” technique, students might be tempted not to put much effort into them. In my experience, this approach leads to a series of problems such as: not actually doing the reading but simply searching for answers; developing bad habits by trying to answer the question as concisely as possible; failing to engage with the material critically or analytically; and sloppy, non-edited work.

In order to unlock the full potential of the FQs, students should adopt the following approach (or something similar):

1. Look over the FQs before reading. Analyze the questions. What are they asking? What information might you need to address this question thoroughly, critically, and analytically? What definitions are required to start answering this question?
2. Complete the full reading, taking reading notes as you go.
3. Using your notes and referring back to the text, bullet point elements of your answers to the FQs.
4. Turn these bullet points into a cohesive (fits together), well-written, thorough, and analytical answer at least a full-sized paragraph in length (for each question).

What do you mean by *thoroughly* or *thoroughness*?

At a minimum, thoroughness means addressing ALL parts of the question. Moreover, it means adopting the opposite approach many students bring to this task. All too often, students try to answer the question in the fewest words possible. There is NO prize for being concise. In the process, they fail to critically assess the question, fail to consider different points of view, fail to consider the evidence on which the authors are using to develop this topic or sub-topic, fail to consider or weave in potential primary source material, fail to give any specific examples to support or challenge the authors' conclusions, and fail to offer a rich and thoughtful response. In almost all cases, scholars have written chapters if not entire books on just one FQ. You are being asked to write a thick paragraph for each.

What do you mean by *analytical*?

Thinking critically and analytically are core goals of the humanities and social sciences. This skill starts by breaking down the FQs. What are they asking? Why would such a question matter (What is the significance of this topic/subject)? The student can then delve into the authors' answer. What is their argument or claim? What is their evidence? What assumptions are they making? What questions remain unanswered with this argument? Students should ask themselves: how can I expand this question in order to increase or maximize its significance? (Not: how can I answer this question as concisely as possible?). Unpack the question and fully develop the answer; do not pack up the question and narrowly address the matter.

You can find a ton of guidance and advice online about thinking analytically and critically. For instance, the Wisconsin Historical Society has a helpful guide that fleshes out the idea of "thinking critically." Check it out. <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/pdfs/lessons/EDU-History-and-Critical-Thinking-Handbook.pdf> (This document is also on the course Moodle page)

What if I just want to do the bare minimum on FQs to get credit?

If students adopt the “bare minimum” approach, they will most likely not participate much in class and will not get as much out of the lecture-discussion. Moreover, if they were to bring the same approach to answering questions on the Midterm or Final Exams, they would receive poor grades. In other words, students should use the FQs to build up their knowledge, prepare to engage in class, and enhance their ability to think and write well. Missing that opportunity would be unfortunate. The bottom line is that getting a “check” on an FQ does not correlate to a good grade on an exam essay or short answer question. Doing the bare minimum on FQs will, in almost all cases, have negative consequences for the student down the road.

What other things should I keep in mind?

Read the Syllabus section on FQs. Read the directions and follow them. Copy and paste the question and then draft your answer. Put your name on the document. Importantly, save the document as a PDF and then submit it as a PDF. Students failing to follow the directions will receive no more than half credit starting on 9/3.

If you have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. This is the case for FQs or any other aspect of this course.