

Study Skills

- **Note taking**

Taking notes is an important part of studying. As you listen to a lecture or take part in a seminar, write down the main themes and topics addressed. Also write down things you do not understand and things you need to work on. Some research suggests that taking notes with pen and paper activates your brain in a way typing on a key board does not. If possible, use a pen and a highlighter to write notes and highlight important keys in your book.

As you take notes outside the lecture and seminar, it can be useful to use the 5Ws and comparison form to help you get an overview of what you know and what you do not know.

of the question if you are asked to analyse, discuss, explain, or define a topic.

Compare and contrast

To compare and contrast is a useful way to make you understand the reading and is also often given in exam questions since it tests in-depth knowledge of the material.

Possible topics to compare based on American Civilization are for instance:

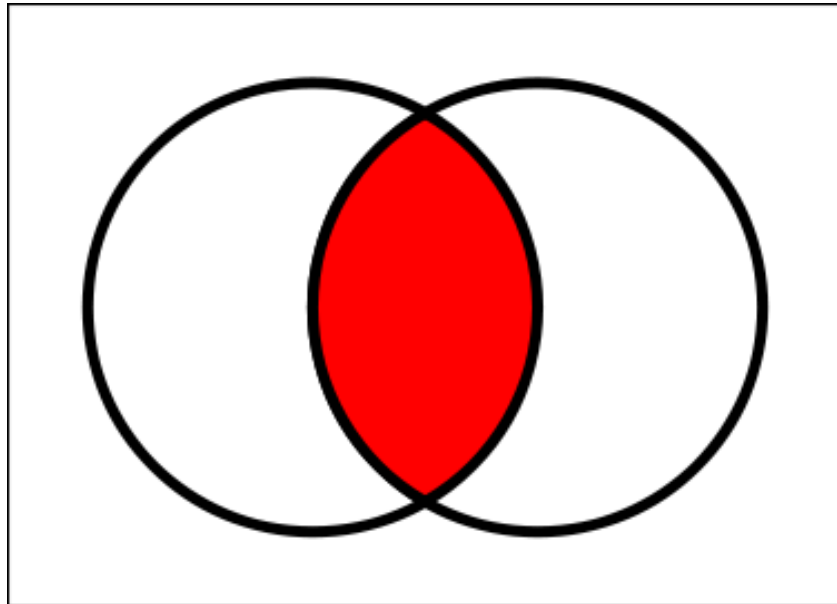
- Waves of immigration to the US
- Different regions
- Types of universities and colleges

Using a comparison form is a useful way of sketching out important similarities and differences. If you are to compare and contrast two regions, for instance, start with region A and write down important aspects about it. Focus on one aspect per column. Then move on region B and plot in information addressing the same aspects. Are there similarities and differences that stand out? Does A or B address aspects that are not addressed by the other?

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | | | | | | | | | |
| B | | | | | | | | | |

Once you have filled out the form, you can use it as a starting point to organize your essay. Focus on topic 1 in one paragraph, topic 2 in the next, and so on. Present and discuss similarities and differences in one paragraph (or if it gets too long, write two paragraphs that follow each other).

Alternatively, a VENN-diagram can be useful. This can help you see similarities and differences. Plot in similarities in the field where the two circles overlap and the differences in the parts of the circles that do not overlap.



The 5Ws and How: Who, what, when, where, why?

When approaching a new topic, try to approach it with the 5Ws and the How. This will help you analyse the material and also to write better essays as it helps you see the issue from different angles. Ask questions such as:

| | |
|---|--|
| Who are involved? Who does this affect? | |
| What happened? What is it about? | |
| When did it happen? | |
| Where did it happen? | |
| Why did it happen? (Or: How did it happen?) | |

Use your hand to remember all of them: you have five fingers and there are 5Ws. Go through each and see if you cover all the Ws. As you answer your exam, it might be useful to use the 5Ws to see if you cover all important fields.

- **Studying films**

The Internet Movie Database

www.imdb.com

This immensely valuable database is the most comprehensive film database available on the Internet and therefore lends itself to a wide variety of uses. It is suggested that you use it in order to obtain further information about those films listed in the Filmographies which appear in each chapter section as well as about any films appearing in the associated lists available on the Internet. The two facilities most likely to be of greatest use to the students are the following:

- **Accessing information about particular films** – dates, directors, themes, plots characters and actors. On the main web page use the drop-down menu in the main search box located to the left of the screen and select the “Title” option. Enter the title of the film you wish to research in the right-hand box and you will then be directed in two stages to the relevant screen from which you can follow the appropriate hypertext links.
- **Reading external reviews of particular films.** Many of these will relate to reviews which appeared when the film was first released. Others may relate to a recent re-issue of the film on DVD. Once you have selected a title and have accessed the page relating to a particular film, you will be presented with a navigation bar at the left-hand side of the page. In the “Awards & Reviews” section of this bar, select the “External reviews” link and you will be directed to lists of reviews available for the particular film.

Reviews

Almost anyone can write a review of a film and post it on this site. It follows, therefore, that reviews accessible on this site will be of variable quality. Some will be virtually useless from the point of view of serious academic study. How do you decide which ones are actually worth reading? The following may all be safely recommended:

- *Los Angeles Times* reviews by Kenneth Turan:
<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-bio-kenneth-turan-staff.html>
- *San Francisco Chronicle* reviews by Edward Guthman and Mick LaSalle:
<http://www.sfgate.com/movies/>
- *Washington Post* reviews: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/>

Reviews may be especially useful if you have limited time available for viewing and if you are trying to decide which films are likely to repay the effort of watching. They may also be useful in directing your attention to particular features of the films which reputable critics have found to be noteworthy in the past. These may well serve as useful starting points for the preparation of essay assignments on film topics.

There are two further sites containing reviews of outstanding quality which do not appear on the Internet Movie Database site but which are both well worth consulting:

- The Greatest Films, *The “Greatest” and the “Best” in Cinematic History*
This is an academically orientated site, searchable by title, which is operated by Tim Dirks and which contains not only his own superb reviews but also has links to reviews by many other distinguished reviewers and also to other film websites.
www.filmsite.org
- Movie reviews by various *New York Times* reviewers
These, again, are of a consistently high standard. All reviews, searchable by title, back to 1960 can be accessed here.
www.nytimes.com/ref/movies/reviews/