

I've attached the journal article assignment.

Let me add a few instructions to help you out.

Note the two-page maximum limit. Note the restrictions on fonts and margins and spacing. What we are after here are succinct answers to fairly large questions. Whereas our graf summaries are exercises designed to hone reading and writing skills, this is much more an exercise meant to develop analytic skills. It's honing our ideas into clear and concise expressions of the most important elements of scholarly writing. These are subject-verb build out sentences, not wandering through a forest of words hoping I might make a point in here somewhere sentences. It requires great discipline and forethought to do this kind of analysis well. So, give yourself plenty of time. Most likely first drafts of sentences and paragraphs will be way too long.

You should print out the article.

On the reading: Skim it first. Then look over the questions and skim it again. Then sit down and read and mark up the thing. What I've asked in these eight questions are some of the key elements of reading and understanding a scholarly journal article. One or two passes at the article the night before it's due won't be enough. This assignment requires effort, that's one of the reasons it's such a big part of your grade.

On the questions.

1) This is a pretty personal question, there's no particular passage that's going to speak to all of us. We're coming at this piece from lots of different places. The key is answering the why question as a scholar. "I found it interesting" won't cut it here. Nor will "I think I relate to this character." What did you find meaningful as a thinker a student of history?

2) Audience. It's not enough to know that it's written for historians. There are all kinds of historians. Find out what the *Journal of American History* is. Find out who the author is and what credentials they bring.

3) This shows up early in a scholarly article, usually in the first five or so grafs. The actual argument will then be laid out - in the order presented in the intro - over the rest of the piece. Every argument is based on the idea that the author is presenting us with a new way to think about something. What is the new way and why is their explanation convincing?

4) This should be fairly easy, except for the word count. There is simply no room for writing your way into a point. You have to boil each takeaway into a coherent short sentence. No passive voice, no prepositional phrasing, no clichés, no meandering.

5) The first part of this question refers to structure: "In this version of the classic five-part essay, Renk outlines his case for Senator Lee Metcalf as the most important environmental voice in American politics. Founding his argument on Metcalf leadership in three key battles over pollution and protecting America's public lands, in the 1970s. . . ."

The second part is about framing and evaluating the argument: "Moving the scene of the early days of the environmental movement from its grassroots efforts to the halls of Congress, allows Renk to make his very strong case for . . . . "

This will be tough at first. But keep in mind, most scholars still use the five-part essay as a model. Other fields even break down and label their sections of articles. Some even have a distilled version of the thesis and argument in a very short abstract. But learning to spot the underlying structure of an article will allow you better control over your processing of information. Knowing there are three main points provided in a particular order going into reading the bulk of the piece will help you understand where you are in the larger argument and allow you to differentiate and prioritize information. And learning to keep the larger argument in mind as you read through a piece is a key skill that will help you better organize your writing later on.

6) Similar to five, but here asking the topic (what it's about), the scope (how the author frames the piece and why), and the argument. But in only thirty words. This takes a lot of discipline.

7) Footnotes in academic writing are another and completely different form of writing. Here the author is not just listing where they received a particular information (quote, stat, story), but telling a tale of their research journey. It's a strange of blend of boasting, travel log, inner monologue, and instructions. Some are even short, revelatory narratives in their own right. Some are fighting with other scholars across time and space. Some are posturing. Most are incredibly helpful at the early and even mid-levels of research into a topic. Which did you find important and why?

The link to the article is embedded in the course website.

Print it out. Mark it up. Think about it. Then write about it. And next week we'll talk about it.