

PREPARING FOR YOUR HISTORY DEGREE

The most important preparation for a History degree is that you should have a broad historical and cultural register, so rather than ask you to read things by way of specific preparation for the papers you will be studying, we want you to develop a breadth of vision and historical curiosity. But we also need to give you some structure. Hence the tasks outlined below.

1. Select at least one work each from List A, List B, and List C of the books listed below, and two additional works, and write a critical appreciation of each. Five books in all. Each review should be about 750 words.
2. Write an appraisal of a podcast or online lecture series on History you have encountered.

Lists A and B are intended to introduce you to books with a broad historical range, List C to books showing the insights that can be gained from new sources and social historical approaches. By all means read them all. These are the kind of books that will help you with the broader disciplinary questions tackled in the papers Approaches to History and Disciplines of History. They may also help you choose the periods you are going to study later. *The asterisked books can be purchased for less than £12 on Amazon.*

List A

David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (2011)

J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World. Britain and Spain in America* (2006)

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700* (2003)

Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis. War, climate change and catastrophe in the seventeenth century* (2013)

*Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther* (2017)

*Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2006)

List B

C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1700-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons* (2004)

*Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe went to war in 1914* (2013)

*John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: the Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (2008)

*Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (20xx)

Janet Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (2015)

*Ruth Harris, *The Man on Devil's Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair that Divided France* (2011)

Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (2008)

*Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2011)

Robert Gildea, *Empires of the Mind. The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (2019)

List C

*James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998)

Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London. Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (2005)

*Orlando Figes, *Just Send Me Word: A True Story of Love and Survival in the Gulag* (2012)

*Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (2018)

Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives. Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016)

Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (2013)

When writing your **critical appraisals**, you may find it helpful to think about the following issues:

What are the main arguments of the work? Are they convincing? Why/why not?

What sorts of evidence does the author use? How do they approach their sources?

Who is the intended audience? (is it written primarily for other academics, for students, for a wider audience or a combination?) How does that impact on the type of work that the author has produced?

For the **podcasts, lecture series**: how effectively are ideas being communicated? Was there a clear argument? How does the format vary from reading a book? Were visual materials used? If so, how well?

All work to be handed in on arrival. We will talk about the reviews in the first of the study skills sessions.

Ian W. Archer

Note on online lectures/podcasts

There are a great number of lectures available online. One really good starting point is the Gresham College lectures: these are given by academics of people in public life, and are designed to be accessible to a wider audience. There are hundreds of them, many on aspects of History. Many of them come with transcripts, and good powerpoint. <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch/>

Many University websites host podcasts of lectures. If you go to the Oxford University site, you can find things such as Emma Smith's wonderful series 'Approaching Shakespeare', Diarmaid MacCulloch's Henly Henson lectures on Thomas Cromwell, Steve Gunn's lectures on 'the English People at War in the Reign of Henry VIII', or William Whyte's superbly entertaining lecture about the foundation of Keble! I have given examples here of ones close to my own areas of interest, but by sleuthing around you will find more. So, for example, there's a lot of North American history under the Rothermere Institute section of the podcasts. <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/>

iTunes U (there is an app) has many University lecture courses online. There is a bias to North American institutions (but many of them prestigious like Yale), and it's not an easy app to navigate (at least I found it so), but if you play around, you ought to be able to find material of interest across a whole range of periods.

Libraries and cultural institutions also often host material, though usually in the more recessed areas of their websites. The British Library has some extraordinary oral history material (sounds.bl.uk); the Folger Shakespeare Library hosts a series of podcasts called Shakespeare Unlimited: they've reached episode 140. EG Listen to the one by James Shapiro on 'Shakespeare in a Divided America', a version of which was also on BBC Radio. <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited> Many museums offer virtual tours. See eg the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio?ii=9&p=0&from=2020-03-22T18%3A08%3A00.4749838Z>

Youtube turns out to be a rich source of quality material if you can filter out the rubbish. I am not a great fan of current TV history programmes (too much personality, not enough analysis), but there are some real classics out there: eg 'Cold War' (BBC Complete series); People's Century (a history of the C20 from below); The Great War (PBS), and albeit in a slightly more fragmented way, the Ken Burns series on the American Civil War.

On BBC Sounds, you can find the complete archive of Melvyn Bragg's *In Our Time*, conversations with experts, over a vast range of topics. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/598SVYJ2smP8qJlpH29y7Vj/podcasts>