

**Writing Assignment title:** History Writing Exercise

**Writing Assignment's author:** Melanie Ziegler

**Summary:** Students write a term paper—integrating course readings and their own secondary research—which delineates the difficulties inherent to the Middle East peace process and addresses possible solutions.

**Objectives:**

1. Critical thinking: Students will be able to critically analyze academic texts, international news, maps, histories, and their own received ideologies and received wisdom for assumptions, political and cultural points of view, and stated and unstated biases.
2. Skills: Students develop core liberal arts skills: reading unfamiliar information and making sense of it; thinking critically about what they're reading; synthesizing material; coming to a conclusion about it; and articulating that conclusion verbally and in writing.
3. Representation: Students develop a recognition that all acts of representation are always partial—that they are shaped by the questions asked and the perspectives of those creating the representation. Therefore, students will be more critical consumers of such representations in the future.
4. Diversity: Students should gain an awareness of international diversity and learn to think about what the world, or specific issues, might look like from other points of view.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- To see (and be able to summarize) a conflict from both sides.
- To select source material supportive of a non-partisan discussion of an issue.
- To successfully integrate secondary research into students' own writing.
- To see a major problem like the peace process in the Middle East as something that can be improved or even resolved (rather than seeing it as irreparable and unchangeable).

**Materials Required:** Writing prompt:

In class we will discuss the Arab-Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and you will read materials on this topic. After we have finished our class study of the conflict, you will submit a fifteen-page, double spaced, typewritten paper that summarizes the perspectives of each side of the conflict. In your conclusion, you will provide an evaluation as to why a peaceful resolution to this crisis has been so elusive and what steps might be taken to lessen or end the conflict. In conjunction with the information from class discussion, you are to reference at least five additional outside sources.

**Lesson Activities:**

1. Assign class reading.
2. Hand out and go over writing prompt.
3. Optional: hand out rubric (below) and discuss in class.
4. Optional: ask students to keep a reading log while reading the book. This could be done hard copy in a journal or completed on Blackboard. Ask students to note their thoughts, interesting facts, responses, etc., every few pages as they read. They can then use this log to help them construct their argument. (It may improve both the quality of their arguments as well as their citation of the book.)
5. Optional: have a mini-lesson on the type(s) of citation you will accept.
6. Optional: ask students to post an annotated bibliography of the sources they expect to use one week or more in advance. This can help students get started and can be integrated into the grading rubric, if the instructor desires. Talk to students in advance about the kinds of source materials you will accept.
7. Optional: provide a mini-lesson of other generic conventions common to writing in the social sciences. Provide guidance as to the type of prose that is most effective: discuss tone, qualifiers, respect for other scholars' intellectual labor.... Consider handing out a small piece of writing (your own, or someone else's) and discussing its scholarly moves in class to help students see what you expect.

**Assessment:** See rubric (below).

**Comments:**

Class discussion may be stimulated by the short description of “the Problem of Palestine” in the textbook, but this assignment requires considerably more material. Additional books and articles referenced in the textbook may be useful, as would the articles listed in the Writing Assignment “Doing History” on this web site. A further recommended text, albeit somewhat dated, is *One Land, Two Peoples: The Conflict over Palestine* by Deborah Gerner. Westview Press, 1991.

Students say they like this assignment because they are presented with the challenge of looking at both sides of the ongoing struggle. They like not being asked to take a position on this complex issue, but being granted the opportunity to show the strengths and limitations of different positions.

Note, however, that students often have a real problem using new terminology accurately. They confuse or conflate terms like Arab and Palestinian, or Arab and Muslim, using them incorrectly or interchangeably. It may be worthwhile for instructors to spend some time in class addressing this issue before asking students to turn in a draft.

**Grading Rubric:**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Introduction or Background Info

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Israeli Perspective

biblical claims, history of discrimination, Holocaust, Balfour Declaration, White Paper

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Supporting Evidence

Wailing Wall Riots, Arab refusal of recognition, 1948 war, Suez crisis, 1967 War, 1973 War, PLO attacks and terrorist attacks over the years

\_\_\_\_\_4. Palestinian Perspective

Already on the land, British Promises during WWI and WWII, Balfour Declaration, White Paper

\_\_\_\_\_5. Supporting Evidence

Dier Yassin, unilateral declaration of Israeli independence, King David Hotel bombing, preemptive attacks during Suez crisis and 1967 War, invasion of Lebanon, Security Wall

\_\_\_\_\_6. Conclusion

Peace plans

Additional challenges/obstacles to peace

Future of Jerusalem

Future of Palestinian refugees

\_\_\_\_\_7. Inclusion of facts/info/perspectives not covered in class

Current crisis with Hamas

Recent events

\_\_\_\_\_8. Use of 3 properly cited outside sources

\_\_\_\_\_9. Overall Organization

Well developed paragraphs

Overall flow of the paper

\_\_\_\_\_10. Mechanics, Grammar and Spelling