Mr. Johnson’s Guide to Historiography

**Historiography** refers either to the study of the [methodology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodology) and development of "[history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History)" (as a discipline), or to a body of historical work on a specialized topic. Furay and Salevouris (1988) define historiography as "the study of the way history has been and is written — the history of historical writing... When you study 'historiography' you do not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians."

Some of the common topics in historiography are:

1. Reliability of the sources used, in terms of authorship, credibility of the author, and the authenticity or corruption of the text.
2. Historiographic tradition or framework. Every historian uses one historiographic traditions, for example [Marxist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist), [Annales School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annales_School), "total history", or [political history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_history).
3. [Moral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality) issues, guilt assignment, and praise assignment
4. [Revisionism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_revisionism) versus [orthodox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodoxy) interpretations

**Ranke, Hegelian Dialectic, and Marxist Historiography**

Modern historiography emerged in 19th century German universities, where [Leopold von Ranke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_von_Ranke) revolutionized historiography with his seminars and critical approach; he emphasized politics and diplomacy, dropping the social and cultural themes Voltaire had highlighted. Sources had to be hard, not speculations and rationalizations. His credo was to write history the way it was. He insisted on primary sources with proven authenticity.

[Hegel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegel) and [Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx) introduced the concept of spirit and dialectical materialism, respectively, into the study of world historical development. Former historians had focused on cyclical events of the rise and decline of rulers and nations. Process of [nationalization of history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalization_of_history), as part of [national revivals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romantic_nationalism) in 19th century, resulted with separation of "one's own" history from common [universal history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_history) by such way of perceiving, understanding and treating the past that constructed history as history of a nation.

The Hegelian Dialectic developed as an approach to structuring our understanding of history. Hegel proposed that all of history could be explained in a series of cause and effect. He claimed that an event, or thesis, led to the appearance of a counter event, or anti-thesis. The interaction of these two-events/developments/phenomenon lead to a new reality, synthesis.

**Modern Historiography**

Modern historians have developed into a plethora of specialties that focus all aspects of the human story in an attempt to form a compelling perspective to analyze and evaluate the past. They can be divided by aspect (i.e. Social, economic, or cultural history), element of society (i.e. women’s history, labor history, etc), or specializing in certain time periods (i.e. Dark ages history). These lenses of historical investigation impact how the historians value evidence and what narratives they choose to emphasize.

**How to Apply Historiography to IB History**

Historiography and a sophisticated understanding of historical events are required to reach the highest levels of the IB essay mark bands. Depending on the topic that is being studied, there are certain common components of historiography that can be applied. See the table on the next page for common perspectives and prominent historians by topic. This table is far from exhaustive but can be a helpful start.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Common Historical Perspectives** | **Prominent Historians** |
| World War I | Orthodox, Revisionist, Post-Revisionist, Anti-Post Revisionist Marxist | Henig, George, Williamson, Herwig |
| Inter-War Period | Orthodox, Revisionist, Post-Revisionist, Marxist | Fischer, Keynes, AJP Taylor |
| World War II | Orthodox, Revisionist, Post-Revisionist, Marxist | Hildebrand, Ritter, A.J.P. Taylor, Eley, Parker, Langer |
| Origins of the Cold War | Intentionalist vs. Structuralist  Marxist | Kissinger, Chomsky, Kennedy, Bragg, Johnson, Zinn |
| Hitler | Intentionalist vs. Structuralist  Marxist | Broszat, A.J.P. Taylor, Kershaw, Overy, Sax |
| Mao | Intentionalist vs. Structuralist  Marxist | Hsu, Lynch, Gray, Johnson, Palmer, Colton |

**How to use Historiography in your essays**

When looking to use historiography in your essays, there are a couple of approaches that are very beneficial and a couple of things to avoid.

Historiography Do’s

1. Introduce relevant historical perspectives in your introduction and select one that you will primarily use throughout your analysis to demonstrate your awareness of the view.
2. Compare and contrast historians’ views on a certain topic (i.e. revisionist vs. post-revisionist views on origins of WWI)
3. Use an historian to support your historical evaluation
   1. For Example: Ruth Henig supports this view of the role of alliances in causing World War I in her book Origins of World War I.
4. Present a quote from an historian as a hook or evidence to within a body paragraph.

Historiography Don’ts

1. Don’t just tack it on to an argument without weaving it into your analysis
2. If you are not sure how it works, don’t just put it in. Using historiography incorrectly is worst than omitting it