
Historical Process: Understanding Historical Reasoning HIST 50

- Fall 2025
- Section 01
- In Person
- 3 Unit(s)
- 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025
- Modified 08/18/2025

Course Description and Requisites

Modes and skills of practical logic and reasoning through study of historical method. Historical problems examined to that end.

Satisfies 1B. Critical Thinking and Writing (Formerly Area A3).

Prerequisite(s): Completion of GE Area A2 with a grade of C- or better.

Grading: Letter Graded

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website](#).

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area 1B: Critical Thinking and Writing

Area 1B courses develop students' understanding of the relationship of language to logic. By engaging students in complex issues requiring critical thinking and effective argumentation, 1B courses develop students' abilities to research and analyze important topics and to construct their own arguments on issues that generate meaningful public debate and deliberation. Courses include explicit instruction and practice in inductive and deductive reasoning as well as identification of formal and informal fallacies of language and thought. Completion of Area 1A (Written Communication I) with a minimum grade of C- is a prerequisite for enrollment in Area 1B. Completion of Area 1B with a grade of C- or better is a CSU graduation requirement.

GE Area 1B Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an Area 1B course, students should be able to:

1. locate, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize evidence in a comprehensive way, including through library research; and integrate research findings into oral and written arguments through appropriate citation and quotation;
2. use a range of rhetorical and logical strategies to articulate and explain their positions on complex issues in dialogue with other points of view;
3. identify and critically evaluate the assumptions in and the contexts of arguments; and
4. use inductive and deductive logic to construct valid, evidence-supported arguments and draw valid conclusions.

Writing requirement

This class requires a minimum of 6000 words, at least 4000 of which must be in revised final draft form.

Course Requirements and Assignments

San José State University, College of Social Sciences

History 50: Historical Process Fall Semester, 2025

Course and Contact Information

Instructor: **Eric Narveson, University Lecturer**

Office Location: **DMH 239**

Telephone: **(408) 274-7900 X 6619**

Email: eric.narveson@evc.edu or eric.narveson@sjsu.edu

Office Hours: **W 4:00-5:30 pm**

Class Days/Time: **Wednesday, 6:00-8:45 pm**

Classroom: **DMH 167**

GE/SJSU Studies Category: **A3**

Times Taught: **127**

Course Description:

From the catalog: Modes and skills of practical logic and reasoning through study of historical method. Historical problems examined to that end.

History 50 is a seminar style course in critical thinking. A common definition of critical thinking is autonomous thinking without the tether of irrational beliefs or unjustified authorities. This is a skill for the thinking mind, and as such should be learned as a skill. You will be able to evaluate more effectively what you read in print or electronically on the Internet, see on video, hear on audio as well as what you are told about the past, present and future. There are several avenues to learn and exercise this skill. This course emphasizes historical methodology, or process. Through the study of historical cases, one can learn to examine historical problems and controversies critically, and grasp the process of reasoning through the analytical skills used by historians. We will do active learning by analyzing documents, selecting, weighing and balancing evidence, and coming to understand how historians do the detective work in understanding the past. Essentially, this course will make a skeptic out of you.

Course Format:

This course is a traditional face-to-face format with Canvas support for assignments, some communications and grade recording keeping. Grades are calculated in a different method than the Canvas calculation formula, so do not rely upon the percentages posted in the Canvas Grades section; refer to this syllabus. Please, do not submit assignments in Canvas, without prior permission from the professor.

GE Learning Outcomes (GELO):

Upon successful completion of this GE course, students will be able to:

1. Locate and evaluate sources, through library research, and integrate research through appropriate citation and quotation. **Assessed by Fallacy Exercises, Quiz, Midterm Exam, In-Class Exercises, Written Assignments, and Final Exam.**
2. Present effective arguments that use a full range of legitimate rhetorical and logical strategies to articulate and explain their positions on complex issues in dialogue with other points of view. **Assessed by Fallacy Exercises, Quiz, Midterm Exam, In-Class Exercises, Written Assignments, and Final Exam.**
3. Effectively locate, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize evidence in a comprehensive way in support of one's ideas. **Assessed by Fallacy Exercises, Quiz, Midterm Exam, In-Class Exercises, Written Assignments, and Final Exam.**
4. Identify and critically evaluate the assumptions in and the context of an argument. **Assessed by Fallacy Exercises, Quiz, Midterm Exam, In-Class Exercises, Written Assignments, and Final Exam.**
5. Effectively distinguish and convey inductive and deductive patterns as appropriate, sequencing arguments and evidence logically to draw valid conclusions and articulate related outcomes (implications and consequences). **Assessed by Fallacy Exercises, Quiz, Midterm Exam, In-Class Exercises, Written Assignments, and Final Exam.**

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate that they can read, write, and think critically about history. **Assessed by Fallacy Exercises, Midterm Exam, In-Class Exercises, Written Assignments and Final Exam**

History 50 Assessment Rubric for written assignments

	EXCELLENT	ACCEPTABLE	UNACCEPTABLE
GELO 1	High quality papers with proper format	Satisfactory papers with some proper format	Unsatisfactory papers with no use of format
GELO 2	Effective arguments using proper strategies	Satisfactory arguments with some use of strategies	Unsatisfactory arguments without use of strategies
GELO 3	Effective use of evidence in support of ideas	Satisfactory use of evidence in support of ideas	Unsatisfactory use of evidence in support of ideas
GELO 4	Identifies & evaluates assumptions in argument	Identifies some assumptions in argument	Failure to identify or evaluate assumptions in argument
GELO 5	Effectively sequences	Uses some arguments	Failure to sequence

evidence	arguments & evidence	and evidence in	arguments and
		sequence	

CLO 1	Effective historical	Satisfactory historical	Unsatisfactory historical
	writing that shows	writing with some	writing that lacks evidence
	reading and thinking	evidence of reading	of reading and thinking
		and thinking	

Textbook

Narveson, Eric J., The Historical Process: Critical Thinking and Historical Methodology, 1st ed., BEK Publications, ISBN 0-9650663-2-0, 1998.

A hardcopy will be available at AS Print Shop in the Student Union upon return to campus.

Other Readings

Boardman, Frank, Nancy M. Cavender and Howard Kahane, Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric: The Use of Reason in Everyday Life, 13th ed., Cengage Learning, ISBN 978-1305956025, 2017.

Davidson, James W. and Mark Lytle, After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection, 6th ed., McGraw-Hill, ISBN 978-0073385488, 2009.

Course Requirements and Assignments: Central to the Historical Process course is the development and application of critical thinking techniques in speaking and writing. Thus, a portion of the grade will be based upon knowledge of different types of reasoning and the fallacies that mislead us. Emphasis will be placed on evidence of the student's ability to apply critical thinking techniques in speech (class discussion or student activities), actions (in-class exercises) and writing (essays or research papers).

With that in mind, the grading is separated into several parts to better address these several goals. Twenty percent of your grade will come from the fallacy exercises in which you will be able to recognize and analyze 33 different informal fallacies. This skill will be tested in the midterm, also worth twenty percent of the grade. Since we are applying this skill to history, some knowledge of historical terms and methods must be understood and this constitutes the quiz, worth five percent of the grade. The abilities of evaluation and reasoning are covered by various exercises conducted in class and requiring your participation. These in-class exercises (worth fifteen percent of your grade) include (but are not limited to): using artifacts, the “outsiders” game, a campus historical/investigative tour, a campus treasure hunt, and the use of personal photos in class, as well as other exercises in class.

The skills of evaluation, analysis and production with a reasoned argument make up the written assignments part of your grade (twenty percent value), with essays on (but not limited to) the Lexington Battle issue, the Shakespeare Authorship question, exploration of conspiracy theories including the Kennedy Assassination, the Tupac Shakur killing, and the events surrounding the 9/11 attacks and Q-Anon. All of these critical thinking skills will be demonstrated with a final examination worth twenty percent of your total grade.

Besides discussions, writing is also an inherent part of this course. At least three written essays must be typewritten, double-spaced, and using a 12 point font size within reasonable margins. Use citation format that is required in your major (the History Department uses Turabian). These three papers should be about 7000 words collectively. Correct spelling and grammar is expected, in addition to a logical and convincing argument. The University General Education guidelines require the equivalent of at least 15 pages of written material, and some of this will be attained through the various assignments not listed under written assignments.

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus. This university-required statement is generic for all courses. There will be no internships, labs or clinical practica in this course.

Final Examination or Evaluation: This course has a final examination. It is cumulative of all the skills learned in the course, and therefore designed as a final demonstration of your acquired critical thinking skills.

Grading Information and Determination of Grades

Fallacy Exercises	20%	60 pts.	GELOs 2-5 & CLO 1
Midterm Exam	20%	60 pts.	GELOs 2-5 & CLO 1
In-Class Exercises	15%	45 pts.	GELOs 1-5 & CLO 1
Quiz	5%	15 pts.	GELOs 2, 4-5
Written Assignmnts	20%	60 pts.	GELOs 1-5 & CLO 1
Final Exam	<u>20%</u>	<u>60 pts.</u>	GELOs 2-5 & CLO 1
Total	100%	300 pts.	

An extra credit option is available after the midterm exam, and will be explained as we review for the midterm.

Please get the assignments in on the due date. This is important, as this is a once-a-week course, so late work becomes problematic if we are to review it the following week. Late work is deducted 10% in value for each week late.

- **For Basic Skills Courses** (A1, A2, A3, B4): This course must be passed with a C- or better as a CSU graduation requirement.

History 50, Fall Semester 2025, Tentative Course Schedule

Week/Lesson/Module	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines	Learning Outcomes
1	20 Aug	Introduction; Artifacts Exercise	GELO 4, 5 CLO 1
2	27 Aug	Historian's Tools; QUIZ	GELO 4 CLO 1
3	3 Sep	Treasure Hunt Exercise	GELO 2-4
4	10 Sep	Fallacious Reasoning I; Question Analysis	GELO 2-5 CLO 1
5	17 Sep	Fallacious Reasoning I; Peterloo Exercise	GELO 2-5 CLO 1
6	24 Sep	Fallacious Reasoning II; Campus History Tour Exercise	GELO 2-5
7	1 Oct	Fallacious Reasoning II; Lexington Exercise	GELO 2-5 CLO 1
8	8 Oct	Fallacious Reasoning III; News & Advertising	GELO 3, 4 CLO 1
9	15 Oct	Fallacious Reasoning III; Photos Exercise	
10	22 Oct	Fallacious Reasoning Sum; Cartoons & Smoking Review	GELO 2-5 CLO 1
11	29 Oct	MIDTERM Exam on Fallacies; Extra Credit Option	GELO 2-5 CLO 1
12	5 Nov	Midterm returned; Conspiracy Research Exercise	GELO 1-5 CLO 1

Week/Lesson/Module	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines	Learning Outcomes
13	12 Nov	Shakespeare Exercise & Paper	GELO 2-5
14	19 Nov	Political Exercise	
15	3 Dec	Review for Final Exam; Outsiders Exercise	GELO 1-5 CLO 1
Final Exam	10 Dec	FINAL Exam, 5:30-7:30	

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](#), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](#) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.