



# WRITERS' CENTRE

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## MST Writing Workshop

Professor Tyagi  
Professor Bergstrom

# Workshop Agenda

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- **Top 10 MST writing tips (*≈ 15 mins*)**
- **Essay 1 prompt analysis (*≈ 15 mins*)**
- **Optional mini-consultations with WC peer tutors (*≈ 30 mins*)**

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# Writers' Centre

## *Academic Writing Workshops*

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### Introduction to College Writing

The PowerPoint slides (with audio recordings) and supplementary materials from the workshop can be found [here](#).

Watch the recording of the workshop (26 August 2020) [here](#).

### CSI: From Evidence to Argument

The workshop handout can be found [here](#).

Watch the recording of the workshop (16th September 2020) [here](#).

Watch a recording of the Library's CSI Research workshop [here](#).

# Workshop Agenda

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- **Top 10 MST writing tips (*≈ 15 mins*)**
- **Essay 1 prompt analysis (*≈ 15 mins*)**
- **Optional mini-consultations with WC peer tutors (*≈ 30 mins*)**

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 1:

Make sure you properly understand the two (or more) texts you are comparing. Keeping the big picture in mind is more important in MST than in, for example, LH or PPT.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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“I remember my classmate received a less-than-satisfactory grade because the prof thought her essay was very much a literature essay.

In LH and PPT, students are trained to analyze a local passage and then discuss its relationship with the larger thematic concerns.

However, in MST, the process is almost reversed. MST professors are much more interested in the big ideas.”

— L, Class of '22

# Top MST Writing Tips

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“Students starting with local passages will run into the danger of having a microscopic or skewed view in the whole essay.

One should begin an MST essay by considering multiple passages by each author side-by-side.

In other words, it is really crucial to have at least a decent understanding of the entire texts before writing.”

– L, Class of '22



## Mind Mapping Entire Texts



# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 2:

Make sure you understand what key terms mean.

Define them in your essay, such as in the introduction, or early in body paragraphs.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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“Have a clear understanding of the terms used by each thinker, and their specific definition for those terms. These key words and their respective explanations often ground the entire core argument of each thinker. For Foucault, I would define words as simple as ‘power,’ ‘control,’ ‘discursive,’ ‘discourse,’ etc. We often use these terms thinking we know what they mean already, but each thinker wields words in very specific ways to further their argument.”

– E, Class of '22

# Top MST Writing Tips

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“For example, Tocqueville’s ‘democracy’ is very different from our common understandings of democracy. Even where two thinkers seem to use similar terminology, it’s dangerous when you conflate two thinkers’ differing definitions—often there’s a reason why they use it differently that will be important to probe into.”

— E, Class of '22

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 3:

Put together a rough outline for the essay.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Introduction

### Optional Section: Brief summary of Text A and B

Section 1: Similarities between Text A and B  
(e.g. “Marx and Durkheim agree . . .”)

Section 2: Differences between Text A and B  
(e.g. “Marx and Durkheim disagree . . .”)

Section 3: Develop similarities or differences  
(e.g. “They disagree on the solutions they offer . . .”)

## Conclusion

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 4:

Put together a rough thesis statement. This working thesis will likely evolve as you are writing, but in the final draft, make it as precise as possible.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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- ✗ “I will show that Marx and Tocqueville are similar.”
- ✓ “Marx and Tocqueville are similar because they both believe religion is important.”
- ✓✓ “Although Marx and Tocqueville agree that religion is an important element of modern society, they differ in their views of the function of religion because . . .”



# Top MST Writing Tips

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✓✓ “Despite Marx and Tocqueville’s agreement in *X* (*importance of religion*), their differences in *Y* (*evaluation of religion’s effects in society*) result in alternative conclusions *Z* (*their opinions on whether religion should be an integral part of society*).”

Essay structure: *X* – similarities  
*Y* – differences  
*Z* – further development

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 5:

Alternatively, if you are struggling to come up with a thesis at the beginning, try starting to write body paragraphs first, which might help you eventually figure out your thesis.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 6:

Flesh out body paragraphs by paraphrasing the thinkers' arguments in your own words.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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One way to structure  
body paragraphs:

PEEL, or, more accurately, PEEEEEL

# Top MST Writing Tips

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P oint

E vidence

E laboration

L ink

# Top MST Writing Tips

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P oint

E vidence 1

E laboration 1

E vidence 2

E laboration 2, etc.

L ink

# Top MST Writing Tips

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E vidence 1  
and  
E vidence 2

should not be two different ways of supporting the same point, as that will be repetitive.

Instead, Evidence 2 should build on Evidence 1 to move the paragraph forward.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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**P**oint – “Marx believes religion is important.”

**E**vidence 1 – “Religion is crucial (pg. 12).”

**E**laboration 1 – . . .

**E**vidence 2 – “Religion is essential (pg. 24).”

**E**laboration 2 – . . .

**L**ink – . . .



# Top MST Writing Tips

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**P**oint – “Marx believes religion is important.”

**E**vidence 1 – “Religion is crucial (pg. 12).”

**E**laboration 1 – . . .

**E**vidence 2 – “Religion sedates the masses (pg. 24).”

**E**laboration 2 – . . .

**L**ink – . . .

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 7:

Spelling out thinkers' ideas in your own words might make for lengthy body paragraphs, but that's all right.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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Body paragraphs can range between 250-300 words in MST papers.

If a paragraph goes above 300 words, try splitting it into two of 150 words each, and seeing if each needs more development.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 8:

Avoid applying LH-style close reading to MST texts.

The content of an author's ideas is more important than the literary qualities of their writing style.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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- ✗ “This Frederick Douglass passage is cloaked in passionate language, with the author using diction like ‘madness’ to convey intense emotion.”
- ✓ “Frederick Douglass believes that pacific methods cannot solve current social problems, and thus violence is the only tool to move society forward.”

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 9:

When quoting, avoid sprinkling too many random words from the texts into your own sentences.

Instead, set up what quotes mean, and why they are important.

# Top MST Writing Tips

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- ✗ “Sojourner Truth says that she has ‘plowed,’ and ‘reaped,’ and ‘husked,’ and ‘chopped,’ and ‘mowed.’”
- ✓ “In this quote, Sojourner Truth argues that she considers herself to be equal to men by showing herself to have performed the same physical labor as them.”

# Top MST Writing Tips

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## Tip 10:

In the conclusion, avoid introducing radically new ideas unrelated to anything discussed earlier in essay.



# Top MST Writing Tips

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Instead, restate the introduction's thesis in a way that shows how it has been enriched over the course of the essay.

Recap main points, and explain their significance. Why does the ground you have covered matter?

# Top MST Writing Tips

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“These two authors’ approaches to understanding colonial exploitation can help shed light on other forms of exploitation in alternate contexts, such as gender oppression . . .”

# Essay 1 Prompt Analysis

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Please write a 1500 word essay on one of the following topics.

- Does the conception of history in Marx, Tocqueville, or Ibn Khaldun negate the idea of individual agency? What does this mean for the possibility of social action? Discuss at least two of the thinkers.

# Essay 1 Prompt Analysis

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To answer these questions effectively, we will have to:

- Choose which thinkers we are examining.
- Define relevant terms.
- Identify the crux of the question.

# Essay 1 Prompt Analysis

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To answer these questions effectively, we will have to:

- **Choose** which thinkers we are examining: Marx, Khaldun
- **Define** relevant terms: history, agency, social action, etc.
- **Identify** the crux of the question: problem of agency v. determinism in two views of history.

# Prompt Analysis to Outline

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Having done this, we can:

- Compare similarities between two conceptions of history.
- Contrast differences between them.
- Develop an argument based on these similarities and/or differences using the second question (possibility of social action) as a focus.

# Essay 1 Prompt Analysis

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Please write a 1500 word essay on one of the following topics.

- Both Marx's proletarian worker and Dubois's Black American are in some sense separated from themselves. Do Marx and Dubois agree or disagree on the nature of the separation, and on the way to overcome it?

# Essay 1 Prompt Analysis

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To answer these questions effectively, we will have to:

- Choose which thinkers we are examining - here that's done for us: Marx, Dubois.
- Define relevant terms.
- Identify the crux of the question.



# Prompt Analysis to Outline

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Having done this, we can:

- Compare similarities between categories of social actor.
- Contrast differences between them.
- Develop an argument based on these similarities and/or differences using the second question (overcoming alienation from self) as a focus.

# Workshop Feedback

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