THE FOURFOLD PARENT GUIDES



History Journal

PARENT GUIDE

A Fourfold history journal for high school

GRADES 9–12

TEACH IT WITH CONFIDENCE

BUILT ON THE FOURFOLD METHOD · GINA GLENN STEFFY

WRITING IN THIS COURSE

Writing

What Commit looks like, and how to help your student say it well

Every unit ends with Commit: your student says it in their own words, usually in writing. Here's what to expect, and some starters for when the page stays blank.

WHAT COMMIT LOOKS LIKE

Level or kind	What they write	Your expectation
Entries	Four short sections a week on a chapter, event or source	Sources named; Commit says what they now think, and why
Special pages	Primary Source Analysis, Cause and Effect, Competing Accounts, Person Study	Each source weighed: who, how they'd know, and what it can be trusted for
Essays	Arguments built from the entries and special pages	A claim, primary-source evidence and the other side stated fairly

SENTENCE STARTERS FOR THE FIVE COMMON TOPICS

Topic	The question it asks	Starters
Definition	What is it? What does this word really mean?	"___ means..." "A real ___ is..."
Compare & Contrast	How is it like or unlike something else?	"Both ___ and ___..." "Unlike ___, ___..."
Circumstance	What was happening around it?	"Because it was ___, ..." "At the time, ..."
Relationship	What caused it, and what did it cause?	"___ led to ___ because..." "As a result, ..."
Authority	Who says so, and how would they know?	"According to ___, ..." "I trust this because..."

STARTERS FOR THIS COURSE

- "This source can be trusted for ___, but not for..."
- "If ___ had not happened, ..."
- "Historians disagree about ___ because..."

> **WHEN THE PAGE STAYS BLANK**
>
> *Ask your student to say it out loud first. Write down what they say, then have them write it in their own hand and improve one sentence.*

AFTER THE WORK IS DONE

Responding

Five minutes a week, not an evening of grading

Level or kind	Check for	A good note sounds like
Entries	A source named and a real claim in Commit	"Good claim. Where did you find that?"
Special pages	Limits of each source named	"You weighed both accounts fairly. Which do you trust more, and why?"
Essays	Primary evidence that proves the claim	"Strong argument. Add the date and author of your second source."

THE RULE OF ONE

Point out one thing done well and one thing to try next time. Never more than one correction at a time. Students who get one clear next step improve fastest.

RUBRIC FOR PARAGRAPHS AND ESSAYS

	4	3	2	1
Claim	Clear, specific and arguable	Clear but general	Vague or only a topic	Missing
Evidence	Two or more specific details, named	One specific detail	General or from memory	None
Reasoning	Explains how each detail proves the claim	Explains one	Restates the evidence	Missing
Own words	Clearly the student's voice	Mostly their own	Close to the source	Copied

Add the four rows for a score out of 16. Use it for the longer pieces, not every short answer.

GRADING TIP

Read once for the claim and once for the evidence. Most growth comes from the Reasoning row: ask your student to explain out loud how each example proves the claim, then write down what they said.

FOR THIS COURSE

Ask "How do you know?" in the margin. It's the most useful comment in history writing, and it teaches your student to cite without a lecture.

Writing Skills

One skill every three weeks, practiced in the Commit step

Work on one skill at a time. When you read an entry together on Friday, look for that skill first, then use the Rule of One: one thing done well, one thing to try next time.

Weeks	Skill	What to look for
Weeks 1–3	Writing in your own words	Commit is written without the book. Check that it doesn't echo the source.
Weeks 4–6	Precise words	Replace vague words ("stuff," "good," "a lot") with exact terms from the subject.
Weeks 7–9	Using evidence	Every claim gets one specific detail, with page, date or source.
Weeks 10–12	Explaining evidence	After each detail, one sentence that begins "This shows..."
Weeks 13–15	Cause and effect	Use "because" and "as a result" to link ideas.
Weeks 16–18	Comparing	"Both ___, but ___" in at least one entry a week.
Weeks 19–21	Writing a claim	Commit opens with an arguable sentence, not a summary.
Weeks 22–24	Answering the other side	State the strongest objection fairly, then answer it.
Weeks 25–27	Paragraph structure	Claim, evidence, reasoning, closing: one paragraph per entry.
Weeks 28–30	Strong verbs and clear sentences	Cut "there is" and "it is"; one idea per sentence.
Weeks 31–33	Revising	Rewrite one old entry and note what improved.
Weeks 34–36	Looking back	Write how your thinking changed this year, with two entries as evidence.

A MODEL TO SHOW YOUR STUDENT

Sample Entry

Sample entry: the Stamp Act, 1765

Show this to your student once, early in the year, so they see what all four moves look like together. Then put it away; their entries should sound like them, not like this.

1 GATHER

March 1765, Parliament required stamped paper for newspapers, licenses and legal documents in the colonies. Primary sources: the Act and the Virginia Resolves. 'Representation' meant elected members in Parliament.

2 TEST

Britain argued colonists were 'virtually represented.' Colonists said a man you didn't vote for can't represent you. Newspapers printed more radical resolves than Virginia passed, so I can't trust the papers on how united people were.

3 CONNECT

It sits between the end of the French and Indian War (1763) and the Townshend Acts (1767). Cause: war debt. Effect: the first intercolonial congress.

4 COMMIT

The Stamp Act turned a tax dispute into a constitutional one, and that argument about representation never went away.