**How to write a historical argument/essay**

In History, one of the key skills learners have to know is how to write an essay. There's a million ways to do this; for first-years, I start learners on this method to give them a simple model to follow. In this example below, I'm assuming they have already chosen a topic and done their research, and now they have to put it all into an argumentative essay. When I teach this topic I give examples as I go, so I have done that here as well.

* Every essay has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. For a first year paper, the intro and conclusion should be no more than half a page. The body would be the biggest section and will be composed of multiple paragraphs.
* Introduction: Introduce your topic in a way that is specific, clear, and to the point. Focus in on your topic and introduce it in a way  that gives me the who, what, where, and when of the matter - think of it like a road map, telling the reader what the next several pages will be like. By reading your introduction, I should have a good idea of what you are going to argue and how you are going to argue it.
  + For example, in an essay about the peopling of North America, describe the topic or key issues (we know people are in North America but there is no consensus about when or how they arrived; the most common theory is that people came across the Bering Strait 13k years ago; alternative theories include the island-hopping theory, recurring migration theory, and that people have been in North America since time immemorial)
* The introduction should include a thesis statement (argument statement); I recommend putting the thesis statement toward the end of the introduction so it is clear and easy to find. For first-years, I recommend they follow this formula with their thesis statement: "In this essay, I will argue that...." The thesis statement should be arguing *for* something. It should be something that a rational person could argue for or against.
  + For example: "In this essay, I will argue that the first people did not come to North America across the Bering Strait but were actually present in North America since time immemorial." A rational person could use evidence to argue for this, or against this.
* The body paragraphs should be your evidence; now you argue that your thesis is correct. You can do this by providing evidence to support your own thesis, or by providing evidence to show that other arguments are not as strong as your evidence; most essays will have both kinds of evidence. Each paragraph should be about one topic. For first years, I recommend they use one piece of evidence (one example) for each paragraph. Construct the paragraph so that you introduce the topic, present the evidence, then explain why that evidence supports your thesis.
  + For example: There is archaeological evidence of humans being in North America prior to 13,000 years ago, when Bering Strait opened. For example, radiocarbon dating on footprints at the White Sands National Park site (in New Mexico) indicate people were moving through that area between 21,000 and 23,000 years ago. This indicates that people were in North America before the Bering Strait opened up for a land crossing during the last Ice Age, and therefore the Bering Strait theory does not explain how people came to North America.
* Other paragraphs should bring in other kinds of evidence.
* End with a concluding paragraph that restates your thesis and highlights some of the key pieces that supports your argument. Provide a concluding sentence to tie everything together.