Scrhoz

Learn Any Period of History Prompt Pack

Prepared by Simon Hennessy | Scrhoz

15 simple prompts for getting to grips with any period of history: the big picture, who's who, why it happened, testing yourself, and planning an essay in your own words.

How to Use This Pack

- Copy a prompt, paste it into any AI assistant (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or similar), and replace each [BRACKETED] part with your own details.
- Name the period and place as exactly as you can, such as "England, 1640 to 1660" and not "the Civil War", and say what you're studying it for.
- Use the AI to understand and to test yourself, not to write for you. Your notes, your argument and your essay stay yours.
- AI can get dates, names and quotes wrong. Check anything you plan to rely on against a book or another reliable source.

Note: These prompts are study aids. They do not replace textbooks, primary sources or published scholarship, and AI can make mistakes or invent details. Where a topic is contested, look at more than one account before you decide. If you're studying for a course, check your school's or college's rules on AI use before you hand anything in.

Get Oriented

1. Set the Ground Rules

> For this conversation, act as a history tutor, not an essay writer. Explain, ask me questions and test me, but don't write my essay or answers for me. Where something is disputed, say so and give the main views. If you aren't sure of a date, name or fact, say you're not sure and don't guess. I'm studying [PERIOD AND PLACE] for [A COURSE / A BOOK / PERSONAL INTEREST], at about [SCHOOL / UNIVERSITY / GENERAL READER] level. Reply with "Ready" and wait for my first request.

Tip: Paste this first in every new chat. The AI doesn't carry it over.

2. The Big Picture at My Level

> Give me a one-page overview of [PERIOD AND PLACE] at [SCHOOL / UNIVERSITY / GENERAL READER] level. Cover the main phases in order, the three or four things that mattered most, and what historians still debate. End with five terms or events I should look up next. Keep it in plain English.

Tip: Read it once, then ask about whichever part you didn't follow.

3. Who's Who

> List the [8] most important people or groups in [PERIOD AND PLACE]. For each one, give a line on who they were, a line on what they did that mattered, and a line on anything historians disagree about. Put them in the order I'd best meet them, not alphabetically. Say so if you're unsure about any detail.

Tip: Pick two names and check the AI's account in a reliable book.

4. Build a Timeline From My Dates

> Here are the dates and events from my own notes: [PASTE YOUR DATES AND EVENTS]. Put them in order, group them into three to five phases with a short name for each, and point out gaps where something important seems to be missing. Don't add any dates yourself. List separately any events you'd suggest I look up and check.

Tip: Redraw the timeline by hand afterwards. It helps you remember it.

Understand Why

5. Explain the Chain of Events

> Explain how [EVENT OR OUTCOME] came about as a chain of "because": each step should say what led to the next, in plain words. Mark the one or two steps that mattered most, and one point where things could realistically have gone another way. Say where historians disagree about the chain.

Tip: If you can retell the chain without looking, you understand it.

6. Explain This Passage in Plain Words

> Here is a short passage from my reading: [PASTE A PASSAGE OF UNDER 300 WORDS]. Explain it in plain words at [SCHOOL / UNIVERSITY / GENERAL READER] level. Define any terms I may not know, and tell me which one or two ideas matter most. Don't add facts that aren't in the passage unless you label them as extra.

Tip: Short passages work best. Try restating the explanation in your own words afterwards.

7. Myth Versus Evidence

> What do people commonly believe about [PERIOD, PLACE OR EVENT] that may not be true? List five common beliefs. For each one, tell me whether it's well supported, disputed or a myth, what the evidence is, and where the belief probably came from. Say clearly when you're unsure.

Tip: Check at least one verdict in a reliable book or encyclopaedia.

8. What Was Everyday Life Like?

> Describe everyday life for [A TYPE OF PERSON, E.G. A FARMER / A MERCHANT / A SOLDIER / A TOWN WOMAN] in [PLACE AND TIME]: home, food, work, family, belief and risk. After each part, say what kind of evidence historians use to know this and how much is informed guesswork. Don't invent named people or quotes.

Tip: Ask what's missing. The people who left the fewest records are often the hardest to see.

Test Yourself

9. Quiz Me

> Quiz me on [PERIOD AND PLACE] using only the notes I paste here: [PASTE YOUR NOTES]. Ask one question at a time and wait for my answer. After each answer, tell me whether I was right, what I missed and how it connects to the bigger picture. After ten questions, tell me which topics I should revise.

Tip: Commit to an answer before you scroll. Guessing is part of how it sticks.

10. Explain It Back to You

> I'm going to explain [TOPIC] in my own words. Tell me what I got right, what I got wrong and what I left out. Don't give me the full answer first. Ask me up to three questions that would help me notice my own gaps. Here is my explanation: [YOUR EXPLANATION].

Tip: Say it aloud first, then type it. You'll find out what you really know.

11. Flashcards From My Notes

> Turn my notes into [15] flashcards, with a question on one line and a short answer on the next. Use only what's in my notes: [PASTE YOUR NOTES]. Mix dates, causes, people and meanings, and don't test dates alone. If anything in my notes looks doubtful, list it separately so I can check it.

Tip: Make a few cards yourself. Choosing what matters is part of learning it.

12. Spot the Gaps in My Notes

> Here are my notes on [TOPIC]: [PASTE YOUR NOTES]. Tell me what a good essay or exam answer on this topic would normally cover that my notes miss, and which parts are unclear or may be wrong. Don't fill the gaps yourself. List them as questions I can go and answer from my sources.

Tip: Look the gaps up in a book, then add the answers to your notes in your own words.

Write It Yourself

13. Plan My Essay Question

> My essay question is: [PASTE THE QUESTION]. Break it down: what it's really asking, any key terms I should define, three different arguments someone could make in answer, and the kind of evidence I'd need for each. Don't write any paragraphs or a full plan. I will choose my own argument.

Tip: Choose the argument you can best support with evidence, not the one that sounds cleverest.

14. Check My Own Argument

> Here is a paragraph I wrote for an essay on [QUESTION OR TOPIC]: [PASTE YOUR PARAGRAPH]. Tell me what point I'm making, whether my evidence supports it, where the argument is thin or jumps ahead, and one counterargument I should deal with. Don't rewrite it. Give me notes I can act on myself.

Tip: Revise it yourself, then ask again if you want a second look.

15. What Should I Read Next?

> I'm studying [PERIOD AND PLACE] at [SCHOOL / UNIVERSITY / GENERAL READER] level. Suggest the kinds of sources I should read next, such as a general survey, a book on one theme, a collection of primary sources and a reliable website. Give me search terms and the names of well-known historians to look for. Don't make up titles. If you aren't sure that a specific book exists, say so.

Tip: Check every title in a library catalogue or bookshop before you trust it.

Where to go next, and more from Simon Hennessy:

- Think Like a Historian Prompt Pack (14 prompts)
- Trumping Hitler
- Reflections Across Time
- Timeless Truths

More from Simon Hennessy

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