

UG Finalist American Studies Resit Assessments 23-24

Please select your module from the list below. It will link to the resit assessment information.

Please take note of the submission instructions for your module. If you are a student trailing the assessment from a previous academic year or having a deferred resit, you will be given access to the Canvas page so that you are able to submit your work.

If you are unsure how to submit, please refer to the guidance on the Sussex website [Submitting an assessment : University of Sussex](#). Alternatively, please contact the MAH Curriculum and Assessment team for advice (mah-cao@sussex.ac.uk).

You can find your deadlines for resits on Sussex Direct

American Studies Finalist Resits	
America in the 21st Century	American Studies Dissertation
American Empire	Topic(s) in Literature

Module Title	Module Code	Format & Weighting
America in the 21st Century	T7051	See below

Assessment Details and Expectations
<p>RESIT: PRESENTATION (30%)</p> <p>Assessment aims: Demonstrate understanding of module material and independent thinking, oral communication and presentation skills.</p> <p>This assessment measures all module learning outcomes.</p> <p>Assessment details: See presentation instructions below.</p> <p>Assessment format: Upload to Canvas as PowerPoint with recorded audio, video, or slides plus script (.pptx, .m4a, .mov, .mp4, .docx, .rtf)</p> <p>Duration: 8-10 minutes</p> <p>Further presentation instructions: Create a presentation on the topic of the week of your choice (see Canvas, choose from weeks 3-5 and 7-10). You can present on one or more of the assigned readings, outside research that you have done on the topic, or some combination of these. If you focus on assigned readings, think about how you will present in a way that is not boring to people have also done the same reading—perhaps by focusing on a particularly challenging aspect of the reading, or by providing further context for that reading. If you present further research on the topic, use quality sources and make sure they are relevant to the week's topic.</p>

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It is up to you to make good choices about which material you will cover and in what depth.

Marking

This assessment will be marked categorically as follows.

Marking rubric for presentations	
80	You blew us away with your well thought out plan and professional delivery. You had one or more objectives for the presentation, and you accomplished them well. Exposition was accurate, clear, and insightful, displaying your critical thinking well. You managed your time well, staying on track while keeping the flow organic. We came away from this presentation energized and enriched.
72	You were prepared with a solid plan, which you delivered well. You had one or more objectives for the session, and you at least partially accomplished them. Any exposition was mostly accurate and pretty clear, and displayed your understanding and critical thinking. You managed your time well, keeping the presentation mostly on track.
65	You were prepared with a plan that you delivered. You seemed to have an objective for the presentation, although it wasn't totally clear what it was. There were some strengths in your plan and delivery, but also some problems, such as presenting a lot of inaccurate information. You made an effort to manage time.
35	You submitted a presentation, but it was not adequately prepared. You lacked a plan, or you were unable to execute the plan.
0	Nonsubmission.

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RESIT: ESSAY (70%)

Assessment aims: Independently research and write a focused, informed, well supported argument about a topic of your choosing relevant to the module.

This assessment measures all module learning outcomes.

Assessment details: Research and write a focused, informed, well supported argument about a topic of your choosing relevant to the module. You have quite a lot of leeway in choosing your essay topic, but it must be relevant to America in the 21st century (with "America" understood broadly: anywhere in North America is acceptable, as is an "America in the world" topic). It's essential to consult the further instructions below.

Assessment format:

- Word, pdf, or rtf format
- A4 page size
- Margins *at least* 2.5 cm
- Double spaced
- pages numbered
- font size at least 11

Word count: 4,000–5,000 words. Citations do not count toward your word count; discursive footnotes do count (so consider carefully whether we need a *Silmarillion*-level backstory in the footnotes).

Referencing style:

Any of the following humanities referencing styles are acceptable. You **must** use a style with page numbers. If you are particularly attached to an author-date style for some reason, give page numbers along with the date.

- [Chicago](#)
- [MHRA](#)
- [MLA](#)
- [Harvard](#)

Further essay instructions: Developing a research essay

Your research question

The research question directs your research process. Focusing your research question and aligning it with a set of workable sources and methods is essential for designing a feasible and well evidenced research essay. Start here:

1. Identify a general area of interest. For the purposes of this module, this will need to be something relating to "America in the 21st century." Some general areas are suggested by the weekly themes: the turn of the millenium, US militarism, environmental crisis and activism, contemporary aesthetics, digital culture, etc. If multiple areas interest you, see if there is any overlap.
2. Preliminary research. Look around at what's been written on the topic. Don't limit yourself to Google; use the [University Library catalogue](#), the [British Library](#), etc. The [American Studies subject guide](#) on the Sussex Library website has an especially useful range of sources, including [America: History and Life](#) and [American Periodicals](#). What research questions have other researchers asked? What is the state of the field, more or less? This will help you get a sense of what the genuinely open, relevant questions are. See the [Research Resources page](#) for further resources.
3. Brainstorm a list of open-ended "how" and "why" questions in the area(s) that interest you. If you have multiple areas of interest (say, X and Y), consider formulating questions like "how did X shape Y?," i.e. examining the intersection of those areas. Then begin to narrow down your list until you find the question that most excites you. This would be a good stage at which to have your first dissertation meeting.
4. Focus your question in order to narrow the scope of your research. What are the key figures (whether people, institutions, ideas, cultural artefacts, places, texts etc.) on which you'll focus? Are you looking at a particular year? A historical span? Focus the question enough that you can plausibly address it adequately in a 4,000 word dissertation.

Now step back and evaluate your research question:

- To whom is this question interesting? Is this a relatively new area of research, or are you building on an existing literature/intervening in an existing debate? (Either is ok, but you should know where you stand.)
- Is this research question ambitious enough? Is it a real research question requiring investigation (as opposed to a factual question with a simple answer)?
- Is this research question feasible? Can you address this question with the time, resources, and word count that you have?
- Is this research question meaningfully answerable using evidence that you can gather? Adjust your question as needed.

You may also find the research resources published by the *Chicago Manual of Style* helpful. [Chicago Manual of Style Resources for Students > Crafting a Paper](#)

Essay general topic suggestions

Essay topics should relate to a theme discussed in the module and be primarily focused on the 21st century. All topics need to be approved by the module tutor.

In past years students have picked the following areas to work on:

- comparing the 21st century with the Gilded Age - looking at inequality and rise of populism coming out of it
- legalization of marijuana
- 21st C gender and lgbtq+ equality issues
- 21st C protest movements
- Impacts of algorithmic suggestions and streaming services on the entertainment industry
- the electoral system, accusations of rigging, and disenfranchisement
- politics and the media/social media
- American warfare in the 21st century
- The role of gender in Hillary Clinton's loss in the 2016 election
- The representation of Indigenous seal hunting in mainstream environmentalism
- The effects of introducing compensation for name, image, and likeness for college student athletes
- Anti-trans state legislation
- Shifting attitudes toward the Confederate flag in the 21st century
- Settler colonialism in video games
- Changes in the journalism industry in the 21st century

Writing up your research essay

You will submit a 4,000-5,000-word essay on a topic of your choice (approved by your tutor) on an aspect of the 21st century, together with your approx 500 word proposal and 500 word essay plan/bibliography in one final document that totals approx. 5,000-6,000 words.

Argument

Make sure that you are making a strong argument at the outset of your essay and then supporting, developing, and giving evidence for your argument throughout your essay. It is essential that it be clear what the argument is throughout the essay. **Your argument is your answer to your research question.** Because of this, you *will not know* your argument when you start doing your research, although you should probably have some working hypotheses. While you will arrive at the final form of your argument near the *end* of your research process, you should state that argument near the *beginning* of your essay and begin building your case for it right away. An argument is a claim that you are making and supporting with your research. It must be contestable, complex, and specific.

- **Contestable:** it is not simply a matter of fact; different people could plausibly hold different positions on the question you are answering (but you will provide the evidence to show why your argument is the best possible answer).
- **Complex:** it is nuanced and does not merely reiterate the same thing over and over; it can explain seeming contradictions and address counterarguments.
- **Specific:** it is the right size idea for this length of writing; it doesn't try to take on the whole world; the argument is commensurate with the evidence used to support it.

A research essay should contain original ideas and work to further develop the area of research that you are writing about, either by looking at the subject in a new way, looking at a subject that has not been fully examined, making a new argument about the subject, looking at sources in a new way or bringing together sources that have not been studied together, or making some other original contribution. *Important:* the level of originality expected here is still at the advanced undergraduate level. You do not need to make a substantial new contribution to human knowledge, as is required of the PhD! We just need to see your mind at work.

Evidence

The essay should use both primary and secondary sources. [[What's the difference? See this website.](#)] The originality of your argument will usually lie in how you analyze your primary sources. The context, framing, and significance of your argument will usually lie in how you position that analysis in

relation to secondary sources.

Some research questions are best investigated through one or two primary sources; others are better supported by a range of sources. The key is to choose primary sources that can meaningfully supply the material you need for answering your research question.

Primary sources should be analyzed critically. It is worth thinking about what does and does not constitute a significant observation about your source. This can be shaped by factors like genre, medium, author/creator, date of creation, physical circumstances, etc. For example, use of emojis is unusual in a printed novel but very common in text messages.

A good research essay uses secondary sources appropriately. It favors quality over quantity. It displays awareness of and engages with important work published on the essay topic. The most sophisticated research essays engage with other scholars as interlocutors, using them to position the essay's argument. In other words, secondary sources are not just sources of facts (although they can be that, too), but of methodological approaches, historiographic claims, and theoretical frameworks.

The essay should include complete referencing and a bibliography. *Paraphrase needs to be cited as well as quotation.* See the [Guide to Referencing](#) below for further details on citation.

Warrants

The reasoning and premises that turns a fact or piece of information into evidence for a claim are called a **warrant**.

Sometimes warrants are implicit: if the reasoning is obvious, it doesn't need to be stated. Other times the reasoning is not obvious, and if it is left unstated, the argument will fail even though you have evidence, because readers can't understand how your evidence supports the argument. Sometimes when you're deep in the writing process, it can be hard to tell whether you've spelled out all (or enough) of your warrants. This is one of the reasons revision is so important. For more on warrants, see Chapter 11 of *The Craft of Research* by Wayne Booth et al. [[Library e-book](#)]

Example: "Brighton is a wonderful place to live; for one thing, there's the beach."

The claim here is that "Brighton is a wonderful place to live." The fact that is being given as evidence is that there's a beach. The unspoken **warrant** is that it is desirable to live near a beach. This is a widely held belief, so the writer has decided not to belabor the point and has left the warrant unstated.

If you wanted to challenge the claim, you might attack the evidence itself by saying that it's not a good enough beach (covered with rocks, cold water, small waves). But you could also concede the evidence and attack the *warrant* instead, by challenging the idea that it's good to live near a beach, perhaps by saying that the salt air degrades the housing faster than usual or by pointing out the increased risk of vicious seagull attacks.

Style

Style in an academic essay is not superficial; it is structural. Use style to support the clear communication of your ideas.

Whole essay architecture: Each section of the essay should have a clear part to play in the development of your argument. Ask yourself what each section *does* or *accomplishes*. Sections should not be interchangeable; each one should build on or add to the last. Many people find it helpful to use section headings or "chapters." Remember that putting some text in bold and calling it a section heading is not a substitute for a coherent, well crafted section. The best written essays have a clearly identifiable structure that does not require the section headings to make sense.

Paragraph structure: A good research essay has both strong overarching ideas and specific details used to support it; it explains clearly *how* the details support the overarching ideas. Balance abstract ideas (often encapsulated in a topic sentence) and concrete details within each paragraph. A good paragraph is internally coherent and also makes its role in the bigger picture clear.

Paragraph transitions: Like style overall, paragraph transitions are not cosmetic, but rather important signals for showing how each paragraph connects to the previous one.

Sentence-level grammar, style, and usage: For the sake of readability, use standard English grammar and any widely used style (punctuation, formatting, etc.). Many of the formal features of documents are arbitrary conventions with no essential truth behind them; they are developed by publishing houses (for example, University of Chicago Press, publishers of the [Chicago Manual of Style](#)) so that their publications can be formatted with professional consistency. What's important is consistency and readability (you can't just invent your own punctuation conventions; other people have to understand what you're doing). A helpful guide to standard punctuation is available here: [Punctuation Guide](#). Formatting expectations are listed in the checklist below; note that if your formatting is unprofessional-looking it won't affect your mark, but it will hurt my eyeballs. In general, it's a good idea to get in the habit of producing professional-looking documents.

Research Essay Checklist

- An appropriate, descriptive essay title (generally *not* a question)
- A clear, contestable, complex, and specific argument
- Primary and secondary sources
- Consistently formatted, logical section headings (if you are using sections—this is not required)
- Numbered pages
- A clear, readable font, at least 11pt
- Double spacing
- Margins at least 2.5cm
- Full in-text referencing using a citation style with page numbers, plus a bibliography or works cited list at the end (see [referencing guidance](#) below)

Guide to referencing in the assessment

Any standard humanities referencing system is acceptable, for example Chicago, MHRA, MLA, etc. Parenthetical citations and footnotes/endnotes are equally acceptable. Note that the citation formats for footnotes/endnotes and for the accompanying bibliography/works cited are usually slightly different. You *must* use a referencing system that includes page numbers; author-date styles are only acceptable in the social or natural sciences. **Accurate, acceptable referencing is not about where you put your parentheses; it's about recognizing your sources with integrity and clarity.** That means that getting your metadata right and presenting it consistently is the *most* important thing. It is *fine* to use a citation manager; I have used [Zotero](#) for years and love it. **However, the citation you get out of a citation manager is only as good as the metadata you put in. Check your metadata.** The metadata downloaded from the Sussex Library catalogue is particularly likely to have errors around authorship (for example, listing an editor as an author or co-author, leaving out a translator, etc.). Read over your citations and see if they make sense.

Examples [all examples given in bibliography/works cited format]:

Fine:

- 👍 Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History." In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, edited by Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Michael W. Jennings, translated by Harry Zohn, 389–400. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006. [Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition]
- 👍 Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History." *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, edited by Edmund Jephcott et al., translated by Harry Zohn, Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 389–400. [MLA, 9th edition]
- 👍 Benjamin, W. (2006) 'On the Concept of History', in Edmund Jephcott et al. (eds.) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. pp. 389–400. [Harvard]
- 👍 Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History." *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940* (pp. 389–400), ed. Edmund Jephcott et al., trans. Harry Zohn. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006. [weird monster hybrid of formats but *I won't call you on it because all the essential info is there and this still constitutes responsible citation.*]

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Problems:

- X Benjamin, Walter, Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Michael W. Jennings. "On the Concept of History." In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, 389–400. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006. [Chicago format is being followed, but this is a bad citation because the editors are listed as co-authors and the translator is missing.]
- X Benjamin, Walter. *On the Concept of History*, edited by Edmund Jephcott et al., translated by Harry Zohn, Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 389–400. [MLA format is being followed, but this is a bad citation because this short essay is being presented as if it were a whole book. A reader trying to find this essay would be looking for a book, and looking in vain!]

Submit to [Canvas](#).

Module Title	Module Code	Format & Weighting
American_Empire	T7081	See below
Assessment Details and Expectations		
RESIT: ESSAY (100%)		
Canvas instructions apply .		
Submit through Canvas .		

Module Title	Module Code	Format & Weighting
American Studies Dissertation	T7053	See below
Assessment Details and Expectations		
RESIT: PRESENTATION (20%)		
Assessment 1 and weighting: Presentation (20% weighting)		
Assessment aims:		
In the original assessment, students presented their work-in-progress during the last weeks of the Dissertation Module.		
This assessment measures the following module learning outcomes:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify an appropriate and relevant area of interest suitable for extended research 2. Develop a research question 3. Show specialist knowledge of the research topic selected 4. Manage a project from beginning to completion 5. Acquire advanced research skills and techniques 		
Assessment details:		
Assessment format: Upload your presentation to Canvas as PowerPoint with recorded audio, video, or slides plus script (.pptx, .m4a, .mov, .mp4, .docx, .rtf)		
Word count / duration / size of assessment: 5 minutes of speaking.		
Additional Information:		
The Presentation Tips here will give you some very useful guidance: Presentation		

[Tips.docx](#) [Download Presentation Tips.docx](#)

Presentations will be assessed for Knowledge and Understanding, Research, Creative and Critical Thinking, and Presentation and Communication (see details below).

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RESIT: DISSERTATION (80%)

Assessment 2 and weighting: Dissertation (80% weighting)

Assessment aims:

The dissertation is an opportunity to pursue an American Studies project of your choosing. Your goal is to produce a thoughtful and original piece of writing, to develop and demonstrate advanced skills of independent working, and to give expression to your academic interests in an intellectually disciplined and creative way.

This assessment measures the following module learning outcomes:

1. Identify an appropriate and relevant area of interest suitable for extended research
2. Develop a research question
3. Show specialist knowledge of the research topic selected
4. Manage a project from beginning to completion
5. Acquire advanced research skills and techniques and deploy them in the preparation and production of a long dissertation with appropriate scholarly apparatus

Assessment details: Weekly meetings, peer review and research workshops during the Autumn term will have guided you through the process of choosing your subject and devising research questions, identifying key debates in your chosen field, developing your own thesis and undertaking the sustained research necessary to demonstrate your command of the topic. Successful dissertations require time, planning, and focus. You will have benefited from the guidance of a supervisor during the Autumn term but the self-discipline, time-management and organisation required to complete the dissertation will be your responsibility.

Assessment format: a Word document with consistent and neat formatting throughout (please see past dissertations for examples of proper formatting).

Word count / duration / size of assessment: 6,000 words.

Referencing style:

Please format your referencing in assessed work following one of the following style guides: MLA, MHRA or Chicago. Please ensure you apply the style consistently. A guide to each of these referencing styles is available on the Skills Hub: [link to guide on different referencing styles](#).

Additional Information:

Similar to the presentations, the dissertations will be assessed for Knowledge and Understanding, Research, Creative and Critical Thinking, and Presentation and Communication (more details below). What is key is how well you engage critically with both primary and secondary sources and strive to make an original contribution to your specialist area.

Students are encouraged to consult books geared toward advising undergraduate dissertation writers, such as Nigel Fabb and Alan Durant, *How to Write Essays and Dissertations: A Guide for English Literature Students*, 2 ed., Routledge, 2005 (ISBN-13: 978-0582784550); or, Laura Lammasniemi, *Law dissertations: a step-by-step guide*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018 (ISBN 9781138240681)

Or here: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/december-2006/practical-advice-for-writing-your-dissertation-book-or-article>

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Module Title	Module Code	Format & Weighting
Topic(s)_in_Literature	T7078	See below
Assessment Details and Expectations		
RESIT: ESSAY (100%) Canvas instructions apply . If this is your second attempt at the assessment, please choose a different question title. Submit to Canvas .		