

WRITING WITH EFFECTIVE SUPPORT

SPECIFIC VS. GENERAL SUPPORT

In a historical essay, it is good to include as much SPECIFIC support as possible. Specific support includes names, dates, facts, figures, social studies vocabulary, personal experiences (where relevant) and other information you have learned in class.

HOW DO I DO IT?

Start with a general idea in your topic sentence, then elaborate by giving examples, data or personal experiences.

BAD EXAMPLE 1 (Support is not very specific)

One reason why it was ok to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was that it saved many lives. Many, many American soldiers did not have to die in an invasion. Also a lot of Japanese civilians did not have to die in an invasion.

BAD EXAMPLE 1 IMPROVED (uses specific data)

One reason why it was ok to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was that it saved many lives. According to the memoirs of Secretary of State Henry Stimson up to 1,000,000 lives were saved. Even if the final numbers would have ended up lower than that, the bomb still saved tens of thousands of American lives. Yet, it wasn't only American lives that were saved. An invasion of Japan would have been preceded by massive bombing. When American planes firebombed Tokyo in the spring of 1945, an estimated 80 to 200,000 civilians were killed—more lives than were lost in the atomic bombings. If you figure that the bombings before an invasion would be even heavier, it makes sense that even more civilians would die. Plus, the heavy fighting when the Americans invaded Okinawa convinced us that the Japanese would fight to the death to protect their homeland. If that were the case, it is likely that a very large number of Japanese would die in normal combat. The bomb, terrible as it was, saved these lives.

BAD EXAMPLE 2 (support is not very specific)

Students shouldn't be required to participate in service learning in high school. It is a better experience if you choose to help others. Requiring students will make them dislike helping others.

BAD EXAMPLE 2 IMPROVED (uses personal experience)

Students shouldn't be required to participate in service learning in high school. Although it is a good cause, it is important to create a positive opportunity with these experiences. Requiring service learning takes the fun out of it. During my sophomore year, my history class shoveled driveways for the elderly. I felt obligated to do it. When I choose to serve food in a soup kitchen on my own, I learned more and felt better about my experiences.