

The following is an annotated example of an undergraduate History essay that received a High Distinction (HD). Below, we point out the exemplary writing features of this essay.

'In many ways, Mirabeau's dream of a patriot king deriving his power from the love of his subjects was not so far-fetched.' (David Jordan) Do you agree?

The French Revolution threw Louis XVI and the Bourbon monarchy into crisis. What began as a push for a more consultative monarchy in the heady summer of 1789 spiralled out of control in the space of only four years, as events, personalities and the king's own conduct conspired to make Louis XVI hated by his own subjects and robbed of his authority, his throne, and finally his life. The Revolutionary politician and ardent constitutional monarchist, the Comte de Mirabeau, envisioned Louis XVI endorsing the Revolution and its accomplishments, reigning as a patriotic citizen king and thereby winning the undying love of a grateful French public. This, Mirabeau fervently hoped, would ensure the survival of the French monarchy and simultaneously guarantee the gains of the Revolution. However, Mirabeau's dream was an impossibility. Louis XVI was unable to reconcile himself to the Revolution as a result of his worldview, his inexorably decreasing popularity, and the Revolution's failure to compromise with the Crown.

Louis XVI's policy towards the French Revolution is a matter of ongoing debate. The king's characteristic inexpressiveness and indecision has made Louis an ambiguous figure, and it has been particularly difficult for historians to deduce what Louis's views and intentions were. Controversy has surrounded such questions as whether Louis was attempting to flee France in the Flight to Varennes, if he wished to suppress the Revolution as well as if he was prepared to enlist foreign armies for that purpose. Recent historians, such as John Hardman and Munro Price, have concluded that Louis XVI was probably willing to compromise and serve as constitutional monarch given the views he expressed in the manifesto, or declaration, which he penned before fleeing Paris in 1791.

This is the background / context to set up the rest of the introduction paragraph. The student author provides a broad picture of Louis XVI's reign and how it was affected by the events leading up to French Revolution.

This is a description of the debate or issue. In this case, the student author is stating Mirabeau's dream / vision. This is directly connected to the thesis statement, which declares the author's point of view on whether or not that vision was reasonable.

The thesis statement is the position (in blue) together with the reasons why, or signposting (in green). The student positions themselves to disagree with the statement--rather than Mirabeau's dream being 'not so far-fetched', the student says it became an 'impossibility.' As you read through, notice how the student author's essay structure is consistent with the order listed here.

This topic sentence sets up the main point of the paragraph, which further elaborates on why Louis XVI's policies are debated. This paragraph connects to the thesis statement / question because it starts to look into why Louis XVI was not going to become a 'patriot king.'

This paragraph sets the scope of the essay in terms of what kind of support the student author will use to support their point. There are some details to do with Louis XVI's rule and connection to the Revolution that are unknown /debated, and there are some that are more probable than not.

Louis XVI could not be loyal to the Revolution, and for this reason the dream of Louis as constitutional monarch could never become a reality. Acceptance of the Revolution was an implicit requirement of Mirabeau's proposition, which imagined the king endorsing the changes wrought by the moderate phase of the Revolution—between 1789 and early 1791—as a way to safeguard its political and social gains.¹ But as both a king and an individual raised in the traditions of the *ancien regime*, Louis XVI was fundamentally incapable of coming to terms with the Revolution and its dramatic alterations to the state and society; in the king's eyes, there was nothing 'moderate' about the creation of the National Assembly, nor its program for reshaping the nation.²

At the very beginning of the Revolution—during the meeting of the Estates-General in 1789—the king, having realised something seditious was afoot, made clear that he wished tradition to prevail and that he would not tolerate overtly democratic politics:

The King desires that the ancient distinction between the three orders of the State be maintained in its entirety ... Consequently, the King has declared void the decisions taken by the deputies of the order of the Third Estate in the seventeenth of this month and all subsequent ones as illegal and unconstitutional.³

Here was the essence of what would become Louis XVI's view of the Revolution. He believed its acts were improper and it had been achieved by means that were simply unlawful. Above all, Louis could not bear to see the social and religious order of France overturned.⁴ Before fleeing Paris in June 1791, Louis penned a declaration, in which

This topic sentence clearly connects to the thesis statement--reinforcing and reminding the reader of the purpose of this essay: to convince us that Mirabeau's dream is impossible. This topic sentence provides one of the reasons why the dream will not be realised: Louis XVI could not be loyal to the Revolution. The rest of the paragraph will further elaborate on this point, with the aim to convince the reader that, for several reasons and factors, Louis XVI was not going to support the Revolution.

This whole paragraph is supporting the idea that Louis XVI couldn't become a 'patriot king' because he was incapable of supporting the people's will, as demonstrated in the early phases of the Revolution.

It is very important to unpack and explain the significance of the quote above, which the student author has done here. The student author calls this quote 'the essence' of the king's views, and further explains what those views are and what they mean in relation to the author's main point, regarding Louis' inability to become Mirabeau's vision of a 'patriot king.'

¹ Munro Price, *The Road From Versailles: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and the Fall of the French Monarchy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 112; Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2004), 455.

² Francois Furet, "Louis XVI," in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. Francois Furet & Mona Ozouf (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 239-40; Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 213.

³ Louis XVI, "The King's Declaration concerning the present session of the Estates General," in *The French Revolution: Introductory Documents*, ed. D. I. Wright (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1974), 41.

⁴ Furet, "Louis XVI," 239-40; Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 213.

he aired his grievances with the Revolution. The king, looking back to those fateful days of 1789, believed he had personally tried to remedy the discontent of his subjects, but had been repudiated:

The convocation of the Estates-General, the granting of double representation to the deputies of the Third Estate, the pains the king took to smooth away all the difficulties which could have delayed the meeting of the Estates-General and those which arose after their opening, all the king's economies in his personal expenditure, all the powers which he surrendered to his peoples in the *séance* of 23 June; . . .all his painstaking solicitude, all his generosity, all his devotion to his people, all have been depreciated and distorted.⁵

Louis's account of the Revolution reveals why he was so opposed to it. He thought he had offered generous concessions and that the revolutionaries had rebuffed him and subsequently enacted changes that were unnecessarily radical. Louis had displayed willingness to change the monarchy in order to help his people.⁶ In this respect, he exhibited features of a concerned, and even patriotic, king. But he could not be faithful to the Revolution, which wholly opposed his vision of France, which, as Tackett writes, "was a vision that set him on a collision course with the men and women of the French Revolution."⁷ Louis could not fulfil Mirabeau's hopes as a king who was for the Revolution; this had the added impact of ensuring he would draw the ire of the French public.

Again, the student author is importantly unpacking the quote to show why they included it here in their paper, and how and why it connects to their thesis statement. The student author further examines and unpacks the idea that the king could not change the monarchy to meet the wishes of the French public, as the change the French republic wanted was totally against Louis' vision of France.

The student author has summarised the point of the paragraph here and crucially shown the reader how it connects to their overall point asserted in their thesis statement. This sentence also helps the reader transition to the next related point, regarding the way the French public comes to regard Louis.

Rather than earning the adoration of the French during the Revolution, Louis XVI was increasingly alienated from his subjects, a result of his own actions and the outbreak of war with France's enemies. The erosion of the public's trust had begun at the meeting of the Estates-General when the king had sided with the nobility instead of the commoners.⁸ In an address to the National Assembly following the insurrection that

Here is another topic sentence clearly connected to the thesis statement. Louis XVI could not become a 'patriot king', or anything close to it, because he did the opposite of earning the adoration of the French public. Instead, the sentence and following paragraph examines why the king was alienating himself from his subjects, based on his own actions and outside circumstances.

⁵ Louis XVI, "The King's Declaration on leaving Paris, 20 June 1791," in *The French Revolution Sourcebook*, ed. John Hardman (London: Arnold, 1999), 130.

⁶ Price, *The Road From Versailles*, 70

⁷ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 213.

⁸ John Hardman, *Louis XVI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 145.

toppled the king in August 1792, a deputation from the Paris Commune gave an account of the “conduct of Louis XVI since the first days of the Revolution,” listing his offences against the French people:

His bloody plans against the city of Paris, his predilection for nobles and priests, the aversion which he showed for the mass of the people... until a treacherous flight opened the eyes of even the citizens most blinded by slavish devotion.⁹

This shows that, by the end of Louis’s reign, the revolutionaries were able to paint a damning narrative of royal betrayal and deceit throughout the Revolution. The

Commune pointed to the king’s bid to escape Paris in the Flight to Varennes as the most revealing act of betrayal. By fleeing, the king appeared to renounce his throne as well as show his contempt for the Revolution.¹⁰ The king’s midnight flight was seen by many to indicate that the king was seeking refuge among foreign powers, whom he wished to enlist to overthrow the Revolution. This was what characterised the Flight to Varennes as treacherous—not only had Louis renounced the crown of an enlightened, liberated kingdom of equals, he had attempted to snatch away the gains of the Revolution with monarchist armies from abroad.¹¹ This was significant because from that moment on, not only was the king unpopular, he was perceived as a threat to the Revolution. In an unsigned memorandum written in Louis’s hand in July 1791,¹² public

mistrust of the king is revealed to have become a pressing concern for the monarchy:

Another important sentence to signal the unpacking of the quote and what it means in relation to the student author’s argument. With the people against him, Louis would be unable to become a patriot king, loved by the French public.

This is a great way to introduce a quote, signalling where the following quote comes from, as well what’s important about it (that public mistrust of Louis is revealed).

⁹ Paris Commune, “Deputation from the Paris Commune,” In *The French Revolution: Introductory Documents*, ed. D. I. Wright (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1974), 139.

¹⁰ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution, 2nd Ed.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 152.

¹¹ Paul R. Hanson, *Contesting the French Revolution* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 85-6.

¹² The memorandum was one of several documents from the *armoire de fer*—a hidden cabinet found in the Tuileries after the fall of the monarchy.

Of all the dangers that surround the King, I fear one in particular if it is prolonged. That is the mistrust felt by the people of His Majesty's character and intentions.¹³

The uncertainty surrounding the king's character, integrity and trustworthiness as king is identified as the predominant issue facing Louis's reign. The memorandum demonstrates that, far from being a beloved sovereign, the king was looked on with suspicion by his people. Just as Mirabeau anticipated the love of the public would be the answer to the monarchy's woes, public resentment could just as easily be the cause of its ruin.

This serves as a concise summary of the above quote. It's great to have the student author's voice here leading us through the purpose of this quote, rather than leaving it up to the reader to decide how to interpret the author's intended purpose for including this quote.

This concluding sentence summarizes the paragraph and also connects it to the thesis statement, reminding us of Mirabeau's wish, and why it was unfulfilled.

The actual onset of foreign war rapidly accelerated Louis's descent into infamy.

Here we turn to a further circumstance which made it clear that Louis could not follow Mirabeau's vision to gain the love of his people.

Following his attempted escape and in light of his lack of enthusiasm for the revolutionary government, the king came to be seen as a liability to the Revolution.¹⁴

The Duke of Brunswick, on behalf of the Prussian king and Austrian emperor, published a declaration threatening the destruction of Paris if the king came to harm.¹⁵

The 'Brunswick Manifesto' voiced the intention of Louis's fellow monarchs to protect the king from his own subjects:

Their Majesties declaring, moreover, on their faith and word as emperor and king, that if the Palace of the Tuileries is forced or insulted, that if the least violence, the least outrage, is offered to their Majesties the king and queen, and to the royal family ... they will take an exemplary and ever-memorable vengeance by giving up the city of Paris to military execution and total destruction, and the rebels guilty of outrages to the punishments which they shall have deserved.¹⁶

¹³ Anonymous, "Undated memorandum in the King's hand," in *The Compromising of Louis XVI: The Armoire de Fer and the French Revolution*, ed. Andrew Freeman (Exeter: The University of Exeter, 1989), 71.

¹⁴ John Hardman, ed., *The French Revolution Sourcebook* (London: Arnold, 1999), 125.

¹⁵ Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution, 2nd Ed.*, 188.

¹⁶ Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, "The Brunswick Manifesto," in *The French Revolution: As Told by Contemporaries*, ed. E. L. Higgins (Cambridge: The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1938), 233.

The manifesto clearly associated Louis with the enemies of France and the Revolution.

This is another great way to transition out of a quote and into an explanation of the relevance of that quote. The main point of that quote is to show that Louis associated with enemies of the Revolution, further proof that he was in no shape to become a patriot king.

The sense of national emergency generated by war, coupled with Louis's association

with the enemy destroyed the monarchy.¹⁷ Louis's actions throughout the Revolution

decreased his popularity and the legitimacy of his claim to rule in the eyes of

Revolutionary France. The flight to Varennes decreased his popularity, ultimately

causing the anger and resentment of the public. From the perspective of Louis's

subjects—particularly those who supported the Revolution—he appeared the antithesis

of a patriot king, in cahoots with France's enemies. Public affection would not see the

This is a great concluding sentence for this paragraph, as it ties the paragraph back to the student author's main point regarding Mirabeau's hope and the king's inability to fulfill it.

king through the Revolution as Mirabeau had hoped; instead, anger and dissatisfaction

would ultimately lead to the destruction of the monarchy.

At the heart of the unease between the king and the revolution was the

In this topic sentence, we get into a deeper point that brings together both the king's actions and the circumstances surrounding him to show that together, both elements created unease and distrust.

Revolution's reluctance to compromise with Louis XVI and its antagonism toward the

monarchy. In July 1789, Louis had ceased to rule as an absolutist king; from that time

on sovereignty was shared between a legislature and the monarchy.¹⁸ However, it was

not a fair arrangement. The politicians of the Assembly controlled the terms on which

Louis XVI exercised royal authority and were unwilling to share actual power with the

king.¹⁹ The Constitution's articles 'Concerning Royal Sanction' show the impotency of

Again, it's great that the student author has both shown where this source comes from as well as the main point of the excerpted quote, which is that the article points out the impotency of the monarchy.

the monarchy:

Article 1. The decrees of the legislative body are presented to the King, who may refuse his consent to them.

2. Should the King refuse his consent, this veto is only suspensive. When the two legislatures which follow that which presented the decree have successively represented the same decree in the same terms, *the King shall be held to have given sanction.* (My italics.)²⁰

¹⁷ Hardman, *Louis XVI: The Silent King*, 137.

¹⁸ Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd Ed, 110-11.

¹⁹ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 213.

²⁰ National Assembly, "The Constitution of 1791," in *The French Revolution: Introductory Documents*, ed. D. I. Wright (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1974), 107.

The king's function thus consisted of merely rubber-stamping the legislation of the Assembly—he could exercise very little control over the way France was governed.

Here the student author concisely reinforces the main point of the quote and what it means for their overall argument regarding Louis' lack of control and inability to become a king loved by his people.

This reveals the low regard the Assembly had for the king and the lack of compromise offered by the revolutionaries. In his declaration of June 1791, Louis fumed over the farcical nature of royal authority, as it had existed since 1789:

As long as the king could hope to see order and prosperity restored to the kingdom by the measures employed by the Assembly and by his residence near that assembly at the capital he counted as naught any personal sacrifices. ... the sole recompense for so many sacrifices is to behold the destruction of the monarchy, authority flouted ... and total anarchy trample on the laws without the semblance of authority given him by the new constitution being sufficient to cure any of the ills afflicting the kingdom.²¹

Louis draws a link between the Revolution's repudiation of the monarchy and his loss of interest in cooperating with the Assembly. Price asserts that, for a time, Louis was willing to serve as a constitutional monarch; but the radical and antimonarchical character of the Constitution of 1791 alienated the king.²² As Louis himself writes of the antagonism toward the monarchy:

The more the king made sacrifices for the good of his peoples, the more the men of faction have worked to devalue the cost and paint the monarchy in the most false and lurid terms.²³

By 'the men of faction,' Louis refers to radical politicians who believed power should lie almost totally with the Assembly—and not be shared with the monarchy. The king's experience of dealing with the Assembly made him lose faith in the prospect of a workable compromise leading him to believe cooperating with the Revolution was both

It's great that the student author further clarifies a term (men of faction) to further support their point regarding the king's inevitable loss of power.

²¹ Louis XVI, "The King's Declaration on leaving Paris, 20 June 1791," 128.

²² Munro Price, "Mirabeau and the Court," *French Historical Studies*, 29 (2006): 59.

²³ Louis XVI, "The King's Declaration on leaving Paris, 20 June 1791," 30.

useless and unpalatable and spurring him to flee Paris, forever dashing hopes of a constitutional monarchy.

Here the student author reinforces their overall point--the king will not be beloved by his people, as Mirabeau had hoped.

Mirabeau's dream of Louis proving himself both a king and a man of the Revolution is more fittingly described as a fantasy. After his attempt to escape from the Revolution was foiled at Varennes, his reputation as king was irreparably damaged and his survival as monarch was forever divorced from the continuation of the Revolution in the minds of the French public. For this reason he could not be classed as either a patriotic or a beloved king. Having forfeited the love of his subjects, the king could not improve his position through popular appeal, nor could he derive power from the inequitable constitutional arrangement between him and the Assembly. This trajectory would lead to the monarchy's downfall in August of 1792 and his eventual execution. In fact, Mirabeau's dream had died some time before Louis mounted the scaffold in 1793. It would be over a decade before monarchy and the Revolution were finally reconciled by Napoleon.

This is the first move of a conclusion paragraph, where the writer summarises the thesis statement, and the main points used to convince the reader of the point of view stated in the thesis statement.

The second move of a conclusion answers the question, 'so what?' Another way of thinking about this move is that it briefly looks to the implications of the thesis statement. These two sentences look to the future consequences of Louis XVI's choices, in light of the fact that his actions and the circumstances around him meant that he could not become anything close to a 'patriot king.'

This essay received a High Distinction (HD). Here we have pointed out the ways in which this essay makes a strong, connected, well-evidenced and analysed argument. No piece of writing is perfect, and therefore as you read through you may have found points that you thought could have been improved. The nature of writing is that it can always be better. In this example, we focused on all the many exemplary features of this essay, and we hope you found it useful and applicable to your own academic writing tasks at ANU.

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