Success in History
Academic Success Center
Iowa State University

Students committed to learning will find many possible paths to success. No path is error free, but the path best for you may not look like the same path as another student. For this reason, students should continuously assess their academic progress in courses and adjust their academic strategies accordingly.

While there is no magic formula, the following suggestions may improve your ability to succeed in history and increase your retention of knowledge.

The Open Door Website at http://www.saburchill.com/history/hist002.html explains that there are two sources of history information:

**Primary sources** are things such as newspapers, diaries or letters written at that time. Also included as primary sources are drawings, paintings and, in later periods, photographs.

**Secondary sources** are things such as books, CD ROMs, Internet sources films, videos, plays, museums and visits to historical sites. The authors of history textbooks, CD ROMs and web sites use other secondary sources and primary sources of information to help them write their texts. You will usually learn history through secondary sources.

**Tips:**

1. If you come across a term, place, person, or event you do not understand, make a note of it and use another source to find out more.
2. Think critically when you read secondary sources. These are only the author’s interpretations of past events. Different authors have different beliefs and if you read enough on your topic you will start to see the difference. This in turn will help you to form your own opinions.
3. Find out how to relate historical events since many times they are inter-related. Nothing occurs in a vacuum – things are causal.
4. Use charts and diagrams or mnemonics to study names, places and dates of important events.
5. Learn maps by drawing them. Trace the outline, photocopy the map, and then practice filling the details!

**How to remember what you have read:**

1. Be an active listener and participant in class.
2. Read ahead and be prepared with questions to ask.
3. Research topics you are assigned to read with secondary sources other than your book. Even looking at pictures and reading captions from other books helps to cement historic events. Find out how ordinary people dressed, lived, what they ate, how they traveled, what technology was available anything to help you paint a fuller picture for yourself.

Information was also retrieved from the following website:
http://www.historyguide.org/guide/guide.html