

## A History Writing Workshop for High School Students to Improve Critical Thinking Skills

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### ABSTRACT

This community service activity aims to improve high school students' critical thinking skills through a history writing workshop. The background of this program lies in the challenges of history learning at the secondary level, which is often dominated by rote memorization, resulting in students' lack of analytical ability and low engagement in constructing historical narratives. The workshop was implemented at SMA Negeri 1 Baturraden with 30 participants from the Youth Scientific Work group. The methods used combined lectures on the principles of historical and essay writing with hands-on training in source analysis and essay development. The activity was conducted in three sessions covering the introduction of historical writing and essay structure, verification and analysis of historical sources, and the practice of writing historical essays. The results showed that participants demonstrated significant improvement in critical thinking, particularly in source evaluation, argument development, and the ability to present historical narratives logically and systematically. The workshop not only strengthened students' historical literacy but also contributed to character building by fostering responsibility, independence, and reflective attitudes. This program is expected to serve as a model for innovative history learning and can be replicated in other schools to enhance students' critical and creative competencies in line with 21st-century skills.

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of technology in the 21st century and the era of the Industrial Revolution 5.0 has brought significant changes in various aspects of life. The ease of access to information offered by modern technology provides positive opportunities for young people to learn more quickly and broadly. However, on the other hand, globalization also presents challenges, such as the growing influence of foreign cultures that are often preferred over Indonesian culture. This condition requires the strengthening of character and national awareness so that the younger generation does not lose their identity as Indonesians (Wulandari et al., 2023).

Education plays a vital role in shaping the character of the nation's future generations. In particular, history education holds a strategic function in instilling national values while also fostering students' critical thinking skills. However, in practice, the teaching of history at the senior high school (SMA) level is still dominated by rote learning. Students tend to be passive, memorizing facts without developing the ability to analyze, evaluate, or construct historical narratives independently. This situation has led to a low level of critical thinking, especially in contextualizing and reflecting on historical events (Kalsum, 2025).

One of the solutions to this problem is through historical writing activities. Writing history is not merely about copying information from textbooks but serves as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills, such as connecting cause and effect, comparing perspectives, and interpreting historical sources. Through writing, students are also trained to construct arguments, formulate evidence-based opinions, and present historical narratives logically and systematically. These abilities are highly relevant to the demands of the modern era, which requires young people to be critical and creative thinkers.

The History Writing Workshop is designed as a strategic effort to help students develop these skills. This activity aims to train students in formulating ideas, processing sources ethically, organizing narratives, and writing structured historical essays. The workshop also introduces an inquiry-based and interpretive approach to history, encouraging students to become more active, reflective, and engaged in the learning process (Firmansyah, 2024). In this way, the workshop not only enhances students' historical writing skills but also fosters deeper historical awareness.

Furthermore, this workshop aligns with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes project-based learning, character building, and independent learning (Mauluda et al., 2025). Through this activity, students will gain authentic learning experiences by acting as "young researchers" who reconstruct historical events using various sources, whether oral, written, or visual. Observations and discussions with partner school history teachers have also revealed that students often struggle to write historical essays in a coherent and in-depth manner. Therefore, this workshop directly addresses the real needs identified in schools.

Beyond its educational benefits, this workshop also represents the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, particularly in the area of community service. For lecturers, the activity serves not only as a medium for sharing knowledge but also as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships with schools. For students, the workshop is expected to enhance historical literacy skills while fostering critical, creative, and nationally minded personalities.

In conclusion, the History Writing Workshop for Senior High School Students as an Effort to Improve Critical Thinking Skills is expected to serve as a best practice for strengthening history learning within the framework of 21st-century skills. Moreover, this activity has the potential to be replicated in other schools as an innovative and transformative model for history education.

## **METHOD**

### **Location of Community Service Implementation**

This community service was carried out at SMA Negeri 1 Baturraden, located at Jalan Raya Rempoah Timur No. 786, Dusun I, Rempoah, Baturraden District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java 53151.

### **Participants**

This activity was attended by students who were members of the Youth Scientific Work, consisting of grade XI and grade X, with a total of 30 students.

### **Implementation**

#### **Lecture Method**

This lecture method is useful for providing information to students on scientific writing. The workshop speakers have relevant expertise. These speakers are lecturers in History Education and Indonesian Language Education. They provide material related to good and correct essay writing and historical themes in essays. In this session, the speakers also provide various examples of interesting historical essays.

#### **Hands-on Training**

In addition to the lecture, in this workshop, participants also engage in hands-on practice guided by the speakers, step by step.

#### **Workstep**

##### *Coordination with Partners*

This includes coordinating the time and location. This is to ensure the effective delivery of the material.

##### *Preparation for Training*

This stage includes preparing workshop materials, selecting resource persons, duplicating materials for students, and providing equipment and supplies to support the workshop.

##### *Training for Students*

The training was carried out continuously by the community service team. The process of the training was conducted as follows:

- First Meeting: Students received material from two speakers representing the fields of History and Indonesian Language. In this session, students were assigned to identify a theme and sources that would later become the basis of their writing;
- Second Meeting: Students verified and analyzed the sources they had collected from the field, assisted by the community service team. Out of 30 students, three groups were formed. Each of the three community service team members was assigned to accompany and guide one group.
- Third Meeting: Students began drafting their essays based on the outline previously provided by the

speakers. Before final submission, students were given the opportunity to receive online guidance through applications such as WhatsApp or email. After obtaining approval and making necessary revisions, the students submitted their final essays through Google Form.



**FIGURE 1.** Flow Of Community Service Activities

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Critical thinking skills are essential for the younger generation who will be the nation's future generation in the 21st century. A person's critical thinking skills cannot grow instantly but need to be trained. One way to train students' critical thinking skills is by holding historical writing training. This is in line with the opinion (Wineburg, 1991) "Thinking historically requires the ability to critically evaluate documents, understand historical context, and synthesize competing narratives". Critical thinking skills provide provisions for students in the future (Mahlow et al., 2024). The benefits of critical thinking skills are to make students have a responsible attitude, independent, active and have a guideline in life, in line with the opinion (Bempechat et al., 1990). The aim of critical thinking is to help students become more reasonable - more capable of making well-founded judgments, of thinking for themselves, and of participating responsibly in the life of the community and in a democratic society" (Busi et al., 2023). The historical writing workshop aims to facilitate students in honing critical thinking skills (Lipman, 2003).

The historical writing workshop, held at SMA Negeri 1 Baturraden, consisted of three 150-minute sessions. The workshop featured speakers with expertise in history and Indonesian. The historical speaker presented material on an introduction to historical writing and critical thinking (Agung et al., 2025). The Indonesian speaker provided material on the structure of good essay writing, in accordance with Indonesian language writing standards.



**FIGURE 2.** Flow Of Community Service Activities

### **First Session - Introduction to Historical Writing and Essay Structure in Accordance with Indonesian Language Rules**

The first session began with remarks from the school and an explanation of the activity's objectives by the community service team from Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto. In the main session, participants were introduced to the basic principles of historical writing, the differences between academic and popular historical writing, the importance of critical thinking in filtering historical information, and the structure of essay writing based on Indonesian language rules (Van Drie et al., 2018). The workshop covered the following topics:

- Definition of historical writing and types of historical writing;
- Introduction to historical thinking related to cause and effect; chronology and multiple perspectives;
- Differentiating historical facts and opinions, and gathering sources;
- Essay writing structure;
- How to create a compelling essay title; Practice in determining a theme and creating a title

Participants were very enthusiastic, as evidenced by the numerous questions and participation in the discussion. Participants began to realize that historical writing is not simply copying information, but requires a deep understanding and critical reasoning of sources.

### **Second Meeting – Collection and Analysis of Historical Sources**

In the second meeting, students were guided to analyze the sources they had collected. These historical sources were gathered by the students in the field over the course of one week. The sources included interviews with experts, books, newspapers, photographs, and other forms of documentation. The next step was to verify these sources in accordance with historical writing principles as stated by Kuntowijoyo (2008), who emphasized that after collecting sources, researchers must verify the data. The purpose of this verification is to determine the authenticity of the data.

During this session, students received material on the process of verification and at the same time practiced verifying the data they had previously collected. In the verification practice, students were accompanied by a history expert as the main facilitator, members of the community service team, and teachers supervising scientific writing in the field of history. The 30 students were divided into three groups, with each group guided by an expert from the community service team.



**FIGURE 3.** Presentation of material on verification and analysis of historical sources  
Source: Personal Document

In the second meeting, students demonstrated improved critical thinking skills by questioning the validity of sources and constructing an initial narrative based on the sources they had obtained. For example, students questioned sources from interviews with written sources obtained from books.

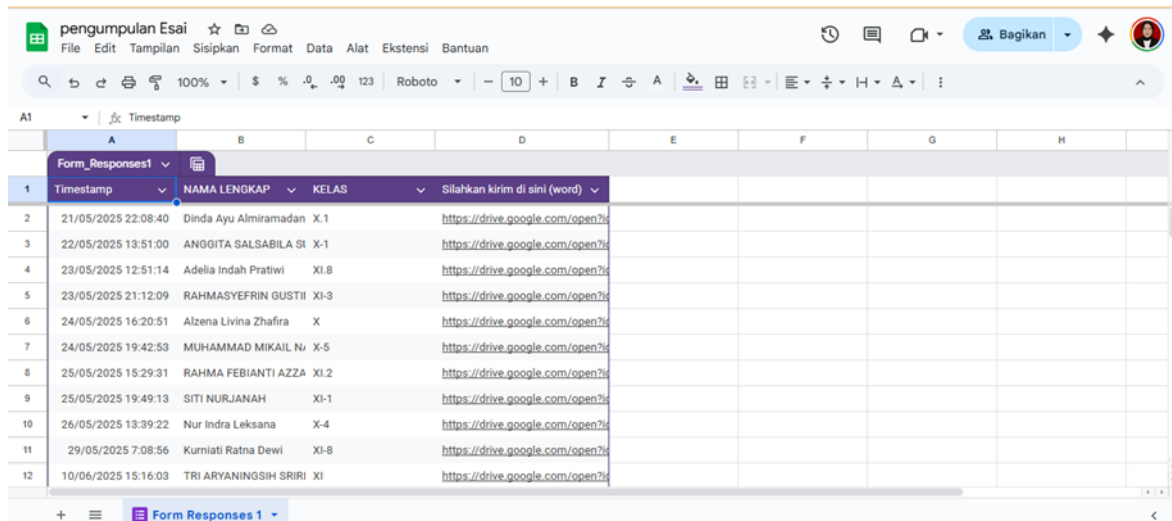


**FIGURE 4.** Question and Answer Session with Students  
Source: Personal Documentation

### **Third Meeting – Writing the Essay**

In the third meeting, students composed essays based on the drafts that had been introduced in the

previous session, under the guidance of the community service team. Due to limited time, students were given the opportunity to consult with their assigned supervisors according to their designated groups. The supervision was conducted online, either through WhatsApp or email. After being revised in accordance with the feedback provided by the community service team, the students submitted their essays via Google Form.



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**FIGURE 5.** Collection of Student Essays  
Source: Personal Documentation

The participants' works demonstrated significant improvement in terms of accuracy in the use of sources, writing structure, and clarity of arguments. Several essays even showed a quality worthy of publication. This finding is consistent with the results of an interview conducted by the team with the extracurricular supervisor, who stated:

"Overall, the writing patterns of our students have changed; they are very different compared to before this training. In fact, out of the 30 essays I have reviewed, 14 show that students are already able to explore interesting ideas from their own living environments. As the supervising teacher, it has also become easier for me to identify students' potential, especially those who could be nominated by the school for the upcoming national essay competition in August." (Suci Rahayu, 52 years old, Supervisor of the Youth Scientific Writing Club)

This serves as evidence that the essay writing training had a tangible impact on the participants' academic abilities, particularly in developing critical, responsible, and independent thinking. As Lipman (2003) stated: "Critical thinking aims to help students become more reasonable — more capable of making well-founded judgments, of thinking for themselves, and of participating responsibly in the life of the community and in democratic society."

Thus, this community service program not only succeeded in enhancing the technical skills of historical writing but also contributed to shaping students' intellectual character to be critical, reflective, and participatory in community and national life. The training may therefore serve as a model for strengthening character education based on history and literacy.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of the History Writing Workshop for students at SMA Negeri 1 Baturraden has

proven to provide a positive impact on the improvement of participants' critical thinking skills and historical literacy. The students' works demonstrated notable progress in the accuracy of source usage, writing structure, and clarity of arguments. Several essays even reached a quality worthy of publication, and according to the supervising teacher, 14 out of the 30 submitted essays already reflected an exploration of ideas relevant to the students' own environments. This indicates that the training not only enhanced technical writing skills but also fostered the academic character of students to become more independent, reflective, and responsible.

Nevertheless, this activity has certain limitations. First, the relatively short duration of implementation (three sessions) was not sufficient to fully develop the students' potential in historical writing. Second, online mentoring through WhatsApp and email faced challenges, both in terms of guidance intensity and accessibility for some students. Third, the evaluation of the program's sustainability was still limited to short-term outcomes, thus requiring further study on its long-term impact on the development of students' critical thinking skills.

Several specific findings are worth noting: (1) students were more enthusiastic when allowed to directly verify field data; (2) the division into small groups accompanied by experts proved effective in fostering critical discussions; and (3) the integration of materials from both history and Indonesian language disciplines became an essential factor in improving the quality of essays.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) extend the duration and intensity of mentoring to provide students with more time to develop their works; (2) utilize more interactive mentoring media, such as a learning management system (LMS); (3) involve more resource persons from various disciplines to enrich perspectives; and (4) replicate the program in other schools as a model for strengthening character education based on history and literacy. Thus, this activity may serve as a concrete contribution to supporting the Merdeka Curriculum and to strengthening history learning that is contextual, critical, and transformative.

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