

**American Veterinary**



**Medical History Society**

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Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions or need advice prior to the contest!



### **Advice and Suggestions for Smithcors Student Essayists**

As past chair of this essay content committee and first place winner several years in a row myself, I want to start by thanking you for your interest in the Smithcors Student Veterinary History Essay Contest! I would like to share my experience and offer you some of what I hope will be helpful advice.

I am so excited to welcome you into the exciting world of veterinary history, so often overlooked by many of our peers. Through this contest you will have the opportunity to research topics of your own choosing, gaining a knowledge that may even surpass some of your professors. Learning the history of our field is an amazing way to gain a deeper understanding of our modern medicine, ethical decisions, business practices, and even ongoing research.

When I was a student, I became enamored with veterinary history through participation in this contest. I found great success as an essayist, achieving 1st prize twice as well as 2nd and 4th. Now, as past chairperson and current judge for the contest, I want to offer to share some insight I have gained through my

experiences in researching and creating my essays. I hope these small bits of wisdom will provide some guidance as you begin the process for yourself, helping you not only to have a better chance at victory but to truly get the most out of this experience regardless of your final ranking.

- Start early! Let's face it, you are busy, and procrastination is an easy choice. However, we all know procrastination only leads to more stress in the end. You may find that setting goals (deadline to pick topic, deadline to gather research, deadline to write introduction, etc.) can help you pace yourself.
- Pay attention to the rules! Can you imagine putting in all the research, writing a beautiful essay, editing repeatedly until it is perfect, only to find out you've been disqualified because you didn't take time to read the rules? Don't be that guy.
- Carefully consider your topic. Take a little time to think of a few topics in which you are actually interested. If you think it is boring, chances are the judges will agree. Do some broad searches online or in the library to determine if there is enough literature available to you. I abandoned one topic after having spent months trying to force it to work. I had purchased books I had hoped would be great sources, but when it came down to it, I was trying to stretch a very small amount of information into a 15-page paper. While it was difficult for me to let it go and pick a new topic, it was the right decision and allowed me to explore a new topic, which led to a winning essay.
- Know your own writing techniques. Everyone works differently. Are you someone who writes in bite-sized pieces? Are you someone who spends time studying then writes the whole paper in a weekend? Whatever your technique may be, utilize it!

- Utilize your friends. While it is important to proof-read your own work, a fresh set of eyes may catch things you don't, and they can help you to improve in areas you may have otherwise chosen to ignore. I usually sent a copy to my father, a friend of mine with no experience in the veterinary field, and one of my classmates. They all provided different points of view and gave honest critiques.
- Be wise with your online searches. I think we have all learned by now that Wikipedia is not a valid source. However, it can be exceptionally useful in finding good, original source material. Down in the "references section" the author typically lists out several books and articles. This is often where I would turn when I was feeling stuck in my research, and it was a life-saver because a new book can reignite your spark after you've burned out from looking at the same material for too long. That being said, be sure to utilize search engines like "PubMed" and the online library through your school.
- Study, study, study! If you make yourself an "expert" on the subject before you begin writing, you may find the essay comes much more easily. You can see the essay take shape before you even begin as you tie points together in your mind.

With all that said, remember that you are the author and this is your masterpiece. Work at it with passion, patience, and perseverance. This experience is going to be so unique, and so unlike the rest of your veterinary education. Appreciate it. Enjoy it. You will make it amazing!