

History EE – Khmer Rouge – RPPF

This is not an official Reflections on Planning and Progress Form (RPPF). It has been created for discussion, as a sample of what students and supervisors might write. You can assess it according to Criterion E: Engagement. It accompanies an example essay from the Philpot Education Support Site.

RPPF	Candidate's comments
First reflection	I knew right away that I wanted to write about the killing fields, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, because this is part of my history as a Cambodian. I talked to my supervisor and history teacher about this need to write about this topic, and he encouraged me to find an angle or focus for my essay. I kept coming back to questions that started with 'why' or 'how': 'Why did the Khmer Rouge kill so many people?' 'How did they come to power?' I found myself describing the historical events that led up to the Killing Fields, and I noticed a thin red line: foreign influences. Pol Pot never would have gained sympathy, if it hadn't been for America's carpet bombing of eastern Cambodia. And my history teacher told me to look at China's involvement as well, which I didn't know much about when I started. So really it wasn't so difficult to arrive at my research question: 'To what extent were foreign influences the main cause in the Khmer Rouge's rise in power?' (176 words)
Interim reflection	I've discovered so much just by reading books, articles and webpages about the rise of the Khmer Rouge. There are so many explanations on how Pol Pot and his friends went from being a weak group of college dropouts to powerful despots. It's tough to figure out which sources to use and which to ignore. I'm not sure how to write an essay without simply restating what other authors have already written so well. I think I'm going to start with the basics and walk the reader through the events that led up to the Killing Fields. My supervisor / History teacher has suggested I keep my focus on foreign influences by organising each section around a particular foreign influence. So now I have to think about the order in which I'm going to present each foreign influence. It's like I have a bunch of puzzle pieces and I have to figure out how to put them together. What's worse, every time I think I have all of the pieces, I discover a new one. I know I should stop reading and start writing, but it's difficult to do this when I'm finding out so much. (196 words)
Final reflection (viva voce)	In the end I had to lock myself up and just write the essay. I almost didn't make the deadline, which is silly because I had so much information so early on. I think I did well on all the criteria, as I marked my own paper. I'm really proud of my bibliography, because it shows how much I read. I have to say that I learned the most from the Pol Pot biography. All in all I have a better understanding of my country's history now that I've written this essay. (92 words)

Supervisor's comments

----- did a good job on her extended essay in my opinion. She was highly motivated to learn more about Pol Pot and the Killing Fields, because she is a Cambodian living abroad and she is curious about her country's past. She was quick out of the gate to find sources. She was especially consumed by Philip Short's biography on Pol Pot, which is clearly visible in the final result. In fact I think she found it difficult to write the essay without summarising his viewpoints. I steered her toward an essay that focused the foreign influences that helped the Khmer Rouge rise to power. In the end, this helped her organise her essay and build an argument.