

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CLASSICS

GUIDELINES FOR HISTORICAL ESSAYS

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HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Gather together all of the information you have about the assignment, including your course outline, assignment handouts (if any), and notes you've made of instructions given in class. You should know how long the essay will be, whether you are writing on a pre-assigned topic or not, and when the essay is due. You should also be familiar with the course text(s) and any readings that the instructor has placed on reserve at the library. If you're in doubt about any of these things...ask!

If you need to select your own essay topic, and don't feel confident about doing so, think about the most appealing options and go to see your instructor. He or she will be happy to help you to choose a topic, but will be less happy if you turn up without anything to discuss. Keep in mind the fact that the instructor needs to apply consistent standards when setting and marking the assignment: requests for special treatment are inappropriate. Senior students choosing to take very junior courses, for example, cannot expect assignments to be redesigned to suit their preferences.

Students with special needs relating to disability should contact Specialized Support and Disability Services at:

2 - 800 Students' Union Building (SUB) or:
<http://www.ualberta.ca/SSDS/>

WHY DO I NEED THIS GUIDE?

In assessing the value of written work by students, members of the Department are interested primarily in the quality of description, analysis and judgment shown in an essay. However, the Department is also concerned that students show an ability to communicate their ideas well. An important element of scholarly written communication involves knowledge of an acceptable style. These guidelines are presented to students to help them avoid common stylistic errors and to become familiar with some of the more important

elements of style emphasized by the Department. The guidelines are not a complete Style Manual. For more advanced and comprehensive advice on style, students should consult the following:

The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th ed. (1993)

U of A Library (Rutherford North Reference Desk): Ref Z 253 M26

on-line: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 5th ed. (1999)

U of A Library (Rutherford North Reference Desk): Ref LB 2369 G53 1999

GENERAL FORMAT

Essays should be typed neatly or written in a legible script. Untidiness or unreadable writing places a heavy drain on the patience of professors. Standard-sized paper should be used. The first page should be a title page including the exact title of the essay, the course and instructor, the date, and the name of the writer. If the essay is typed, it should be double-spaced. If it is written, students should write on every second line. Only one side of the page should be used. A margin of one and one-half (1 1/2) inches is required on the left hand side of each page and a one (1) inch margin on the right. It is essential that students use proper grammar and spelling, and take care to organize their essays logically. All essays should be carefully checked—proofread—before submission.

RESEARCHING HISTORICAL ESSAYS

There are various approaches to the research and writing of a paper. The following comments are made as suggestions. Some people prefer to read the entire relevant part of a book straight through, and then go back to make notes. Others prefer to make notes as they go along. The first method is probably preferable, and no more time consuming than the second in the long run, but either is satisfactory.

There are many ways of making notes and collecting material for an essay. One of the most popular is to take everything down in a notebook, but a more satisfactory method is to use separate sheets, or half-sheets, of paper with one note, quotation, or piece of information in each sheet or half-sheet. This system permits you to rearrange and to organize the material until it is in the best possible order. Be sure to put the name of the author and book on each sheet, or half-sheet, and also the exact page from which the information was taken. This will be necessary when it comes to writing footnotes.

When you have completed reading, and note-taking, it is time to plan your essay. Read through your notes and put them in rough order. Draw up an outline of your essay. At this stage gaps may show up, requiring further research, but better to know this now than later. You may find at this point that you have too many notes for some areas of your essay topic. Do not hesitate to put these excess notes aside.

When your plan is complete, and you are reasonably sure of what you want to say, it is time for the first draft. Write this carefully, being sure to keep track of any material for which footnotes will be necessary. Re-read the draft carefully. Is your material in the best possible order? Should some of your points be expanded? Are there sections that should be deleted? Have you really done what the title of the essay requires? Have you included an introduction

and conclusion? Did you say exactly what you meant to say? Check your spelling and grammar. Refer to a good dictionary and to a handbook of English usage if necessary.

If you have started in plenty of time, you will be able to put this draft aside for a day or two before starting to write a second draft. Such a delay is very helpful in permitting you to read your own writing critically.

Prepare your second draft carefully, paying great attention to the organization and style of your essay. Incorporate your footnotes into this draft. All quotations, any ideas which you have adopted but not quoted, and facts not generally known should be footnoted.

CREATING HISTORICAL ESSAYS

Historical writing demands precision, accuracy, a good literary style, documented evidence and a clearly presented and well-developed argument. For this reason, the writing of a history essay is not a simple process. It involves more than a mere stringing together of a number of related facts. It certainly involves more than an interpretation based on a single source. There is a logical and correct approach to historical writing which, if followed, will help students avoid many of the difficulties they often experience with essays and term reports.

To begin with, in researching a subject, students should make certain that they keep an accurate record of their sources of information. Having completed their research, students should organize their material in such a way that their papers will represent a clear, logical and coherent study of their subject.

Because historical writing consists of a historian's interpretation of the subject material, it is imperative that students have a clear idea of their approach to their subject before they actually begin writing. Essentially, this means that students must first have a thesis or argument, based on their research, which they intend to develop and prove in the course of their presentation. The thesis or argument should be, in effect, a question which the author poses at the beginning of his/her paper and which he/she intends to answer in the essay. The thesis or argument should be clearly stated in the first part of the essay. It may also be useful in this part of the essay for the writer to give his/her general approach to the problem under consideration.

In the body of the essay, the thesis or argument should be developed, supported by documentary evidence (sources of information drawn from primary and/or secondary sources which are properly cited in footnotes). By the end of this section of the essay authors should have proved or disproved the argument or thesis they set out to examine at the beginning of the paper.

In the concluding section of the essay, authors should discuss the implications of what they have written, drawing certain observations from their study. These observations should relate to the thesis or argument which the authors set out to prove. No new material should be introduced into the concluding section of the essay.

The above approach, if followed, should give the essay a logical and coherent approach to the study of a historical problem. If, however, the choice of a topic, organization, or

research does create unusual problems, do not hesitate to make an appointment with your instructor.

QUOTATIONS

The general tendency of students is to quote far too much. Quotations should be used sparingly and only for good reason. It is usually better to condense and summarize material from a source than simply to quote it. When quotation is necessary, quote exactly. If you wish to omit a portion of quotation, indicate such an omission by using an ellipsis (three dots: ...). For short quotations of three or fewer lines, indicate the words borrowed by enclosing them in quotation marks. For quotations longer than three lines, indent the words quoted and single-space the passage, but DO NOT use quotation marks. The source of all quotations must be acknowledged in footnotes.

FOOTNOTES

Acknowledging the source of quotations is one important use of footnotes. It is NOT the only use. Footnotes must also be used always to acknowledge the ideas and opinions of others, and to give authority for information or facts which might be open to some doubt. Footnotes can also be used to call attention to other interpretations, additional sources of information or to make *short* comments which do not fit into the main text. Do not use footnotes for extended commentary.

Footnote numbers should be placed in an elevated position at the end of a paragraph, or at the end of the appropriate sentence within the paragraph. Footnotes should appear at the bottom of the page, separated from the text by a line. In typed papers, footnotes may be placed on a separate page(s) preceding the bibliography. Footnotes should be indented a uniform number of spaces and they should be single-spaced.

ALL SOURCES FOR EXTERNAL QUOTATIONS, IDEAS, OPINIONS AND INFORMATION MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED BY STUDENTS IN FOOTNOTES. PLAGIARIZING—COPYING WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGMENT—FROM OTHER ESSAYS, TEXTS, ENCYCLOPEDIAS, OR ANY OTHER SOURCE, WILL BE DEALT WITH SEVERELY. FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEFINITION AND CONSEQUENCES OF PLAGIARISM SEE THE "CODE OF STUDENT BEHAVIOUR" IN THE UNIVERSITY CALENDAR OR ON THE WEB:

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec30.html>

It is impossible to list all of the various forms of footnotes in a guide of this nature. If further information is required, consult a recognized style manual. The following are examples in the Chicago style:

1. Emery Blackfoot, Chance Encounters (Boston: Serendipity Press, 1987), 101.
2. Anthony B. Tortelli, ed., Sociology Approaching the Twenty-first Century (Los Angeles: Peter and Sons, 1991), 56.
3. John N. Hazard, The Soviet System of Government, 5th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 25.
4. Ernest Kaiser, "The Literature of Harlem," in Harlem: A Community in Transition, ed. J.H. Clarke (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), 205-7.
5. Paulina Jackson to John Pepys Junior, 3 October 1676, The Letters of Samuel Pepys and His Family Circle, ed. Helen Truesdell Heath (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), no. 42.

- ⁶ Noel Robertson, "The Dorian Migration and Corinthian Ritual," Classical Philology 75 (1980), 19-20.

The abbreviation Ibid. may be used when references to the same work follow each other with no reference in between. Always underline Ibid., or use italics, and follow it with a period. For example:

- ¹ M. C. Reed, Investment in Railways in Britain, 1820-1844 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 6.
- ² Ibid., 131.

It is also acceptable to substitute a short form of a work for Ibid. For example:

- ¹ M. C. Reed, Investment in Railways in Britain, 1820-1844 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 6.
- ² Reed, Investment, 131.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unless directed otherwise by the instructor, at the end of your essay you should include a bibliography - a list, in alphabetical order according to author - of the works used in preparing the essay. Once again, consult a style manual for comprehensive information on style for bibliographies. Here is a sample bibliography in the Chicago style:

Blackfoot, Emery. Chance Encounters. Boston: Serendipity Press, 1987.

Hazard, John N. The Soviet System of Government. 5th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Jackson, Paulina. Letter to John Pepys Junior, 3 October 1676. The Letters of Samuel Pepys and His Family Circle, ed. Helen Truesdell Heath, no. 42. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955.

Kaiser, Ernest. "The Literature of Harlem." In Harlem: A Community in Transition, ed. J.H. Clarke. New York: Citadel Press, 1964, 199-213.

Robertson, Noel. "The Dorian Migration and Corinthian Ritual." Classical Philology 75 (1980):1-22.

Tortelli, Anthony B., ed. Sociology Approaching the Twenty-first Century. Los Angeles: Peter and Sons, 1991.

USING INTERNET SOURCES

Like any other source of goods and services, the Internet is subject to the warning "caveat emptor" or "let the buyer beware"! Because anyone can put anything onto the Internet, information found there is not necessarily accurate. Websites with university addresses, for example, can contain everything from online essay-writing guides (like this one) to student essays containing a range of errors. Determine whether or not your instructor allows the

use of Internet information before you use Internet sources to research your essay topic. If you may use them, ensure that you are familiar with the University of Alberta's definitions of plagiarism. Many students mistakenly believe that information from books is protected while information from the Internet can be cut-and-pasted with impunity.

Treat Internet sources as you would printed sources. Use footnotes or endnotes to document all quotations from the Internet, providing the author's name, the title of the work, the full title of the site (if the work is part of a larger site), the date of publication, and the full URL (Uniform Resource Locator) of the document that you are quoting from. It is also useful to indicate the date on which you consulted the source: websites are often short-lived. Use pointed brackets to enclose the URL, making sure to omit any punctuation that is not actually part of the address. It is best to put the whole URL on a single line to avoid confusion. Here are some examples of Internet citation:

An article from an e-journal on the WWW (World Wide Web):

Graeme Davison, "On History and Hypertext," in Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History:
<<http://www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/new.htm>>
19 August 1997.

A document from a WWW site:

German Foreign Office Memorandum, Hewel Berchtesgarden to State Secretary von Weizsacker, 29 June 1939:
<<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/Avalon/nazsov/062939.htm>>
The Avalon Project, Yale University Law School, 1997.

A discussion list message:

David Smiley ds210@columbia.edu, "Re: WWW sites for studying suburbia,"
in H-URBAN h-urban@h-net.msu.edu, 28 July 1997, archived at:
<<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/infoserv/urban/hma/hurban/index.html>>

Internet sources must be included in the essay's bibliography as well. Refer to the section of this guide on footnotes/endnotes and bibliography for information about different styles of citation. Some styles require the author's surname to be presented first in bibliographies, but not in notes.

ADDITIONAL HELP

The University of Alberta Libraries provide excellent online guides to researching and writing essays:
<http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/index.cfm>

The Oxford English Dictionary team has created a site called "Ask Oxford" which contains user-friendly help on everything from spelling to grammar:
<http://www.askoxford.com>

Finally, if in doubt...ask! Your instructor is your first and best resource.