

So, You Have To Write A History Paper!

guidelines for doing a great job

While there are many components to researching and writing a history paper, this introduction provides some of the basic tools you will need to write short book reports, longer term papers based on secondary sources, and major research papers based on primary sources. At the end of this guide, you will find a list of online resources and publications that offer additional information and citation guides for you to consult.

Crafting Your Paper

Title Page

The first page usually should contain only the paper title, your name, the course number, the professor's name, and the date. Some professors, however, do not require a title page, so pay attention to their instructions.

The title should be informative enough to provide the reader with insight into the topic, purpose, and direction of the paper.

Poor title: "Richard Nixon in China"

Better: "Nixon Meets Mao: Historical Repercussions of the Shanghai Communique"

Introductory Paragraph

The opening paragraph (or two) should provide a brief outline of the paper, a short historical description of the topic (historical context), and a clear thesis – a statement of purpose, including the points on which you will focus and the conclusion you will draw.

After scanning this information, the reader should know (1) the topic of the paper; (2) your perspective on the topic; and (3) the general organization of the paper.

Supporting Paragraphs

Each paragraph subsequent to the introduction must contain a topic sentence, addressing one of the major points related to your subject, or the development of your explanation or argument. The body of each paragraph introduces evidence (properly cited!) that supports the point you have made.

Transition Statements

Paragraphs should end or begin with statements that provide a clear indication of the material that follows. Phrases like "the following year," "the second point," or "contrary to this opinion," help guide the reader from one point of the narrative or argument to the next.

Poor transitions undermine the organization of the paper and break the line of reasoning – opening the door for the reader to doubt the argument and, ultimately, to question your conclusion.

Conclusion

The conclusion should contain a brief summary of your thesis and a recap of the main points you established throughout the paper. This is your opportunity to impress the reader by reinforcing the significance of your own perspective, insights, or opinions. End with a strong statement related directly to the evidence and the arguments presented in the paper.

Specific Writing Hints

Research and Design

A paper is only as good as the research behind it. Be thorough in your reading!

A good paper must have a strong, clear and direct thesis. Poor organization can usually be traced back to a weak or unclear thesis.

A good paper must be **crafted**. Writing is *hard*, *slow* work. Edit, re-edit, and then edit again!

Writing Mechanics

The first time you mention anyone by name in your paper, you must provide their full name and a short identification of that person (e.g., United States president, George W. Bush...; historian Steven Avery...; Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai...).

Similarly, you must provide a short introduction to quotations (e.g., As Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1849, “the time is now...” or: The mayor responded with “a fit of rage...”).

Do not quote factual information. It is almost always sufficient to paraphrase (put the information in your own words) and cite the source.

Limit quotations to phrases or passages that are insightful, inspiring or clearly illuminating.

Direct quotes should be framed by double quotations marks (e.g., a “mark” not ‘mark’).

Commas and periods are always placed *inside* quotation marks. Place colons and semi-colons *outside* quotation marks.

Quotations over three (3) typed lines in length should be blocked (single-spaced, both right and left margins indented). Remember, you do not use quotation marks when using blocked quotations.

Do not use contractions in academic papers (e.g., can’t = cannot; shouldn’t = should not).

Never end a sentence with a preposition (with, to, for, by, etc.).

Spell numbers 1-10 (one, two, three...); use numerals for higher numbers (11, 12, 13...).

Place time references (month, year, etc.) at the beginning, not end, of the sentence. (e.g., “By the end of 1863, . . .”).

Underline or italicize the title of all newspapers, magazines, and journals (e.g., *Newsweek* or the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel). Use quotation marks to identify essay, chapter, article, and film titles (e.g., The film “Rising Sun” describes...).

Do not refer to the United States (or any other nation) as “he” or “she.” Similarly, don’t use “we” when referring to Americans (or other nationalities).

”America” is not a nation. Use “United States.”

Writing Style

Academic prose is not the same as colloquial speech! Avoid slang or emotionally charged terms such as fed up, stupid, dissed, humongous, pissed off, guy, chick, etc.

Writing should be direct, concise, and specific! Name people; provide dates; explain events; and define terms.

Avoid using *vague* terms such as thing, many, soon, a lot of, it is safe to say, more or less, for the time being, it was said by some, by and large, eventually. Rather, use *specific* terms: one hundred students, after two years, nearly 25 people, until 1925, President Kennedy stated

If one sentence ends with the same word, name, phrase, or date that begins the next sentence, then combine the two!

Avoid strings of short declarative sentences. Combine to form longer, more complex, and more interesting sentences.

Avoid starting a sentence with “It was” or “It is” (e.g., “It was the turn of the century and the settlers were...”). Rather, use: “At the turn of the century, the settlers...”.

Avoid multiple usage of the same word. Use your thesaurus to find a synonym. While writing, check out <www.thesaurus.com>.

Citing References: Chicago Style

Specific information, statistics, and ideas that you include in your paper from other sources (e.g., books, journals, magazines, encyclopedias, web sites, films, interviews) **must** be acknowledged to avoid charges of plagiarism. (See back cover of this pamphlet.) Historians use the *Chicago Style* of citing references, which is different from *MLA Style* that you may have been taught in some of your other classes.

The following examples illustrate the proper citation format for the most common references. Note that the format for sources changes slightly between footnotes/endnotes (fn) and bibliography (b). Also, please note that when you are citing more than one work by an author in the bibliography, the first citation is a “full” citation (as shown below). Succeeding citations of works by the same author begin with -----. This way, the author’s name is not repeated in consecutive citations. In consecutive footnotes that cite the same reference, the first footnote citing the reference is a “full” citation; the term “Ibid” is used in succeeding consecutive citations (Ibid., p. 5; Ibid., 22-24).

For additional examples, please see the *Chicago Manual of Style Online* at: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

Books

Single Author

- (fn) 1. Thomas Key, *The Enemy Within* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), 42.
(b) Key, Thomas. *The Enemy Within*. New York: SUNY Press, 2000.

Multiple Authors

- (fn) 2. Thomas Key et al., *East Meets West*, (Boston: McCalb and Co., 1931), 161.
(b) Key, Thomas, et al. *East Meets West*. Boston: McCalb and Co., 1931.

Editor, Translator or Compiler

- (fn) 3. Thomas Key, trans., *The Analects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 14-16.
(b) Key, Thomas, trans. *The Analects*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Chapter or Essay in a Book

- (fn) 4. James Tomey, “Foes,” in *American Foreign Policy*, ed. Ken Keys (New York: Routledge, 1997), 9.
(b) Tomey, James. “Foes.” In *American Foreign Policy*, edited by Ken Keys, 8-24. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Electronically Published Books

- (fn) 5. Thomas Key, *The Enemy Within* (New York, SUNY Press, 2000), <http://general.pub/academicpress/key> (accessed March 24, 2008).
(b) Thomas Key. *The Enemy Within*. New York, SUNY Press, 2000. <http://general.pub/academicpress/key>. Also available in print form.

Journal Articles

- (fn) 6. Patricia A. Simons, “Qing Commerce,” *Late Imperial China* 14, no. 1 (Summer 1985): 34-40.
(b) Simons, Patricia A. “Qing Commerce.” *Late Imperial China* 14, no. 1 (Summer 1985): 34-40.

Magazine or Newspaper Articles

- (fn) 7. Mary Louise Dewey, “Diversity in America,” *Newsweek*, March 15, 2008, 4.
(b) Dewey, Mary Louise. “Diversity in America.” *Newsweek*, March 15, 2008.

Documents/Primary Sources

- (fn) 8. “Seward to Hay,” May 17, 1862, *Despatches from the United States Consuls in Shanghai*.
(b) United States. Department of State. *Despatches from United States Consuls in Shanghai, China*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870-1915.

Web Sites

- (fn) 9. Marquette University, “Footnotes and Endnotes: Chicago Manual,” <http://www.marquette.edu/wac/citations/FootnotesandEndnotesChicagoManual.shtml>
(b) Marquette University. “Footnotes and Endnotes: Chicago Manual.” <http://www.marquette.edu/wac/citations/FootnotesandEndnotesChicagoManual.shtml>

Additional Help Online

Raynor History Research Page

<http://www.marquette.edu/library/subjects/history.html>

Online! A Reference Guide to Using and Citing Internet Sources

<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/index.html>

Historian's Toolbox

<http://www.marquette.edu/library/subjects/histoolbox/>

Fr. Prucha's Guide:

Research Papers in History

<http://www.marquette.edu/library/subjects/Prucha.pdf>

Note on Plagiarism

Written work required for any history course at Marquette must conform to university policies on academic honesty. The following statement on plagiarism and other policies and procedures related to academic honesty can be found at <http://www.marquette.edu/rc/academichonesty.shtml>

Plagiarism is intellectual theft. It is using the intellectual creations of another without proper attribution. Plagiarism may take two main forms, which are clearly related: 1) To steal or pass off as one's own the ideas or words, images, or other creative works of another and 2) To use a creative production without crediting the source, even if only minimal information is available to identify it for citation.

Credit must be given for every direct quotation, for paraphrasing or summarizing a work (in whole, or in part, in one's own words), and for information that is not common knowledge.

The following two websites deal specifically with plagiarism. The first link is to the Bedford/St. Martin's tutorial on avoiding plagiarism. It is an excellent online resource available to students:

<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/plagiarismtutorial/default.asp>.

The second link is to the American Historical Association's guide to understanding and avoiding plagiarism. The AHA plagiarism guide includes definition, prevention, detection, exercises, and additional websites that offer information about plagiarism:

http://historians.org/governance/pd/Curriculum/plagiarism_intro.htm