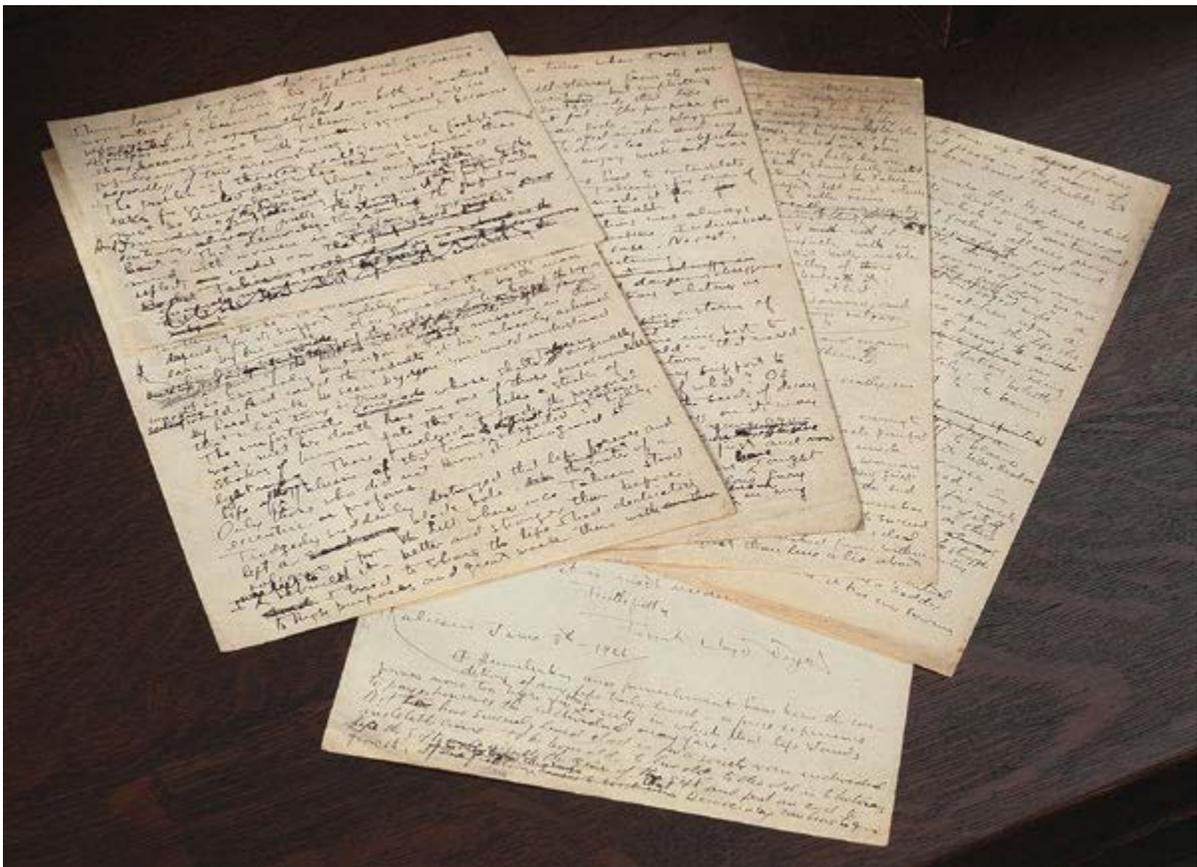


RADFORD UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

WRITING GUIDE FOR HISTORY



I. Introduction to the Guide

- A. The history program writing curriculum
- B. Expectations for upper-division courses

II. Notetaking

- A. Taking lecture notes

III. Writing History Well

- A. General comments
- B. Thesis
- C. Essay structure
- D. Sentences
- E. Paragraphs
- F. Introductions
- G. Quoting and Paraphrasing

IV. Types of Assignments

- A. Overview different types of assignments
- B. Book or article analyses
- C. Primary source analyses
- D. Historiographical essays
- E. Research papers

V. Supporting Materials

- A. Grade Rubric
- B. Department of History Style Sheet
- C. Sample footnoting
- D. Sample Bibliography

Taking Lecture Notes

There are several relatively easy things you can do that will put you on the road to being successful in a History class:

- 1) Attend class
- 2) Pay attention
- 3) **Take good notes**

Taking notes in class is important because it helps you to stay alert and focused on the class and because you will walk away from the class with a fairly detailed record of what was said. Memory is imperfect and will not last long, but you will have the notes for review throughout the term. Finally, taking good notes will help you differentiate the more and less important and discern the instructor's main point.

Accurate notes will be helpful when you need to review material for an exam or assignment. In addition to helping you merely remember the contents of a lecture, your note taking strategy can help you grapple with the material and more fully understand a historical topic, event, or question. Thus, you should consider note taking as an **interactive** process rather than just a secretarial skill. It is more than simply an aid to memory. Note taking and review is part of the process of analyzing the material.

Do not lean on other people for good class notes; take notes yourself. By writing things down, you take the first step toward putting the information and ideas in your own words and making them part of your own intellect. It is hard at first, mostly because you are trying to write down the last point while simultaneously listening to the next point. But keep practicing, and you will find that it gets easier.

Current research supports these ideas and also shows that final results on exams and papers can be improved if certain methods for taking notes are employed.

- **Take notes by hand in a notebook.** Significant research has demonstrated that typing notes on a computer is less effective than writing notes by hand in a notebook. So, put your computer (and phone) away, and get out your notebook.
- **Organization is key.** Your notes should be written legibly and begin with the date and subject of the lecture. It is often best to write on every other line or to leave a large margin on at least one side of the page. This will allow you to add material later and to underline your notes and write additional comments without cluttering the page.
- **An outline is not a proper set of notes.** If the professor hands out an outline or makes one available electronically, make sure to use it. The outline is usually just a barebones list of topics to be covered in class. You can use the outline's points as the major headings in your notes, but you will need to fill in a lot of information that is not on the outline. Fill in examples taken from the lecture, class

discussion, and/or the assigned reading that illustrate the main points on that outline. Add relevant dates and names. Define terms used on the outline.

- **Do not try to write down every word the instructor says.** The more time you devote to writing, the less attention you can give to understanding the main points and identifying the outline and argument of the lecture. You do not want every word of a lecture, but you do want every idea. You will need to process the subject matter in order to condense the lecture without losing the significant meaning. Taking notes is an exercise in abridgement and paraphrasing.
- **Develop your own shorthand.** Never use a sentence when you can use a phrase or a phrase when you can use a word. Use abbreviations and symbols whenever possible. Why write out "popular sovereignty" when you could write "pop sov"? John C. Calhoun can become JCC, Abraham Lincoln AL, etc. Every note taker also develops short forms of words such as cd for could, wd for would, w/ for with, n for not, k for can, gd for good, etc. Start by using one or two such forms, and then gradually add more.
- **Complete reading assignments before class.** This allows you to develop an overview of the main ideas, secondary points, and definitions for important concepts. If everything the instructor says is new to you, you will spend so much time writing that you may not be able to grasp the theme of the lecture. If you have obtained some basic information from the reading, however, you will be able to concentrate on noting points in the lecture that are new or different.
- **Watch for clues from the instructor.** If the instructor writes something on the board or overhead, it is likely important. If the instructor repeats a point during the lecture, make sure to note it. Dramatic voice changes and long, intentional pauses usually indicate emphasis as well.
- **Pay attention to class discussions.** Many students let their minds drift off or start fiddling with their phones when a student asks a question and the professor stops lecturing. Do not. Oftentimes, class discussion covers material that the professor would otherwise lecture on and so is pertinent.
- **Review your notes as soon as possible after the lecture.** This dramatically improves retention. Fill in missing verbs and punctuation so that, a month from now, the sentences make sense. Write a summary at the end of the day's notes, recapping the main themes and the most interesting points made. These mini-essays will be valuable when you study for the exam. Who knows? The professor may ask for a short essay on one of these very topics.
- **Merge notes from the lecture and readings.** Keep notes from the lecture with notes from the readings on the same topic. Look for gaps in your understanding in each, and identify where they complement or contradict each other. Ask your instructor if you still do not understand a point.
- **Review notes repeatedly, not only just before exams.**

The History Program Writing Curriculum

All History courses require writing. Different types of writing assignments are appropriate at different course levels. The types of writing assignments vary from course to course. The volume and intensity of writing expected in a course increases as students progress to higher course levels. The following outline describes the writing expectations at each course level of the History program.

100-level HIST courses

- 100-level HIST courses are content driven. Students primarily seek knowledge and comprehension with some expectation for analysis and synthesis. To support learning content, students write. Examples of writing assignments include the following.
 - Essay examinations
 - Response essays
 - Formal, short papers
 - Thesis and argument outlines
 - Assessed note taking

HIST 295: The Historian's Craft

- HIST 295 focuses on skills. Requisite skills include library literacy, database searching, source analysis, argumentation, and composition. To support learning skills, students write. Examples of writing assignments include the following.
 - Book and/or article analyses
 - Primary source analyses
 - Research papers (8-10 pages)

300-level HIST courses

- 300-level HIST courses are content driven. Students seek knowledge and comprehension. Students also analyze content, which may include practicing library skills and database searching. To support learning and analyzing, students write. Examples of writing assignments include the following.
 - Primary source analyses
 - Secondary source analysis
 - Research papers

HIST 495: Senior Seminar

- HIST 495 focuses on the completion of a significant original research paper or a developed historiographical essay. Students demonstrate analytical ability and command of skills. Writing assignments include the following.
 - A senior capstone writing project of 20-25 pages
 - Additional short writing assignments may also be expected

Expectations for Upper-Division History Courses

Welcome to your program of courses in upper-division history. These classes offer an in-depth exploration of a variety of topics. They are based on the expert knowledge of your professors and are an opportunity to engage in subject matter to a degree that you have not before experienced. These classes can be incredibly enriching and rewarding—and challenging. Much of how you perform at this level is up to you. After all, by now you should realize that you will spend much more time outside the classroom working on course material than you spend in class. More than ever your success is up to you, and the ability to succeed depends on your drive, your initiative, and your hard work.

All upper-division history courses require a significant amount of reading and writing. These are the essential tools of the historian. History is a written discipline. In order to learn it, we read. In order to express what we know about it, we write. If you do not like to read and/or write, then history is probably not the right major for you. Upper division history courses will typically have three to five books to read depending on their length and level of difficulty. Likewise, most upper division courses will have a similar writing load— a total of 15 to 25 pages of writing. The assignments will vary from professor to professor and from course to course. Some courses may have a single large research paper. Other courses may have weekly writing assignments and one or more critical reading papers. Still others may have primary source analysis papers and critical reading papers. Most, if not all, will have essay examinations.

Reading and writing are skills that need to be learned, practiced, and mastered. Writing allows us to express our ideas clearly and to persuade our readers that our interpretation of the past is convincing. HIST 295, the Historian's Craft, will particularly assist you in these skills; in 300-level courses you will practice these skills; and you will show mastery of these skills in HIST 495. The following department Writing Guide provides helpful information and assistance, but the extent to which you succeed in mastering the craft of the historian will depend on the effort that you put into it. When you graduate you can easily convince employers that you can read, write, and think, which is often what companies want.

Some General Statements about Writing History

The purpose of history papers is for you to interpret sources and arrive at a conclusion about the significance of your subject. It is not merely a description of “what happened”; rather, history papers must take the form of an argument in support of a thesis explaining how and why something happened and why it is important. A good history paper argues persuasively something important about the past.

Understand the assignment

- Make sure you read the assignment carefully and understand what you are being asked to do. Failure to follow the assignment guidelines is one of the most common problems with history papers. If the assignment asks you to compare two views on a particular document, you must understand both the similarities and the differences of the two views and give approximately equal weight to each of them in your discussion. If the assignment asks you questions about a specific text, you must explore the issues raised by the questions and present your analysis based on a close, critical reading.

Provide a thesis statement

- You must provide a thesis statement at the beginning of your paper that reflects what you have concluded about your topic after a critical analysis of your sources. The thesis statement does not just state the topic, it answers an arguable question. It should be the answer to the question, not the question.

Support your thesis statement

- The body of your paper must support your thesis, paragraph by paragraph, by presenting evidence from your sources. You should also respond to contradictory evidence (information that seems to counter or weaken your thesis) to persuade your reader that your position is the more compelling argument. A good historical argument is objective, accessible, accurate, scientific, professional, interesting, and useful.

Substantiate your arguments

- Throughout your paper, you should be able to include an example, quotation, or other direct and specific reference to prove every assertion you make. Your conclusions should be based on your own evaluation of your evidence.

Clearly explain yourself

- Never assume that the reader knows what you mean without being told. Be sure, therefore, that your sentences and paragraphs say exactly what you mean them to say. Never discuss your ideas in a superficial manner. Do not assume that your reader knows the context of your subject matter. Always support everything you say with logical argument and evidence.

Document your paper

- Even short essays require that you properly cite and document the sources of your information. For more information on documenting sources, refer to the department Style Sheet.

Follow Conventions of Grammar

- Effective writing requires that one observe the common conventions of proper grammar (not the grammar of the text message or the tweet). Sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, word choice, and syntax matter. How you write is as important as what you are writing. Your message (argument, evidence, etc.) will be lost if your writing is not clear.
- Think of it this way: if professors are caught up in correcting your spelling and grammar, then they will be unable to concentrate on your thesis and evidence. Poor composition can even leave your ideas utterly unintelligible.

Manage time effectively

- History is a time intensive discipline. Good research, good thought, and good writing takes time. Budget enough time for each assignment so that you are able to complete any required reading or research to allow a well written and carefully proofread paper.

Revise and rewrite

- No history paper—whether a book analysis, a short essay, or a research paper—is “finished” after the first draft. Leave your analysis aside for a day and then get back to it and read it with a fresh eye. Aim for clarity and conciseness as you make your first revisions.

Proofread carefully

- Be in a place where you can read your draft without distraction, and read it slowly paragraph by paragraph. Be willing to delete sentences and paragraphs and recast them. Proofreading is also hard work. It is helpful to read the paper aloud slowly. If possible, print out each draft, and proofread and mark up the paper copy with revisions.

THESIS

Every paper must have a thesis. In many respects, the thesis statement is the most important part of the paper. The thesis statement is what you will prove in the paper.

A thesis statement:

- Directly reflects the conclusion you have reached about your topic.
 - Is what you will attempt to prove in your paper. The thesis generally explains why or how something happened.
 - Is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or some aspect of it.
 - Makes a claim that others might dispute. A thesis needs to make an argument not provide a mere summary.
 - Is usually a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader.
 - Is the result of reading source materials, thinking about them, and coming to some conclusion about what they mean. The reading and the thinking comes first, before the thesis statement is formed.
-
- A thesis IS—
 - An answer to the question posed
 - Specific
 - Debatable
 - Based on analysis of source material
 - The focal point of your essay
 - A thesis is NOT—
 - A topic
 - A question
 - A statement of fact
 - A mere expression of your personal opinion

Basic Essay Structure

A powerful argument has a strong and clear thesis as well as compelling evidence, but poor organization will sap the strength of any argument. Solid paragraphs are the building blocks of excellent essays, but if these building blocks are pieced together poorly, then essays collapse.

A sensible essay begins with a useful and interesting introduction and ends with a useful and interesting conclusion. Between the introduction and conclusion, the body of the essay presents the evidence that proves true the thesis. The body of the essay should be subdivided into as many well-integrated paragraphs as are necessary to present the evidence.

In other words, the concept of the “five-paragraph essay” is excellent so long as it is understood that a “five-paragraph essay” does not have to be limited to five paragraphs. Paragraphs must be sequenced so that evidence is presented logically. Writing an outline before writing an essay is crucial. This outline will lead to a well-organized essay:

I. Introduction

- A. Grab Readers’ Attention
- B. State Thesis
- C. Give Overview of Argument
- D. Review Historiography

II. Body of Essay

- A. Major Point One
 - 1. Topic Sentence
 - 2. Evidence
 - 3. Summation (if long)
- B. Major Point Two
 - 1. Topic Sentence
 - 2. Evidence
 - 3. Summation (if long)
- Etc.

III. Conclusion

- A. Restate Thesis
- B. Review Key Evidence to Reinforce the Thesis
- C. Drive Home the Significance of Paper

Sentences

1. Make strong statements. Avoid indecisive language and make sure every sentence matters.
2. Clarity is key, and so simpler sentences are often better sentences.
3. Revise sentences that are excessively long.
4. Be concise; do not be wordy. Eliminate unnecessary words.
 - Wordy: This map illustrates the electoral vote of the 2000 national election for President of the United States.
 - More concise: This map illustrates the electoral vote of the 2000 presidential election.
5. Avoid needless repetition of words. Do not overuse any expression or sentence construction.
 - “However,” “very,” “quite,” and “like” are commonly overused words.
6. Avoid using slang.
7. Avoid writing questions.
8. Avoid the First Person Singular:
 - Generally speaking, history is not written in the first person singular. In most cases, the use of the first person tends to weaken statements.
 - Weaker Statement:
 - “In my opinion, Frederick Jackson Turner ignored the role of Native Americans in the emergence of democratic institutions.”
 - Stronger Statement:
 - “Frederick Jackson Turner ignored the role of Native Americans in the emergence of democratic institutions.”
9. Use strong verbs. Use the active rather than the passive voice
 - Passive: The cake was eaten by Bill.
 - Active: Bill ate the cake.
10. Keep the tense consistent. Remember that the simple past tense is the historian’s friend.
 - Incorrect: The defendants **appealed** the decision, but the Court of Appeals **affirms**.
 - Correct: The defendants **appealed** the decision, but the Court of Appeals **affirmed**.
11. Make sure subject and verbs agree in number.
 - Incorrect: Many professors believe that specific instructions to prepare students for the many responsibilities of citizenship **is** needed now more than ever before.
 - Correct: Many professors believe that specific instructions to prepare students for the responsibilities of citizenship **are** needed now more than ever before.
12. Make sure pronouns agree in number and gender with the nouns to which they refer.
 - Incorrect: **A child** needs to be educated beginning at birth; teaching should not be delayed until **they** enter school.
 - Correct: **Children** need to be educated at birth; teaching should not be delayed until **they** enter school.
13. Make pronoun reference clear: because pronouns are substitutes for nouns, readers must know which nouns the pronouns are replacing.
 - Incorrect: History is a growing career opportunity. Because of this, I would like to learn more about it.

- Correct: Because history offers many career opportunities, I would like to learn more about it.

14. Use parallel construction.

- Incorrect: **Many people** lease cars because the payments are much lower. The only drawback is that at the end of the leasing term **you** do not own the car.
- Correct: **Many people** lease cars because the payments are much lower. The only drawback is that at the end of the leasing term **they** do not own the car.

15. 'This' and 'that' should be used as adjectives not nouns.

Paragraphs

- A single topic should compose a single paragraph. Make sure that each sentence in the paragraph relates to one another, each being on the same topic.
- Think of paragraphs as small papers: each should have an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- The first sentence of each paragraph is the topic sentence and should tell the reader what the paragraph will be about. The topic sentence is the argument you will support in the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph will support the topic sentence.
- Although paragraphs can technically be of any length, it is best not to have too many paragraphs that are either too short (less than three sentences) or too long (a page or longer).
- The writing style of each paragraph should flow together. Be especially careful of this when you use a quote within the paragraph.
- The sentences within a paragraph should flow in an organized order. They should follow logically from the first sentence of the paragraph to the last. Think of your paragraph as a chain, with each sentence linked to the previous with no kinks or breaks.
- Good paragraphs connect to each other. Often, but not always, the last sentence of a paragraph begins to guide the reader to the next idea.

Writing Effective Introductions

First impressions matter, so a good introduction is crucial. A dull introduction is bad; a poorly constructed introduction is poison. A good introduction is useful: it tells the reader what you are going to prove true about the past. A good introduction is interesting: it makes the reader want to read your essay. A good introduction includes:

- ***A Hook:*** To be interesting, your introduction can provide a hook that will grab your reader's attention at the outset and make your reader want to see what else you have written. You could start with an apt quote, a moving quotation from a relevant primary source that makes your topic seem real and your argument seem important. You could start with a vignette, a colorful story relevant to your topic and illustrative of the themes your essay will develop. You could start by simply stating your thesis, letting your powerful expression of truth demand your reader's attention.
- ***An Overview of Your Argument:*** An overview of your argument is a brief recitation of the major points you will make in your essay that will prove true your thesis. Think of the overview as a list of turn-by-turn directions guiding the reader through your argument. A good overview makes your essay more user friendly, accentuating your thesis and clarifying your organization.
- ***An Historiographical Review:*** A review of the relevant historiography is a brief summary of important work that had been done on your topic by other historians. (For certain assignments, such as primary source analyses, the review of historiography may be unnecessary.) A review of relevant historiography makes your essay more meaningful, emphasizing your thesis and positioning it relative to other research.

All in all, write with clarity and, if possible, with flare. The rules and tips on quality writing presented throughout this Writing Guide are nowhere more important than in your introduction. If your introduction is useful and if your introduction is interesting, then you have taken a big step forward toward writing a good essay.

Quoting and Paraphrasing Basics

I. Definitions

1. To 'paraphrase' is to use your words entirely.
2. To 'quote' is to use a source's words.
3. An "off-set" quotation is dropped into the grammar of your sentence as if an independent sentence.
 - Dr. Smith said, "He likes cake."
4. A "run-in" quotation is woven into the grammar of your sentence.
 - According to Dr. Smith, he "likes cake."

II. Punctuation

1. Quotation marks always enclose a source's words (except see point II.8).
2. Citation numbers go at the end of sentences outside of terminal punctuation.
3. If a sentence ends with a quotation, the quotation marks go after the terminal punctuation but before the citation number.
4. For an "off-set" quote, capitalize the first letter of the first quoted word.
5. For a "run-in" quote, do not capitalize the first letter of the first quoted word (unless, of course, that word is a proper noun).
6. If you add or change a word in the middle of quotation, indicate the change by enclosing the word in square brackets.
7. Use ellipsis dots when deleting words from the middle of a quote. Place three dots, each separated by a space, in place of deleted words. Retain the terminal punctuation. Never place ellipsis dots at the beginning or end of a quote.
8. Quotes of five lines or longer must be presented in block style. A block-style quote is single spaced, is not enclosed in quotation marks, and is indented one tab.

III. Tips

1. All information quoted or paraphrased from sources must be cited.
2. Paraphrasing must not change the meaning of what a source says.
3. Use direct quotations sparingly. One or two quotations should suffice to emphasize a particular point or argument you are making.
4. Quote only what is necessary to support a point. Long quotes are usually unnecessary.
5. Short quotes, woven into the grammar of your sentences, are often most effective.
6. When quoting, proper grammar must be maintained.

Overview of the Typical Types of Writing Assignments

Most upper-division courses include several kinds of writing assignments:

Analytical Response papers—these assignments ask you to reflect on a given reading, source, film, or theme of the course and discuss/evaluate some aspect of it. Do not assume that response papers can be taken lightly. Such assignments are rarely intended to be free-flowing, last minute scrawls on the back of a napkin. Be prepared to address a question and support, in depth, why you think that way about it. These exercises are analytical in nature and should be treated as such.

Book or Article Reviews—these assignments will vary depending on the requirements of the course. All book or article/essay analyses in history should explain the basic argument of the reading material and assess the argument's strengths and weaknesses. Was the argument convincing? If so, then explain why, and if not, explain why not. Your assessment can include an evaluation of the author's use of evidence, methodology, organization, and style. Some instructors will also expect you to place the book within its historiographical context, examining the relationship between this work and others in the field.

Primary source analysis papers—these assignments ask students to examine, read, interpret, and analyze primary source material. Reading a source critically is one of the historian's most fundamental skills. The purpose of these kinds of assignments is to analyze a primary source as deeply and as thoroughly as possible. Think concretely and critically about its content, its historical context, the historical cultural values that shaped it, and its relevance to your research.

Historiographical essays—these essays focus on how scholars have interpreted certain events, not on the events themselves. Basically, these assignments are "histories of history" and require that students be able to explain the different schools of thought on a subject. Even when consulting the same information, historians do not necessarily reach the same conclusions. They are influenced by their personal backgrounds, by the times in which they live, and by their approaches to history, i.e. economic, intellectual, military, political, feminist, environmental, etc.

Research papers—these papers require students to prove an original thesis using evidence from multiple sources. The purpose of a research paper is to allow students to practice the craft of historical writing at a more sophisticated level than is possible in other history assignments. Like shorter history papers, a research paper takes the form of an argument supported by evidence.

Writing a Book or Article Analysis

A book review is an essay in which the writer adopts a critical perspective toward the subject matter of a specific book. This does not mean only fault finding. Rather, to be “critical” implies an objective judging so as to determine both the merits and the limitations of a book. In other words, you must take the book apart, interpret the subject matter, and evaluate the author’s argument. The direct way to accomplish this is to (1) explain the central argument of the author and (2) explain your thoughts about that argument.

- *Read the whole book, not just the introduction and conclusion:*
 - As you read, try to think about points you might include in your analysis. When you come to something you think worthwhile discussing, stop and write it out before continuing your reading. This way, when you are finished with the book, you will have a number of partially developed discussions. The job of incorporating them into a well-organized paper will be far easier than if you wait until you have finished the entire book before beginning to write.
- *Tell the reader what book or article you are analyzing:*
 - Place the complete publication data at the top of your paper: author, title, edition (if applicable), place of publication, publisher, date of publication. If the analysis is of an article make sure to include the journal title, volume, issue, and pages of the article.
 - The first paragraph of your paper should include a brief summary of the book or article.
- *Determine the thesis of the book or article:*
 - A significant portion of your book or article analysis should be devoted to explaining the thesis statement of the author by elaborating on the author’s arguments and his or her evidence. This means that you must state what you believe the author’s thesis to be, as well as how you intend to relate to that thesis.
 - What is the major thesis or argument the book or article makes?
 - What is the author trying to prove?
 - Are there any more “narrow” sub-arguments that support the overall thesis?
- *Determine the book or article’s evidence:*
 - What evidence does the author use?
 - On what sources and secondary literature is the work based? How are they used?
- *Analyze the book or article critically:*
 - A chapter by chapter summary is not a book review. Such writing is not analytical; it is merely a retelling of the book.
 - Your own thoughts about the author’s thesis will be a significant part of the essay. Your thoughts (a) might concern the relationship between the author’s thesis and ideas and the theories or arguments presented through the textbook and/or the class lectures. Your thoughts (b) might concern the quality of the book.
 - What are its strengths and weaknesses?
 - What was good about the book\article?
 - Are the author’s arguments logical?
 - Is the evidence convincing?

- Is there other evidence or are there other arguments which suggest that the author's thesis is weak or incorrect?
- Be fair to the book/article and its author, but be honest to yourself as well. If you feel the writing is biased, say so and why. The reader of the review wants to know whether the book or article is worth reading. Never criticize a book without being able to reference specific passages from the book that support your criticism.
- *Think about history and bias:*
 - History writing can be, and has been, highly partisan. Historians are indeed affected by the age in which they write and by their own experiences and beliefs. In some cases, a history book has "an axe to grind." Can you detect one in the book or article you are reviewing?

Primary Source Analysis

The purpose of these kinds of assignments is to analyze a primary source as *deeply and as thoroughly* as possible. Do not simply provide a general summary or overview of your source. Think concretely and *critically* about its content, its historical context, the historical cultural values that shaped its production, and its relevance to your research. Read between the lines to discover its biases and assumptions.

In structuring your Primary Source Analysis Essay, you should respond fully to the series of questions that typically compose such an assignment. Do not simply list answers to the assignment questions. Rather, you must write your paper in essay form. It should have an introduction, several body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Both content and style matter. Your essay must be a polished piece of writing.

Basic Identification

What type of source is it? For example, is it a newspaper article, a film, a letter, a map, or something else?

When and where was it created?

Who created it?

Author's Intent

What was the author's place in society? For example, what was the author's profession, status, class, gender, ethnicity, etc.?

How might the factors listed in the question above have shaped the author's perspective in this source?

Why did the author create this source?

Did the author have an argument? If so, what was it?

Who was the intended audience for this source and how did that shape the perspective?

Historical Context

Under what specific historical circumstances was this source created?

What larger historical events, processes, or structures might have influenced this text?

Is this source consistent with what you know about the historical record from that time?

Content of the Source

What historical facts did you learn from this source?

What biases or other cultural factors might have shaped the message of this source?

How do the ideas and values in the source differ from the ideas and values of our time?

What questions were left unanswered by this source?

Relevance of the Source

What research question are you using this source to answer?

How does this source confirm or contradict evidence from other primary sources?

How does this source confirm or contradict interpretations in secondary sources?

Does this source represent any patterns with other primary sources?

What does this source tell you about the topic?

Historiographical Essays

Historians do not write in a vacuum; their ideas always have some relationship to those of other historians. An historiographical essay is one which analyzes the way a single historical topic is treated by a number of historians. The purpose of historiographical essays is for students to consider how different historians approached the same historical issues.

- To begin an historiographical essay, you will first read multiple works on the same topic, such as the causes of the American Civil War or the political ideology of Otto von Bismarck. Sometimes these sources will be assigned to you; other times, you will choose your own historians and books.
- You will then analyze the authors' arguments much like book analyses, being sure to avoid simple summaries. In addition to pointing out areas of agreement and disagreement in the works on the subject, a good historiographical essay discusses the reasons for the differences and their implications for the understanding of the subject.
- Historiographical essays may be organized chronologically (in the order that the books on the topic were published) or methodologically (grouping historians with similar interpretations together).
- In an historiographical essay, your most important task is to understand what the authors are saying and be able to explain their central ideas and arguments to the reader in relation to each other. You should also comment on the authors' approaches. Are they interested mostly in political, economic, social, or intellectual questions? What types of sources do they use? You should also consider each author's own cultural values and assumptions. Where these perspectives are apparent, they should be brought to the reader's attention.
- Pay particular attention to prefaces and introductions, which generally offer reasons for writing the article, and to passages that mention opposing views. Try to relate your author's views to the general historiographical context of the subject, i.e. to the other books written on the topic.
- When researching an historiographical essay, you should consider many questions:
 - How has the historiography on this subject evolved over time?
 - What are the different schools of thought on the topic, and how do they impact the interpretations of this subject?
 - Why have different scholars come to different conclusions about this topic?

Research Papers

In research papers, you have to combine aspects of other types of assignments to make an argument that proves an original thesis. Thus, you must do both primary source analysis and secondary source analysis, and you must compose an argument that has structure, style, and evidence. Proceeding in the following order can help you to succeed.

1. Identify your topic.
2. Read general sources (textbooks and encyclopedias for example) to get an overview of the background and context of your topic.
3. Conceptualize your topic as a well-focused research question.
4. Search systematically for secondary sources specific to your research topic.
5. Read and analyze secondary sources, taking careful notes.
6. Identify primary sources relevant to your research question.
7. Read and analyze primary sources taking careful notes. (Understand that steps can overlap. For example, in reading your primary sources, you may find that additional secondary source reading is necessary.)
8. Review your evidence to discern the best possible answer to your research question.
9. Compose this answer into a clear and strong thesis statement.
10. Gather the best evidence you have to prove your thesis statement true.
11. Write an outline.
12. Write a draft of your paper.
13. Get feedback on your thesis and argument.
14. Write a revised draft of your paper that is carefully edited and proofread.
15. Repeat steps 12-14 as often as necessary to develop a final draft.

Grading Rubric

		Excellent	Good	Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable	Score
Topic	Is the topic suitable for the assignment?						
	Does the essay stay focused on the topic?						
Thesis Statement	Does the essay have a thesis statement?						
	Is the thesis statement strong and clear?						
Argument	Does the essay develop an historical argument?						
	Is the argument supported by strong evidence?						
	Does the paper include analysis?						
	Does the analysis support the thesis?						
Research	Does the essay make sufficient use of available resources?						
	Are resources appropriate for the essay?						
	Are the sources well analyzed?						
Composition	Is the essay well organized with a clear and logical presentation of ideas?						
	Does the essay employ a voice appropriate for an historical essay?						
	Does the essay employ proper grammar?						
Technical Details	Does the essay follow the Department Style Sheet and Assignment Instructions?						
	Are the footnotes and bibliography correctly formatted?						

Radford University Department of History Style Sheet

One key to writing well is writing correctly. Regardless of the strength of your evidence and interpretations, incorrect writing obstructs communication. Only by carefully editing and diligently proofreading your essays can you be sure that you have written correctly. So, before submitting any essay in a history class, consult this quick guide to history department style to make sure that your essay is written correctly.

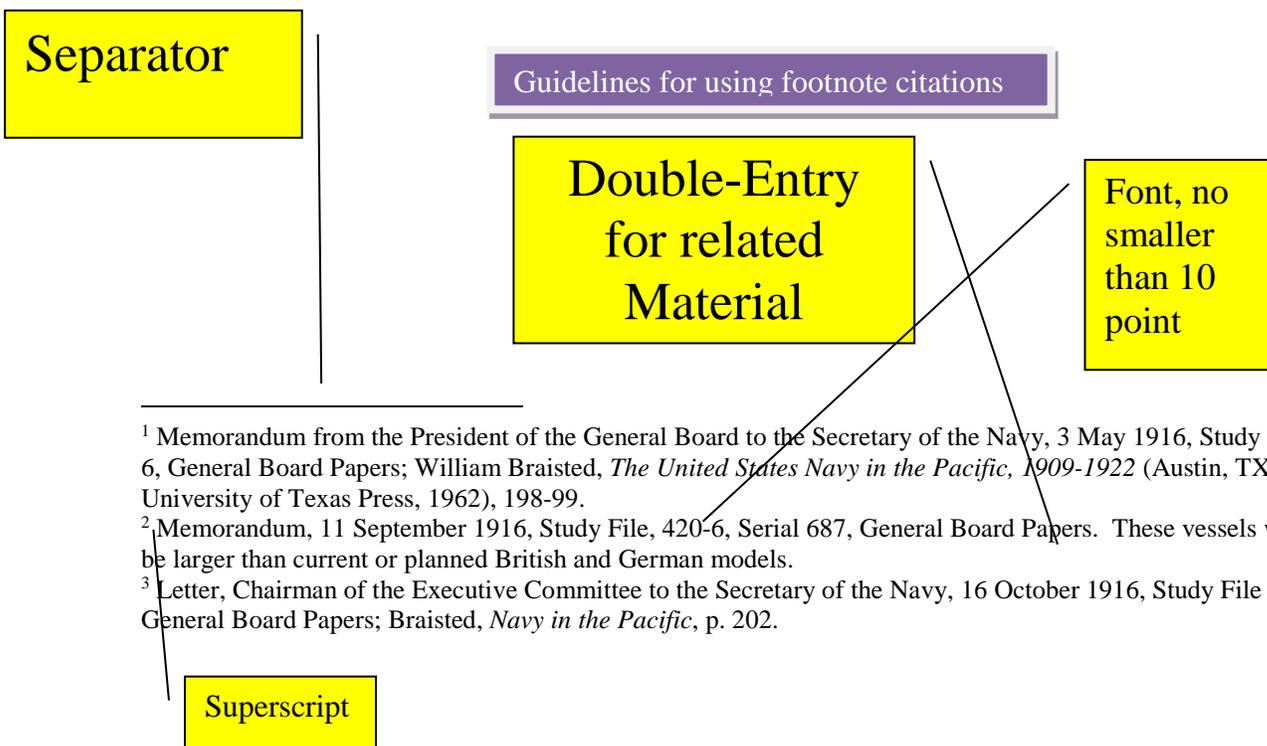
1. Always be aware of and follow precisely any specific instructions issued by your instructor.
2. Essays must be typed, must be double-spaced, and must have one-inch margins on each side.
3. All pages after the first page must be numbered, with pagination placed top right.
4. Always use 12-point Times New Roman font.
5. Essays must not include blank lines between paragraphs.
6. All essays must have a cover page that includes the title of the essay, your name, your instructor's name, the course title, and the date.
7. Always use footnote references.
8. All essays must use proper style. Unless otherwise noted, the Radford University Department of History follows all rules of style set forth by the University of Chicago Press. Thus, information on such matters of style as when to capitalize words, when to italicize words, how to use quotation marks correctly, and how to write correct references and bibliographies can be found in the University of Chicago Press *Manual of Style*. This style guide can be consulted online at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>. Every student who is a history major or a social science major should own a copy of a useful introduction to using Chicago style, either Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* or Mary Lynn Rampolla's *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*.
9. Always make sure that the words you use mean what you think they mean and are spelled correctly. The University of Chicago Press recognizes *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* as the dictionary of record. This dictionary thus provides definitions and spellings considered correct, and if you are uncertain of how to spell a word or of what a word means, only consulting this dictionary can provide you an authoritative answer. Every student who is a history major or a social science major should own a copy of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*.
10. Always use correct grammar. Unless otherwise noted, the Radford University Department of History follows the basic rules of grammar set forth by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White in *The Elements of Style*. Every student who is a history major or a social science major should own a copy of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*.

11. Many common mistakes are easily avoided. A few examples follow.

- Never use contractions.
- Possessives are not contractions. Use apostrophes to indicate possessive form.
- Never use slang or colloquialisms.
- Block quotations are used for quoting material longer than five full lines of text, are single spaced, are indented, and are not enclosed by quotation marks.
- Quotation marks must always enclose shorter quotations and are almost always placed outside of terminal punctuation.
- Reference numbers must be placed at the end of the each sentence (eg. after final punctuation and quotation marks) in which there is material drawn from a source. Failure to follow this rule is not only a breach of style but also a potential example of plagiarism.
- References use Hindu-Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.), not Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, etc.)
- Ellipsis points (. . .) must be used whenever material is excised from within a block of quoted material. Ellipsis points should not be used at the beginning or ending of a block of quoted material.
- Always give a person's full name the first time you mention him or her. Subsequent references use only the last name.
- Pronouns must match their antecedents.
- Historians write in past tense.

Sample Footnoting

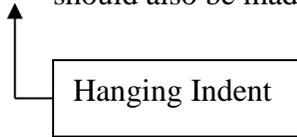
The hefty Clydesdales of the fleet, the ten projected battleships would come in two varieties, both combining armor and big guns in quantities the world had not before seen. The first of this group (*Colorado, Maryland, West Virginia, and Washington*) were to displace 32,000 tons and mount a main battery of eight 16-inch guns, the biggest naval rifles in the world.¹ Those behemoths would, however, be dwarfed by the six projected dreadnoughts of the *North Carolina* class. About 25 percent heavier than the largest previous American capital ships, each of these great vessels would weigh in at a massive 42,000 tons and mount twelve-16 inch guns.² In defense of these monsters, Admiral Badger explained: “Lest our vessels be inferior in power to similar types abroad we must construct battleships carrying more powerful weapons than hereto-fore.”³



Sample Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bibliographies should be divided between primary and secondary sources. All entries should also be made as hanging indents as represented here.



Secondary Sources

All listings of works in a bibliography should be done alphabetically, by the last name of the author. If there is more than one author, then use the name of the lead author to place the work in alphabetical order. If, for some reason there is no author, then use title of the work.