

History Writing Centre Web Site Text  
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## Part I – Sources

### 1. Working with Historical Sources – Tips for Conducting your Investigation

Historical sources come in a wide variety of styles and formats, and are generally divided by historians into two types – primary and secondary. Each is further distinguished and explored on the following pages, but we may take a moment to consider the importance of taking notes and keeping track of your findings during the investigative phase of your writing assignment. This is the equivalent of building a case-file for the defence of your argument. The following tips will be of some assistance when conducting your research investigation.

**Start early**, and you will have much greater success in finding what you are looking for. A university library's sources are placed under considerable strain when the end of term approaches, and you may find your topic was more popular than you realized. Don't delay the start of your research – examine the library's catalogue online if possible, and keep track of what you discover. This will save time hunting through the stacks, and if a potentially valuable source is on loan, you can request that it be held for you when it is returned by another patron. In addition, if you find titles for sources not available in any UBC library, you can request that they be sent to UBC via Interlibrary Loan.

**Speak with your instructor or TA**, and she or he will undoubtedly have some suggested reading suitable for your research. If you have further questions about the material you find in these sources, do not hesitate to bring them to your instructor's attention.

**Examine authors' bibliographies** for further sources. If you find a particularly valuable secondary source, the author or authors will have listed their own sources for your information. The disclosure and citation of sources is a fundamental part of the discipline of history at every level, and the bibliographies of many works will yield a wealth of titles for additional reading. Some may be very obscure primary sources, or even private interviews and manuscripts, but more common secondary sources will often be found in most university libraries. Consult these bibliographies carefully. They often provide valuable clues.

**Taking notes** as you examine your sources is a vital component of the research process, and they will be of immense value as you stitch the major points of your argument together. When reading, note down any major findings, authors, or quotations that you find which are of value to your central thesis. Take the time to note authors' names, page numbers, and the substantive details of their arguments. Some sources cover a wide era or a series of diverse topics. In these cases, each individual part or chapter of a monograph or an edited volume may have its own argument, and may draw a series of specific conclusions. Keep track of where the author or authors are headed. If the argument appears to be irrelevant to your investigation, you may consider using another source instead. Also, please refrain from writing in or otherwise defacing your university's resources. Explicit and legible notes should only be taken down in a separate notebook.

## 2. Primary Sources

Primary sources are those that were produced or recorded in the era which you are researching. These generally include: diaries or personal journals, letters or telegrams, books or autobiographies written by contemporary figures (people who lived in that era), court transcripts or police records, newspaper or magazine articles, government documents such as law codes or transcripts of parliamentary proceedings, recorded speeches, interviews or their transcripts, laboratory notes, ships' logs, inscriptions, photographs, etc. Other, less conventional primary sources can include: folk tales, oral histories or legends, works of art, song lyrics, etc. The university's library has a wide variety of primary source material for your consideration, and much of it, including copies of newspapers and magazines dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is available on **microfilm** and **microfiche**. Do not let unfamiliarity with the library's microfilm- and microfiche reading machines get in your way! Periodicals on film are often invaluable sources of information about the past, and the library's staff will be pleased to help you examine the extensive collection of reels in the university's holdings. Examining older periodicals can be very enjoyable, and if you find a valuable article, it can even be photocopied by the film-reading machine for your convenience. Be sure to note all of the publication information, such as date, issue, volume, etc, before returning the reel.

Primary sources are historians' windows on the past, enabling them to discover what people were doing, planning, or discussing at a particular time. By examining such sources in a larger context, such as an historical investigation into a particular event or societal trend, they can provide valuable clues. Of course, while a private diary might reveal a hidden opinion or unknown event, an autobiography might also attempt to alter the historical record in the author's interest. The researcher must be careful when approaching sources written by those figures who were close to the events they are describing. Their memories may be fuzzy, and they might even exaggerate or deemphasize particular details. Consider this, if you were writing an autobiography of your own life, would you describe in detail all of your most embarrassing moments or faults? Well, the tendency for major figures from the past, such as revolutionary leaders or politicians, to gloss over their less successful ventures when writing about their own lives may be even greater. Similarly, they might choose to portray their contemporary rivals in a less than flattering light. Be aware of an author's possible interests in discussing or avoiding certain subjects. Sometimes the authors of primary sources were professional historians, but more often they were not.

**Government documents** are an example of primary sources that may provide highly specific information such as legislative text or statistical figures, but may not provide a very broad overall context. It is therefore up to the researcher to determine the relevancy or the validity of the details they provide. Considering the nature of the era in which the documents were produced, and the audience for whom they were written, can help to evaluate their usefulness. Similarly, **newspaper reports** and articles are often greatly influenced by the political atmosphere in which they are written. The information, and

especially the analyses that they provide must be weighed carefully with less editorial or opinionated sources. Unlike historians, journalists generally produce reports about current events, and do not have the benefit of hindsight to help them draw their conclusions about the present. Thirty years after a story appears in the newspaper, new information will often have come to light, and the article's contemporary assumptions may appear incorrect – or even ridiculous. It is important to remember that earlier authors may not have had access to as many sources – or as many sides of the story, as yourself.

Another type of primary source is the **novel**, which is often mistakenly dismissed by students because “it's fiction -- it's not about anything that really happened.” Novels, like political tracts, can also engage in contemporary debates. The novel can tell us about its author's concerns and assumptions, and the kinds of issues that preoccupied writers in a particular era. Of course, we must also beware not to believe that everything the novel says is “true,” and we must not forget that the author has made specific decisions about how to portray the characters. Therefore, we must be careful not to confuse what the novel's narrator or characters say with what the author was actually thinking. The author may have chosen to create characters with radically different opinions than him or herself.

For information on citing primary sources, see Part III - Citation Format.

### 3. Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are those written about the past from the point of view of a future date. Typically they are produced by authors who have examined a variety of primary sources dating to a previous era or eras while conducting an investigation into an historical topic. Secondary sources generally take the form of monographs (books written by an author or authors on a particular subject), composite works or compendiums written by a series of authors about a subject or subjects, and articles in academic journals. After sifting through a good deal of evidence such as autobiographies, speeches, government records, etc, the authors of secondary sources are then able to draw a series of broader conclusions about particular historical subjects. For example, the individuals involved in a large event, such as a World War, were typically participants in only a small part of the action – but the author of a secondary source can combine the writings or recollections of several dozen participants to form a larger picture of the nature of the conflict. Through such a composite analysis, conclusions might be drawn about the impact of the war on anything from world oil prices to the role of women in wartime production, depending upon the sources consulted and the author's angle of inquiry.

It should be noted, however, that not all the authors of secondary works on historical subjects are professional historians. Many such works are also produced by journalists, biographers, investigative reporters, and even authors of fiction who have opted to write nonfiction works. The sources produced by these kinds of authors can range in character from broad, general accounts to highly specified or technical investigations. Often they

are reflective of a popular approach to the past that readers from many walks of life, young or old, find enjoyable to read. Sometimes these authors have digested the works of professional historians and have proceeded to write an account of the same subject that is more approachable for people with a casual or passing interest. Be aware of the types of secondary sources that you consult. Biographical details about their authors are often available, and they will help you to determine how popular or how scholarly a particular source may be. Virtually anything published by a university press will have gone through a peer-review process – an examination by a series of scholars in similar fields – and will likely be a good academic source. Online book reviews can also be of value.

It is also important to distinguish between an author who is summarizing other people's views, and an author's who is expressing his or her own views. For example, if a passage in a secondary work read “Eighteenth century anatomical writing was profoundly misogynistic. Women were not only physically but also mentally inferior to men,” then it would be inaccurate to paraphrase this by stating “The author thinks that women are inferior to men.” In fact, the author is merely assessing the beliefs held by eighteenth century anatomical writers, and is not sharing his or her own opinion on the subject. Read your sources with care, and be sure to identify correctly the agent or speaker who is making claims or expressing opinions. Your choice of secondary source material will have an impact on the nature of your investigation and the angle of your argument. Consult your instructor if you have any questions about your sources. For information on citing secondary sources, see Part III - Citation Format.

#### 4. Online Sources

In the past dozen years, a wide variety of electronic media sources have come into use by people in many professions, including historians. They can be valuable sources of information such as government documents, statistics, and bibliographic references, etc. While these sources can be very useful and access to them has increased tremendously, it must be noted that the credibility of these sources can vary widely. When consulting sources online, consider the nature of the publications you encounter. Are they web-based academic journals or government databases, or are they popular web sites hosted by private individuals? If they are popular sites, what are the credentials of the person or group hosting the site? What was the publication date of the site, and when was it last updated? Many web sites about historical events or subjects are available, but be careful when examining their contents. If they make bold or innovative claims without providing reference to their own source material or evidence, it is possible that their arguments are unsubstantiated. Do not subscribe to radically revisionist interpretations of historical events or to conspiracy theories that cannot be supported by the weight of accessible, credible evidence. Well researched and well written histories will always provide the reader with explicit references to the sources used in the authors' investigations.

The university library web site provides access to a wide variety of online academic journals, known as electronic-journals or **Ejournals**, and many historical journals are among them. Authors of articles featured in such sources are typically professional

historians, and their work is usually peer-reviewed, which means that it has been examined for credibility and accuracy by an editorial committee and a series of experts in that particular field. An index of E-journals on the UBC Library web site.

Another valuable online resource is the **article database** kept by major periodicals such as The New York Times newspaper, The Economist magazine, etc. Occasionally these periodicals require a small fee to access or to reproduce a particular article from a back issue, but if the article is unavailable in a standard microfilm collection such as that here in the university library, it may be a useful option. Use caution when subscribing to such web sites. Reputable, trustworthy sites will always keep your personal details and credit card information private.

## **Part II – Style**

### 1. The Purpose of the Research Essay

The research essay is one of the most important skills that students must develop during their university careers. Essays are a major part of the written work assigned to students in History, and this web site will attempt to address the key questions and concerns of students when approaching the research and writing of these papers.

Firstly it must be noted that effective academic writing is not an innate skill or ability, but rather one that takes time and practice to develop. Writing clearly and crafting a logical, convincing argument that makes the best use of available sources is the basic goal – and simplicity of style can often enhance the effectiveness of that argument. Writing assignments in History may take any of several forms, including: the research essay, the book review, the comparative book review, the annotated bibliography, and the simple reading note, to name a few. While the structure of the paper may differ in each of these cases, the aim of the writer should nevertheless remain the balanced presentation of suitable sources in order to develop and defend a central argument supported by strong conclusions.

The student may consider the process of researching, organizing, and preparing the essay as similar to the prosecution of a case before a jury of one's peers in a court of law. The familiarity of the courtroom drama makes a useful parallel for the process of writing a research essay. A case must be investigated, evidence must be collected, weighed, and organized, and a clearly articulated argument must be presented to an audience that will ultimately decide the merits of the author's case.

The best essays state their aims at the outset, through the provision of a clear introduction in which the author's thesis, or argument, is presented to the reader. Following this opening argument, a good essay develops point-by-point, in a logical fashion, and introduces relevant, supportive evidence. Each of these points typically constitutes a subsection of the argument, and by organizing them in a straightforward manner, the intended effect should be to carry the reader along with the argument. Finally, after

linking these points together, the essay must propose a conclusion or conclusions supportive of the initial thesis. At this stage, the reader must decide whether the author's research, the presentation of his or her evidence, and the formulation of his or her argument have effectively supported the central thesis of the paper.

## 2. Choosing a Topic

Often, students face difficulty in choosing a topic because of the wide variety of possible subjects at hand. Some instructors will issue a list of suggested topics in order to facilitate this process, but the student may feel free to consider another topic and obtain the instructors' permission to pursue it instead. When choosing a topic, a few things should be considered.

- Is the topic manageable? If it is too broad, the instructor may recommend that the student narrow down the investigation to permit the formulation of a useful, manageable argument.
- Is there adequate source material available? Consider that an obvious or especially popular topic may put a strain on available library resources, and that a particularly obscure topic may yield very few sources at all. Well documented subjects will often provide the author with a wealth of sources.
- Is the topic credible? The student should be careful to avoid sensationalist topics, and should focus upon topics that can be dealt with historically. For example, where a theologian might ask "Does God exist?" or a scientist might ask "Can the development of the universe be explained without invoking the concept of God?" the historian asks a very different question: "How did belief (or disbelief) in God shape the actions of this particular person or group?" or "How did new scientific ideas affect religious institutions in this particular time and place?" Finding an angle of historical inquiry often involves asking how and why particular events or circumstances influenced individuals and their societies.
- Above all, what interests you? Review the instructor's lectures, the texts involved, and any supporting course materials. World History courses are indeed broad, but there will undoubtedly be several subject areas that pique your curiosity. Speak to your instructor and/or teaching assistant if you are experiencing difficulty choosing a topic. They will advise you.

## 3. Developing an Argument: Formulating a Thesis Statement

A research essay cannot simply *report* on historical events or ideas, it must have a particular point. The reader wants to know, "Why am I reading this?" "What is the author arguing here?" You may think about it in this way: a prosecuting attorney would not simply present a host of evidence to a jury without arguing a particular case. The evidence itself does not constitute an argument – it must be presented to the reader after they have been advised of the argument, or "charges" at hand. When formulating a thesis statement, consider the kinds of questions that students typically have:



- **What is a thesis?** A thesis is the central, core argument being made by the author. The thesis should provide the research paper with a point, or reason for presenting the evidence uncovered during the investigation of the topic. It is the “case” being made for the consideration of the jury of the author’s peers. Writing a paper without a thesis is like reviewing evidence without prosecuting a case – the reader will be confused and may even grow irritated, and will question the author’s point.
- **Are a thesis statement and an introduction the same thing?** No, they are not, however the thesis, or statement of the author’s argument, is expected by the reader to appear early in the paper – in the introduction, or very soon thereafter. The introduction presents the topic to the audience, defines the subject, period, and event or ideas to be discussed. The thesis statement makes clear to the reader exactly what is being argued by the author.

When formulating a thesis statement, the author should consider the following angles:

- **What is it about this topic that is problematic?** Many topics are naturally problem-based, and are readily debatable. Determining on which side of the debate you stand can lead to the formulation of an argument. Other subjects involve causal relationships between events. These subjects are often chronologically oriented, and while there may be several competing schools of thought on why a particular event took place in the way it did, you may see one or two of them as primary. Focusing upon them and arguing for their preeminence as causal factors would constitute a thesis for your paper.
- **Do I agree with the scholarship?** Determining where you stand on the chosen topic can be a starting point when developing an argument. Some topics are widely documented, but their sources may disagree with one another or present contrasting hypotheses or explanations. Some sources are much more recent than other works of prior scholarship, and they may involve revised or “revisionist” theories. Examine them carefully. Are you convinced by the newer approaches to a particular topic? Are they based upon newly discovered evidence that you find persuasive?
- **Are there specific themes within this topic that I can investigate?** Many topics, such as wars, social or political revolutions, or aspects of societal change, involve many different actors or agents. You may wish to examine such a topic by focusing upon a particular sub-theme such as the role of women or minorities, the state of political or gender relations, or the influence of science and technology. This can be further explored in light of causative or consequential effects – that is, how did the actors or agents affect events, or how did the events affect the actors?
- **Can the evidence that I have uncovered support the claim I am making?** It would be wise to consider the evidence you have found during your investigation and weigh it objectively before writing your essay. Devising an argument before fully considering the material could lead to an unexpected discovery: your argument is flawed or unsupportable. Working in reverse order to substantiate an uncertain argument is the equivalent of finding your suspect guilty or innocent

before deciding on the case you wish to make. Read your sources critically, and take careful notes of what you have discovered. These notes will become crucial to the formulation of your thesis, or case. After you have made your initial determination and formulated an argument, these notes will then help you to form the body of your essay. The more notes you have, and the more carefully you have kept track of the key evidence you have uncovered, the more easily you will be able to construct and link together the main points of your paper.

#### 4. Planning a Draft of Your Essay: Structuring Your Argument

The body of your paper should flow logically from the initial argument you have made, in the context of the introduction that you have provided. If in your paper you are considering a particular event, such as the Apollo Mission to the moon, and you are examining a series of causal factors, you may wish to proceed in a chronological fashion. This would involve setting the stage at the outset by defining for the reader the subject at hand, the time period involved, and the principal components of your angle of approach.

If, for example, your thesis involved arguing that there were particular technological advances in rocket science that made the Apollo lunar project possible, you would need to make this subject and time frame understood by the reader in the introduction. As the paper progressed, you would need to identify the principal agents and actors involved in the project, such as NASA, and Neil Armstrong. Key terms like “NASA” and “escape velocity” would require definitions, which should appear conveniently in the text as each term is introduced. Essentially, this helps the reader, or jury, to understand your case. In a courtroom, expert witnesses could be called upon by the prosecutor to explain difficult concepts to the jury. The jury may well be composed of intelligent people, but they are unlikely to be familiar with all of the technical details of your case. This is why you must provide these convenient definitions – to avoid having the reader ask “What does that term mean?” Of course, obvious terms, such as “earth” and “moon,” require no explanation. The task of distinguishing between terms that require definitions, and those that do not, is up to the author. Experience over time in presenting your work in a written format will make this distinction easier. If you are uncertain, consult your instructor or teaching assistant.

When building your argument, you should present its various components in a sequence that can be easily understood by the reader. In this case, the discussion of the Apollo project’s early development and its initial goals should naturally precede any analysis of the many launch attempts. Provide indicators for the reader that make it clear what you will be examining next. As each point is made, you may decide how best to present the evidence you have uncovered that points to certain technical achievements as the source of the mission’s success. You may paraphrase another author, or possibly even quote a senior technician, etc. (See Part III – Citation Format.) In this manner the weight of the evidence you have collected is added to your argument to support the individual points you are making. Your reader does not wish to be surprised by sudden changes in your argument, or by evidence which appears to contradict your earlier claims. The strength

of your case relies upon maintaining the momentum necessary to enable the reader to accept your conclusions. At each point, the evidence presented should be relevant and presented in context. Quotations should be introduced by naming the speaker, and providing the reader with the information necessary to appreciate the significance of the evidence. Freestanding quotations without introductions will leave the reader confused, and your argument will appear less convincing. For further information on using quotations, see Part III – Citation Format.

When arguing your case, be sure not to omit relevant details that the reader may consider important. In this case, the Apollo project should probably not be discussed without making mention of the contemporary rocket program undertaken by the Soviet Union. Also, the technical advances made by German rocket scientists during World War Two should probably not be neglected – for they form the basis of later rocket programs. Related subjects such as these provide a suitable context for your central topic. The reader may wish to know how these sorts of parallel considerations affect your analysis, and you should consider incorporating them in order to strengthen your argument and defend against possible alternative explanations.

#### 5. Writing for Your Audience: Format, Tips to Consider, and Pitfalls to Avoid

Do not write with any particular instructor or teaching assistant in mind. Instead, write for an audience that you imagine having a similar role or disposition as yourself, such as classmates. If there is a new topic or term that you learned while investigating your case, do not neglect to define it for your audience as well. If there is a particularly technical point, try to summarize it briefly before proceeding with your argument. This will prevent “knowledge bias” – a term describing an author’s use of terminology based upon the assumption that his or her audience must already understand it. Your reader may already know the term you have defined, but there is no harm in defining it again anyway. This makes your argument more appreciable.

Most importantly, avoid unnecessarily complex language when writing your essay. Literary gymnastics are not essential elements of a well written, coherent, convincing paper. The overuse of big words could possibly offend or confuse your audience, and they should not be relied upon in order to sound authoritative. Remember, your argument is based upon the assembly and analysis of the works and arguments of others, and you are not expected to be an absolute authority on the subject. The key aspect of the exercise is to learn to deal critically with diverse sources as evidence to further a particular argument. The mastery of that particular subject or field is not a reasonable or expected priority. Your audience will understand, for at no point is the prosecutor of a case involving complex terminology or scientific principles expected to cease being, primarily, a litigator. Take your time, and have confidence in your ability to think critically.

### Format:

Your writing will benefit greatly from adopting a format that is clear, standard, and appreciable to your audience. Efficient writing requires a minimum of effort to read, and grammar, spelling, and punctuation are all important elements in the transmission of your ideas.

- Use a **12** point font, and **double space** your lines of text.
- Number your pages, beginning with the first page of the text through to the end of the bibliography
- Use normal, 1-inch to 1.5-inch margins. These are typically the default settings of any word processing program.
- Employ a consistent citation format throughout the paper. See Part III - Citation Format.
- Place quotations of more than two sentences in freestanding, offset paragraphs.
- Create a detailed **title page** that includes all of the following information:
  - The title you have chosen for your essay, which should be underlined
  - Your name & student number
  - The course, section and tutorial number, i.e. History 125 (002) L2D
  - The name of your Professor or Teaching Assistant
  - The name of your institution (in this case, UBC)
  - The due date of your assignment

### Tips to Consider:

- **Consult several sources when researching your paper.** If you rely simply upon one or two sources, or primarily upon very old sources, your argument could appear unbalanced or out of date.
- **Keep history in the past tense.** Events of long ago, or even of yesterday, belong to the past, and should be referred to in that tense. Certain types of sources, however, such as novels and philosophical works, are often written in a kind of “eternal present” or present-continuous tense, and the present tense should therefore be used when introducing evidence of this sort.
- **Choose simple words.** Overwhelming your audience with big words can be counterproductive for your argument. For example, “*The television commentator was quite sesquipedalian,*” can be stated more simply as “*The television commentator had a fondness for using big words.*” Forcing your audience to look up definitions for your terms will not enhance your argument.
- **Read your work aloud.** This may feel awkward at first, but it is a *very* effective method of initial proofreading that any writer can use to identify problems in their text. After staring at your paper for several hours, it becomes easy to miss obvious errors in grammar, spelling, terminology, etc. Take a break, come back to your writing at a later time, and read it aloud – slowly.
- **Have someone proofread your work.** This is the easiest and most neglected source of free editing to which all students have at least some access. Some students are too shy or embarrassed to let others read their work – don’t let that get in your way! Approach someone you trust, whom you feel writes and speaks

well, and ask them read your work with a pencil in hand. Be proud of your work and have confidence in your ability to improve your writing with practice and with time. Most people would be flattered that you asked, and will undoubtedly be interested in what you have written. Working at writing well should not be a solo endeavor – but likewise you should not depend exclusively on the help of others.

#### Pitfalls to Avoid:

- **Avoid excessively wordy sentences.** Keep your statements direct and to the point, not weighted down with unnecessary or repetitious commentary. Redundant vocabulary, such as “*eventual subsequent consequences*,” and “*the need for this essential necessity*” will sound very awkward. There is always a temptation to try to sound authoritative, like the narrator of a documentary film, but overly dramatic language will only degrade the effectiveness of your argument. Keep it simple, and your audience will have an easier time grasping your point.
- **Avoid sweeping generalizations.** Your argument will sound less convincing if you resort to broad or obvious assertions, such as “*Wars have been fought by tribes and nations since the dawn of mankind*” or “*Throughout history, humanity has been faced by countless natural disasters.*” Statements such as these are terribly obvious and tedious for the reader.
- **Don’t let the dictionary define your terms.** Avoid beginning your essay with a quotation or a dictionary definition, such as “*The Gage Canadian dictionary defines ‘communism’ as...*” This is a tired, cliché manner in which to begin a paper. Dictionary definitions are frequently irrelevant because the sense of a word may have changed dramatically over time. In fact, the way in which a word or concept has changed might even be the chief point of a research paper.
- **Don’t editorialize.** Keep your argument focused on the sources, and incorporate them to support your case. Although your topic may be dramatic or controversial, avoid including your own personal opinion. Statements like “*the government’s decision was idiotic*,” or “*hers was the greatest victory ever*” reflect the author’s own opinion, and that is not the object of an essay. The reader wants to be convinced of the merits of your case based upon the evidence you have collected, and does not want to hear your personal opinion on the subject.
- **Don’t self-reference.** Avoid identifying yourself within the text of your paper with the terms “I” or “me” or “my.” When necessary, it is preferable to refer to “this paper” or sometimes to “this author,” in the event you are referring directly to your own argument. For example “*This paper argues that...*” or “*In an interview with the author, Mrs. Jones said...*” Again, this technique will distance you and your personal opinion from the argument and the evidence, which are working together to convince the audience of your thesis – not of the validity of your own opinions. This adds a degree of objectivity to your analysis.
- **Avoid using the passive voice.** The use of the passive voice in writing is usually associated with a weak argument that cannot name or identify its agents. If the reader needs to ask “to whom are you referring here?” then it is likely you are

using the passive voice. An active construction would read “*The government took several steps to address the problem,*” but a passive construction would read “*Several steps were taken to address the problem.*” What happened to the government? What agent or actor undertook the action here? Similarly, “*several expeditions were launched*” or “*a new project was undertaken,*” both employ the passive voice. Be explicit when making statements such as these, and don’t leave the audience to guess or assume the identity of the agent performing the action.

- **Avoid colloquial language and slang phrases.** This type of writing is not appropriate in a research paper or essay, and its use should be avoided. Phrases like “*airy-fairy*” and “*hothead countries*” are not clear or objective. Choose your words carefully, for they can be very powerful tools. The use of language that is too familiar can dilute the strength of your argument. Similarly, if an author “gushes” or sounds overly passionate about a particular subject, the audience may become suspicious.
- **Avoid using mixed metaphors.** Be careful not to mix metaphors when describing something. To say that “*the army tore down the fortress walls like a tornado and flooded in through the gates*” is a mixed metaphor because the concepts of ‘tornado’ and ‘flood’ do not match.

## 6. Drawing Conclusions: Making Effective Closing Arguments

Finally, your paper should propose strong conclusions. These conclusions should reflect the argument you stated in the introduction, and should summarize the material you have presented for the final consideration of the reader. In a courtroom this phase would be the prosecutor’s closing arguments, designed to encapsulate the case and to persuade the jury to accept the conclusions supported by the evidence. Restating your case is a literary device that brings the reader back to your initial claims after having reviewed the material, in order to complete the argument. Essentially you are reminding the audience of your argument and asking them to consider its validity now that you have presented all of the evidence.

A common, but tired, way to end a paper is by posing a question for the reader’s consideration. This, in most cases, should be avoided. To conclude with a rhetorical question such as “*Will humanity ever learn that war is primarily a destructive phenomenon?*” is an empty line of inquiry that will usually cause readers to roll their eyes, rather than inspire reflection. Rhetoric is a tempting literary device, but it is one that is intended to generate dialogue, and a reader cannot converse with your paper. Keep your conclusions focused on the evidence as it supports your argument and summarize your position concisely. If there are further considerations related to your subject that have yet to be examined by scholars, mentioning them would be an effective way to wrap up.

## Part III – Citation Format

### 1. Common Questions about Citations

The following questions are some of the most frequently asked by students when citing sources and including quotations in their papers. The examples given here employ **MLA Style** for footnotes and bibliographic entries. Other citation styles are discussed in Part III. If you have further questions, be sure to speak with your instructor.

**What kinds of things to I need to cite?** You are required to cite direct quotations, as well as the sorts of facts and ideas that lie outside of the sphere of what is generally considered to be common knowledge. That is, arcane or unusual facts should be cited to help the reader to understand what you mean, and where you found such information. For example, it is commonly known that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima occurred on 6 August 1945, and such a fact would not require citation or an explanatory footnote. The fact that the bomb released energy equivalent to approximately 15,000 tons of TNT, however, is a sufficiently unusual fact to require citation. You should therefore provide a footnote or an endnote to enable the reader to follow up on your claim, thereby substantiating your argument through the citation of hard evidence. A number appearing in superscript (on the upper part of a line) is then used to direct the reader's attention to a corresponding footnote or endnote. This number would look like this.<sup>1</sup> There are no hard and fast rules to determine what sorts of things require citation – experience and practice will make this distinction easier. The things that require citation are:

- The source of all direct quotations of someone else's words
- The source of any important ideas or controversial arguments mentioned, summarized, or paraphrased
- Translations for words or phrases in foreign languages that the reader could not be expected to understand and are not commonly used in English language sources
- Occasional, sparing footnotes may be used to explain technical points in further detail or to provide additional information if they would aid the reader

**What if I am including several facts or ideas in a single paragraph? Do I have to include a footnote after every sentence?** No, if you include several facts or ideas within a single paragraph, they may be more conveniently cited at the end of the paragraph in a single footnote or endnote. This will obviate the need to include a footnote at the end of every sentence, which becomes tedious for both the author and the reader. **Note:** Good essays do not employ a large number of citations merely to appear authoritative. Keep your citations focused upon the evidence you present and the facts or ideas you convey to the reader.

**When should I quote a source directly?** You should incorporate quotations from primary sources only when they support your argument directly, and are fundamental to the demonstration of your case. Do not employ unnecessarily long quotations, for they can distract the reader and break up your reasoning. Keep them short and on point.

**Sample quotation:** *Ho Chi Minh was very confident that his forces would triumph over the forces of the United States in Vietnam, and claimed “You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.”*<sup>2</sup>

This quotation demonstrates Ho Chi Minh’s beliefs very directly, and supports the author’s claim that Ho was “*very confident*.” If a quotation is more than two sentences in length, separate it from the text as an offset paragraph (entirely indented).

**If I find a quotation in a book, do I cite the original source of the quotation, or the book I found it in?** Always cite the source in which *you* found the quotation. The original source of the quotation should be included in your citation “as found in” the secondary source.

**Sample footnote:**<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ho Chi Minh, as found in Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam – A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1983) 169.

**Can I quote another author’s words as found in a secondary source?** This happens far less often, but on occasion, it can be a useful way to compare the arguments or ideas of two or more authors. For example, if two authors disagreed about the state of mind or the effectiveness of a particular politician during his or her time in office, it might be useful to include a quotation to demonstrate the differences in their reasoning.

**Sample quotation:** *Stanley Karnow disagrees with recent biographers of Henry Kissinger, and claims Kissinger was “baffled and frustrated by the Communists during his secret negotiations with them.”*<sup>3</sup>

**What is paraphrasing?** This is the conveyance of another author’s ideas in your own words. If you wished to relate the substance of the above quotation without copying out the text verbatim (exactly as it appeared), you could reformulate the passage, express it in your own words, and then cite the author or authors just as you would if you were quoting them. Remember that even when paraphrasing, you are still making use of someone else’s work, so even though it is not an exact duplication of a passage, it must be cited. A paraphrased example of the above quotation appears below.

**Paraphrased example:** *Stanley Karnow disagrees with recent biographers of Henry Kissinger, and claims Kissinger’s negotiations with the Vietnamese Communists were in fact both frustrating and confusing.*<sup>3</sup>

**Can I use in-text citations like I do in Science papers?** In-text citations, such as those featured in the APA and CBE citation styles, are generally not appropriate in History papers or journals. In-text citations typically appear in brackets at the end of a sentence. Some instructors, however, will permit the use of in-text citations, especially if the paper involves interdisciplinary work. Consult your instructor or TA.



**What is plagiarism?** Plagiarism is intellectual theft. It is the submission of someone else's words or ideas without acknowledging their original author, and it is a serious and punishable academic offense. Just as you would not want to have your own work stolen and passed off by someone else as their own, you should not submit the work of others as yours. *Plagiarism is very easily avoided*, simply by citing your sources, quoting or paraphrasing the words of others, and making careful research notes to keep track of your findings. Consult "Plagiarism Avoided – UBC Faculty of Arts Guideline." As an institutional response to the problem of plagiarism, The University of British Columbia recently subscribed to the **TurnItIn** plagiarism detection system. This web-based service compares students' work with material on public web sites and that sold by companies or individuals – so-called "paper mills."

## 2. Acceptable Citation Styles

Acceptable citation styles in History include:

- **MLA Style** – Developed by the Modern Language Association, a non-profit member organization that promotes the teaching and study of literature and language. Visit [www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org).
- **Chicago Style** – Developed by the University of Chicago. This style is sometimes known as Turabian Style.

Both of these styles place bibliographic citations at the bottom of the page as *footnotes*, **or** at the end of a paper as *endnotes*. Both citation styles are equally acceptable, and each has a series of rules for the citation of different kinds of sources, such as books, journal articles, chapters in collected works, etc. Each style also has a particular format for your *bibliography*, which must be included at the very end of your paper for the reader's information. The bibliography is sometimes referred to as the *works cited* page, and it is an alphabetized summary of all of the sources you have consulted during the investigation of your topic.

Whether you choose to use the MLA or Chicago citation style, what is most important is that you use that style *consistently* throughout your paper. This will help the reader to review your source material more easily. Keeping your citation format consistent is a key feature of a well presented and well referenced argument. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago Press publish comprehensive guides to their citation styles, which can be purchased through their web sites, as well as in bookstores. The MLA Handbook citation guide is also available in the Reference section of Koerner Library under the following call number: LB.2369.M63 1995. A series of basic examples in MLA style is found in Part III. A more comprehensive online resource for the MLA citation format is available through the Faculty of Arts web site.

Inappropriate citation styles for the Humanities include **APA Style**, developed by the American Psychological Association, and **CBE Style**, developed by The Council of Biology Editors. These styles are commonly used in the Social Sciences and the Sciences, respectively, and feature in-text citations instead of footnotes or endnotes. These are not generally accepted citation formats in History papers. Some work done in

interdisciplinary fields may incorporate in-text citations, however. If you feel that using in-text citations might be appropriate for your paper, consult your instructor or TA.

### 3. Basic Citation Examples for Footnotes/Endnotes and for Bibliographies

The following basic citation examples are presented in MLA Style, and provide both the correct footnote/endnote format **and** the correct bibliographic entry format. These entries reflect the format required for the *first time* such sources are cited. Subsequent citations may be simplified. See the following page in this section. Remember, your paper must provide bibliographic citations for quotations, etc. in the form of footnotes or endnotes, **and** a comprehensive, alphabetized bibliography at the end of the paper. The entries below reflect the correct format for each of these types.

#### **Book by a single author, Co-authors, or a Corporation**

- **Footnote or Endnote:**

Author's first and last names, Title of the Book (City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, year) page number.

**e.g.** <sup>3</sup> Stanley Karnow, Vietnam – A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1983) 169.

- **Bibliography:**

Author's last name, first name/name of corporation. Title of the Book. City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, year.

**e.g.** Karnow, Stanley. Vietnam – A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1983.

#### **Journal Articles and Periodicals without continuous pagination (each volume begins at page 1)**

- **Footnote or Endnote:**

Author's first and last names, "Title of the Article," Title of the Periodical Volume number. Issue number.(year): page number.

**e.g.** <sup>4</sup> Daqing Yang, "A Sino-Japanese Controversy: The Nanjing Atrocity as History," Sino-Japanese Studies 3. 1. (1990): 31.

- **Bibliography:**

Author's last name, first name. "Title of the Article." Title of the Periodical. Volume number. Issue number. (year): first page number- last page number.

**e.g.** Yang, Daqing. "A Sino-Japanese Controversy: The Nanjing Atrocity as History." Sino-Japanese Studies. 3. 1. (1990): 14-35.

#### **Article or Chapter in a Collected Work, Anthology, or Compendium**

- **Footnote or Endnote:**

Author's first and last names, "Title of the Work," Title of the Anthology, editor(s)/company. first and last names (City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, year) page number.

**e.g.** <sup>5</sup> Ramon H. Myers, "The Agrarian System," The Cambridge History of China, eds. John K. Fairbank & Albert Feuerwerker (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 233.

- **Bibliography:**

Author's last name, first name. "Title of the Work." Title of the Anthology. editor(s)/company./translator. first and last names. City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, year.

e.g. Myers, Ramon H. "The Agrarian System." The Cambridge History of China. eds. John K. Fairbank & Albert Feuerwerker. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

### Online Sources, E-journals

- **Footnote or Endnote:**

Author's first and last names (if given), Text Title ed. Editor's first and last names (City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, month, year), Title of the Site, online, name of supporting/publishing institution, <full address of the site> date of access.

e.g. <sup>6</sup> H. Joseph Carnie, Talking to the Centre: Different Voices in the Intellectual History of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) ed. Alison Jeppesen (Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan, Spring, 2002), Gateway, online, University of Saskatchewan, <<http://grad.usask.ca/gateway/currentissue.html>> December 8, 2002.

- **Bibliography:**

Author's last name, first name (if given). Text Title. ed. Editor's first and last name. City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, month, year Title of the Site. Online. Name of supporting/publishing institution. Date of access <full address of the site>.

e.g. Carnie, H. Joseph. Talking to the Centre: Different Voices in the Intellectual History of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). ed. Alison Jeppesen. Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan, Spring, 2002), Gateway. Online. University of Saskatchewan. December 8, 2002<<http://grad.usask.ca/gateway/currentissue.html>>

**Note:** There is a wide variety of internet sources, and many will not feature all of the publication details cited above. It is your responsibility to ensure that any online sources you have used are accurately cited. For a complete listing of online source citation formats, consult the MLA homepage at [www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org), or the MLA Handbook, which can be purchased online, or found in the Reference section of Koerner Library under the following call number: LB.2369.M63 1995. As a general rule, you should strive to make your citations for internet sources as detailed and comprehensive as possible. The site address, or URL, and the date of consultation are critical details that should not be left out.

### Government Publications

- **Footnote or Endnote:**

Government and agency, Title of the Publication (City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, year) page number.

e.g. <sup>6</sup> Government of the Province of British Columbia, Health and Welfare Services. Proceedings of Staff Conference, Health and Welfare Services (Vancouver, B.C.: Provincial Secretary, 1937) 28.

- **Bibliography:**

Government and agency. Title of the Publication. City of publication and abbreviation for state, province, or country: publisher, year.

**e.g.** Government of the Province of British Columbia, Health and Welfare Services.

Proceedings of Staff Conference, Health and Welfare Services. Vancouver, B.C.: Provincial Secretary, 1937.

This is a basic listing of citation and bibliographic entries for only a few types of sources, and there is a wide variety of materials not listed here. Consult the MLA Handbook for a complete listing (see above).

#### 4. Subsequent Citations – The Shortcuts

After a source has been cited in full, and you wish to cite it again in another footnote or endnote, it is not necessary to provide another full bibliographic entry. You may simplify the entry in one of two ways, depending upon the timing.

1. If you wish to cite a source two or more times in immediate succession, you may substitute the term “Ibid.” for the full entry. “Ibid.” is an acronym for the Latin adverb “ibidem,” meaning “in the same place.” This indicates to the reader that you are citing the same source again, and obviates the need for making laborious and time-consuming citations. You need only add the correct page number or numbers if the subsequent citation was found in another part of the source. If the citation was found on the same page as the previous one, simply enter “Ibid.” Footnotes or endnotes featuring these entries would look like this, where citation #7 is the first citation of the source:

<sup>7</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam – A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1983) 169.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 172.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 174-175.

2. Secondly, if you wish to cite a source again later, and there are citations from other sources in between, then you may shorten the entry to the author’s last name alone, followed by the term “op. cit.” This is an abbreviation for the Latin term “opere citato,” meaning “in the work cited.” This method indicates to the reader that you are returning to cite a source consulted previously – but not immediately beforehand. **Note:** If you are using two or more sources by the same author, you will need to indicate more clearly to which source you are referring, generally by the inclusion of the date of publication. This will keep the sources distinct. Remember to provide a full bibliographic entry the first time you cite each source. Footnotes or endnotes featuring these entries would look like this:

<sup>7</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam – A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1983) 169.

<sup>8</sup> Daqing Yang, “A Sino-Japanese Controversy: The Nanjing Atrocity as History,” *Sino-Japanese Studies* 3. 1. (1990): 31.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Karnow, *op. cit.* 172.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 177.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Daqing Yang, *op. cit.* 31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

As you can see, these two shortcuts can be used in combination. Each time, be certain that “*Ibid.*” is used only when a source is cited two or more times in immediate succession, otherwise your citations will be incorrect. If you are careful, this method of citation will save time.

If you have additional questions, be certain to speak to your instructor or TA.