

Writing History Essays (WHE)

1. What is a History essay?

1.1. In History courses, professors assign essays for two reasons:

a) to allow you to explore a specific **topic** in depth and develop conclusions of your own about it. An essay provides an effective means of testing not only your **knowledge** but also your **understanding** of a topic and the issues raised by it. Essays test understanding by asking you to select and reorganize relevant material to produce your own answer to the set question. An undergraduate essay need not be particularly innovative in its approach and insights, but it must be the product of your own understanding of and dialogue with the sources. Essays that do not answer the question can only be regarded as demonstrating some knowledge of the topic, but no understanding. Essays that merely reproduce what others have said (or plagiarize) do not even show knowledge of the topic.

b) to give you the opportunity to develop several essential **skills**: how to find out and select information, how to analyze and interpret sources, and how to present ideas, conclusions and evidence in such a way that your reader understands what you are saying. The ability to write good essays is a skill that requires constant attention and practice. It is, however, a skill that will serve you well no matter what you choose to do when you leave university. The ability to process information and communicate ideas effectively is crucial not only in the study of history but also in the workplace and in democratic society.

1.2. **Essay topics** are generally framed as questions to be answered or problems to be analyzed. To answer the question or analyze the problem, you must assess evidence and present an informed point of view, not merely give an opinion. You are required to practice the same rules as professional historians: to collect all the relevant evidence, evaluate it fairly and critically, and use it to formulate, develop and support a sound argument.

1.3. There is **no single “right answer”** to any question posed in an essay assignment in History. History essays are less about finding the correct answer to the set question than they are about demonstrating that you understand the issues it raises and the texts that discuss these issues. The evidence almost always permits a variety of solutions, and different approaches generate different conclusions. There are, however, limits to the field of possible solutions, since they must fit in with the evidence (what the primary sources tell us about the events under discussion). Thus what is important is not only the argument you formulate but also the evidence you use to support it. And while there is no single right answer, there certainly are **wrong answers**—those that fall outside the field of possible solutions or fail to take account of the available evidence.

1.4. You will be expected to **use this guide** in two ways: a) in the process of researching and writing your essay; b) after the graded essay is returned to you. In my comments, I will refer to specific paragraphs of the guide in this way: WHE 1.4 (this paragraph); WHE 5.6 (the paragraph that begins “Do not use verb forms of ‘to feel’” on page 6); WHE 2.2.1.1 (the paragraph that begins “Every history essay must integrate information and evidence” on page 2).

1.5. You are welcome to discuss any aspect of your essay with me. Do this well in advance of the due date.

2. The process of writing an essay: Preparation

Writing an essay is a process that involves a series of steps.

2.1. The first thing is to **know what your essay is about**. This seems obvious but often students fail to read the essay question and specific requirements carefully. Reread the question or topic and instructions

before you start your research, again before you begin to write, and a third time when you revise your first draft. If you have any doubt about what the topic involves, ask me before you start work on the essay.

2.2. The second step is to **research the topic** (learn everything you can about it) and **take notes**.

2.2.1. Begin by identifying and rereading **all the relevant sources**. You must use a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, in correlation with each other. Depending on the type of essay, these sources will only comprise readings assigned by the instructor or will require a bibliographic search for additional sources. Studying a variety of primary and secondary sources will enable you to:

- understand the basic facts about the topic you are covering
- place the specific topic into a broader historical context
- review what other historians have written about your topic
- look at your topic from a wide range of perspectives
- build your own argument
- support your assertions with historical evidence and examples taken from your sources.

2.2.1.1. Every history essay must integrate information and evidence from a variety of sources. A **summary** of a single secondary source is not an **essay**.

2.2.2. Your **bibliography** (see below, section 6) should list all the sources you consulted in the preparation of your essay. Conversely, all the sources listed in the bibliography must have contributed in some way to the formulation and elaboration of your argument. Do not include in the bibliography sources that you did not use in the essay (or, worse, sources that you did not even read).

2.2.3. If the assignment is a **research paper**, you will need to find sources and evaluate whether they are relevant to your topic. (It will help to see what is relevant and what is not if you first generate a **list of questions**.) In the case of **books**, check the table of contents, read the preface or introduction, look up some of your key words in the index, and skim the relevant chapters. In the case of **journal articles**, read the abstract first, and if there is none, read the first few and last few paragraphs and skim the rest.

2.2.3.1. Articles in **reference books** (such as encyclopaedias) can be useful only to give you an overview of the topic. Citing such works will undermine the credibility of your essay.

2.2.4. Read or reread the sources carefully, **taking notes** on any material you feel might be relevant. Mark interesting passages and look up unfamiliar words and references. Remember that you are interested in both the **factual information** contained in your sources and the **interpretations** of the various writers (historical actors or historians). Read carefully and critically so that you learn to distinguish these two elements, and keep track of them separately in your notes.

2.2.5. Your notes must be **accurate**. They will include both paraphrases and direct quotations.

When you **paraphrase**, be sure you use **your own words**. Do not simply rearrange or replace a few words. Instead, read over what you want to paraphrase; cover up the text with your hand, or close the text so you cannot see any of it (and so are not tempted to use the text as a "guide"); write out the idea in your own words without peeking; then check your paraphrase against the original text to be sure that you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words and that the information is accurate.

If you specifically want to copy a **quotation**, enclose it in quotation marks (" ").

Always note the source and page references for the notes you take. This will save you the time and trouble of tracking down references later.

2.2.6. Read, take notes, and write with a good **dictionary** handy. It is the only way of being sure you understand the meaning of the words you read and use in your own writing.

2.3. The third step is to **organize your notes** and decide on an **argument**.

2.3.1. Devise a system of organizing your notes that you find sensible and appropriate to the topic or the length of the paper. You may take notes on file cards, computer files, or separate sheets of paper, using a new card, file or sheet for each topic or for each source you consult. Over time you will develop the system you find most successful.

2.3.2. Reread all your notes to remind yourself of the information and evidence you have collected. You should then decide on what your **overall argument** (or **thesis**) will be and the **major points** you will need to cover to develop and support your argument. An argument is not a statement of fact or some blindly obvious truth (e.g., “This essay shows that Nazis were antisemitic”) but **a debatable statement that you need to prove**. When attempting to determine whether your argument is sound, ask yourself whether someone could contest what you are claiming. If so, then you have formulated a genuine argument—one that is open to debate and in need of proof.

If, after formulating your argument and deciding on the major points you will need to develop to support it, you find that you are missing evidence for a specific point, go back to the sources you used or locate new ones and do some more research.

2.4. The fourth step is to write an **outline**. Use point form to list your main ideas. State your argument at the beginning of the outline and make sure that the points you make support it. At this point you should consider the **structure** (or organizational scheme) that will be most appropriate for the essay. Is it more appropriate to approach the topic chronologically or thematically? In what order should your points be made? Which themes should receive the most attention? Would a comparison be helpful? Errors in logical progression or awkward changes of topic will appear more clearly in an outline, so take time to consider what you have written.

3. The process of writing an essay: Writing

3.1. If you have researched the topic well, taken good notes, and prepared a good outline, writing the essay might involve not much more than filling out the points you have set down. Writing generally takes longer than you anticipate, however, and you should not leave it to the last minute so that you have no choice but to submit the first draft as your finished essay.

Your essay should have an **introduction**, **body**, and **conclusion**.

3.2. The **introduction** should introduce the topic and show how you intend to answer the question. It should define the **topic** or problem, briefly outline its historical **context** (or background) with reference to the specific **time** and **place**, define the **key terms**, and state your **argument**. The introduction may also tell the reader how the paper will be structured (the **main points** you will consider) and the kind of material or **evidence** you will be using. Generally, one paragraph (sometimes two) is sufficient space for an introduction.

3.2.1. Although many good introductions begin with a broad statement concerning the topic, you should avoid unwarranted generalizations (“Throughout history...” or “Since the beginning of time...”) and empty statements (“...had a great impact” or “there are many similarities and differences...”). When exactly? What precise impact? What specific similarities and differences?

3.2.1.1. The first sentence of an essay creates a lasting impression on the reader. It is crucial that it be meaningful and correct (grammar, spelling, accuracy of information, etc.).

3.2.2. Always revise your introduction after completing the first draft of the essay. When you have a rough draft of the rest of the paper, and have read through it and thought about it, you will be in much better shape to write a coherent introduction.

3.3. The **body** of the essay develops the argument in detail and supports it with evidence and illustrations.

3.3.1. In History essays, you must strike a balance between **information** and **analysis**. When you are writing your essay, think that your reader is someone interested in learning about your topic but with no previous background. Thus, you should provide your reader with the necessary **information** and **context**. When you mention a historical event or process, you must indicate where and when it happened and include at least a brief description of its significance. When you introduce a historical actor (someone you discuss or quote), you must briefly identify him or her. When you use any key term (e.g., “Enlightenment”), you must define it briefly.

3.3.2. As historians, our job is not just to tell the story of some past event or person (although telling stories is definitely central to the discipline). We must not only narrate or describe past events; we must try to make sense of them. In addition to stating the facts, we must **explain** and **interpret** them. **Analysis** means thinking about and evaluating particular historical events, phenomena or sources in a critical manner. As you research and write about your topic, ask yourself the two most important analytic questions: **how** and **why**. Why did the events you are examining happen when they did? Why did events unfold and take shape in the way that they did? What were their consequences, and how did they relate to other developments? Why did the authors you read (both historical actors and historians) take differing stands? What is your own interpretation of the issues?

3.4. **Paragraphs** are the building blocks of your essay. In general each paragraph should contain one major point (or “mini-argument”). You have three important tasks to perform in each paragraph. First, state the **topic** (mini-argument) of the paragraph in the first (topic) sentence. The topic sentence should tell the reader what the paragraph is about. Then, you must support or illustrate your point with specific historical **evidence**. This evidence should be words or actions of historical figures that demonstrate the general point, taken from primary (sometimes secondary) sources. Finally, you must **analyze** the evidence (how exactly does it support your point?) and explain the importance and relevance of the paragraph’s topic to the question asked and to your general argument. Every paragraph in the body of the essay should have these three components: main point, evidence, analysis.

3.4.1. Technically, paragraphs can be of any **length**. Within limits, each must be as long as required to cover its topic fully. Thus each paragraph should have a minimum of three or four sentences. If a paragraph threatens to fill an entire page of double-spaced type, you may want to see if it can be logically broken in two. It may, in fact, be long because it addresses more than one topic. If so, split the topics apart.

3.5. The body of the paper must flow from one idea to the next. Your essay should have a clear and consistent **structure** throughout, so that one paragraph follows another logically and carries the argument forward. Use **transitions** between paragraphs to show the links between ideas. Often, but not always, the last sentence of a paragraph begins to guide the reader to the next idea. (For this reason, it is often a good idea to end paragraphs with a sentence summing up their findings.) Or the topic sentence of the next paragraph may accomplish this.

3.6. In the **conclusion** you should pull together the main points of your essay and emphasize the strengths, significance or implications of your argument (why should we care about this question?). Your conclusion must follow logically from the points you made in the course of your essay and the evidence you have assembled. One paragraph is usually sufficient space for the conclusion.

3.6.1. A summary of your essay is not a conclusion. Avoid trivial statements or overgeneralizations (e.g., “The world today would look very different without the Industrial Revolution”).

3.7. Every essay should have a **title**. The title should be clear and descriptive so that the reader knows immediately what the essay is about.

4. How to use quotations and paraphrases in History essays

4.1. In general, do not quote from **secondary sources**. An essay should be written **in your own words**. It should never be a patchwork of quotations and paraphrases cut and pasted from your reading. You, not Isser Woloch or Natalie Zemon Davis (or any other historian whose work you have read) are the author of your essay, so use your words, not theirs. Quote from secondary sources only when you wish to call attention to a historian's precise phrasing or specific argument.

4.2. When you **paraphrase** information or ideas from a secondary source, you must: a) accurately relay the information in the original; b) use your own words (not just change around a few words and phrases); c) let the reader know the source of your information (in a footnote or endnote, see below). To be acceptable, a paraphrase must do all three things. Unacceptable paraphrases are a form of **plagiarism**. (On paraphrases, see also 2.2.5 above.)

4.3. As a historian, you must provide concrete historical evidence to illustrate and support every assertion in every paragraph. Quotations from **primary sources** make the most effective evidence.

4.4. Try to keep the quotations as short as possible. Only quote the sentences or phrases in the source that are immediately relevant to the idea at hand and necessary to support your point. Avoid using long (block) quotations. Break up and paraphrase long quotations, omitting everything extraneous. (But if you do use a block quotation, see 4.8 below.)

4.5. Quote **accurately**. All quotations must correspond exactly to the original in wording, spelling, and punctuation. Indicate all omissions within the quotation with an ellipsis (...) and any changes or remarks inserted into the quotation with square brackets ([]). There is no need to put an ellipsis at the beginning or end of a quotation. To ensure accuracy, proofread your quotations carefully and check them against your source.

4.6. Quote **fairly**. You must not misrepresent the explicit meaning of the original source.

4.7. Never simply drop a quotation into your paper. Quotations must be:

4.7.1. properly **introduced**: introduce the speaker or writer to your readers, so they will know who you are quoting, and indicate text, date, and circumstances;

4.7.2. properly **integrated** into your own prose: be sure to construct your sentences in such a way that the quotation is smoothly introduced and part of a grammatically correct unit. Pay close attention to the grammar and syntax of sentences with quotations in them. When a quotation is introduced by a grammatically complete sentence of your own, use a colon (:) before the quotation.

4.7.3. properly **analyzed**: always explain the purpose of each quotation (why and how you are using it) and elucidate how it is relevant to the main point of the paragraph and to your general argument. Quotations are evidence, and historians must always analyze and interpret the evidence. For this reason, do not use a direct quotation as the topic sentence or last sentence of a paragraph.

4.8. Indent and single-space long (block) quotations. Do not use quotation marks around block quotations.

5. Style

5.1. Your personal writing style will develop with practice. There are, however, **rules of grammar and punctuation** that must be observed in order to make your meaning clear. Just as playing a musical instrument or sport involves following rules, so does writing. Coaches and trainers teach the best ways of holding a bat or golf club, swinging a tennis or squash racket, and executing a forward pass. After musicians, athletes, and writers learn, practice, and master the basics, they sometimes modify the rules to

suit their particular needs and personalities. Many world-class musicians, athletes and writers, however, never deviate from basic principles. Instead, they use those principles as tools for self-expression.

5.2. **Write clearly and precisely.** Use specific, concrete words instead of vague, general ones wherever possible. The meaning of every word and phrase must be absolutely clear.

5.2.1. Phrases such as “clearly,” “it is obvious,” “it is evident,” “no doubt,” “of course,” “naturally,” and so on usually accompany claims unsupported by textual evidence or specific information. Avoid them.

5.3. Vary your choice of **words**. Do not use the same word or phrase too often, either in the same paragraph or in the same essay. Word variation makes your writing more interesting.

5.3.1. Make your **sentences** as straightforward as possible, but try to vary their length and structure to keep the reader interested.

5.4. Do not use **contractions** in academic writing (“don’t,” “isn’t,” “wasn’t”), unless you are quoting someone else’s words.

5.5. While use of the **first person** should be avoided in History essays, it may be acceptable in certain cases (for instance, in your introduction or conclusion, when you state your argument or explain your methodology, or when you agree or disagree with another historian’s argument or interpretation).

Do not use awkward and passive constructions (“one argues that...,” “we will examine...,” “it is argued that...”) as substitutes for the first person singular.

5.6. Do not use verb forms of “**to feel**” when you mean “argue,” “claim,” “believe,” “think,” “say,” “write,” and the like. We can rarely know what people in the past actually felt, and it is more accurate to describe what they said or wrote as beliefs rather than feelings.

5.6.1. Countries, cities and regions do not have feelings, thoughts or beliefs. Rather than “Italy resented the outcome of the war” or “France believed that...” write “Many Italians resented the outcome of the war” or “The French government believed that...”

5.7. Avoid the **passive voice**. The **active voice** takes the form of “something (or someone) does something.” Examples: “John’s father punished him for stealing the candy” or “The king declared war.” The passive voice is in the form of “something is done.” Examples: “John was punished for stealing the candy” or “War was declared.” The passive sentences beg the question: **by whom?** The passive voice lets the writer shirk the responsibility of providing a subject for the verb (**who** did something? who punished John? who declared war?). In a History essay, who did something is always crucial.

5.8. History essays are written in the **past tense**, not present tense. Do not switch back and forth between past and present tense in the same sentence or paragraph.

5.9. In a History essay, never use “the 18th century,” “the 1700s” or “the seventeen hundreds.” The correct form is “the eighteenth century.”

5.10. **Historical periods, processes or movements**, such as the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, always have the first letter capitalized when used as nouns. The words “medieval” and “industrial” (as in “medieval art” or “industrial economy”), however, are adjectives and are not capitalized (except, of course, at the beginning of a sentence).

5.11. **Titles:** use *italics* or underlining for titles of books, newspapers or films; use quotation marks (“ ”) for titles of articles, book chapters, historical documents or poems.

5.12. While it is up to you whether you want to use *italics* or underlining in your essay, once you have made your choice you should be consistent (use only one of the two throughout the essay).

5.13. Some common problems:

5.13.1. **Subject-verb agreement:** singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs.

5.13.2. **Pronouns:** a pronoun (“he,” “they,” “it”) usually refers to something earlier in the text (its **antecedent**). When you use a pronoun, it must always **refer unambiguously** to some person or thing just previously mentioned. This is an incorrect example: “England started the war. They felt France had broken the treaty.” Who are “they”? Here is a corrected version: “England started the war because the king was convinced that France had broken the treaty.” Another incorrect example: “Although the motorcycle hit the tree, it was not damaged.” Is “it” the motorcycle or the tree?

5.13.3. All pronouns must **agree** in number (singular or plural) with the things (nouns) to which they refer. An incorrect example: “The Spaniard hated the Aztec because of their religious beliefs.” And the corrected version: “The Spaniard hated the Aztec because of his religious beliefs.”

5.13.4. Sentence fragments and run-on sentences:

5.13.4.1. A **sentence fragment** fails to be a sentence because it lacks a subject, verb, or clause. Examples: “In Japan, during the last war and just before the armistice” or “Even though he had the better arguments and was by far the more powerful speaker.”

5.13.4.2. A **run-on sentence** has at least two parts (or **independent clauses**), either one of which can stand by itself, but the two parts are not properly connected. When the two parts are connected only by a comma (,), the run-on sentence is called a **comma-splice**. Example: “Rousseau wrote *The Social Contract*, he also wrote *Emile*.” To repair comma splices, change the comma to a semicolon (;) or period (.), or add an extra word. Corrected versions: “Rousseau wrote *The Social Contract*; he also wrote *Emile*” or “Rousseau wrote *The Social Contract*, and he also wrote *Emile*.”

5.13.4.3. The length of a series of words has nothing to do with whether it is a correct sentence, a fragment, or a run-on sentence. An extremely long sentence may be grammatically correct or a fragment; a very short sentence may be a run-on sentence.

5.13.5. **Possessives:** form the possessive form of nouns correctly.

To form the possessive of a singular noun or a plural noun that does not end in “s,” add an apostrophe (') and an “s.” Examples: “Rousseau’s book”; “Engels’s career”; “the women’s wages.”

To form the possessive of a plural noun ending in “s,” add only an apostrophe. Examples: “the aristocrats’ privileges”; “the workers’ strike.”

5.13.6. **Parallel structure:** expressions of similar content and function should be structurally similar. Example of **faulty parallelism**: “In spring, summer, or in winter.” Corrected versions: “In spring, summer, or winter” or “In spring, in summer, or in winter.” Another example of faulty parallelism: “She wanted three things: to get a degree, to make good friends, and learning about life.” Corrected version: “She wanted three things: to get a degree, to make good friends, and to learn about life.”

5.13.7. **Dangling modifier:** when you begin a sentence with a modifying word, phrase, or clause, you must make sure that the next thing that comes along can, in fact, be modified by that modifier. When a modifier improperly modifies something, it is called a **dangling modifier**. Example: “Arriving by boat in the New World, the weather was brutal.” Who arrived by boat in the New World? (not the weather!) Corrected version: “Arriving by boat in the New World, the Puritans found the weather brutal.”

5.14. More common problems:

5.14.1. Remember to observe the difference between these words (if you are not sure, look them up in the dictionary):

- **accept** and **except**: “accept” is “to receive willingly”; “except” is “with the exclusion of.” Example: “I would accept your excuse, except the part about losing the watch.”
- **affect** and **effect**: “affect” is usually a verb; “effect” is (usually) a noun. When you affect something, you have an effect on it. Example: “What effect does this have on you? How does it affect you?” “Effect” as a verb is a different word altogether, which means “to bring about or to accomplish,” as in “to effect a change.”
- **allowed** and **aloud**: “allowed” is the past of “allow” (permit); “aloud” means “out loud.”
- **it’s** and **its**: “it’s” (with an apostrophe) is the contraction of “it is” or “it has”; “its” (without an apostrophe) is the possessive form of “it” (means “belonging to it”). “It’s,” as a contraction, does not belong in a History paper.
- **lead** and **led**: “lead” is only present tense. The past tense of “lead” is “led.”
- **principle** and **principal**: as nouns, a “principle” is a fundamental truth or personal code of conduct and a “principal” is the head of a school or learning institution.
- **their** and **there**: “their” is the possessive of “they”; “there” means “in or at that place.” Example: “They are driving their new car over there this afternoon.”
- **then** and **than**: “than” is used as a function word to indicate difference of kind, manner, or identity. Example: “I am taller than my father.” “Then” means “at that time” or “soon after that.” Example: “Let me eat first; then we can go to the movies.”
- **to**, **too** and **two**: “In two hours, it is going to be too hot to go to town.”
- **where** and **were**: “where” means “at, in, or to what place”; “were” is the past tense of “are.” Example: “Where were you?”
- **woman** and **women**: “woman” is the singular (“one woman”); “women” is the plural (“two or more women”).

5.14.2. **A lot**: avoid it in formal writing. Instead, write “many,” “a great deal,” “plenty,” “several,” or any word or phrase conveying the same meaning.

5.14.3. A **novel** is a work of fiction. Charles Dickens and Jane Austen wrote novels. Historical documents and scholarly works are not novels.

6. Documentation: footnotes (or endnotes) and bibliography

6.1. **Documentation** (or **citation**) for History essays must follow a two-part system, comprising a series of notes, placed either at the foot of the page (**footnotes**) or at the end (**endnotes**), and a list of all works consulted (**bibliography**). This system makes it possible for the reader to find the exact source of the quotation, idea, or information you are citing and to get an overall view of the study and research on which your essay is based.

6.1.1. **Notes** (footnotes or endnotes) are used to **identify the sources** of all the information, paraphrases, direct quotations, and ideas and interpretations that are not your own. In a History essay, you will find that most paragraphs have **at least one note**. It is important that your notes are complete and accurate. If you are in doubt about citing “common knowledge” information, err on the side of citing; even unintended failure to cite sources constitutes technical plagiarism.

6.1.2. Notes are numbered consecutively by placing a numeral in the text (usually above the line) at the end of the passage to be cited and also at the beginning of the note to which it refers.

6.1.3. The **basic pattern** for notes is: Author(s) or editor(s), title, place of publication, publisher, year of publication, page references. A complete citation contains all of this information. If an article or document has no page numbers, indicate it like this: n.p.

Here are some **examples** (underlining may be substituted for *italics*):

• **book:**

¹ Isser Woloch, *Eighteenth-Century Europe: Tradition and Progress, 1715-1789* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 254-255.

• **edited book:**

⁵ Margaret C. Jacob, ed., *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 94.

• **chapter** in an edited collection:

² Olwen Hufton, "Women, Work, and Family," in *A History of Women in the West*, vol. 3: *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 27.

• **primary source** (document) from an edited anthology:

¹⁷ Olympe de Gouges, "Declaration of the Rights of Woman" (1791), in *Lives and Voices: Sources in European Women's History*, ed. Lisa DiCaprio and Merry E. Wiesner (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 261.

¹⁸ Joseph II, "Letters" (1765, 1768), in *Sharing the Stage: Biography and Gender in Western Civilization*, ed. Jane Slaughter and Melissa Bokovoy, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 82.

• **journal article:** in this case the pattern is: Author(s), title, title of journal, volume and issue, date, page references.

¹⁰ Krisztina Robert, "Gender, Class, and Patriotism: Women's Paramilitary Units in First World War Britain," *International History Review* 19, no. 1 (1997): 63.

¹¹ Martin D. Pugh, "Politicians and the Woman's Vote 1914-1918," *History* 59, no. 197 (1974): 360-361.

• **online document:**

³ "Constitution of 1793," in *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, ed. Lynn Hunt and Jack Censer, <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/index.html>> (accessed December 2004).

6.1.4. After the first, full reference in a footnote or endnote, **subsequent references** to the same source are shortened:

⁵ Woloch, *Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 35.

⁶ Jacob, ed., *The Enlightenment*, 63.

⁷ Hufton, "Women, Work, and Family," 22.

⁸ Gouges, "Declaration," 261.

⁹ Robert, "Gender, Class, and Patriotism," 64.

6.1.5. Your note must always indicate clearly **whose words** you are discussing or quoting. If you quote the words of a historical actor (or another historian) as quoted by the author of a secondary source, this is how you should cite them:

⁴ Etta Palm D'Alders, quoted in Bonnie G. Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1989), 106.

6.1.6. In general, avoid unnecessary notes. If several consecutive sentences in the same paragraph refer to the same source, combine the citations into a single note (preferably at the end of the paragraph) and list all the relevant pages:

⁷ Bonnie G. Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1989), 54, 68, 57-58, 109.

6.1.7. If a sentence or paragraph refers to more than one source, you can cite all the sources in a single note (using complete or shortened citations as required). Separate each source by a semicolon (;).

Example:

¹¹ Bonnie G. Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1989), 55; Woloch, *Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 60; Hufton, "Women, Work, and Family," 22-23.

6.2. The **bibliography** at the end of the essay lists **all** of the sources consulted and cited in the essay (see 2.2.2 above). List the sources in alphabetical order by author (last name first) or title (if the author is unnamed).

6.2.1. The main differences between notes and bibliographic entries are:

- in bibliographic entries authors' names are given **last name first** and listed in **alphabetical order**. In research papers, primary sources and secondary sources may be listed separately
- **capitalization** and **punctuation** are substantially different in the bibliography
- in the notes, **page references** to chapters, articles or documents are to the specific pages containing the information being cited. In the bibliography, page references are to the entire chapter, article or document. For example, an article in a journal may cover pages 35 to 70. In a footnote the page reference will be to the relevant page(s) in the article, perhaps pages 38-39. In the bibliography the page reference is to the entire article, pages 35-70
- each entry in the bibliography should be formatted as a **hanging indent**.

Here are some **examples**:

"Constitution of 1793." In *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. Ed. Lynn Hunt and Jack Censer. <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/index.html>> (accessed December 2004).

Gouges, Olympe de. "Declaration of the Rights of Woman." 1791. In *Lives and Voices: Sources in European Women's History*. Ed. Lisa DiCaprio and Merry E. Wiesner. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001, 261-264.

Hufton, Olwen. "Women, Work, and Family." In *A History of Women in the West*. Vol. 3: *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*. Ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, 15-45.

Jacob, Margaret C., ed. *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

Joseph II. "Letters." 1765, 1768. In *Sharing the Stage: Biography and Gender in Western Civilization*. Ed. Jane Slaughter and Melissa Bokovoy. Vol. 2. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003, 82.

Pugh, Martin. "Politicians and the Woman's Vote 1914-1918." *History* 59, no. 197 (1974): 358-374.

Robert, Krisztina. "Gender, Class, and Patriotism: Women's Paramilitary Units in First World War Britain." *International History Review* 19, no. 1 (1997): 52-65.

Smith, Bonnie G. *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700*. Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1989.

Woloch, Isser. *Eighteenth-Century Europe: Tradition and Progress, 1715-1789*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1982.

7. Revising and editing your essay

7.1. **Never write only one draft.** The most experienced writers go through several revisions before their work is ready for others to read. It is often very helpful to put the first draft aside for a day or two. Looking at it with a fresh perspective will help you spot weaknesses in organization and content.

7.2. When your first draft is finished, read it over using the following **checklist**:

- Have you made your intentions and your argument clear to the reader?
- Have you defined all important terms?
- Does every point in your essay relate to your argument? Have you included any irrelevant or unnecessary material? Have you repeated yourself?
- Have you forgotten any important points?
- Have you supported all your points with evidence?
- Have you properly introduced and explained the significance of all quotations and examples?
- Have you provided footnotes or endnotes where necessary, and are they complete and accurate?
- Is the essay the right length as set by your instructor?
- Have you prepared a complete and accurate bibliography?
- Is the vocabulary appropriate for university writing? Is the language as precise as possible? Is every word the best possible word for the meaning you wish to convey?
- Have you checked carefully the spelling, punctuation, and grammar, particularly in areas where you are uncertain?

7.3. You should always **proofread the printed text** of your essay before submitting it. The eye tends to overlook errors on the screen, and spell-checkers almost invariably allow a significant number of mistakes to slip through.

7.4. **Some technical points:**

7.4.1. The **title page** must show the title of the paper, your name, the course number and name, the date the assignment is due, and the instructor's name.

7.4.2. **Number the pages** and staple them together. Why is this so hard to do? Number them by hand if you cannot make your computer do it.

7.4.3. **Indent** five spaces when beginning a new paragraph.

7.4.4. When using a computer, **backup your work** frequently. Crashed computers and lost disks are not acceptable reasons for late essays.

7.5. **Unacceptable papers:** the following kinds of papers will be returned unmarked (rewrite and resubmit, or F):

- papers without notes (footnotes or endnotes)
- papers that do not address the set questions or use the required sources
- plagiarized papers.

7.6. For **additional help**, you may consult the following:

- *Guide to Grammar and Writing*, <<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>>

Adriana S. Benzaquén, Department of History, Mount Saint Vincent University, 2004 (revised July 2008)

In preparing this guide, I have adapted material from the following sources:

Good Historical Research and Writing, Richard W. Slatta, NC State University: <<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/>>

Guide to Grammar and Writing: <<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/index.htm>>

Guide to Writing History Papers, Todd F. Carney, Southern Oregon University: <<http://www.sou.edu/history/carney/writing.htm>>

Guidelines for Preparing History Essays, Jack Corse, SFU, <<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/subjectguides/hist/histessay.htm>>

How to Write a Good History Essay, Paul A. Hayward, Lancaster University: <<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/depts/history/course-sites/hist213/writing.htm>>

Notes on Writing a History Essay, Department of History, Carleton University: <http://www.carleton.ca/history/essay_guidelines/gateway.htm>

Penning the Past, Alyssa Lodewick, Brown University: <http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Center/lodewick.htm>

Reading, Writing, and Researching for History, Patrick Rael, Bowdoin College: <<http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/>>

Research and Writing, Emil Pocock, Eastern Connecticut State University: <<http://www.easternct.edu/personal/faculty/pocock/r&w.htm>>

A Guide to the Preparation and Presentation of Essays, English Department, MSVU, 2003

Department of History Style Guide, M. Brook Taylor, MSVU, 2004