

GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING HISTORY ESSAYS

A. DESCRIPTIVE VS. CRITICAL WRITING

1. **Descriptive** writing says what happened or what another author has discussed; it provides an account of the topic.
2. **Analytic or critical** writing asks and answers questions, makes comparisons, and presents and defends a thesis or argument. Rather than just stating the facts, this approach explains and interprets them. Why did events take place, what were their consequences, how did they relate to other developments? Why did the authors you read take differing stands? What is your own interpretation of the issues?
3. In most history courses you will be asked to write and think critically. You are expected to provide your own analysis of the topic or issues.
4. You must provide evidence and examples to support your arguments. Make sure that you understand clearly what each assignment requires in terms of the balance between description, analysis, and argument.
5. If you encounter material that does not support your position, do not ignore it. You must explain why you think that evidence is less persuasive or important.

B. THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF A FORMAL ESSAY

1. **Title Page:** the paper's title, your name, the course number and the date should appear on a separate first page.
2. **Introduction:** lays out your topic, states what your particular approach or argumentation will be, and tells your reader how the paper will be structured (the main points you will consider). You may also provide some background or context in this section. Generally, one paragraph is sufficient space for an introduction.
3. **Body:** presents your evidence and examples in a logical and orderly fashion. This section develops your analysis and argument.
4. **Conclusion:** pulls together the main points of your essay and reasserts or emphasizes the strengths of the thesis or argument. The conclusion should indicate why it was important to arrive at the point in question - what can be seen that could not be seen, as it were, when you started.
5. **Footnotes or Endnotes:** in most cases, history essays will require footnotes (at the bottom of the page) or endnotes (at the end of the paper). Either form is acceptable. Footnotes and endnotes use the same format and the only difference between them is their physical location.
6. **Bibliography:** in most cases history papers will include a bibliography of the works cited in the footnotes or otherwise consulted. **Note:** The 'Harvard style' of bibliographical references (indicated in brackets in the text) is generally not acceptable in history papers.

C. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

1. The body of your paper should be organized into several main sections, each of which deals with a given sub-topic, issue, or question within your general subject. In each section, you will have one or more paragraphs focusing on individual aspects of that topic.
2. A paragraph consists of a block of material about a single sub-topic or about a particular point contributing to the development of your argument or thesis.
3. Each paragraph should begin with a general topic sentence indicating the subject of the rest of the paragraph. By reading the topic sentence of the paragraph, your reader should be able to get a summary of the subject you are addressing. The remaining sentences in each paragraph provide more detail or evidence about the main topic. The paragraph should **develop** the idea laid out in the topic sentence. A good expository paragraph normally contains at least three sentences in addition to the topic sentence and may have a concluding sentence.

4. Each paragraph within a section should be clearly related to the one before and the one after, creating an even, logical flow. If the link is not readily apparent, you should include a **transitional sentence** describing the connection.
5. Normally, papers of less than 25 pages in length do NOT require headings at the beginning of each section. Including good transitional sentences and paragraphs, eliminates the need for such headings.

D. GENERAL RULES FOR ESSAY WRITING

1. **Spelling:** Spell-check AND proof-read your essay carefully or ask a friend or family member to do so. A sloppy paper distracts attention from what you are saying and raises questions in your reader about the carelessness of preparation. Remember that computer spell-checkers do not catch typos like "marital" vs. "martial" and "there" vs. "their."
2. **Contractions:** do not use contractions (isn't, wasn't) in formal writing.
3. **Commas:**
 - a) use a comma after each item in a sequence of three or more items, including the next-to-last. For example: The Hudson's Bay Company traded for beaver, marten, and fox.
 - b) use commas to set off parenthetical phrases (one that could be put into parentheses or removed from a sentence) instead of parentheses.
4. **Spacing and Print Size:** unless instructed otherwise, always type and double-space your work, using standard margins (usually 1 inch on the sides and bottom and 1.5 inches on the top) and a standard print font (12 point or 10 cpi). Remember, your reader should not require a magnifying glass.
5. **Word Count:** as a general rule of thumb, one page of typed, double-spaced text (exclusive of footnotes) contains roughly 250 words. A 10 page assignment (regardless of font size) then, should contain approximately 2500 words.
6. Number the pages so your instructor can refer to them.
7. Indent the beginning of each paragraph 5 spaces from the left margin.
8. Staple your paper together neatly.
9. Keep a copy of your paper either on disk or photocopied.

F. REFERENCING AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

1. **Plagiarism:** or academic dishonesty can take many forms presenting other people's text and ideas as if they were your own, or submitting a paper that you did not write. Consult your instructor or TA for further guidance on this issue. See also University Calendar, "General Regulations," paragraph 1.
2. You must acknowledge the sources of all your information and any ideas or interpretations you have taken from other works. These references are usually placed in footnotes or endnotes (see below), including all works consulted.
3. You may not use a paper you wrote for one course to fill an assignment in another course, unless prior approval is obtained.

G. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

1. A **primary source** is a record left by a person (or group) who participated in or witnessed the events you are studying or who provided a contemporary expression of the ideas or values of the period under study. Examples of primary sources are letters, autobiographies, diaries, government documents, minutes of meetings, newspapers, or books written about your topic at that time. Non-written primary sources include interviews, films, photos, recordings of music, and clothing, buildings, or tools from the period.
2. **Secondary sources** are accounts written by people who were not involved in the events or in the original expression of the ideas under study. Written after the events/ideas they describe, they are

based upon primary sources and/or other secondary works. Thus an early 20th-century historian could prepare a secondary study of the American Civil War through reading documents from that period, interviews with veterans, examination of weapons and so on. 3

1. When working with **secondary sources**, limit your use of direct quotations. In general, your paper will flow better if you paraphrase the statement, putting it into your own words. Quote only when you wish to call attention to the author's precise phrasing.
2. When using **primary sources**, you may want to use a few more direct quotations to illustrate the mood, language, or 'flavour' of your sources. But even here, be sparing. A good rule of thumb is to quote only when you plan to analyze or interpret the passage; otherwise, paraphrase.
3. Do not use a direct quotation as the topic sentence of a paragraph.
4. Every direct quotation must be put into quotation marks and given its own individual reference, normally in a footnote or endnote.
5. Quotations of 5 or more lines need to be indented 5-8 spaces on either side and single spaced. When you use this format, do not use quotation marks (but do still give the reference in a note). Shorter quotations should be typed as part of the paragraph.
6. If you leave out words from a quotation, to shorten it or to make it fit into the grammar of your own sentence, indicate the omission by using three periods. For gaps in the middle of a sentence, use three periods; for omissions at the end of a sentence, use four periods (eg. "History can be fantastic").
7. If you insert a word into a quotation, to increase clarity or adjust it to your own presentation, put the insertion into square brackets thus: She commented that "by January ... [the trees] looked sickly."

I. FOOTNOTES/ENDNOTES -- FORMAT

1. Footnotes and endnotes are used to indicate the exact source of every quotation used, and to acknowledge the opinions of others incorporated into the essay. It is usual to refer in the body of your essay to the name of the author you are quoting. Give the full details of author, title, publication, date and page in the footnote.
2. Footnotes and endnotes should be numbered consecutively throughout the paper, and the number should be slightly above the line of text.¹ The first line should be indented five spaces.
3. If a work is cited more than once, the first note should contain the full citation, while subsequent notes may include just the author's surname, a shortened form of the title and page number.²
4. Footnotes will appear at the bottom of the page (as shown below), while endnotes will appear on a separate page at the end of the essay (with the heading "Endnotes" at top of page).
5. Notes should be single-spaced, with two spaces between each note (see examples attached).

J. FOOTNOTES/ENDNOTES -- EXAMPLES

Book or monograph ¹Bruce Trigger, Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered (Montreal, 1985), 55.

Article contained in an edited volume (anthology) ²Elizabeth Jameson, "Imperfect Unions: Class and Gender in Cripple Creek, 1894-1904," in M. Cantor and B. Laurie, eds., Class, Sex, and Working Women (Westport, 1977), 87.

Article contained in a journal or magazine ³Dianne Newell, "The Importance of Information and Misinformation in the Making of the Klondike Gold Rush," Journal of Canadian Studies 21, No. 4 (1986), 98.

¹ Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Chicago, 1967), 67.

² Turabian, A Manual for Writers, 75.

Subsequent notes ⁴Trigger, Natives and Newcomers, 65.

Book with more than one author ⁵Ken Coates and William Morrison, The Sinking of the Princess Sophia: Taking the North Down with Her (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 35-38.

Quotations from other sources Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), as quoted in John L. McDougall, "The Frontier School and Canadian History," Canadian Historical Association, Report of the Annual Meeting held at Ottawa May 22-23, 1929, 121.

Edited works ⁷Kerry Abel and Jean Friesen, eds., Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects (Winnipeg, 1991), 167, 178.

Work by one author, translated by another ⁸René Lévesque, Memoirs, trans. Philip Stratford (Toronto, 1986), 28 .

Newspaper article ⁶Gary Gerhardt, "Troubled Bighorn Herd," Rocky Mountain News (9 January 1989), 8.

Films ⁹The Other Side of the Ledger: An Indian View of the Hudson's Bay Company (National Film Board of Canada, 1970).

K. BIBLIOGRAPHY -- FORMAT

1. The bibliography should list all the books and articles used in the preparation of your essay -- including those that you did not quote from or cite directly.
2. The bibliography should start on a separate page, with the heading "Bibliography" at the top.
3. The items in the bibliography should be arranged in **alphabetical order**. Each item should be single-spaced, with the second and subsequent lines indented 5 spaces. These items are **not numbered** (see examples attached).

L. BIBLIOGRAPHY -- EXAMPLE

Abel, Kerry and Jean Friesen, eds. Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1991.

Coates, Ken and William Morrison. The Sinking of the Princess Sophia: Taking the North Down with Her Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Gerhardt, Gary. "Troubled Bighorn," Rocky Mountain News, 9 January 1989: 8, 19.

Jameson, Elizabeth. "Imperfect Unions: Class and Gender in Cripple Creek, 1894-1904," in M. Cantor and B. Laurie, eds. Class, Sex, and Working Women. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977: 245-63.

Lévesque, René. Memoirs, trans. Philip Stratford. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986.

Newell, Dianne "The Importance of Information and Misinformation in the Making of the Klondike Gold Rush," Journal of Canadian Studies 21 (1986): 95-111.

Note: Not all instructors require references in such detail, and in general keep in mind that course requirements vary. Consult your instructor or TA for the exact requirements in your particular course. All instructors, however, require logic, consistency, and neatness.