



GUIDE TO THE WRITING, PRESENTATION, AND REFERENCING OF ESSAYS

2017

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1. Writing and researching

1.1 What is a history essay?

Essay writing is an integral part of every History course. We stress the importance of essays because of their role in developing the skills of research, analysis and writing which are essential for historians and are relevant to so many careers. An essay in History is not just a collection of facts, though a good essay will contain a wealth of historical information.

Most History essays have several elements: narrative, description, and analysis. Above all, a History essay must present an argument: that is, a systematic and persuasive development of a position or point of view, using appropriate evidence. Writing an essay, therefore, is a reasoning process in which you examine the opinions of others, search for and analyse the evidence, and draw your own conclusions.

Writing a history essay is also a process of communication. Your presentation of evidence and discussion of texts must be understandable and directly relevant to your argument. Your argument should justify your conclusion. In short, you must attempt to persuade the reader that your conclusions are correct, or at least plausible, and not just unsubstantiated assertions.

Finally, writing a history essay is a creative process. History is an art, not just a technical exercise. We encourage you to pay attention to your writing style and to develop its fluency and elegance.

1.2 Preparing a history essay

1.2.i Defining the problem

There are two main kinds of essays you will be asked to write. Your lecturer may invite you to choose from a range of set topics, or may encourage you to devise your own topic. Sometimes you are given a choice between writing an essay on a set topic, and writing on a topic of your own creation.

If you are writing on a set topic, first look carefully at the terms of the question. The terms or concepts in the question will require definition or elaboration. They are not self-evident. If you are asked to decide whether the French Revolution was in fact a 'bourgeois revolution', the argument will not proceed very far if you do not make clear what is meant by 'bourgeois'.

This does not mean that you begin your essay by quoting a dictionary definition. Terms and concepts acquire a specific meaning in the context of the course you are studying. 'Bourgeois', for example, is taken to mean different things by different writers, and different things in different contexts; a dictionary definition is therefore almost useless, and can be misleadingly simple. Providing definitions then, is not a mechanical but an intellectual exercise (often a very difficult one) in the understanding and clarification of concepts in terms of the literature of the subject.

Once the terms of the topic are clarified, you need to begin your general reading. As a starting point, go to the reading lists, provided in your course guide, which seem to relate to the question. The object is to define the problem to be examined and to decide where to find your solution. At this stage you are 'testing the water'. Detailed note taking is likely to be inefficient until you are clear about where you are going.

If you are devising your own topic, you will probably be asked to develop an essay proposal. This is a proposed topic, with a brief outline of the issues you wish to explore, together with a proposed bibliography, a list of works you have found relevant to that topic. To get started, think about the issues in the course that

have interested you most. What would you like to follow up in more detail? Read those materials listed in the course guide that seem to relate to those issues. Formulate a possible topic, and the ideas you want to explore. The topic does not have to be in the form of a question. You now need to decide how you are going to research that topic.

1.2.ii Researching an argument

In both kinds of essays, if the problem has been clearly and precisely defined then it will be easier to determine what material is needed and is relevant.

This material takes two forms. First, in order of consultation, are what historians often call 'secondary sources', that is, the works of historians and other later writers. Next are 'primary sources', contemporary to the events or developments you are trying to explain. The distinction is not always clear and the same source might be a primary or a secondary source depending on your topic. For example, a history book written in 1935 about nineteenth century politics will be a secondary source if you are investigating nineteenth-century politics, but a primary source if you are investigating the intellectual history of the 1930s.

If you are writing an essay on a set topic, the secondary and primary sources may have been listed for you, or you may have to search library catalogues and databases to build up your own bibliography, or list of works you think you should consult. If you are devising your own topic, you will definitely need to search for the relevant secondary and primary sources. At this stage write your essay proposal, outlining the topic and issues you want to investigate and the works you will consult. Your lecturer will give you feedback, letting you know whether it is clearly formulated, whether its scope is appropriate for the time you have, and whether the materials you have selected are indeed relevant.

1.2.iii Note taking

During this research stage you will be taking extensive notes. There are many different systems of taking notes, and over time you will develop one that suits you.

Very often, plagiarism – the presentation of other people's ideas as your own – is accidental and results from poor note taking. Remember to record the full bibliographical details of the material you are using, including page numbers, because you will need to acknowledge all direct quotations and all those occasions where you use the ideas and evidence of others.

Many people find it useful not only to keep direct notes of what they have read, but also to record separately various thoughts and ideas that they might want to develop in the essay.

1.2.iv Writing the essay

Historical writing combines literary and analytical skills. The arts of historical writing include making complex or unfamiliar ideas comprehensible, evoking what we can of a past time and mentality so that they seem to live in the present, narrating a story in a lively and exciting way, and developing a clear and sustained argument. Not all essays need all these skills, but most topics need most of them.

Organise the essay as a whole, and plan each part. List the main points you want to cover, and the sequence of the argument. Keep the word limit in mind so that each part of the essay is allocated space commensurate with its importance to the whole essay.

There is no authorised way of setting out an essay. Some people like to begin with an anecdote or striking quotation that illustrates the issues and draws the reader in. Others prefer to begin by straight away defining the problem or issues to be investigated. However you start, within the first few paragraphs you

need to tell your readers what the essay is about and give signposts as to what they may expect to find in the remainder of the essay. It is always important to outline the contributions of other historians, to indicate if there are competing schools of thought on your topic, and to make it clear where your own argument or analysis fits in. The main part of the essay will be spent in developing and demonstrating your argument. You will need some kind of conclusion, which should not simply repeat points already made but should summarise the argument at a higher level of generality than was possible earlier in the essay.

Finally, edit the essay with special attention to typographical errors, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Even very experienced writers spend a lot of time editing their own work. Make sure you allow time for the editing process.

If you are having difficulty in writing, don't hesitate to visit the [Academic Skills and Learning Centre](#). Also, read J. Clanchy and B. Ballard, *Essay Writing for Students: A Practical Guide*, Longman, Melbourne, 1991.

2. Presentation and submission

2.1 Conventions of presentation

Your History lecturers and tutors expect students to learn and follow the technical conventions of scholarly writing, and historical writing in particular. Those concerning referencing are described in Section 3, below. Some of the other common conventions are as follows.

2.2 Presentation of quotations

It is quite difficult to learn when to quote a source directly and when it is better to summarise something in your own words. A good rule of thumb is that quotations should be used when the form of words in the quotation itself is significant: this is especially the case for secondary sources from which direct quotes should be used sparingly. When you do quote, it is important to acknowledge correctly the writer of the original.

2.2.i Long and short quotations

All material directly transcribed from another person's writing or speech should be clearly shown as such.

For short quotations this is done by enclosing the quoted passage in single inverted commas (' '). Where there is a quotation within material you have quoted, show this with double inverted commas.

Example:

As Webb asked rhetorically, 'What, in the name of common sense have we to do with obsolete hypocrisies about peoples "rightly struggling to be free"?'

Long quotations (longer than about thirty words) are not enclosed in inverted commas. Instead, they are indented and set with single-space line spacing.

Example:

In one of the most extraordinary analogies to emerge from the age of consent debates in the 1880s, W.T. Stead argued that,

Before the 14th of August it is a crime to shoot grouse, lest an immature cheeper should not yet have a fair chance to fly. The sportsman who wishes to follow the partridge through the stubbles must wait till September 1, and the close time for pheasants is even later. Admitting that women are as fair game as grouse and partridges, why not let us have a close time for bipeds in petticoats as well as for bipeds in feathers? At present that close time is absurdly low.... It does not give the girls a fair chance.

Stead was vilified for many things during this campaign, but never for treating young girls as chicks.

2.2.ii Omissions and additions

Sometimes a passage you wish to quote will contain some material that is irrelevant to the point you actually wish to make. This material should be omitted, and the omission indicated by the insertion of an ellipsis. An ellipsis consists of three dots (...)

Example:

Original: 'What's the good of reminding us that we're at war? He should have thought of that a long time ago – and let us get on with making the revolution which is our job. As though the war had any meaning if we can't make the revolution at the same time'.

Your quotation: 'What's the good of reminding us that we're at war?...As though the war had any meaning if we can't make the revolution at the same time'.

Never place an ellipsis at the beginning of a quotation, or at the end of a very short quotation. It is, however, necessary to place an ellipsis at the end of a long quotation when the original sentence has been left incomplete.

It is sometimes necessary to insert material into a quoted passage. Sometimes a quotation may lose its sense if taken from its original context and therefore be meaningless to your reader unless you insert a few words. Sometimes it is necessary to change the tense of a verb (e.g. 'is' to 'was') to make the passage conform grammatically to the sentence you are writing. Enclose the insertion in square brackets, thus: [xxx]. Do not use square brackets for any other purpose.

Examples:

Original: 'The rank and file are for the most part our very good friends'.

Your sentence: Shaw's claim that the Social Democratic Federation's 'rank and file [were] for the most part our very good friends' was probably exaggerated.

2.2.iii Corrections

Some quoted material contains errors of fact or expression. To show the reader that such errors are the original writer's rather than your own, follow them with the word 'sic' italicised and in square brackets ('sic' is the Latin for 'thus' or 'so').

Example:

'One of the propagandist intellectuals, Mr G.D.H. Coles [sic], pleads for a "democratic partnership in the control of industry".'

The 'Coles' in this quotation was actually called Cole. It is significant that the author made this mistake consistently throughout the document, as it suggests that he is not really familiar with a writer whose work he is criticising. Some errors are obviously merely typographical, and therefore utterly insignificant. It is best to correct these 'silently', without using 'sic'.

On the other hand, some historical documents, for example letters written by nineteenth century labourers, are riddled with errors of spelling and punctuation. Reproduce these in their original form, but do not use 'sic'. If you are not sure that it will be clear to the reader that the errors have been transcribed from the original, point it out in your text or in a footnote.

It is considered bad manners to insert 'sic' simply as a means of ridiculing an author.

2.3 Titles

Titles of books, pamphlets, newspapers, and journals (free-standing works) should be *italicised* wherever they appear. They should not be enclosed in inverted commas. Titles of journal articles, speeches, and

individual contributions to edited collections (non free-standing works) should be enclosed in single inverted commas, not italicised. It is important to note that this applies to titles used in the main text of your essay, as well as in the footnotes and bibliography.

2.4 Numbers

Spell out all numbers from one to twenty. Use numerals for numbers above 21, except for thirty, forty, etc. However, 100 is expressed as numerals. There are some circumstances in which numerals are always used, regardless of the magnitude of the numbers. The most obvious are:

Ages: An 18-year-old.

Dimensions: 3 metres x 5 metres

Military units: The 9th Battalion

Money: \$3.12

Percentages: 17 per cent

Weights: 2 kg

2.5 Dates

Dates are shown as follows:

17 July 1936

26 Jan. 1788

March, April, May, June, July and August are usually written in full. The other months are usually shown as Jan., Feb., Sep., Oct., Nov. and Dec.

2.6 Departmental requirements for presentation

2.6.i Word limits

It is important to keep within the prescribed word limit. The length of an essay affects its nature and scope, so do not attempt to develop a narrative and argument that cannot be written in less than 10,000 words if your limit is 3,000.

Keep the word limit in mind at every stage of planning the essay. The limit is imposed to encourage the skill of writing economically, to persuade you to focus on the central issues rather than reproduce everything you know. The word limit also reminds you of one of the great traps of historical writing: namely, the desire to report findings which might be fascinating, and have taken some time to collect, and yet are not precisely relevant, or merely provide more evidence for a proposition you have already established.

Every word in the main text of the essay counts, including quotations.

2.6.ii Format

You should use only one side of each sheet of unfolded A4 paper and leave a wide left-hand margin (about 5 centimetres) for your tutor's comments. The essay should be typed if at all possible. For typescript, use a 12-point font, and either 1.5 or double spacing. Handwriting must be clear, neat, and double-spaced.

2.7 Submission of essays

All written assessments must be submitted electronically via Turnitin on the course Wattle page no later than 4 pm on the due date. Turnitin will record the time and date of submission. If specified by the convenor, a hard copy should ALSO be submitted to the Joint Office adjacent to the main entrance of Coombs Building 9. A coversheet available from the School website or the joint office should be attached.

Late submission of assessment tasks without an extension are penalised at the rate of 5% of the possible marks available per working day or part thereof. Late submission of assessment tasks is not accepted after 10 working days after the due date, or on or after the date specified in the course outline for the return of the assessment item. Lateness penalties will be calculated from the time of the electronic submission.

If for a very good reason you desire an extension of the submission date, you must consult your tutor before the prescribed date of submission. If illness has been the problem, you must present a medical certificate.

Be sure to keep a copy of your essay. On extremely rare occasions electronic submissions have been corrupted after they have been submitted.

3. Referencing

3.1 What to reference and why

Referencing serves two purposes. Firstly, it enables you to give due acknowledgment to the sources used in your essay: not just for direct quotations, but also for summaries, ideas and inspiration. Failure to do so is tantamount to claiming that another's words or ideas are your own, which constitutes a form of plagiarism (see Section IV). Secondly, referencing enables the reader of your essay to follow up the evidence or other material cited in your text. In essence, referencing is a way of demonstrating good faith in the use of your sources.

Referencing has two components: the footnotes or endnotes, which acknowledge specific words, ideas and information in the body of the text, and the bibliography, which lists the cited sources. It is important to present the footnotes and bibliography accurately and consistently in accordance with certain conventions.

There are several different systems of referencing in common use, but the School of History follows the Chicago Manual of Style notes and bibliography system. Please note that the School of History does **not** use the 'author-date' system. Individual course convenors may have modifications or further requirements that will be given in the relevant course outline.

3.2 Chicago Manual of Style

This style guide is available online with open access to a [Quick Guide](#).

The full version of the manual can be accessed through the University library's electronic resources.

The house editors have an extensive archive of questions and answer that should be your first place to look if you have a query that is not answer in the style guide.

If you use reference management software such as EndNote or Zotero, the 'Chicago Style' feature in these applications is acceptable in essays for submission in the School of History.

3.3 Use of footnotes and endnotes

There are pros and cons for the use of footnotes or endnotes discussed in the Chicago Manual of Style section 14.38. Purely for ease of marking, footnotes are preferred in this School, but endnotes will be accepted.

Place the footnote number at the end of the relevant passage of your text (e.g. the end of a quotation, or the end of a passage which summarised someone else's work). The footnote number should be superscripted; this is presented in a small font size and slightly above the baseline of the text. The footnotes themselves should appear at the bottom of the relevant page.

Both footnotes and endnotes should be numbered consecutively through the essay (i.e. do not start again at 1 on each page).

3.4 Using footnotes for more than citations

Footnotes are sometimes used to supply information or a comment that is supplementary to the text. Such notes are sometimes helpful, but before including one, ask yourself if the information is really necessary. If not, omit it. If it is, consider including it in the text.

3.5 'Lifted' quotations

Sometimes it is necessary to quote or paraphrase material that you have seen quoted in a source, but have not yourself seen in its original context. Do not do this too often: it is best to check the original if you can, as mistakes are frequently perpetuated by this method. The most obvious example where you might quote in this way is a quotation from an historical document that you have read in a secondary source.

It is misleading simply to reproduce the author's footnote so as to give the impression that you have consulted the original source yourself. Remember, one of the main purposes of referencing is to enable your reader to look at what you have read. You must therefore show in your footnote, not only the full details of the original source, but the full details of the source in which you found it.

Example:

Hutt to Lord John Russell, 15 May 1841. C. 627, 380, quoted in Paul Hasluck, *Black Australians: A survey of native policy in Western Australia 1829-1897* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1970), 76.

3.6 The bibliography

The bibliography is a list of sources, primary and secondary, that you have cited in the essay, as well as any unquoted work that has supported your research on the topic. It starts on a fresh page at the very end of your essay. The formatting style for references difference to that used in footnotes – the Chicago manual of Style explains this for you.

Sources should be separated under the headings of 'primary' and 'secondary' and if the list is extensive you may choose further subheadings such as 'books', 'journal articles' and so on. Each section should list the references in alphabetical order.

4. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is any attempt to present the work of any other person as your own. A student therefore commits an act of plagiarism if she or she copies, summarises or paraphrases any text written by any person without proper acknowledgement.

The School of History abides by the principle that its students should show they can think independently and sustain in their own words a clear and cogent argument, Students may not submit work containing unacknowledged or improperly acknowledged transcription or excessive quotation of the work of others.

Students should understand the University's policy of plagiarism as set out in its [Code of Practice for Student Academic Integrity](#).

The ANU uses Turnitin to enhance student citation and referencing techniques, and to assess assignment submissions as a component of the University's approach to managing Academic Integrity. For additional information regarding Turnitin please visit the [ANU Online](#) website. The Academic Skills and Learning Centre also has further information on [plagiarism](#) and [academic honesty](#).

Plagiarism is a most serious offence and severe penalties will be imposed on anyone found guilty of it. The mildest of these is a requirement to resubmit the work; a medium penalty is the award of no marks for the assignment concerned; and the stronger penalty is automatic failure in the course.

Students may sometimes plagiarize inadvertently, through inexperience or failure to understand the aim and methods of university study. Apart from the question of deliberate deceit, the practices briefly summarised below can impede sound thinking; learning to avoid them is part of training in the skills of scholarship.

4.1 Copying

Copying is the quotation of another author's text, word for word, without acknowledgment. It is not sufficient to make a general attribution without page numbers or give references for some but not all of the passages copied. References should be to the work in which the material is found: lifting reference or footnotes that refer to a third work – as if it has been consulted when in fact it has not (see 3.5) is not acceptable.

For example: this is a paragraph of Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*:

“Southern slave society grew out of the same general historical conditions that produced the other slave regimes of the modern world. The rise of a world market – the development of new tastes and of manufactures dependent upon non-European sources of materials – encouraged the rationalization of colonial agriculture under the ferocious domination of a few Europeans.” (p.4)

Although referenced, the following statement is a case of plagiarism unless inverted commas/indentation is used:

Southern slave society grew out of the same general historical conditions that produced the other slave regimes of the modern world.¹

4.2 Summarising

Summarising the argument of other authors (for example, by isolating main points and tracing connections) is legitimate, provided it is made clear that this is what is being done. To summarise others' arguments, ideas or information as though they were one's own is plagiarism.

For example, each of the following statements should be footnoted with Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 3-5.

As Hofstadter argues, progressivism was essentially a defensive movement.¹

It seems clear that progressivism was a defensive movement.¹

The sexual purity movement, as Hofstadter points out, was a clear example of the defensive nature of progressivism.¹

4.3 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means putting an author's meaning into different words. This is permissible only if full and exact references are given. A common form of plagiarism combines copying with paraphrase, repeating some words of the original text and substituting different words for others. The more the wording is changed, the more fully the copyist may have understood the material; but it is still necessary to cite the source of the ideas and of any direct quotations.

For example, from the same paragraph of Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, the following statements are cases of plagiarism unless referenced:

It appears that all modern slave societies grew out of the same historical circumstances.

Southern slave society developed from similar historical circumstances: the rise of the world market, the development of new tastes and the growth of new manufactures.

4.4 Other plagiaristic practices

Other plagiaristic practices such as submitting the same essay for two different courses or submitting a former or current student's essay as your own are treated as blatant cases of plagiarism.