

HISTORY 247: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS IN HISTORY

Below is a guide for writing a prospectus (or abstract) for a research paper. Although you may not be able to answer all of these questions in your prospectus, you should try to have some solid preliminary answers.

1. Thesis statement or hypothesis
 - a. the topic or subject of your examination
 - b. the question you are going to ask about the subject, based on a series of premises about the subject (in other words, the perspective from which you will examine the subject)
 - c. the argument you are going to make about it (this will undoubtedly shift as you research and write, but you need to begin to formulate a hypothesis to help direct your inquiry)
2. Annotated bibliography
 - a. primary sources
explain why you've chosen these sources
 - b. secondary sources
explain what they offer your study: the information they provide; the author's argument and perspective

NOTE: How to find sources:

Hawthorne-Longfellow Library:

1. on-line catalog (be inventive, but specific enough)
2. reference bibliographies (autobiographies, diaries)
3. government documents
4. newspaper microfilm (and indices)

An invaluable source for this course is the H-L Library Maine History Research Guide

<http://library.bowdoin.edu/rguides/amerhist/maine/>

NOTE: For primary source materials, you can also check the footnotes and bibliography in a good secondary source on the *topic*. Look for primary sources that have not been selectively quoted by a historian. When you use secondary sources, try not to take the historian's interpretation at face value.

3. Methodology
 - how will you use the sources?
 - are they valid/reliable for the questions you want to ask?
4. Projected outline of the essay

NOTE: Historians use footnote or endnote format for citations and provide a bibliography of the sources that we consult, rather than parenthetical citations and a works cited page. For a quick lesson on correct format, see Patrick Rael's "My Handouts for Writing Papers" on his faculty home page at <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/faculty/P/prael/> or A Brief Guide to Footnote Citation in History under Course Resources on the course homepage.

Additional information on citations:

Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Manual to Writing in History*, 3rd ed.
Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed.
Research and Documentation Online (online guide from Bedford/St. Martin's Press) ([online](#))
A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities ([online](#))
Online! from Bedford's/St. Martin's Press ([online](#))