

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER: HISTORY/GWS 249

I. THE RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS

Here are guidelines for writing a prospectus (or abstract) for a research project in history. Although you may not be able to answer all of the questions at this stage, you should 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
(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)

KEY: women's *voices*: search for primary sources, and for the historiographer literature that offers a context for reading and understanding those voices

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 (ask Ginny Hopcroft)
4. newspaper and journal microfilm (and indices)
6. internet search engines

For primary source materials, you should check the footnotes and bibliography in a good secondary source on the *topic*

NOTE: you need to read primary sources that have not been interpreted by an historian. When you read selections of a primary source in a secondary source, you have to be aware of (and wary of) the interpretation of the historian/author who is analyzing the writer.

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: Think of your prospectus as a work-in-progress. As you work with the secondary literature on your subject, either broadly or narrowly conceived, you should think about how your study fits into the historiographical literature.

As you begin to analyze your primary sources, you may discover that you need additional sources, which you should add to the annotated bibliography. And, as you analyze the evidence in both your primary and secondary sources, you may discover that your thesis premises have changed, and that you need to revise, or rethink altogether, your thesis question.

As you begin to write your essay, your work-in-progress prospectus will become the foundation for your introduction.

II. THE INTRODUCTION TO A RESEARCH PAPER

Your introduction should begin by presenting the thesis premises which lead to either an explicit or implicit thesis question. Your thesis statement (which may be more than a single sentence) answers the thesis question.

To locate your study, offer a brief review of the historiographical literature (secondary sources) on your subject, either broadly or narrowly conceived.

Then offer a brief, but thoughtful discussion of the primary sources that you will explore to support your thesis. In this final section of the introduction, you should discuss both the evidence that your sources provide and the shortcomings of your sources.

NOTE: In History, we 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 Citation and footnote basics; Citation guide; advanced; and or Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students on his faculty home page (under "My guides for writing papers")
<http://academic.bowdoin.edu/faculty/P/prael/>

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](#))