

4.a.

Research Papers

Arguments and the thesis: The best papers are not droll surveys of historical data, but *arguments*. That is, they stake out a *thesis* (a conclusion or historical argument) and try to support it. Arguing a point provides focus for your paper; it engages you as the author and challenges you to think critically.

Developing your topic: The best way to devise a thesis to argue is to pose yourself questions about subjects that interest you. What was behind lynching: was it economic or psychological? How did African Americans feel about participating in World War II: were they happy or ambivalent? How successful was non-violence as a strategy during the Civil Rights movement? These are examples of questions or problems that can lead you into theses. You start out by looking into the question you set for yourself. As you learn more, you refine your question until you develop the problem that will guide you through your paper-writing. Ideally, your question will be interesting enough to let you do a sophisticated paper, yet narrow enough to be manageable. I can help you develop a problem and narrow your topic once you have expressed an interest in a particular time or subject.

Sources: The sources you will use will provide the raw data from which you will seek to answer the question you pose for yourself. In order to get you thinking and writing quickly, I will work closely with you to determine the sources you will use. This will prevent you from spending all your time simply finding material. All of the material we will use will be readily available. Some sources are more challenging to get and use than others; be realistic about what you are willing to do.

PAPER WRITING STEPS

Here are the steps involved in writing a paper.

Start out: Develop a problem and select primary sources in consultation with me.

Find primary sources: Locate the primary sources you will use. Check them out, if possible. If not, determine how and when you will use them (as in the case of microfilm, etc.). Consult with me about useful sources.

Research: Take notes from your primary sources. It is best to do this on note cards, so that you can arrange notes by topic when you prepare to write. *Make sure to note on each card the source for the note, so you can footnote it later.*

Analyze notes: Every night after you have taken notes, look over all the note cards you have compiled so far. Do this even if you have just started taking notes. Look over your notes, noting interesting recurring patterns in your data, or interesting questions that pop up. The point is that you must analyze your notes *as* you do your research. Constant analysis will suggest themes to look for when researching, and will help you develop your argument. Do not wait to analyze your notes until you have finished taking them; it doesn't work like that.

Prepare outline and develop hypothesis: After analyzing your notes, prepare an outline of your paper. An outline is your tentative scheme for organizing and writing the paper. The main purpose of the outline is to determine the structure of your paper. Without an overall sense of how the component parts of your research will address your topic (and hence support your thesis), you will have a very difficult time writing your paper. Through preparation of an outline, you should begin to get a sense of the argument you want to make. This argument is your tentative thesis, or hypothesis. You should keep your hypothesis in mind at all times when writing; you should ask yourself if your material supports it, or if you need to modify it.

Write first draft: Once you have a good collection of notes (you needn't have finished all of your research) and an outline, you should write a first draft of your final paper. Arrange your notes according to your outline. Your paragraphs should correspond to your outline, and each should advance your goal of supporting your hypothesis. A first draft will challenge you to articulate ideas that have been floating around in your head. You will probably realize that what you thought were simple ideas are actually complex, and are more difficult to express than you expected. That is normal; most of us don't realize how smart we really are.

Write final draft: Evaluate and edit your first draft. This is a crucial step! After reconsidering your paper, write your final draft, revising your first draft and incorporating the extra research you have completed. Throughout the paper writing process, the most important (and challenging) task will be to constantly edit and revise your work.

TAKING NOTES

Your research paper is based on your reading from different sources, so your notes must be sufficiently complete to be meaningful *after* the source has been read (or interviewed or heard or seen). Since you have to document (foot- or end-note) your paper, your notes must contain adequate resource information. Notecard method (using 3"x5" or 4"x6" index cards) is a convenient and flexible method of organizing your research. When you take notes, write only one note on each card. In addition to the note itself, write:

- a. in the upper left hand corner of the card, the appropriate category or topic/subtopic to which the note refers.
- b. in the upper right hand corner, the name of the source.
- c. the page number(s) of that part (or those parts) of the source that you have used in taking the note. If you have used more than one page, indicate your page numbers in such a way as that when you start to write your paper, you can tell from what page each part of your note comes, for you may not choose to include the whole note.

This separate card method will make organizing your information much easier. When you come to outline and to organize your paper, you will be able to sort your notes in any way you please--by subtopic for example--and to arrange them in any order you please. You may even find that you want to recategorize some of your notes. Such flexibility is impossible if you take notes in a notebook. You will also be able to footnote your paper without having to refer to the sources themselves again.

In taking the note itself, paraphrase or quote your source or do both; *but do only one at a time*. Paraphrases and quotations require special care. Anything between paraphrase and quotation is not acceptable: you either paraphrase or quote, but do nothing in between. To paraphrase a source (or part of a source) is to reproduce it in words and word orders substantially different from the original. When you paraphrase well, you keep the sense of the original but change the language, retaining some key words, of course, but otherwise using your own words and your own sentence patterns. As a rough guide, if you copy more than three words in a row from a source, these words should be in quotation marks.

To quote a source (or part of a source) is to reproduce it exactly. When you quote well, you keep both the sense and language of the original, retaining its punctuation, its capitalization, its type face (roman or italic), and its spelling (indeed, even its misspelling).

WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

A *working* bibliography should be started at the outset of your investigation. It has a few functions:

- a. it tells you if there are insufficient, adequate, or overabundant amounts of information on your topic.
- b. it gets you organized and points a direction for you to start researching. It helps you to get down to work.

If you compile your bibliography on index cards, you will have more flexibility in alphabetizing and adding and deleting sources. Your bibliography should always be undergoing change as your research progresses.

Keep a separate card for each source you consult. Be sure to include all of the relevant publication information for each of your sources. A few examples taken from Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, (Chicago: Fifth Edition, 1987) follow. These are only the most common types of sources you will need to cite; you will surely need to consult Turabian or another style manual for others. Note that the way to cite a source in a bibliography is different than the way to cite a source in a footnote.

1. Book (footnote, bibliography):

¹John Hope Franklin, George Washington Williams: A Biography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 54.

Franklin, John Hope. George Washington Williams: A Biography. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

2. Article in a scholarly journal (footnote, bibliography):

¹Richard Jackson, "Running Down the Up-Escalator: Regional Inequality in Papua New Guinea," Australian Geographer 14 (May 1979): 180.

Jackson, Richard. "Running Down the Up-Escalator: Regional Inequality in Papua New Guinea." Australian Geographer 14 (May 1979): 174-85.

3. Article in a newspaper (footnote, bibliography):

¹William Lloyd Garrison, "Guilt of New England," The Liberator (Boston), January 7, 1832.

Garrison, William Lloyd. "Guilt of New England." The Liberator (Boston), January 7, 1832.

It is essential that you obtain complete and accurate bibliographical information on each source, whether it be primary or secondary, which you use. Consult Turabian, 175-228 for directions on information needed for different types of sources.

REVISING THE DRAFT

1. After you have written the first draft, you should revise it. You should not begin this revision immediately after you have finished the first draft. Let your paper sit for awhile and then come back to it with a fresh view. As the researcher and writer, you have been too close to your work. You

need a little distance before you look at the paper again. You might want to change some of the original organization, or delete parts which are tangential or insignificant to your main argument. You may also need to do some additional research and strengthen your arguments.

2. Think about how you have arranged the arguments in your paper. Does the paper's organization offer the most effective arrangement of your ideas and evidence to support the theme?
3. Reread the topic sentence for each paragraph. Does the sentence make your point and does the information in the paragraph support it?
4. Be sure that you have placed your topic in its historical context, preferably in the first few pages of the paper.
5. Locate your argument among those offered in the secondary historical works which you have read. At this point, you should have some idea of how your approach/theme adds to the body of historical literature on your topic. How have other historians treated the subject? What is different and/or unique about your approach/theme by comparison to the way previous historians have treated the topic? (Bear in mind that I realize that you have not completed an exhaustive analysis of all of the secondary works on your topic. In fact, you have probably only read a few articles and/or books. I just want you to locate your work in relation to the secondary material you have read.)
6. Think about your introduction and conclusion. Remember that these are crucial to the paper and you should take some time when writing them. The introduction not only interests the reader in getting beyond the first few pages but it also presents the focus of your argument. The conclusion is your chance to make a lasting impression on your audience; take advantage of it!
7. The final revision of your paper should include a check of overall organization, style and composition, spelling, proof of thesis, and format (arrangement of title page, pagination, endnotes if applicable, bibliography, citation form.)