guidelines for the preparation of research papers in history

**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. **Analytical 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 do a number of authors take differing stands? What is your own interpretation of the issues?

3. In a research paper 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.

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 due date should appear on a separate first page.

2. **Introduction:** lays out your topic, states what your particular approach or argument will be, and tells your reader how the paper will be structured.

3. **Body:** presents your evidence and examples in a logical and orderly fashion. This section provides background, and 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.

5. **Footnotes or Endnotes:** in most cases, history essays will require footnotes **OR** endnotes. Footnotes and endnotes use the same format and the only difference between them is their physical location. References which appear in the body of the paper – including all forms of APA notation – are **NEVER** acceptable in a history paper.

6. **Bibliography:** in most cases, history papers will include a bibliography of the works cited in the footnotes and all works otherwise consulted during the development of the essay.

**C. GENERAL RULES FOR ESSAY WRITING**

1. **Spelling:** Spell-check AND proof-read your essay carefully. A sloppy paper detracts 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 such as ‘marital’ vs. ‘martial’, ‘there’ vs. ‘their’, and ‘heir’ vs. ‘here.’

2. **Contractions:** do not use contractions (isn’t, wasn’t) in formal writing. The only exception to this rule would be a contraction within a quotation.

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. **Sub-headings:** normally papers of less than twenty-five pages in length do NOT require a heading at the beginning of each section. Including good transitional sentences and paragraphs, eliminates the need for such headings.

5. **Spacing and Print Size:** unless instructed otherwise, always type and double-space your work using standard margins (usually 1 inch margins) and a standard print font (12 point). Remember, your reader should not require a magnifying glass and will easily detect “creative” margins.

6. **Word Count:** as a general rule of thumb, one page of typed, double-spaced text (exclusive of footnotes) contains roughly 250 words. A 3000 word assignment therefore, should be approximately twelve pages in length, excluding the bibliography.

7. **Number the pages** consecutively from beginning to end (including the bibliography), beginning with the first page of TEXT (not the title page).

8. **Indent** the beginning of each paragraph five spaces from the left margin and do not insert spaces between your paragraphs.

9. **Staple your paper** together neatly. A cover or folder is not necessary

10. **Keep a copy** of your paper (either on disk or photocopied) and **ALL** of your research notes until the assignment has been graded and returned to you.

**D. USING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES**

**A primary source** is a record left by a person (or group) who participated in or witnessed the events you are studying. Examples of primary sources are letters, autobiographies, diaries, government documents, minutes of meetings, newspapers, interviews, films, photos, recordings of music, clothing, buildings, or tools from the period.

**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.

1. When working with **secondary source**s, limit your use of direct quotations. In general, your paper will flow better if you paraphrase the statement, putting it into your own words and providing a footnote.

2. When using **primary source**s, 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. Quote only when you plan to analyze or interpret the passage.

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 separate reference, normally in a footnote or endnote.

5. Quotations of four or more lines need to be indented five 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 integrated into 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 periods. For gaps in the middle of a sentence, use three periods, for omissions at the end of a sentence, use four periods (e.g. “History can be frustrating because of these . . . stylistic requirements.” Or: “History can be frustrating….”).

7. If you insert a word into a quotation to increase clarity or adjust it to your own presentation use square brackets: She commented, “by January . . . [the trees] looked sickly.”

8. **Citing Wikipedia:** “[A] Wikipedia citation can be an appropriate convenience when the point being supported is minor, non-controversial, or also supported by other evidence. In addition, Wikipedia is an appropriate source for some extremely recent topics (especially in popular culture or technology) for which it provides the sole or best available synthetic, analytical, or historical discussion…. Wikipedia should NEVER be used as the primary source for information on anything that is central to an argument, complex, or controversial.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**E. REFERENCING AND ACADEMIC HONESTY**

1. **Plagiarism** or academic dishonesty can take many forms including presenting other people’s text and ideas as if they were your own, or submitting a paper that you did not write.

2. You **MUST** acknowledge the sources of all your information and any ideas, arguments, or interpretations you have taken from other works. These references are usually placed in footnotes or endnotes (see below), including all works consulted.

3. Always provide a footnote for the following types of information: quotations (the note follows the quotation immediately); statistics; ideas attributed to another person/group (e.g., Mayan astronomers believed that the fifth and final cycle of the world would end in the year 2012 – you must footnote this unless you have personally interviewed a Mayan astronomer); or theories taken from other authors.

4. You may not use a paper you wrote for one course in another course.

**F. 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. Give the full details of author, title, publication, date, and page in the footnote.

2. Footnotes/endnotes should be numbered consecutively throughout the paper and the number should be slightly above the line of text. Indent the first line five spaces.

3. If a work is cited more than once, the first note should contain the full citation, while subsequent notes may include only the author’s surname, a shortened form of the title, and the new page number.

4. Footnotes will appear at the bottom of the page, while endnotes will appear on a separate page, before the bibliography, at the end of the essay (with the heading **Endnotes** at top of page – not “Works Cited”).

5. Notes should be single-spaced, with two spaces between each note.

6. Notes may also be used...[[2]](#footnote-2)

**G. 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.

**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, 1990), 35-38.

**Quotations from other sources**

6Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), 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**

9Gary Gerhardt, “Troubled Bighorn,” *Rocky Mountain News*, (9 January 1989): 8.

**Films**

10“The Other Side of the Ledger: An Indian View of the Hudson’s Bay Company” (National Film Board of Canada, 1970).

**Websites**

11Jack Granatstein, “Canadians at Vimy,” <http://www.firstworldwar.com>, accessed January 12, 2010.

**H. 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. It should be the **last** page of the paper.

3. The items in the bibliography should be arranged in **alphabetical orde**r. Each item should be single-spaced, with the second and subsequent lines indented 5 spaces. These items are not numbered (see examples attached).

**I. BIBLIOGRAPHY – EXAMPLE**

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

Cantor, Miriam and Brian Laurie, eds. *Class, Sex, and Working Women*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977.

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

Gerhard, Gary. “Troubled Bighorn,” *Rocky Mountain News*, 9 January 1989: 8, 19.

Lévesque, René. *Memoirs*, trans. Philip Stratford. Toronto: McClelland & 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.

1. Alan Liu, Department of English, University of California at Santa Barbara, “Wise Words on Wikipedia,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, <http://chronicle.com/wiredcampus/article/1395/wise-words-on-wikipedia> accessed July 5, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. in order to provide additional information which would otherwise have necessitated parentheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)