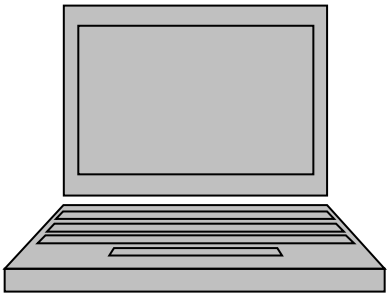
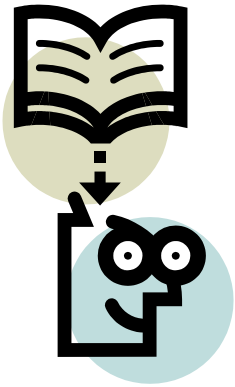
Upper-Division History Courses:
Total War Europe





Writing Conventions
For Historical Essays

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Updated January 2023

Table of Contents

WRITING, CITING, QUOTING

I have created several YouTube videos explaining history writing conventions.
These can be accessed by
clicking on the link if you are viewing a PDF of this page,
visit my website http://facstaff.bloomu.edu/lstallba/index.html
or visit my YouTube Channel, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNO0nvuSU4pg-bVm3vO8zow

Writing a Thesis

Writing Paragraphs: A Definition

Writing Paragraphs: Segues

Writing Paragraphs: Unity and Coherency

Writing Paragraphs: Proving Claims

Writing Paragraph: Concluding a Paragraph

Writing Paragraphs: Proofreading

Writing Paragraph: Diagnosing Problems

Active and Passive Voice Writing Lively Sentences

Citing Sources

Quotations: When and How

Quotations: Framing

Epistemology and Writing Conventions

Writing Conventions: Avoid First Person

Writing Conventions: Personal Pronouns

Writing Conventions: Past Tense

Writing Conventions: Avoid Vernacular

Writing Conventions: Sweeping Generalizations

Writing Conventions: Global Statements

What makes historical essays plausible and meet the standards of the historical profession?

- ✓ Reading essays place a burden on working memory. Therefore, the structure of a historical essay provides a road map for the reader. The introduction tells the reader where we are going, the body paragraphs get them there, the conclusion tells them where they have just gone. It helps the reader consolidate information by creating coherency and reducing the cognitive burden of reading.
- ✓ The student writes for an audience, who is not the professor. They assume the reader has some interest, maybe even a history-channel knowledge, in the subject, but that they do NOT know what readings were assigned or what occurred in class.
- ✓ Do not arrive at conclusions until you have access to enough reliable information.
- ✓ Aspire to be objective which means acknowledging to yourself that you have biases, preconceptions, and assumptions that may be influencing how you interpret the evidence, present, and support the claims.
- ✓ All conclusions must be drawn from the available evidence or be a reasonable, plausible inference when the evidence is lacking.
- ✓ Your interpretation of history has to stand the test of plausibility, to be trustworthy and gain the reader's confidence.
- ✓ Do not say anything that is contradicted by the available evidence or else you will lose the reader's trust.
- ✓ Interpret the past on its own terms, that is contextualize, to achieve greater plausibility.
- ✓ Anticipate counter claims and challenge respectfully.

- ✓ Write an articulate essay that advances a plausible, trustworthy interpretation abiding by the conventions in historical writing; do not simply throw data, facts, or evidence at the reader.

Before Starting to Write

- ✓ Read the essay question or assignment; be certain that you understand what is being asked or expected of you.
- ✓ Break down the content into a series of questions if your professor has not done so. For example, if you are being asked to analyze the origins of World War I, break this down into questions such as: How did Austria contribute to the origins of war? How did Serbia….? By trying to chunk information into questions that need to be answered, you might avoid slipping into storytelling, you will remain focused on advancing your thesis, and you will be less overwhelmed.
- ✓ Know the content this includes the text, context, and subtext. If you have not been engaging with the content, preparing for class in haste, failing to review, you will struggle to express your ideas.
- ✓ Make timelines to increase your awareness about the sequence of events. Timelines serve as a useful review activity.
- ✓ Review and study relevant class or reading notes, document collections, historical essays, textbook, and so forth.
- ✓ Then take notes as you review and study to generate a list of ideas that you might incorporate into your essay. If you have broken down the content into a series of questions, organize your note around these questions.
- ✓ Engage in pre-writing by reviewing content and making notes.
- ✓ Pre-write the body paragraphs before writing an introduction or conclusion.
- ✓ **Should you compose a thesis first?** At most, write a tentative thesis if you believe that it helps you to focus. Often when we write, we mistake a focus statement for a thesis. Drafting an essay involves working through and thinking through the sources. After you have worked through your body paragraphs, you will be able to more precisely articulate a thesis, claims that you are making or the answers to the essay question, and also know what background information the reader will need in the introductory paragraph.

Steps From First Draft to the Final Draft: An Overview

Step 1: Start your essay at least a week before it is due. Do <u>not</u> make your first draft your final draft.

Step 2: First write the body paragraphs, not the introduction.

- This may sound counter-intuitive, but it is worth a try! This advice is driven by the writing process: **writing through is thinking through**. We may create writer's block by stumbling over how to get started.
- Write the body paragraphs without concerning yourself with word choice, word order, paragraph structure, etc.
- In the process of writing, assuming you have a strong foundation of knowledge, you develop greater familiarity with the "vocabulary of the event," to speak about the events, people, ideas. Your confidence increases.

Step 3: After writing body paragraphs, set your paper aside in order to contemplate the content, structure, composition.

Step 4: Rewrite and edit the paragraphs of the body of your paper. Now you should begin revising paragraph topic sentences, sentence segues, word choice, proper grammar, punctuation, effective incorporation of quotations as evidence, and paragraph transition sentences.

Step 5: Write the conclusion of your essay restating the major points of your claims and some details on how you proved it.

Step 6: After you have revised the body of your essay and conclusion, write the introduction. Be sure to revisit any thesis that you may have composed to ensure that it continues to reflect the claims found in your essay.

Step 7: Proofread and edit to create a **professional** look; *you embarrass yourself and lose credibility when sloppy work is submitted.*

How to Write the Introductory Paragraph

- The introductory paragraph tells the reader what to expect. It must provide essential background so they can create a framework in their brain that enables them to process your claims through their working memory. Although our readers begin with the introduction, that does not mean that you, the writer, should being there.
- Write the introductory paragraph **last**. Writing involves working through material, making choices about what must be included. So, you probably cannot know what background information is essential for the reader, let alone know your thesis, that it the claims that you are advancing to answer the historical question(s) in the essay prompt. If you feel discombobulated when you do not start at the introductory paragraph, then write your introduction but be certain you revise it, or even consider tossing it out and starting over. Be sure to revise your thesis so that it will tell the reader where you are going.
- The introductory paragraph must end with a thesis statement usually, it's a single sentence, but it might be more than that.

  A thesis statement provides a concise answer to the question posed or to the assignment; it should not simply explain the focus of the essay.

  Ineffective thesis statement:
  This paper will discuss whether or not the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution represented sharp breaks in historical periods.

  Effective thesis statement:
  The Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution were distinctive periods of history and represented sharp breaks from one another.

- An introductory paragraph provides **background** that is relevant to the ideas explained in the body of the paper.
- To begin writing your introduction, review the body paragraphs of your essay and take notes on what needs to be introduced to the reader in the first paragraph. You will find **cues in the paragraph topic sentences** if they are linked to a potential thesis.
- If the essay is in response to an assigned question, **do not assume** the reader knows the question or the sources assigned; assume your audience has a college education with a general knowledge of history.
- **Avoid** starting your introduction with global statements such as "Throughout history …" Not surprisingly, you are more likely to make global statements or gross generalizations if

you write your introduction first and then fail to revise it when you have completed full drafts of your paper.

How to Write the Body of your Paper

- Consult your **pre-writing notes**, in which you have ideally chunked information into potential paragraphs.
- Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence that **links the reader to your thesis**; these are sometimes difficult to write in early drafts of your paper, because you are still working and thinking through the material. Do not get anxious about writing the perfect topic sentence. Be prepared to revise it!
- In historical essays, your interpretations of the question must be supported by an **analysis of evidence and factual details** that persuades the reader that your claims are plausible.
- If you want to convince the reader by **quoting a primary or secondary source**, you need to incorporate the quotation effectively and judiciously.
  - Use quotations as evidence to advance a claim or because the original source is uniquely phrased or memorable.
  - Incorporating quotations within your essay allows readers to judge your ability to assess evidence. It's comparable to having an eyewitness testify in a courtroom. So, it's a good idea to incorporate quotations into your essay.
  - However, do not string together a series of quotations (as a general rule, a paragraph should not contain more than 1-2 quotations; the overall paper should be ¾ to 3/5 your own words).
  - Do not quote if you are only providing factual information or common knowledge (i.e. stated the same way in 2 or more sources).
- If you are quoting a source, give **attribution** to the source within the paragraph (see example below on framing quotations effectively).
- If **quoting verbatim**, use quotation marks and cite with a footnote.
  - Unique word choices, phrases (three words or more), and sentences taken verbatim from a primary or secondary source must be encased in quotations marks " " with punctuation located inside quotation marks and footnote number outside.
  - Failure to use quotation marks to separate your words from a verbatim passage constitutes **plagiarism** (see example below and section on how to footnote).
- Cite the source if you are paraphrasing or summarizing ideas not your own; failure to do so amounts to **plagiarism** (see example below and section on how to footnote).
- When quoting a source, minor edits to make the passage more readable are allowed if you use **ellipses** or **bracket** the change. Ellipses are used when we remove passages or words that do not change the meaning, but are also unnecessary to advance your claim. Brackets might be used if I am quoting a letter, and the author wrote, "she only had time enough to rescue the puppies from the fire." I would need to identify who "she" is. "[Margaret] only had time …"
- When quoting a source be sure that you **do not misrepresent** the original intent of the author.
- **Citing sources** is absolutely critical to win your reader's trust, even if that reader is only your professor who knows what you were assigned to read. We cite direct quotations, ideas that we paraphrases, and our summaries of other people's work. In the case of paraphrasing and summaries, we might cite a single page or a range of pages. The paraphrase must be authentic and not "word patching," that is replacing every third or fifth word.
- In history, we use **footnotes or endnotes** that follow *Chicago Manual of Style* also referred to as Turabian. Historians prefer footnotes or edndnotes over parenthetical

citations because they are neater in appearance and allow your reader to focus on your words, not the citation. What is more, some of our citations can be quite complex when we are referring to individual items within archival folders and boxes.

How to Frame Quotations

When we quote a source to win the reader's trust, we want to make this experience as seamless as possible for the reader. Consider this excerpt from a sample **that <u>ineffectively frames</u> the quotation:**

> Mary represented the Enlightenment. "Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers -- in a word, better citizens." She also criticizes Rousseau.

It's quite a jolting reading experience. Who is Mary? Is the quotation her words? Why is the quote being offered? Now consider this excerpt **<u>effectively framing</u> the quotation:**

> Mary Wollstonecraft was shaped by and reflected the Enlightenment (an eighteenth-century movement) goals of social justice when she wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. In addition, Wollstonecraft epitomized the Enlightenment through a writing style that appealed to her readers' ability to reason. For example, she wrote, "Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us . . . better citizens."[1] In short, she argued that if men treated women as equals they would benefit as well. Her choice of words indicates a desire to appeal to rational thought by suggesting that slavishness undermines citizenship. Wollstonecraft was particularly critical of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who is frequently associated with the Enlightenment as well. …

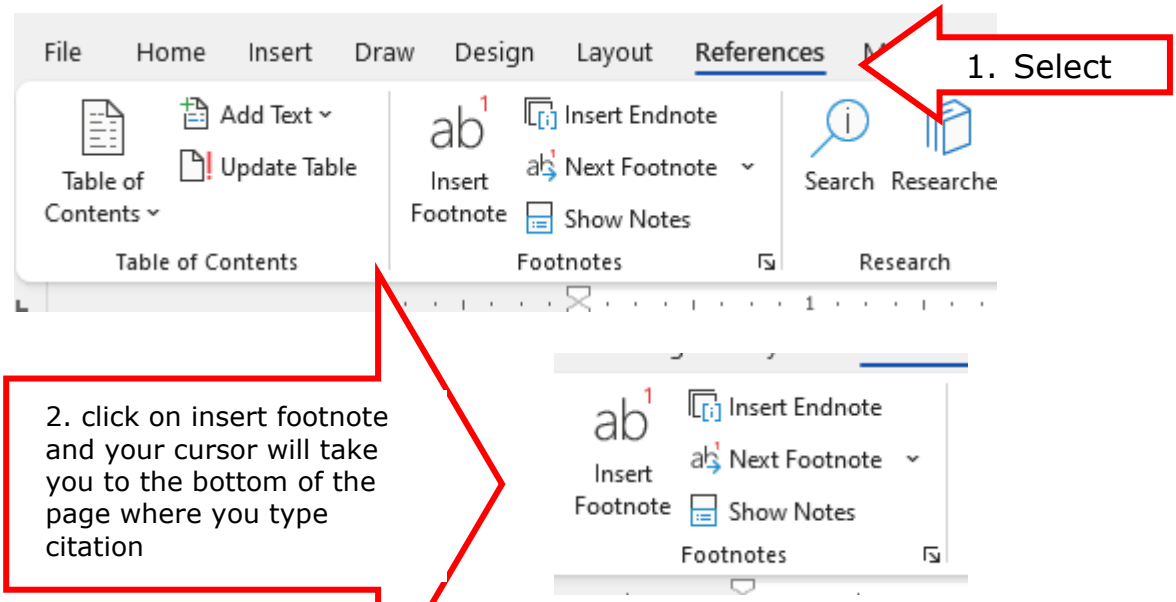
Features of Ineffective Framing and Quoting	**Features of Effective Framing and Quoting**
• the writer just jumped into the quotation without making it clear that these are Wollstonecraft's words	• the writer uses the pronoun she, which has a clear antecedent so that the reader knows these are Wollstonecraft's words
• referring to the author by their first name creates an air of familiarity that is inappropriate; presumably Mary's last name is offered earlier (first names are for pets, relatives, and friends)	• the first time the writer mentions Wollstonecraft, s/he uses her first name as well, thereafter the writer uses the last name
• after the quotation, the writer immediately starts a new thought regarding Wollstonecraft's views of Rousseau	• after the quotation, the writer tells the reader what the evidence proves; a restatement of the quotation
• the writer provides no hints as to the author's background	• the writer sufficiently hints at the author's background by referring to the title of Wollstonecraft's book and the year of publication
• the writer mentions the Enlightenment but offers no time frame	• assuming that this was the first time the term Enlightenment was used, the writer has assisted the reader by briefly indicating the time frame of the movement in

[1] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in *Aspects*, *87*.

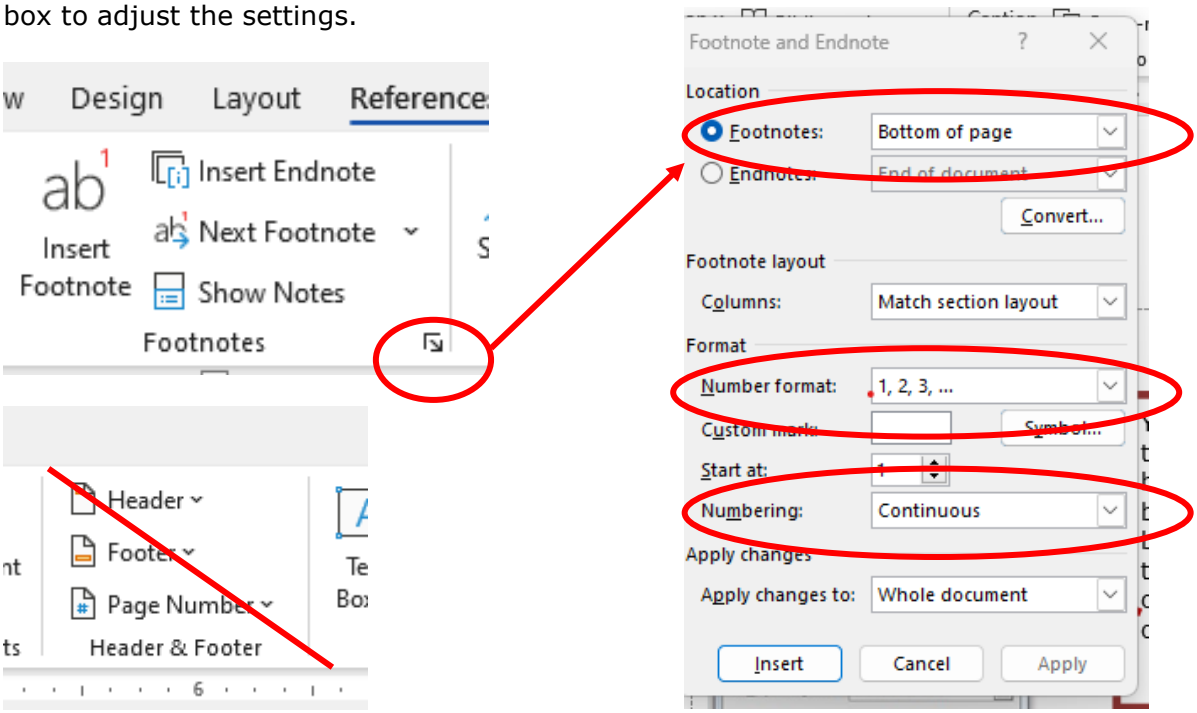
- the quotation is not followed by a footnote

parentheses
- the quotation is followed with a footnote outside the punctuation marks

Inserting a Footnote with Microsoft Word (Office 365)



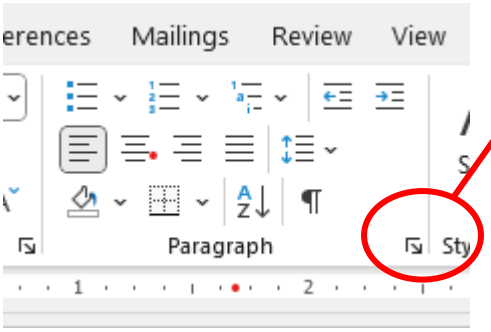
Depending upon the computer that you are using, you may need to open the references dialogue box to adjust the settings.

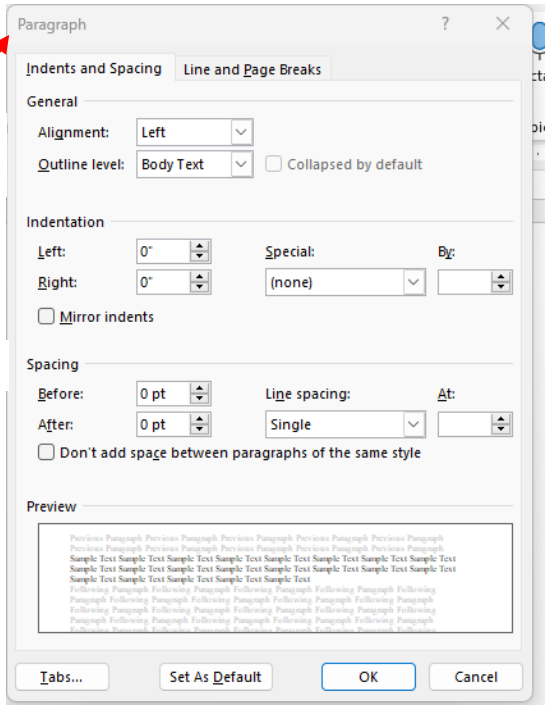


Do NOT use the insert Header/Footer to create a footnote.

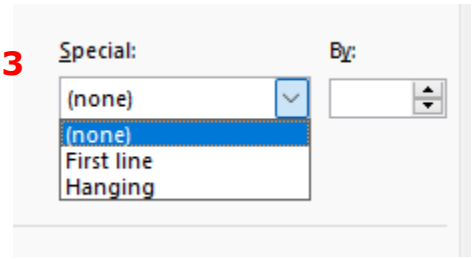
Adjust Line Spacing and Hanging Indents with Microsoft Word
Word usually has a default setting of multiline and auto spacing, which may not be the format that your professor requires. For example, on some assignments, I prefer students submit single-spaced, in other cases, I want them to submit double-spaced work. The preferences revolve around whether I plan to annotate your submission.

The dialogue box, paragraph, is on the home ribbon





1. **Alignment:** left
2. **Spacing:** I set my default to 0 for **Before and After and Line spacing** is either set on single or double depending on the format requirement.
3. **Indentation:** Hanging is selected when typing bibliographies



What Information to Include in the Footnote?

You may question the necessity of including footnotes, when your professor knows what you read. However, it's a good habit to develop to practice citing regularly, especially if you are a history major. Having said that, formats for document packs that I distribute, may differ slightly from the norm.

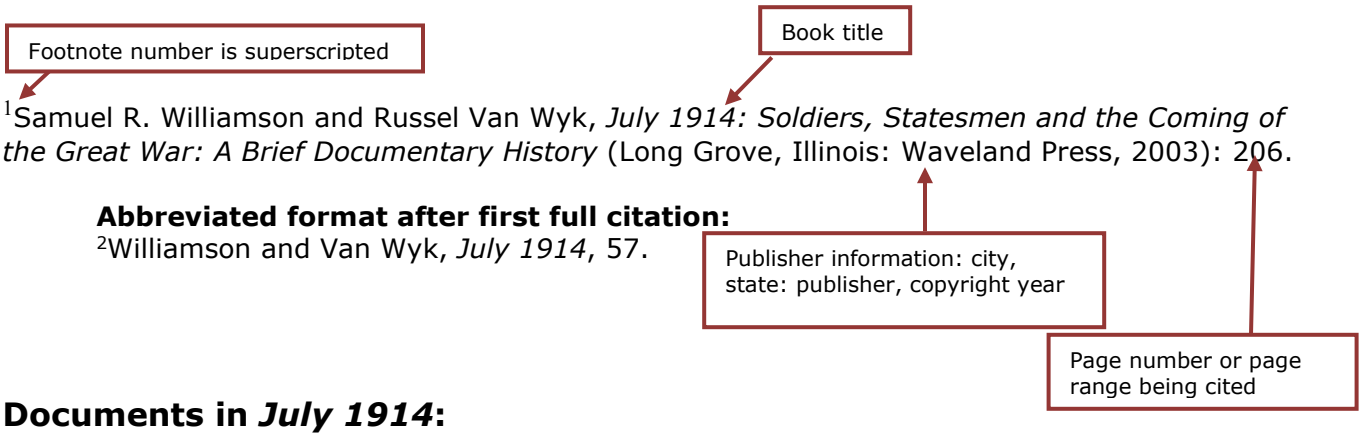
Please note, when you add a footnote to the text of your essay, it should be placed at the end of the quoted source, outside the punctuation. However, when it appears as a note at the bottom of the page, the superscripted number appears automatically at the beginning of the citation.

The first time that we cite a source, we provide **full information**. If we cite it again, we provide an **abbreviated format**. Please note, your professors may vary on what they want in an abbreviated footnote just as publishers differ. For example, years ago, we used abbreviated Latin to indicate as cited somewhere else in the work (*op cit*) which is no longer practiced. Yet, *Ibid.* which references the source exactly above is still used.

Below is the citation format that I expect my students to follow. Consult Turabian or *Chicago Manual of Style* for more detailed explanations

The Most Common FOOTNOTE Citations

Books:

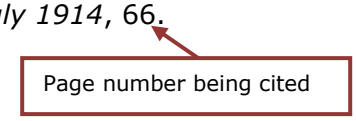


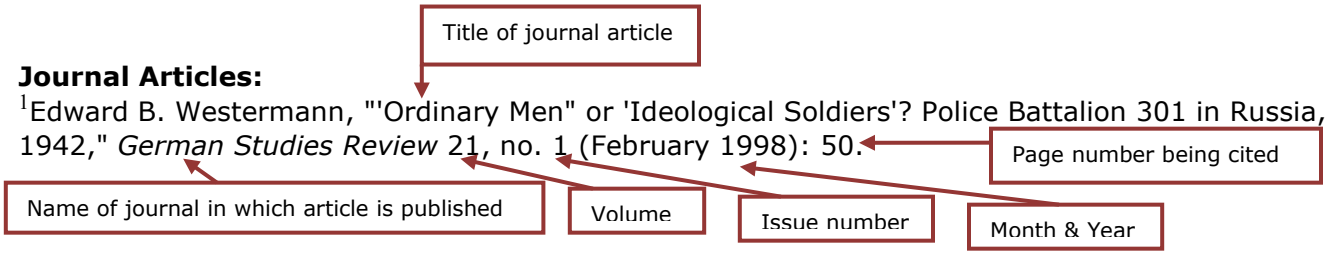
[1]Samuel R. Williamson and Russel Van Wyk, *July 1914: Soldiers, Statesmen and the Coming of the Great War: A Brief Documentary History* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2003): 206.

Abbreviated format after first full citation:
[2]Williamson and Van Wyk, *July 1914*, 57.

Documents in *July 1914*:

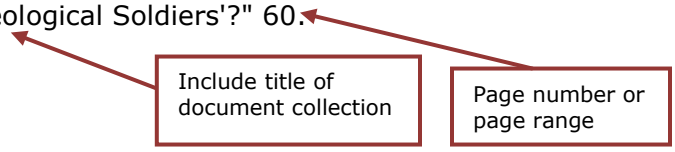
[1]Minutes of the Common Ministerial Council, 19 July 1914, in *July 1914*, 66.





Journal Articles:
[1]Edward B. Westermann, "'Ordinary Men" or 'Ideological Soldiers'? Police Battalion 301 in Russia, 1942," *German Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (February 1998): 50.

Abbreviated format after first full citation:
[2]Westermann, "'Ordinary ' or 'Ideological Soldiers'?" 60.



Citing from the WW II document collections in BOLT:

[1]Document No. 1, German-Polish Agreement, Berlin, 26 January 1934, 1.

In other words, cite the document number, author, title of the document, title of the handout, page number. If you were citing a document from an archival collection, in addition to the name, date, title and type of source, you would include far more information including the name of the Archive, the document collection, the archival box and folder number, and if microfilm, the reel and frame numbers.

How to Write the Conclusion

- Because reading involves using your working memory, an essay conclusion should restate the main points of your interpretation. You should briefly remind the reader how you proved it by making specific references to the most notable evidence or examples that you offered in the body of your paper.
- To decide what you should include in your conclusion, re-read your body paragraphs, taking notes on the main idea in each paragraph and how you proved them. This will help you compose a conclusion.
- A conclusion should not introduce new information; it should be a restatement of how you proved your thesis.
- After you compose and refine your conclusion, revisit or write your introductory paragraph.

To summarize: A historical essay has three parts: I am going to tell you what I am going to say it (introduction), I am going to say it (body paragraphs), and I am going to tell you what I just said. In many ways, each body paragraph has a similar structure. The paragraph topic sentence relates the reader to the thesis and the goal of the paragraph. Then the writer presents their claims, corroborates, and wraps up the paragraph by either summarizing the goal of the paragraph and/or transition to the next paragraph.

Stylistic Conventions in Writing History Papers

Every discipline has a style of writing. Not all publications or professors always abide by these conventions, perhaps because they are adjusting their rhetorical style to the expectations of their reading audience. Still, these conventions shape readers' expectations. So, they are useful to know and incorporate into your writing practice for historical essays.

- Most historians prefer papers to be written in the **simple past tense**, i.e. write about the past in the past tense.
- Most historians prefer a writing style that is **simple and direct** (e.g. prefer "because" over "due to the fact that"); we abhor wordiness – most readers do.

  Ineffective: We have done a study of the documents, and we have reached the conclusion that they are invaluable.
  Effective: We studied the documents and concluded they are invaluable.

- You should write in the **active voice**, not the passive voice (unless you intentionally want to create doubt), i.e. make the subject and verb easy for a reader to identify.

  Ineffective: The Nazis were marching.
  Effective: The Nazis marched.

  Ineffective: The lamppost was hit by the car.
  Effective: The car hit the lamppost.

  Ineffective: The pamphlets were distributed by the Allies.
  Effective: The Allies distributed the pamphlet.

  Ineffective: There are many reasons for the outbreak of World War I.
  Effective: Many reasons exist for the outbreak of World War I.

- **Avoid** the use of clichés, street vernacular, and slang. Why? Their meanings can be too easily misconstrued out of context because of generational and experiential gaps.

- **Avoid** the use of first person (I, me, we). Why? My biggest objection to first person is it leads to wordiness. Yet, there are other reasons. First, your tone becomes more

authoritative and professional. You are suggesting to the reader, that the interpretation is not simply your opinion, but your interpretations shaped by the standards of the profession. Note: in other disciplines, your professors may expect first person as a way of separating your voice from that of the researchers

- **Avoid** the use of personal pronouns (you, us). Why? It is vague, lazy, and implies that your or we were in the past.

  Ineffective: Browning implies that even if you shot the Jews, you may not have personally hated them.
  Effective: Browning implies that even if German soldiers shot the Jews, the perpetrators (or they) did not personally hate their victims.

- **Avoid phrases** "In my opinion," or "I believe that". Why? Unless you are citing another source, historians assume that what you wrote is your opinion, your learned judgment having abided by the standards of the profession. Opinion is not sentiment.

- **Avoid** using contractions in your paper such as can't, won't, don't. Why? Use of contractions can undermine the impact of the phrase; cannot, will not, do not that all sound more emphatic.

- The first time you mention an individual in your paper, use their first and last name, thereafter refer to the individual by their last name. If you use their first name, your tone become too familiar and potentially disrespectful. First names are for pets, relatives, and friends.

- Consider putting essential dates or time periods in parentheses to remind the reader of the time frame. For example, you could write: During the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850) or During the Enlightenment (Eighteenth Century). Failing to remind the reader periodically about the time frame could lead to confusion especially when days, weeks, months, or year are critical to placing your interpretation into context.

- A country is an "it" not a "they" (Germany = it; Germans = they).

- During class discussions, we generically refer to our primary sources as documents, but in your written essays, you should be more specific and accurate. For example, do not write, "In Adam Smith's document, . . . " rather you should write, "In Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, . . . "

- Book titles are always italicized or underlined.

- Always allow yourself time to proofread and edit your work; ideally give yourself time to set aside your paper for a day so that you may re-read it with a fresh perspective.

- The most effective way to proofread is to read your work out loud with purpose as though you were presenting your ideas to an audience. Alternatively, ask someone to read the paper to you out loud with purpose, while you have a copy that you can annotate. Do not try to fix it, just place a mark in the margin so you can return, review, revise.

Top Ten Tips to Edit Your Paper[2]

10. **It is polite to point!**
If your paper does not have a workable thesis, it is likely to drift. A good thesis does two things: it states (in affirmative terms) what you intend to prove in your paper (its main point), and it lays out a plan for accomplishing this. For example: World War I resulted from a series of tensions that developed among European nations at the turn of the century. Among these were imperialism, militarism, and an unstable alliance system.

9. **Sometimes it pays to be narrow-minded.**
Students get into trouble when they try to do too much. You cannot possibly write about everything there is to say about a subject. Notice how the sample thesis above limits the paper to just three aspects of origins World War I: imperialism, militarism, and alliances.

8. **Sink rocks, don't skip stones.**
Pursue a few things in detail. No one wants to read a paper that merely mentions things; **discuss them**. The usual rule of thumb is that it is better to say a lot about a few things than a very little about many things. Think of it as the difference between skipping a stone across a pond versus tossing a rock to the bottom. Be a rock when you write.

7. **Oh yeah, says who?**
Do not even bother to quote unless it is clear in the text itself who it is you are quoting. You cannot accomplish this with a footnote; you must identify the speaker in the text. Example: According to historian Mary Beth Norton, "The prosperity of the late Gilded Age largely ignored industrial workers."

6. **So what?**
There is a difference between historical evidence and trivia. If the material does not relate to your thesis, it might be interesting but it is not relevant. It is also your job to analyze the material you present. Unless you tell your reader why something is important, your information is simply random material.

5. **Finish your veggies . . . and your thoughts!**
Do not forget to tell the entire story and to tell your reader why you have included what you chose. Your motives may be clear in your mind, but your audience reads what is on the paper, not what is on your mind.

4. **One good example is worth a thousand colorful adjectives.**
Be specific. Every time you make a point, have at least one example to illustrate it. Any hack can use a thesaurus and string together vague adjectives, but a good writer can make her/his work live through examples that make vague points tangible and real. Do not tell me something was "really bad;" explain what made it bad.

3. **Who the hell are "the people?"**
Avoid general categories that are so vague they are meaningless. Be concrete and specific. For example: "The Indians" is a vague phrase: "Cherokees in southwest Georgia in the 1820s" is specific. And the "American or French or Japanese . . . people" as a whole never agreed on a single thing, so do not tell me they did! Tell me which people you mean [such as German government officials or French intellectuals].

---

[2] Rob Weir, "Fixing Writing Problems," *The Teaching Professor* (June/July 1998): 7.

2. **Do not put socks in your underwear drawer.**
The vast majority of "organizational problems" come when the writer fails to keep related material in the same place. Thoroughly discuss a topic, then move on to another point. For example, if you are discussing Natives and slaves in a paper, discuss each separately. Do not begin to discuss Natives, switch to slaves, and then jump back to Natives. Your paper should be like an orderly chest of drawers, with each distinct item in its own place.

1. **Proofread and edit.**
This is number one because so few actually do it. Careless errors, clunky phrases, spelling mistakes, and deplorable grammar abound simply because too many writers think they are done once they put the final period onto the page. Not so, Moe. Read your work [out loud and with meaning]. If what you have written sounds wrong to you, it is not going to sound any better to me. Remember: it is no sin to not know how to spell something. It <u>is</u> a sin not to look it up.