



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

**UNDERGRADUATE
STUDY GUIDE**

2018-2019

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KEY INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR STUDIES

Purpose of this Guide

This Guide contains some key advice suggestions about developing your study skills as an undergraduate historian. Its chief aim is to help you help yourself to perform well in your studies.

Please see the Department of [History Undergraduate Handbook](#) for all other information about your degree, including relevant regulations (e.g. related to assessment, attendance and so on).

Dates of 2018-19 terms

- **Term One:** Monday 24th September 2018 to Friday 14th December 2018
(4-week Christmas vacation)
- **Term Two:** Monday 14th January 2019 to Friday 29th March 2019
(4-week Easter vacation)
- **Term Three:** Monday 29th April 2019 to Friday 14th June 2019

Academic Timetable

Your [individual academic timetable](#) is available online via Campus Connect. You can download this to a personal calendar if you wish. You should check your timetable regularly as it links to the live Timetabling system and therefore updates automatically to reflect any changes. Timetable changes within two working days are notified by email to your RHUL account.

Study Weeks ('READING WEEKS')

- **Term One:** Monday 5th - Friday 9th November 2018
- **Term Two:** Monday 18 – Friday 22 February 2019

Aims of the Undergraduate Degree Programmes in History

The aims of our degree programmes are:

- to provide a sound and extensive basis for the study of History, meeting the general requirements of the History subject benchmarking statement in the development of knowledge, understanding, and intellectual, discipline-specific and key skills
- to provide a flexible and progressive structure in which students are able to gain knowledge, understanding, and appropriate skills relating to distinctive research specialisms
- to produce graduates with a range of personal attributes relevant to the world beyond higher education, who are able to engage in lifelong learning, to consider ethics and values, and to contribute to the wider community.

The study of History, therefore, cannot be conceived in terms of a linear or mechanistic progression. Skills and qualities are acquired cumulatively and iteratively. Thus it is impossible to identify a standardized module-by-module sequence of student attainments. Nonetheless, the programme of study required for a History degree leads to the steady, 'snowballing' build-up of expertise.

The outcomes, or achievable objects, of the successive stages of learning might be presented in summary form as follows:

- By the end of their first year students have developed an understanding of new and unfamiliar areas of historical experience and have acquired, or further developed, skills of rapid reading, essay writing and computer literacy in an historical context.
- By the end of their second year students have gained a deeper understanding of past events in the context of their time, partly through the study of broad periods across several countries and partly through the more detailed study of a particular period or theme.
- By the end of their third year students have defined many of the key terms and analytical concepts deployed in historical analysis, gained an appreciation of the changing frameworks of historical interpretation and, in their 'Special Subject' module (Group 3) work, contributed themselves to the deeper understanding of a complex historical problem through their own independent study of original sources.

STUDY SKILLS

During the course of your undergraduate work you develop a range of skills that can be transferred to your chosen career and life beyond higher education. To aid analysis and illustration, skills may be divided into those which are 'generic' and those which are 'subject specific'.

Generic skills are those which are not particular to History but which may be learned through the study of a variety of subjects. Examples of such skills are: time-management; self-discipline; self-direction; independence of mind and initiative; ability to work with others and to have respect for their reasoned views; intellectual integrity and maturity; analytical coherence and clarity of expression; empathy and imaginative insight.

However, there are some generic skills which are more particular to history. These include the ability to gather and analyse evidence and to be fluent in both verbal and written expression. These are considered at greater length below.

Skills which are **subject-specific** to History centre on the learning outcomes identified above. Principally, they embrace:

- an ability to use sources critically in the light of their content, perspective and purpose;
- an ability to decide between conflicting views and evidence;
- a willingness to show intellectual independence;
- a capacity to marshal an argument by drawing on, and presenting, the above skills.

In the course of your undergraduate career you also develop a range of study skills which will be of both practical and theoretical importance to you in your later career. If a model of linear development were appropriate (which is not entirely the case) these skills could be mapped out as in the table that follows overleaf.

Skills Training

To hone their study skills, students should take advantage of the optional sessions offered through **History Lab**. All undergraduate History students should be enrolled on the History Lab Moodle page. History Lab is a series of sessions designed to offer insight into academic writing, oral presentations, exam technique, careers and other areas. History Lab will facilitate the development of analytical and communication skills crucial for undergraduate study and the post-university world of employment.

Additionally, students are encouraged to take advantage of the sessions provided by [CeDAS](#) (the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills).

Skills development during your degree

Year of course	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Reading Skills	You should have the ability to read a text at an appropriate speed looking for trends, issues and events. You should be able to distinguish between different types of texts and to understand how they relate to the subject. You will be aware of what is relevant to an essay topic.	You should be familiar with different types of texts and how to approach them. You should be able to define your tasks clearly and know what questions to ask. You should know how to approach a text, assessing its value in terms of argument and evidence.	You should have the ability to read rapidly, to know what question to ask and to be able to evaluate a text in terms of argument and evidence.
Note-taking	Your notes should be organised, and relevant. References, such as author, title and page should be noted. You should have the ability to select what is relevant and be able to cross- question a text.	Your notes should be well organized and purposeful, with all the necessary references. You should know how to choose what you need from a text.	Your notes should be well organized, relevant and purposeful, with appropriate referencing of a high standard.
Communication skills – written	You should have the ability to develop an idea of what is relevant to a topic. You should make attempts at definitions of concepts. You should eliminate inconsistencies. You should be learning to develop your own view and finding the appropriate evidence to support it. You may be able to write an excellent essay without a plan but most people cannot - each essay should have a plan with an introduction, middle and conclusion. Your style should be lucid, free of colloquialisms, jargon and short forms. Your grammar, spelling and punctuation must be correct.	Your essays should be properly structured and have a clear line of argument. The ideas should be arranged logically, and show depth of analysis. You should be confident of how much evidence is needed and what is appropriate to the subject. You should have developed a clear and accurate scholarly style. You should know how to define your concepts and work within a definition.	To the ability to write a clear, well-structured, essay is added the further ability to write a dissertation based on primary sources and involving the capacity to sift, interpret and evaluate primary material.

Communication skills – oral	You should be contributing to class as much as you can in order to develop your ideas and help the class to work as a group. Class papers should be succinct and organized so that they can be given without shuffling the paper. They should be about the main points of the topic, and spoken to the class, and not merely read aloud.	You should make confident and fluent contributions to class. Your class papers should be well structured and delivered at an appropriate pace and with helpful emphasis. You should make the other students aware of problems and questions.	You should be able to make a presentation conveying your ideas in a way that is succinct and articulate. You should be able to use visual aids. Your presentation should be properly planned and you should be able to handle questions put to you subsequently.
Group Collaboration	You should be willing to exchange ideas with other students in class (and beyond), and from time to time work in a pair or a group.	You should be able to demonstrate enhanced skills in group work and be able to work collaboratively in dynamic group contexts, especially as a team member, but also sometimes taking a more leading role.	You should have learned to work in a group, discussing, organizing and presenting a topic together with others. You should have learned to lead or chair a group discussion, opening it, managing it and bringing it to a successful conclusion.
Time Management	You should be keeping pace with the work assigned. If you fall behind you should be able to apply for an Extension through the online College system. You must have all your essays handed in by the final deadline.	You should be working regularly and meeting deadlines. You should anticipate tasks and deal with them in good time.	You should be working regularly, meeting deadlines and planning ahead.
Information skills	You should know how to find different types of works in the library, and use the library catalogue. You should be able to synthesize information from a variety of sources.	You should be capable of using different types of sources of information including from a range of primary and secondary sources. You should be able to use your initiative to find the material you need.	You should be capable of using and demonstrating critical awareness of different types of information, including text, digital, visual, aural and others. You should be capable of locating diverse types of primary and secondary sources beyond those listed in your module bibliographies.

Self-assessment	Including with appropriate guidance, you should be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and find ways to deal with any weaker aspects.	You should be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses, develop your strong points and find ways to improve any weaker aspects. You should do this on a regular basis without direct instruction.	You should be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses, develop your strong points and find ways to improve any weaker aspects. You should be able to do this independently and also work proactively to develop new skills in response to your evolving needs.
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Modes of Teaching and Learning in the History Department

Your modules are taught in two chief ways - by lectures and seminar groups. You will also have smaller tutorial classes in some courses. First-year Foundation modules are delivered over one term by means of a lecture each week and a class (of about 10 students) every fortnight. First-Year Gateway modules are taught over two terms by means of a lecture and tutorial class every week. 'Survey' modules are taught over one term by means of a lecture and seminar class each week.

The pattern of teaching on 'Further' and 'Special Subject' modules is different. There are approximately 40 hours of teaching for these courses which meet in weekly sessions of 2 hours. The seminar style is normal for these types of modules, though there are variations from one to another, depending on the tutor's preference, the nature of the subject and the size of the study group.

Essay writing lies at the heart of the teaching and learning process. It is crucial to your progress, therefore, that you devote the greater part of your energies to your essay work. Gateway, Survey and Further modules require the writing of a number of essays per module. Final-year 'Special Subject' modules courses require the writing of commentary exercises ('gobbets') as well as essays. The section on **Essay Writing** and the section **The Art of Writing Gobbets** in this handbook provide useful guidance.

On first arriving at university to read History (and similar subjects) many students are surprised to discover how much work they must do by themselves. It is rare, for instance, for a first-year student to have more than eight to ten possible formal teaching hours in a week. Often there may be less. This is normal at a top university.

This is because at university you are exploring knowledge for yourself within frameworks of guidance offered by your tutors. It is up to you to make sure that you use and manage your time as constructively as possible.

You are reminded that attendance at all classes and submission of coursework (of passable quality) is compulsory. Please see the History Undergraduate Handbook for more detail on attendance requirements.

Guidance on Hours of Study

In order to achieve a good degree result, students are recommended to devote at least 30-35 hours per week (including lectures and seminars) to their studies during term time. The time outside formal teaching sessions should be used for individual reading and research in preparation for essays and seminar presentations, and to consolidate and supplement information given in lectures, seminars and tutorials. Private study is extremely important not only in developing skills needed to achieve a good degree but also in developing the transferable skills required by employers.

Evaluation of Student Work and Assessment

Full details on assessment are given in the Department of [History Undergraduate Handbook](#). There are two main types of assessment:

- **formative** assessment, which seeks to evaluate coursework and to encourage your further development at the same time; and
- **summative** assessment, which provides a formal and official grade for the purpose of your final degree result.

Formative assessment takes place mainly through the marking of essays. In your essay work you are expected to demonstrate in an integrative fashion all the skills which you are being taught. However, certain modules emphasize particular skills. Some, for example, require you to show profound and accurate understanding of the perspectives of cultures and times very different from your own; others require you to analyze and evaluate primary source material. Most modules require you to learn a range of skills as set out in their individual specifications and learning outcomes.

Summative assessment is carried out in a number of ways:

- by written examinations at the end of each academic year in each of the modules that you are taking
- by coursework essays or dissertations
- by oral presentations on some of your courses.

In practice, most modules are examined by a *combination* of both coursework and examination. Written examinations afford you the opportunity to demonstrate not only your knowledge and understanding but also important life-skills such as the ability to express yourself in clear, well-informed prose when under pressure.

You are advised that work **MUST** be submitted by relevant deadlines. If you are unable to do so owing to extenuating circumstances such as illness, you should apply for an Extension – for more information see the Department of [History Undergraduate Handbook](#).

Tips on How to Study

The following notes are intended to help you study at university successfully. They do not cover everything that you might want to know about techniques of study: we want to keep them short enough for you to read quickly! But we hope that they make the process of learning and studying more efficient and more productive.

Relevant Reading

There are various helpful books available in the Library to help you develop your study skills, including:

On the study of History:

John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (2015 edition or any earlier edition)

Tracey Loughran, *A Practical Guide to Studying History: Skills and Approaches* (2016)

Jeremy Black and Donald MacRaild, *Studying History* (2016)

On writing:

Bryan Greetham, *How to Write Better Essays* (2013 edition or any earlier edition)

On oral presentations:

Joan Van Emden and Lucinda Becker, *Presentation Skills for Students* (2016 edition or any earlier edition)

A good all-round guide to studying at university is:

Stella Cottrell, *The Study Skills Handbook* (2013 or any earlier edition)

Reading

It is essential that you get used to reading effectively for your various modules: reading widely is not an optional extra, but an integral part of your degree.

At university reading books cover to cover is not typical. During your first year you will learn the art of 'gutting' a book, making efficient use of the introduction and conclusion, the chapters and the index to help guide you towards key parts of the book.

Over time, you will come to learn how historians debate particular topics through their books and articles, and with practice you will become more adept at discussing their interpretations in seminars and in your own written work.

One key point: when you read, resist the urge to start taking notes immediately. Instead, skim read the book or article to get a sense of the whole, and then take notes on key points, rather than copying everything verbatim. Always remember to make a careful note of the publication details and page number so you can reference the material in an essay or return to it at a later date.

While you should always prioritise reading from your module bibliographies, if employed with caution and common sense, online resources can be very useful. Do make sure you use the Library's 'History Subject Guide' for advice on digitised resources, including primary sources. In terms of broader use of the internet, the Department encourages responsible usage! You should be mindful that often there is no 'quality control'. Please avoid sites like Wikipedia, which can be edited by anyone.

The internet is perhaps best used in the initial stages of research, when you are finding out about a topic, before reading widely from your module bibliography. You should never use online sources in place of scholarly books and journal articles. Your tutors have created your bibliographies in help guide your reading and you should use their recommendations.

ESSAY WRITING

What is an essay for?

Essay questions usually aim to do two things:

- to give you the opportunity to demonstrate you know and understand specific information relating to your module
- to give you the opportunity to show how you can *handle* information, i.e. how you organise it, analyse it and evaluate it.

Your tutors care about both these aspects more or less equally. Your aim is to show how well you can do both these things.

Analysing the essay title

When you choose an essay title, you should first analyze it. A good way to start is to pick out the key words. These fall into two categories:

- **Content**-related words - words which signal to you *what* you should write about
- **Procedure**-related words - words which indicate *how* you should write about it

For example, take the following essay title:

'Pressure groups have never successfully affected government policy': Evaluate this statement with reference to at least three pressure group campaigns from the last five years.

The key content words are: pressure groups; government policy; successfully; three campaigns; last five years.

The key procedure word is: evaluate

1. The *content words* set the parameters on what you can write about.
2. The *procedure words* determine your approach.

Sometimes question do not include any procedure words, in which case you will probably need to ensure that you cover the relevant background information/facts, and include analysis and evaluation of them.

Some Key *Procedure* Words:

Account for	give a good explanation of something and evaluate (possible) causes/reasons
Analyze	examine the topic by dividing it into parts and looking at each part in detail; form judgements about each element and the whole
Argue	provide reasons for and / or against something, in an appropriate order, citing evidence, which may be other people's research, or other kinds of facts / information
Assess	judge the significance of something, referring to the special knowledge of experts wherever possible (i.e. referring to /

	quoting from other people's work)
Comment on	give your own opinion about something, supported by reasons and evidence
Compare	examine one thing in relation to something else, to emphasise points of difference or similarity
Contrast	explore the differences between two things
Criticize	give your judgements about the good and / or bad qualities of theories / opinions supporting your decisions with reasons & evidence
Define	explain the exact meaning of a word or phrase
Describe	give a full account or detailed representation of something
Discuss	consider something by writing about it from different points of view with supporting evidence
Enumerate	list and mention items separately in number order
Evaluate	calculate the value / effectiveness of a theory / decision / object etc., including your own opinion, and supporting each point with evidence
Explain	give reasons for or account for something, so it is clear / easy to understand
Illustrate	use examples or diagrams to explain something
Interpret	give your own opinion of the significance of something (give reasons / evidence wherever possible)
Justify	give good reasons for decisions or conclusions, perhaps by referring to other texts
Outline	give the main features, facts, or general idea of something, omitting minor details
Prove	show something is accurate/true/valid by using facts, documents and / or other information to build your case
Reconcile	show how apparently conflicting things can appear similar or compatible
Relate	establish how things are connected or associated, how they affect each other or how they are alike
Review	to examine an area and assess it critically
Show	explain something giving evidence or examples to establish a strong case
State	put something clearly and concisely
Summarize	give a brief, concise account of the main points of something (leaving out details)
Trace	follow the cause or stages in development of something from its start

Planning your essay

Many students go wrong when planning essays because they assume that they need to read a lot before they start to plan. The problem with this is they rapidly acquire a lot of information which is very difficult to organise, and the more they read, the worse it gets! A way of approaching your essay that avoids this problem is to follow the sequence below.

1. Analyze the title: what does it *require*?
2. Find out the *essential* information; check any words in the title you do not understand in a general reference book, or a reference text for your discipline.

3. Start to plan the structure of your essay. You should see what the question needs you to put in your essay. Then when you do start to read in earnest, your reading will be much more focused.

Some ways of starting to structure your essay could include:

- talk the title through with a friend
- talk it through to yourself
- start to write (but remember that at this stage, you will need to be prepared to scrap most of what you're writing)
- draw a 'mind map'. Write the main areas of your essay in the centre of a large sheet of paper. 'Brainstorm' ideas connected with them, drawing in lines to show how they connect, and annotating the connecting lines. Add more ideas in bubbles as they occur to you, until you have a map of your essay, with all the ideas linked.
- draw a 'flow diagram', which is a series of boxes connected to one another, with a stage of your argument in each box.

You could try all these things; you can try them in any order. You can also repeat them at a later stage if you feel your essay is going off the rails a bit. As you plan, start thinking about:

- what areas are very complex
- what areas need developing more
- what areas need an example or illustration
- what areas need references

4. The next stage is to read, because you should be much clearer about what you need to find out from the texts. This will save you a considerable amount of time and make your reading much more effective. Now you are searching for something specific, you are more likely to recognise it when you find it. Do not spend too long reading. Make sure you allow time for writing the essay. People probably learn as much from the process of writing as they do from reading, as this is the time you really make sense of the new ideas.

When reading, resist the urge to start taking notes straightaway. Instead, skim read key parts, including the introduction and conclusion, and use the index to help you reach the information you are looking for.

5. You are ready to write a draft essay now. First though you may need to re-plan it in the light of your reading. Changing your plan is fine, as it proves you have learnt from the reading! When you are drafting, it is more important to write *something* than to get it perfect. If there are any real tangles, leave them for the time being; they may be clearer later.
6. Revise your draft and be quite ruthless in editing if necessary.
7. When you are happy with the content of your essay (or when you have run out of time!) make sure you proof-read your essay. This is very simple, does not take very long and forms part of the assessment of your work – and can positively influence the mark you get! It also shows you care about your work

Proof-reading should focus on the following:

- Spelling: Sit down with a dictionary and a ruler and work through your essay line by line backwards, starting at the end, using the ruler to focus on each word. Use the spell-check! Even so, you will need to check your essay for 'typos', such as 'fro' instead of 'for' and 'form' instead of 'from', which your spellcheck will not recognise as an error.
- Punctuation: Read the essay aloud, slowly, as if you were giving a speech. In particular check for mistakes with apostrophes. Also watch out for run-on sentences: this is where a writer joins two independent clauses together. The most common kind is the comma splice, where a writer uses a comma to separate what should be two individual sentences.
- Favourite errors: Most of us have words that we always spell wrongly and perhaps other 'favourite' errors as well. Compile a list of your personal ones to use when you proof-read.

8. Hand your essay in ... **on time!**

Writing Introductions

Your introduction can be written last of all. There are several ways you can approach an introduction:

1. 'This is what I'm going to tell you...'

Your introduction can be a 'map of the essay' for the reader. This means you will list the key stages of your essay, so your reader knows what to expect in what order. This is particularly useful for longer assignments, as it prepares the reader and helps them to follow your arguments.

For example: In this essay I will be describing the arguments around X, and evaluating the evidence for and against it. The approach I will take will be predominantly A, but I will also consider the perspective B and C. I will review the effects of X in the context of M and L, and base my conclusion on the recent research in this area published by Z.

2. 'Statement of Argument'

Your introduction can be a summary of your main point, i.e. a 'thesis statement'. In a short essay this can be a sentence or two.

For example: In this essay I will argue that X is Y. My evidence for this is A, B, and C. The counter-evidence offered by P, I will show is inconsistent with P's later claims. I will demonstrate that when X is treated as Y, it can be applied in effectively and efficiently in context O.

3. 'Why is this an interesting question?'

You can use the opening paragraph to discuss why this is a worthwhile question to ask and to answer. This is a sophisticated opening, showing the extent to which you understand the context of the question.

For example: The question of X has attracted considerable controversy recently. This is because of Government Acts 1 and 2, passed in 1995. Changes

in the context have also focused attention on X, and with current changes in the distribution of funding, the role of X in society is becoming increasingly significant.

There is no reason why, for a longer essay of 5000 words or more, you should not use all three of these introduction styles. The best order is probably: 2 (statement of argument / abstract), 3 (why this is an interesting question), and then 1 (this is what I am going to tell you). For shorter essays, choose one, or reduce them all to a sentence or two.

Conclusions

Many students find conclusions tricky. Again, there are several models you can choose from, including:

1. 'I have told you ...'

This is probably the simplest way to finish your essay (and the one most people opt for in exams). You simply summarise the content of your essay, drawing attention to your main points. The disadvantage with this is that for a relatively short essay, your reader will probably still remember what you told them; it adds little to your essay and is unlikely to gain you any marks - it's just a way of stopping! However, if your essay (or dissertation) is longer at 5,000 words or more, it is always worth including a short summary. The reader can refer to it if they have missed any of your main points.

For example: In this essay, I have discussed X, Y, and Z.

2. 'My answer to this question is...'

If you have so far described the arguments for and against a particular point of view, you can use the conclusion to give your own perspective and explain why you hold it. You need to be careful, because the conclusion is *not* a good place to introduce new information. It's better to evaluate information you have already given earlier in the essay. If you find yourself tempted to introduce new ideas, you can go back and build them in to your essay.

For example: My own view is that although X and Y are more popular views, the evidence in fact suggests Z is the most effective method of producing the P effect. This is based on A, B and C.

However, if you have been asked to avoid being subjective and the use of the personal pronoun *I*, you could phrase the conclusion as follows:

For example: There are strong arguments supporting X and Y. However, the arguments for Z perhaps carry more weight. This is suggested in particular by factors A, B and C.

3. 'A comparative evaluation'

You can use your conclusion to look at the arguments you've raised from a different point of view, to acknowledge that there is more than one way to view the situation.

For example: Although it is true that A and B are regarded in Europe as X, from the perspective of another culture they might appear Y.

4. 'Where this essay could go next'

When someone completes a research paper, they usually end by suggesting what the next person to do research in that area needs to look at.

For example: 'Having shown that potatoes can be poisonous when consumed in large quantities, future research might investigate the long-term effects of eating potatoes on cats, dogs, and other animals.'

This again is a sophisticated ending, to be used if you are fairly confident about the topic you are writing about, but to be avoided otherwise, because it can also expose what you don't know!

To use this approach in your essay, you could identify 'gaps in current knowledge.'

For example: Although there is considerable knowledge about A, and its effect on B, there is as yet little information about the effect of A on C, particularly from the perspective of D. Until more is known about this area, conclusions must remain tentative.

Again, you might choose one of these endings for a shorter essay, and a combination of several, or all of them for a longer piece of work, like a dissertation.

Essay Content

- An argument (i.e. a point of view), a claim, or an attitude you want to support/prove/explain should be at the centre of your essay. Try to keep the focus on this throughout your essay. Do not get side-tracked or wander off the main point.
- Be aware of other points of view. You only have to think about the different beliefs people held 100 years ago, or that people from different cultures today have held or hold, to realize that different points of view can be found on absolutely everything. You need to acknowledge this diversity and comment on why you hold the view you do. Use appropriate examples and illustrations to support your points. These really help to give weight to your ideas.
- Identify relations between different facts/ideas.
- Make comparisons, point out contrasts and draw analogies as appropriate.
- Give your evidence, and weigh it up, pointing out any flaws or ambiguities in it.
- Try to keep every sentence you write relevant to the overall direction of your essay. This is very hard at first, but it gets easier with practice.

Essay Style

- Should you use 'I' or not? Historians tend not to do so, as a general rule, though it can depend on the type of assignment you are producing. Whatever style you decide – be consistent.
- Use appropriate terms and linguistic structures to signal the stages in your argument, for example, 'however', 'despite the fact that', 'an additional example is', and so on. This is called **signposting** and helps your reader to follow your reasoning processes.
- You will not be expected to write like a professor in your discipline after only a year or two studying it in higher education, so do not worry if your essays do not read like your text books. (This may even be a good thing!). However, you should be trying to use

appropriate vocabulary: it may be helpful to start a checklist of the words associated with a certain topic, together with short definitions.

- Writing a good academic essay will probably require you to learn a new way of presenting information. The important thing is that you are clear, relevant, and don't make generalizations you cannot support, either with quotations or with other evidence. You should also look at relevant section in this handbook on referencing and footnoting.
- There is no magic number of paragraphs in an essay. Each paragraph will contain a point, supported by examples, that supports your overall argument. Do not feel that you must adhere to a rigid structure of introduction, 4-5 paragraphs, and then conclusion. Paragraphs can vary in length but be wary of making them either too long or too short. Around 8-12 lines for each is in the right ballpark but not a rule as such.

Non-Essay Forms of Writing

When producing other, shorter pieces of written work, structure and clarity remain paramount. Even if you are only producing a blog of 10 lines of prose, ensure that it is well-organized and has a clear opening argument, supporting evidence and a summary/conclusion. There is obviously room for a flexibility of approach here but the basic criteria of argument, evidence, structure etc applied in essays also apply to shorter pieces of work.

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Why do tutors use oral presentations?

Oral presentations can sometimes be the cause of a great deal of anxiety, so why do we require you to do them? There are quite a few good reasons...

- You learn more. Researching and presenting a subject usually results in better understanding and recall.
- Presentations given by members of your peer group can stimulate interesting discussions which are not tutor-led. They provide a chance for you to develop your own thoughts and ideas.
- It gives you the opportunity to practice giving presentations before you get into the world of work and post-university employment. Many people have to make presentations at work. You can give yourself a head-start in the relatively safe environment of the seminar room.
- Group work and presentations give you the chance to meet and work with other people, and enjoy the team effort of putting your ideas together.
- There is usually some flexibility in the topic you present. It is your chance to do something that interests you; if you're interested in the topic, your presentation will benefit!
- Unlike an exam, you can prepare more or less exactly and take all the materials in with you.

What makes a good oral presentation?

- It has to be **audible**. If the class cannot hear you, they are not going to pay attention. Looking up and making eye contact with people at the back of the room will help you project your voice.
- **Talk to your audience**, rather than reading your notes out. It will be far more interesting and far easier for them to follow.
- It has to be the **appropriate length**. Make sure you know how much time you actually have, and practise your talk beforehand against a clock. There is nothing worse than having to squash enough material for thirty minutes into ten minutes. Try not to talk non-stop; leave brief pauses for others to absorb what you have been saying and/or take in your slides.
- Powerpoint can be a fantastic addition to your presentation: many modules will require you to produce a Powerpoint presentation. Think carefully about how many slides to use: using too many will not work effectively and will become a distraction for your audience. Make sure your slides are not too cluttered: avoid small font and small images. Use bold colours, but avoid anything too distracting! The key thing to remember is that Powerpoint slides are part of your presentation, not all of it! Make the slides work for you, rather than having them dominate your delivery or making you feel distracted. Practise if you are not used to using Powerpoint.
- The content of your presentation needs to be **relevant** to the course and to your audience. Address your fellow students, not the tutor, and make sure the content is appropriate to their level of knowledge. If you want them to sit up and listen, make it directly relevant to their lives.
- Your presentation should have a clear **structure**. Your audience will quickly get lost if you jump around and do not make the structure explicit. Distributing a handout first with the outline of your talk will help your audience pick out your main points. It is

helpful if you give 'sign posts' to the structure of your talk; for example you could start by saying 'first, I am going to talk through some definitions of --- and then discuss the role of --- within ---' and later: 'so, I've spoken about ---, now I'll go on to '

- Aim for a presentation style that **holds the attention of your audience**. Use understandable, clear language, PowerPoint slides, handouts, questions and discussion. Look at the audience, make eye contact, smile, try not to fidget; ask the audience questions, or ask them to discuss a point.
- Consider using **handouts**. This can help your audience to engage with your presentation. Provide clear handouts containing a summary of the presentation, follow-up reading, and any other crucial information. Avoid using small font.
- If you are presenting in a **group**, make sure everyone is clear about their tasks and what they do when; you do not want three people all doing the same thing. Think about who will stand and sit where (and think about the lay-out of the room you will be in). Working in a group gives you the opportunity to divide the topic into sections, with each person presenting a section. Be careful, however, that there is continuity and each part is relevant. Someone should give an introduction and a conclusion to hold the whole talk together.
- Make sure you use the feedback from your tutor afterwards, so you will know how to improve in future. Also be sure to ask your peers for their honest views. This will help make it easier next time round!
- As with exams, nerves are natural! Use the adrenaline to help you through the experience.

Checklist

Try answering the following questions to help you clarify what you are going to do. Add any questions that will help you:

1. How long have I got?
2. What do I need to include in order to cover the topic?
3. Where can I find out information?
4. Have I cut out everything which is not relevant?
5. Is the structure clear?
6. What handouts do I need?
7. When and how will I use them?
8. What activities can the group take part in?
9. Can I present from my notes without reading word for word?

Have a run through and now think about the questions again.

Before the presentation

1. Have I got the handouts in the right order?
2. Have I got my notes to refer to?
3. Have I got a bottle of water with me?

During the presentation

- Take a deep breath
- Relax and smile!
- Do not hide behind the screen
- Do not read out the notes without looking up

- Talk to the back of the group, so your voice carries
- Look at your audience and make sure you look around all parts of the room
- Do not rush through
- Give your audience the opportunity to ask questions
- Be flexible; if your audience do not understand be prepared to rethink and explain your points another way
- If someone throws in a question you are not entirely sure about, open it to group discussion.

This is the topic you have researched; relax and enjoy telling the rest of the group. If you are enthusiastic, it will come across.

After the presentation

Ask yourself these questions, and ask a friend/your tutor as well:

- What were the strengths of my presentation?
- Did the slides (and handouts) work well?
- Did the audience engage?
- Could I be heard? Did I hide? Did I make eye contact?
- What were the weaknesses of my presentation?
- What could be improved for next time?

THE ART OF GOBBET WRITING

Gobbet writing is a different art from the writing of essays. The gobbet is definitely not a mini-essay. The gobbet tests different skills and it is directed to different ends.

A gobbet is, essentially, a 'source question'. Often the sources used as texts, meaning the gobbet involves a 'document question'. Gobbets can also involve visual sources like photographs or still shots from films: in these cases, you are required to 'read' the image and explore it drawing on the same skills as with a textual analysis.

It is an exercise in contextual criticism. The aim should be to look at a particular passage, evaluate its significance to the historian and set it in the broader pattern of events. How are these ends to be achieved?

Your first and most important task is to READ the passage carefully. It has not been selected at random. A gobbet generally has 'a bull's eye': that is, a single big issue which is addressed. Your task is to identify that issue, examine the background to it, evaluate its importance and indicate something of the sequel. This is the essence of what is known as 'contextual' criticism.

But there also needs to be commentary of a textual nature. That is to say, you need to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your source. A number of questions usually invite comment. Who was the author of the passage? Where and why was the author writing? What were the sources? How soon after the events was the narrative composed? Who influenced the writing of the text? What is needed is informed textual analysis, structured in such a way as to shed light on the author's standpoint and literary purpose.

Ideally, textual and contextual criticism should be blended into a single commentary. Sometimes, for convenience, you may have to separate them out. However, ideally this should be avoided. Every part of your commentary should inform and shed light on every other part.

So what is the purpose of gobbet writing and why are you asked to do it? There are two main reasons. Firstly, gobbet writing makes you look at your source with great care. You learn how to squeeze every drop of significance out of it. You learn how to read between the lines and to absorb insights you might otherwise miss. Secondly, it forces you to write economically. In essay writing you tend to be expansive; you spread yourself. But in gobbet writing the reverse is required. Your focus has to be narrow; your structure taut and your style economical. In short, you will be acquiring skills of critical analysis that will serve you well later in a variety of environments.

PRESENTING YOUR WORK

Remember that your name **must not** appear on your essay as it is marked anonymously. You should include the following identification in the header.

- **For all formative coursework essays and all Foundation course essays** the header should include your **student number**, which is the number on your student card starting 100-----, the course code and the assignment number.
- **For all Gateway assessed essays, Year 2 Independent Essays and 'Special Subject' dissertations** the header should include your **candidate number**, which is the number given to you via your student portal that starts 10----- and the course code. Remember that if you do not provide sufficient identification in the header you could lose the marks awarded for the assignment.
- Essays must be word processed using a legible size 12 font, and should be 1.5 or double spaced to allow the marker space to write comments and notes.
- Pages should be numbered.
- Double-sided printing.
- The word count must be included. Word count should include footnotes but exclude bibliographies or appendices. Penalties apply where the word limits are exceeded.
- Where there is no general agreement on spelling or style (e.g. judgment or judgement; '4 July 1776' or 'July 4, 1776'), you should use your own preference. What is most important is that the essay should be internally consistent whatever conventions are used.
- Images may be included if appropriate. Ensure that the source is referenced. Images should not be just simply as 'illustrations', but rather discussed as part of your argument. You may insert images into your main text or include them in an appendix.
- All assignments should be securely stapled. Please **do not** put your essay in a plastic wallet or file.

Coversheets and electronic submission

It is your responsibility to submit both an **electronic copy** (via Turnitin) and a **paper copy** of your assignment. The paper copy and the electronic copy of your written work must be identical. The paper version must be accompanied by the correctly completed coversheet and electronic submission receipt attached. Again, under no circumstances should a student's name be displayed on the submitted piece of work.

Further information on the submission of written work can be found in the [Department of History Undergraduate Handbook](#).

Referencing written work

It is vital that you reference your written work appropriately. Failure to do so could constitute a form of plagiarism.

Importance of referencing

When you produce written work, it is essential that you indicate ideas that are not your own, giving the precise source of information. The History Department requires you to write footnotes at the bottom of each page. Footnotes should be in single line spacing – clearly demarcated from text – and numbered sequentially throughout each essay.

You should always give as much information as possible in your footnote, using precise page numbers. This will enable you to find any information again, if necessary. By referencing in this way, you are also allowing the reader to understand the breadth and depth of your reading, and where to find a source if they wish to consult it too. Finally, proper use of referencing protects you from accusations of plagiarism, by allowing the reader to understand precisely which ideas are yours and which are those of your sources.

Tutors marking your assignments give much weight to the technical accuracy of essays and dissertations. So check very carefully, especially for spelling mistakes, wrong quotations and errors of typing. Ensure that the footnote numbers correlate with those in the text.

Students who fail to meet necessary standards of footnoting and referencing in their assignments are penalized by the deduction of marks.

Quotations

Direct quotations should be used sparingly: it is often better to paraphrase in your own words. However, any quotations require footnotes indicating their source. Long quotations (i.e. fifty words or more) may be given in separate blocks in single spacing, indented from the margin at both left and right, without quotation marks. However, although long quotations are sometimes necessary, it is best to quote more selectively and integrate the quotations into your text. This should be done by the use of single quotation marks to indicate where the quote begins and ends. You can omit irrelevant words from a quotation by inserting three ellipsis dots [...]. Double quotation marks should **only** be used for quotes within quotations.

Referencing systems

From 2018-19 the History Department's requires students to use the MHRA (Modern Humanities Referencing System) referencing.

For further guidance, see:

MHRA Quick Guide: <http://www.mhra.org.uk/style/quick.html>

Full Guide: <http://www.mhra.org.uk/style>

Footnotes

N.B. All footnotes, whether or not they form complete sentences, should end with full stops.

Book

Author(s) | Full Title of book (in *italics*) | Edition (if not the first) | Place of publication | Publisher | Year of publication | Chapter or page reference (preceded by p. or pp.) if appropriate. The abbreviation edn is used for edition if appropriate.

Examples

Kate Cooper, *Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), pp. 20-34.

John Tosh and Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 4th edn (Harlow: Longman, 2006).

Second and subsequent footnotes

If you refer to the **same** book in a **later footnote** it needs to be cited in the shortest intelligible form. Usually the author(s) and page numbers will be sufficient.

e.g. Cooper, pp. 50-67.

e.g. Stone, p. 33.

e.g. Tosh and Lang, p. 97.

If you refer to more than one work by the same author in the same piece of work include the title (in a shortened form) in the later footnote in order to avoid ambiguity.

e.g. Cooper, *Band of Angels*, pp. 72-82.

e.g. Stone, *Liberation*, p. 35.

e.g. Tosh and Lang, *Pursuit*, p. 100.

If you are citing an ebook which does not display page numbers, give instead the chapter number if this is shown (e.g. Chapter 2).

Journal Article

Author(s) | 'Title of article' (in single quotation marks) | *Title of journal (in italics)* | Volume number | Issue number | Date of Publication | Pages numbers of article if appropriate, **not** preceded by p. or pp.

Examples

Markus Daechsel, 'Misplaced Ekistics: Islamabad and the politics of urban development in Pakistan', *South Asian History and Culture*, 4:1 (2013), 87-106.

Rebecca Jinks, "'Marks Hard to Erase": The Troubled Reclamation of "Absorbed" Armenian Women, 1919-1927', *American Historical Review*, 123: 1 (2018), 86-123.

Note that the title of the article is in quotation marks i.e. '-----', while the title of the journal is in *italics*.

Second and subsequent footnotes

e.g. Daechsel, p. 95.

e.g. Jinks, p. 99.

If you refer to more than one item by an author in your essay or dissertation, you must include part of the article title in the later footnote.

e.g. Daechsel, 'Misplaced Ekistics', pp. 96-101.

e.g. Jinks, "'Marks'", p. 122.

Edited book

If you are citing a book containing a collection of chapters by different authors place the book's title first in the footnote before the name(s) of the editor(s).

N.B. ed. by is used for 'edited by'.

Examples

After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence, ed. by David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist (London: Routledge, 2012).

From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1970, ed. by Taylor Sherman, William Gould and Sarah Ansari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Introduction.

Second and subsequent footnotes

e.g. *After the Holocaust*, p. 100.

e.g. *From Subjects to Citizens*, p. 21.

Chapter in edited book

Author(s) | 'Title of chapter or section' (in single quotation marks) | in *Title of book (in italics)* | Edition (if not the first) | Editor(s) of book, preceded by ed. by | Place of publication | Publisher | Year of publication | Page number(s) of the particular reference, preceded by p. or pp., if appropriate

Example

Stella Moss, 'Manly Drinkers: Masculinity and Material Culture in the Interwar Public House', in *Gender and Material Culture in Britain after 1600*, ed. by Hannah Greig, Jane Hamlett and Leonie Hannan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 138-52.

Amy Tooth Murphy, "'I conformed; I got married. It seemed like a good idea at the time": domesticity in postwar lesbian oral history', in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. by Brian Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). pp. 165-87.

Second and subsequent footnotes

If the **same** chapter is referred to in a **later footnote** it needs to be cited in the shortest intelligible form. Usually the author and page number(s) will be sufficient.

e.g. Moss, p. 147.

e.g. Tooth Murphy, p. 170.

If you refer to more than one work by an author in your essay or dissertation, then include the title in the later footnote in order to avoid any ambiguity.

e.g. Moss, 'Manly Drinkers', p. 147.

e.g. Tooth Murphy, "'I conformed'", p. 182.

Thesis/Dissertation

The titles of unpublished theses and dissertations should be placed within single quotation marks. The degree level (where known), university, and date should be in brackets.

Example

R. J. Ingram, 'Historical Drama in Great Britain from 1935 to the Present' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 1988), p. 17.

The same advice as for books applies to second and subsequent footnotes.

Book Reviews in Journal

Author(s) of review | 'Title of review' (in quotation marks) | review of | Title of the book reviewed (in *italics*) | by | Author of the book reviewed | Title of journal (in *italics*) | Volume number | Issue number | Date of Publication | Pages numbers of article, not preceded by pp. | Page number(s) within brackets of the particular reference (if necessary), preceded by p. or pp.

Examples

Andrew Nagorski, 'The totalitarian temptation', review of *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism and Some Lessons of the 20th Century*, by V. Tismaneanu, *Foreign Affairs*, 92 (2013), 172-176.

Many book reviews have no title, as in this example:

R.J.W. Evans, review of *A Concise History of Wales*, by Geraint H. Jenkins, *Welsh History Review*, 24 (2009), 187-189.

Newspaper Article

Author(s), if stated | 'Title of article' (in single quotation marks) | Title of newspaper (in *italics*) | Day, month and year | Section of the newspaper (e.g. section G2), if applicable | Page number(s), preceded by p. or pp.

Example

Jonathan Friedland, 'Across the Divide', *Guardian*, 15 January 2002, G2 section, pp. 10–11.

Second and subsequent footnotes

Friedland, p. 10.

If you refer to more than one item by Friedland in your essay include the article title in the later footnote e.g. Friedland, 'Across the Divide', p. 10.

Manuscript

City or town where the manuscript is held | Name of the archive, library or other institution which has the manuscript | Collection Name | Manuscript or Collection Number.

The citation of manuscripts within collections should be according to the system of classification of the repository/archive.

Example

London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula, D III, fol. 15.

Second and subsequent footnotes

MS Cotton Caligula, D III, fol. 15.

Bibliography

At the end of your work, list all the sources you have referred to in your footnotes and any other sources you have used. Full bibliographic details need to be given. The list is in alphabetical order, according to the author's or editor's surname.

The sequence of citation in a bibliography is usually as follows:

1. Primary Sources

- a) manuscript
- b) printed – e.g. newspapers; printed texts

2. Secondary Sources

- a) printed - can be sub-divided into monographs, journal articles and chapters from edited collections if you prefer
- b) unpublished – e.g. unpublished theses, web entries

N.B. The surname of the only the **first named** author or editor should precede the forename or initial, as in the examples below.

Examples

Cooper, Kate, *Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013).

Jinks, Rebecca, "'Marks Hard to Erase": The Troubled Reclamation of "Absorbed" Armenian Women, 1919-1927', *American Historical Review*, 123: 1 (2018), 86-123.

Sherman, Taylor, William Gould and Sarah Ansari, eds, *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Starobinski, Jean, *Montaigne in Motion*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Tooth Murphy, Amy, "'I conformed; I got married. It seemed like a good idea at the time": domesticity in postwar lesbian oral history', in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. by Brian Lewis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). pp. 165-87.

Tosh, John and Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 4th edn (Harlow: Longman, 2006).