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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 2020-21 terms

- **Term One**: Monday 21 September to Friday 11 December 2020 (4-week Christmas vacation)
- **Term Two**: Monday 11 January to Friday 26 March 2021 (4-week Easter vacation)
- **Term Three**: Monday 26 April to Friday 11 June 2021

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 2 - Friday 7 November 2018
- **Term Two**: Monday 15 – Friday 19 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:

- Students, by the end of their first year, have developed an understanding of new and unfamiliar areas of historical experience and have acquired, or further developed, skills of rapid reading, academic writing and computer literacy in an historical context.

- Students, by the end of their second year, 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.

- Students, by the end of their third year, 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 work, contributed themselves to the deeper understanding of a complex historical problem through their own independent study of original sources.
STUDY SKILLS

In 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 that are ‘generic’ and those that are ‘subject specific’.

Generic skills are those that are not particular to History but which may be learned through the study of a variety of subjects. Examples of such skills include: 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 that 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 that 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.

During your undergraduate career you also develop a range of study skills that 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. History Lab is a series of sessions designed to offer insight into a variety of skills that pertain not only to university but the post-university world of employment too. This year’s sessions cover multiple themes, including how to write a good essay, effective use of social media, and guidance on applying for jobs and postgraduate degree programmes.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of course</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Skills</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note-taking</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Your notes should be well organised and purposeful, with all the necessary references. You should know how to choose what you need from a text.</td>
<td>Your notes should be well organised, relevant and purposeful, with appropriate referencing of a high standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication skills – written</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication skills – oral</td>
<td>Group Collaboration</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Information skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>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 organised 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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>You should be working regularly and meeting deadlines. You should anticipate tasks and deal with them in good time.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>You should be working regularly, meeting deadlines and planning ahead.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>Including with appropriate guidance, you should be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and find ways to deal with any weaker aspects.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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</table>
Modes of Teaching and Learning in the History Department

(Please note that teaching in 2020-21 is being delivered according to Royal Holloway's Flexible Learning guidelines and so some of the below may therefore differ somewhat for this academic year)

History modules at Royal Holloway are normally taught in two chief ways - by lectures and by seminar groups. There are also smaller tutorial classes in some modules. The first-year Foundation module – HS1004 – is delivered over two terms by means of a lecture and a class (of about 10 students) every week. First-year Gateway modules are likewise taught over two terms by means of a lecture and tutorial class every week. Second-year 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 modules, 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.

Academic 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 assessments. Most of our modules include a variety of assessments, including essays and document commentary exercises (gobbets). There can also be other kinds of written assessment depending on individual modules. 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.

Guidance on Hours of Study

In order to achieve a good degree result, it is recommended that students 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 assessments and seminar presentations, and to consolidate and supplement information provided in lectures, seminars and tutorials. Private study is extremely important not only in acquiring skills needed to achieve a good degree but also in developing the transferable skills required by employers.
Evaluation of Student Work and Assessment

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 essay plans and other shorter exercises. In this 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 analyse 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 examinations;
- by coursework essays or dissertations;
- by oral presentations on some of your courses;
- by other forms of assessment, e.g. blog posts, book reviews, policy briefing reports.

In practice, most modules are examined by some combination of both coursework and examination. 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 Student Intranet page on "Applying for an Extension".

**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 via the Library to help you develop your study skills, including:

- Jeremy Black and Donald MacRaild, *Studying History* (2016)
On writing:

On oral presentations:

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

**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 order to 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 that 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 analyse 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 fifty years.

The **key content words** are: pressure groups; government policy; successfully; three campaigns; last fifty 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 questions 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**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account for</th>
<th>give a good explanation of something and evaluate (possible) causes/reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyse</td>
<td>examine the topic by dividing it into parts and looking at each part in detail; form judgements about each element and the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argue</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess</td>
<td>judge the significance of something, referring to the special knowledge of experts wherever possible (i.e. referring to /</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
quoting from other people's work)

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

**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 approach is they rapidly acquire a lot of information that is very difficult to organise, and then 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. Analyse 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 are 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 of 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 that 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, also 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 that 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 that 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 instead 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 piece of coursework of 5,000 words or more, you should not use all three of these introduction styles. Here 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 summarize 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 is better to evaluate information that 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 have 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, only 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 do not 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 that 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? As a general rule, historians tend not to do so, though it can depend on the type of assignment that 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 it definitely 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 do not make generalizations that 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 reinforces 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 again not a rule as such.

Non-Essay Forms of Writing

When producing other, shorter pieces of written work, structure and clarity remain equally paramount. Even if you are only producing a blog of 10 lines of prose, ensure that it is well-organised 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.
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 that 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.
- Group work and presentations give you the chance to meet and work with other people, and enjoy the team effort involved in putting your ideas together.
- There is usually some flexibility in the topic that you present. It is your chance to do something that interests you; if you are 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 others cannot hear you, they are not going to pay attention. Be sure to project your voice.
- It has to be the appropriate length. Make sure you know how much time you actually have and ensure that your presentation is not significantly under or over time. Try and get it as close to the allotted time as possible.
- Try not to talk non-stop; leave brief pauses for others to absorb what you have been saying and/or take in your slides.
- Think carefully about how many slides to use in your PowerPoint: 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!
- The content of your presentation needs to be relevant to the module and to your audience. Address your fellow students, not the tutor, and make sure the content is appropriate to their level of knowledge. You, for example, should clearly explain historically specific terms and acronyms.
- Your presentation should have a clear structure. Your audience will quickly get lost if you jump around and do not make the structure explicit. 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 ---’

- If you are working on a group presentation, make sure everyone is clear about their roles and tasks. 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.
- Make sure that 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 and can be especially pronounced during the Q&A after your presentation. Use the adrenaline to help you through the experience.
- Take a moment before responding to a question from either your fellow students or tutor. It is always good to pause for a second and give the question proper thought, as opposed to diving in and perhaps not answering it properly.

Checklist

Try answering the following questions to help you with your presentation:

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 that is not relevant?
5. Is the structure clear?
6. Am I clearly audible throughout?
7. What kind of questions might other students ask? You don’t want to invest too much in this, but it might help you feel more confident when it comes to the Q&A.

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 work well?
- Did the audience engage?
- 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 are texts, meaning the gobbet involves a ‘document question’. But gobbets can also involve visual sources like photographs, cartoons 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.

Gobbet writing, therefore, is an exercise in contextual criticism. The aim should be to look at a particular passage or other kind of source, 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 that 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. E.g. Who was the author of the passage? Where and why was the author writing? What were their 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 that 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 working environments.
PRESENTING YOUR WORK

Remember that your name must not appear on your essay as it is marked anonymously.

- 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.
- 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.

Electronic submission

All written assessments and coursework must be digitally submitted to Turnitin by their respective deadlines. More information on this, including the relevant Turnitin submission portal/s, can be found on your modules’ Moodle pages.
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 (in order) 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. 50 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

**The History Department requires students to use the MHRA (Modern Humanities Referencing System) for their referencing**

For further guidance, see:


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**


**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**


**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.

**Note** that p. or pp are used in second and subsequent footnotes.

**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**


**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


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


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**


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


**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**


**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 first named author or editor should precede the forename or initial, as in the examples below.

**Examples**


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.