



Writing Centre

Writing in the Disciplines: History

Academic writing in history often includes the interpretation of historical events through different theoretical lenses (feminist, post-colonial, constructivist lenses, etc.). You may work with either **primary** or **secondary** sources.

What are primary and secondary sources?

Primary sources are central to historical research. They are immediate, first-hand documents or artifacts created by people directly connected to an event (witnesses or participants). These may include diaries, interviews, newspaper articles, poems, or music.

Secondary sources analyze a scholarly question or historical event and rely on primary sources. These may include books and articles about a topic. Use your library’s databases to help you find secondary sources!

Do This:

- Provide historical context. What else was happening that’s relevant to your topic?
- Craft your own interpretation of history! Use historical evidence to answer your research question.
- Wait until you’re finished writing to input your long-form footnotes. Use short form while you write.

Don’t Do This:

- Presume your reader knows about your topic. Introduce your ideas before analyzing them.
- Mix up your tenses. Discuss all primary and secondary sources in past tense.
- Forget to do your background reading. Have general knowledge of your topic.

Citation Style: Chicago

Tips for Common Assignments in History:

<u>Primary or Secondary Source Analysis:</u> <i>A paper written to elicit meaning about the past by analyzing sources.</i>	This is a deconstruction and evaluation of the author’s argument. Think about how their perspectives influence their interpretation.
<u>Research Essay:</u> <i>A paper written using primary and secondary sources as support for your claims to answer a research question.</i>	In this paper, you are explaining historical events from <i>your</i> point of view using evidence. Interpret primary and secondary sources to support your claims.
<u>Annotated Bibliography:</u> <i>An alphabetical list of full citations, each followed by a brief paragraph (the annotation).</i>	This is written to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of a source.

Adapted From/Further Reading

- <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/writing/disciplines/history-paper>
- Taylor McKee, Associate Professor of History at TRU
- <https://www.bowdoin.edu/profiles/faculty/prael/pdf/short-version.pdf>