



## **A Guide to Writing Historical Research Papers.**

### **What is a Historical Research Paper?**

History research papers present information and analyze an event, person, place or idea from the past in writing. Although you might attach a map, chart or photograph that you refer to in your paper, you will rely mainly on words. Writing a paper is a chance to tell what you know and what you think about a part of the past.

### **Getting Started.**

- Conduct your research. Examine secondary and primary sources, taking careful notes and keeping track of which source each piece of information came from. From your research, you should come up with your thesis – the argument you want to make in your paper.
- Make an outline. Using your notes, you can create a list of the main information you want to include in your paper, where each piece of information will go, and in what order. This will help when you sit down to write your paper.
- Start writing. You might begin by writing your introduction in which you state your thesis. -Introduction: your introduction should tell the reader where you intend to go with the rest of your paper. -Body: the main body of your paper is where you can make the case for your conclusion. Present your evidence, the primary sources, and your analysis of how they support your thesis. -Conclusion: your conclusion is like the summary of your paper. It should summarize your main points that prove your thesis.
- Read and Revise. A polished product takes time, so it is important to re-read and revise your paper. Check for clarity, unity, and coherence. Is it clear how your topic relates to the NHD theme? Does your conclusion flow logically from your thesis?

### **Things to help you out during the research process:**

Nothing in history happens in a vacuum. To understand the connections between your topic and the time period, begin reading about the time period and as you read ask yourself questions: why did my topic happen at this particular time and in this particular place? What were the events or the influences that came before my topic? How was my topic influenced by and how did it influence the economic, social, political, and cultural climate of the time period? All of these questions will help you to build the story of your topic and grasp the historical significance.

While you are researching a topic for this project, you will read different types of sources: tertiary sources, secondary sources, and primary sources:

### **Primary Sources**

A primary source is a piece of information about a historical event or period in which the creator of the source was an actual participant in or a contemporary of a historical moment. The purpose of primary sources is to capture the words, the thoughts and the intentions of the past. Primary sources help you to interpret what happened and why it happened.

Examples of primary sources include documents, artifacts, historic sites, songs, or other written and tangible items created during the historical period you are studying.

### **Secondary Sources**

A secondary source is a source that was not created first-hand by someone who participated in the historical era. Secondary sources are usually created by historians, but based on the historian's reading of primary sources. Secondary sources are usually written decades, if not centuries, after the event occurred by people who did not live through or participate in the event or issue. The purpose of a secondary source is to help build the story of your research from multiple perspectives and to give your research historical context.

An example of a secondary source is *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* by James M. McPherson, published in 1988. They are a great starting point in helping you see the big picture. Understanding the context of your topic will help you make sense of the primary sources that you find.

The primary and secondary sources McPherson used are listed in the bibliography. Another researcher might consult these same primary sources and reach a different conclusion.

### **Tertiary Sources**

Tertiary sources are based on a collection of primary and secondary sources and may or may not be written by an expert. Tertiary sources should never appear in your bibliography but are only used as exploratory sources, to give you ideas about what to research. Wikipedia is not a reliable source and should not be utilized or appear in your bibliography. Examples are dictionaries, encyclopedias, fact books, and guidebooks.

### **The Historical Research Project Requirements:**

Papers must be typed or computer printed on plain, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper with 1-inch margins on all sides. Pages must be numbered consecutively and double-spaced with writing on one side and with no more than 12 characters per inch or no less than 10-point type. Papers must be stapled in the top left corner and should not be enclosed in any cover or binder. The title page should have no illustrations.

The text of historical research papers must be no less than 1,500 and no more than 2,500 words in length. Each word or number in the text of the paper counts as one word. The paper category 2,500 word limit does not apply to: notes, annotated bibliography, illustration captions, and supplemental/appendix material. Appendix material must be directly referred to in the text of the paper. Extensive supplemental materials are inappropriate. Use of appendices should be very limited and may include photographs, maps, charts, and graphs, but we strongly suggest no other supplemental materials.

**Your Project Must Include: Citations/Bibliographies**

To record the information the three acceptable styles of writing for projects are Turabian, APA and MLA. Historians use Turabian but we know that many classes in middle school and high school teach the APA or MLA style. It does not matter which of these three styles you use, but it is important to be consistent. For help with questions of citations, you can check out Turabian, APA or MLA guides from your local library.

Citations—footnotes, endnotes or internal documentation—are required for this project. Citations are used to credit the sources of specific ideas as well as direct quotations. Please note that an extensively annotated footnote should not be used to get around the word limit.

**Your Project Must Include: Annotated Bibliography**

An annotated bibliography is required for all projects. The annotations for each source must explain how the source was used and how it helped you understand your topic. You should also use the annotation to explain why you categorized a particular source as primary or secondary. Sources of visual materials and oral interviews, if used, must also be included.

List only those sources that you used to develop your entry. An annotation normally should be only 1-3 sentences long.

Source (example): Bates, Daisy. *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*. 1st ed. New York: David McKay Co. Inc., 1962.

Annotation (example): Daisy Bates was the president of the Arkansas NAACP and the one who met and listened to the students each day. This first-hand account was very important to my paper because it made me more aware of the feelings of the people involved.

## Sample Historical Research Project Rubric

Pupil Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Category	Beginning 1	Developing 2	Accomplished 3	Exemplary 4	Score
Complete Task	Limited understanding of essay writing.	Some parts of essay completed.	Most parts of essay done.	All parts of essay completed.	
Tone of Essay	Tone is inappropriate to purpose.	Tone does not contribute to persuasiveness.	Tone enhances persuasiveness, but there are inconsistencies.	Tone is consistent and enhances persuasiveness.	
Organization	Does not use appropriate topic sentence in each paragraph, does not support topic well.	Uses an appropriate topic sentence in each paragraph but does not support topic well (or other way around).	Paragraphs have appropriate topic sentence and good supporting sentences.	Uses exemplary topic sentences and supports with thoughtful, well-crafted supporting sentences.	
Conventions	Includes more than five grammatical, spelling or other errors in text	Includes four-five grammatical, spelling or other errors in text.	Includes two-three grammatical, spelling or other errors in text.	Have no grammatical, spelling, or other errors in text.	
Clarity	Does not express ideas clearly	Attempts to express ideas clearly	Generally expresses ideas clearly	Consistently expresses ideas clearly	
				<b>Total Points x 5</b>	