

History 230

Research Paper

Overview

Why do research?

- Nearly all personal & professional challenges call for us to know more...
- Research in any field teaches us to solve problems, find information, organize thoughts and data, and communicate & use results...
- Research teaches us to discriminate among sources so we can make best arguments...

Doing Historical Research

- Most of you will not be historians, so why fool with this?
- Because the process of research is basically the same in all fields..you will learn a universal skill.
- But, historical research is also difficult since it is in the past, and we have only limited knowledge of any past...this is part of the fun of it!

Guided Research Paper

- Guided research takes incremental steps to complete the overall polished paper.
- Each step is completed by due dates, graded with feedback, edited and improved as needed, and leads to a subsequent step.
- For example, in this Civil War History course you will begin with steps to select a general topic; then select a specific topic; and then develop a thesis.

Research Steps & Due Dates

- Selection & discussion of general topic:
- Selection & discussion of specific topic:
- Exploratory reading & discussion of working bibliography:
- Submission & discussion of initial thesis:
- Submission & discussion of revised thesis, initial source list, & rough outline:
- Discussion on research progress & findings:
- Submission & discussion of first draft:
- Submission & discussion of revised draft:
- Submission & discussion of final polished paper:

General Topics--1848 to 1877

- Biographical [the easiest]; includes flawed & charismatic leaders; as well as focus groups such as women, freedmen, prisoners, specific regiments, etc.
- Military Engagements [any major engagement...approximately 250]
- Technical, Munitions & Scientific Developments
- Medical & Health Issues
- Economics, Wartime Funding & Commerce/Industry
- Political Parties, Causes, Major Legislation & Events
- Home front, Social, Religious & Educational Issues
- Special locations, a state history thru the war years; a fort; or a city
- Art (including military art), Literature, Music, maps and mapping--all of the period and related to the war

Selecting a Specific Topic

- Do this in discussion with classmates and your professor.
- You may not repeat the specific topic of a classmate, first to declare, first rewarded!
- Inventory your own personal interests, your hobbies, your major
- Skim through the textbook and the *Bibliography...*
- Your specific topic must be approved by the professor

Topics Disallowed

- No “large” topics such as the “causes of the Civil War”; or why the “South lost”.
- No “small” topics such as the Battle of Aiken.
- No topics focused on re-enactments.
- No topics related to tours, national parks and such.
- No topics on weather events except with permission.
- No family histories or genealogies except with permission.
- Nothing on Abraham Lincoln.
- No topics outside the time frame (1848-1877) or unrelated to the Civil War.

What is a thesis?

- A thesis must make a claim or answer a specific question about your topic.
- A thesis is one key sentence within the opening paragraph.
- The thesis & the context of the opening paragraph set a series of signposts like a roadmap directing the reader through the evidence to be presented in support of the thesis.
- A thesis must be challenging and specific. If it is bland, general, or just plain common sense--then readers will ask “so what”?
- The thesis evolves as you read about your topic, so an initial thesis should become more specific as you research.
- The class will discuss examples elsewhere in the course.

Asking Good Questions

- You begin to develop a research thesis by asking good questions--take this seriously as it is a critical life long skill.
- Historians ask question about people--why they did what they did--important stuff!
- History research begins with *why*
- You might ask: *Why did McClellan fail? Why did so many prisoners die in Andersonville? Why did many Northerners oppose the war? Why did artist glorify the war?*

Initial Reading & The Thesis

- After asking such questions, historians do an incredible amount of reading and research before they postulate a thesis and begin research.
- As a student you do not have the background to do this nor the time, thus this approach of a guided research paper and a closed list of topics-
-you can't go "wrong".
- Still, you must do some initial reading to begin to answer your question & think about the thesis...

Initial Reading for Your Thesis

- Read course instructions on theses
- Read what your textbook has to say about your topic, and what sources it lists on your possible thesis
- Check at least two other credible sources (perhaps one online and one hard cover book) and read the first chapter or so. See the *Select Bibliography* of sources
- At this stage it is also acceptable to use “Google” to get some ideas; BUT, remember you may not ever use Google, or any other open source online dictionary or reference encyclopedia as a source for your actual paper.

Researching and Note Taking

- Start taking formal notes immediately as you read for your thesis.
- Note the full citation info for all sources, even though you may discard some.
- Use a word processing software and set up a template that can be used to key in info and easily save the notes--see the following slide.

Notes, Holland, *Frank Mottly's War*

SUBJECT:

Date:

Source:

Ideas, facts, etc.:

Quote:

Comments:

Type of Note?

- Summarized note from source. Notes in your own words that summarize ideas, events, timelines, facts, and other information from one unique source. Note taking form should cite the source and page numbers or other location aids.
- Paraphrased note from source. Notes as above, but when the source's words are better and you paraphrase. A paraphrase is a re-statement of the author's words. Again a full citation is required.
- Quoted note from source. A direct quote with exact words of the source and an exact citation.

Note--even accidentally forgetting where you got information is plagiarism and will result in a zero, so be careful.

Hardline on Quotes

- Never use a quote when your words will do. This will cost you points.
- Never open or close your paper with quotes, we are looking for your insight. This will cost you points.
- You may use only one long indented quote ; if it is absolutely needed (as in a paper documenting a law, proclamation, etc.); and if no longer than five (5) lines single spaced. This can cost you points.
- You may use only six one-line or less in-paragraph quotes in the entire paper; but no more. This will cost you points.

Draft Thesis

- Now, answer your question
- Begin to draft an initial paragraph about why this is a good answer to an important question about the Civil War
- Also begin your methodical research...doing some research every other day or so
- Revise and refine your thesis as you go

Sources

- Start with general works on the subject--the text book, several books listed in the text bibliography.
- Early on read for context. This means if you are doing something that happened in September 1862; what else was going on--in the Union, in the Confederacy, in major theaters of the war, and at the home-fronts. Just do not over do this.
- Then work your way down to more specific books, articles, and online sources.
- Your final paper must have at least six sources.
- Three must be academic, respected, current and/or relevant books.
- One must be an online source.
- Two must be primary sources, or the equivalent online virtual and/or transcribed version of same.
- Your instructions in the course will provide more help here.

Working Bibliography

- Remember, that we will use the Turabian/Chicago style and so you must keep a working list of each source used in both forms used--as a note and as a work. Instructions in the course will provide more help here.
- See the course online for instructions about the bibliography and web sources.

First Draft

- In class discussion, instruction, and other pointers for writing will be provided.
- But, begin writing sooner rather than later.
- Map out or outline where you think your writing will go.
- Start with the opening--it should provide the reasons why your thesis is important.
- It should state the thesis. And it can provide needed background or context.
- Use the first draft to get all of your ideas down on paper.

Everything you will ever do professionally or personally will begin with questions asked, and answers *found!*

Your research may not result in the replacement of fossil fuels; it will be as monumentally important to you. You will learn about the Civil War, about doing research, and about evaluating evidence.

Take this seriously, and have some fun digging.

Good luck!