

Hist 17BH Research Paper

Technical Requirements

*8-10 pages of original historical analysis, not including title page or bibliography.
(double spaced, except for block quotes; 12 pt. font and standard margins)

*Significant use of at least 5 secondary sources. If you use primary sources, they need to be in addition to these 5 sources. You will most likely have more than 5 sources, but you are not expected to use those additional sources to the same extent that you do your main 5 sources.

*A strong thesis that presents some sort of argument and takes a side on an historical question that has been, or can be, answered in more than one way. Although your evidence should primarily focus on supporting your thesis, you do need to address the counterarguments and why you have not convinced by them.

*Proper Citations: use whatever academic format you are comfortable with. MLA, APA and Chicago (also known as Turabian) are the most familiar and straightforward. Of course include a proper Bibliography. You need to pay careful and considerable homage to the source of your knowledge; even when it's just an "idea" and not specific words that you are borrowing from another scholar, give credit where it is due.

Timeline

March 20:

- Prepare a list of possible topics you are interested in exploring
- We will meet in the library and receive a special instructional session on research and using the library (this will take place during our normal class hours).

May 1:

- We will use our class meeting time as well as my office hours to meet individually
- You need to have a typed outline prepared to show me. This means you have settled on a topic, have the majority of your sources, and have a general idea of a thesis.

June 3:

Final Draft Due.

Choosing a Topic:

Read the intro and conclusion to each chapter, look at pictures, think about things that we've discussed in class that caught your interest and made you wish we could spend more time on it. You are free to write your paper on any topic that falls within American history from 1865 to the present.

***Chronology:**

Are you interested mainly in a particular period of time, if so, why?

***Categories:**

Is there a certain type of history that you find more interesting to you than others? Each week I've give you a taste of economic, political, cultural, social, intellectual history, etc... Are you interested in gender history? Are you interested in the ways in which race and class have affected life in America?

***Specific Events:**

Is there a specific event that has always held a particularly strong sense of fascination for you? If so, why? What would you like to know more about it?

Creating a Thesis:

A thesis comes from prolonged and deep study of a particular topic; as you become more familiar with that topic you will realize many things:

- 1) Historians often disagree about the meaning or significance of certain facts. You will likely find yourself persuaded by one "side" or the other, or oftentimes you might find convincing bits from both sides of the argument.
- 2) Your interpretation or analysis of certain historical phenomena might change drastically when you stumble on new and relevant information. Did you have a preconception about a certain time, event, idea, or circumstance in history that is radically changed by your research?
- 3) You'll finally realize why all your teachers were so obsessed with the "compare and contrast" exercises throughout high school. It's really, really useful for discovering a new perspective that might lead to an excitingly different interpretation. Comparing different time periods, different geographical locations, different responses of different demographic groups to the same major event... this will often give you a sort of "ah ha!" moment.
- 4) You'll finally realize that your annoying 5 year-old sibling/cousin/child/babysitting subject is on to something with her/his incessant use of the word "why?" This is perhaps the most important basic question an historian can ask. It's what takes a basic narrative from "This happened and then this happened" to "This is important, and interesting, and affects me personally."

Doing Research:

GO TO THE LIBRARY! Yes, the physical building, where there are physical books on shelves. The Internet has been a godsend for historians, and all scholars that have to do research. I cannot imagine having to walk to the library and search, by hand, through a card catalogue every time I want to know whether the library has a certain book. However, there are certain things that the Internet and digitization of the research process cannot replace.

If you are not sure how to use the library—where to find books, how to search for things in the online catalogue—that is totally fine. Just ask a librarian for help. They are awesomely intelligent and helpful. Helping you is their job and they love to do it. Don't be shy and don't feel badly asking for help on things you suspect you should know already.

Start by finding several books that cover your topic in a very general and broad way. An online search will identify a couple of these; go find them on the shelves, and then look at the books nearby on the shelf. I often find the most useful sources that way.

- Use indexes, intros and conclusions to scan through and get a sense of what is useful and interesting to you.

- Look through their footnotes and bibliography to get a sense of who/what they read in order to do their research, and this will give you a long list of other important and well-respected sources of your topic.

- As you narrow your topic and thesis, you might find that what Cabrillo has isn't enough for you. You can get other sources from other libraries through the interlibrary loan system, sent to you via the Cabrillo library. Also, you will likely find it necessary to use UC Santa Cruz's main library, McHenry.

Writing the Paper:

- go back over the articles I've assigned in the Course Reader. They are intended to provide you with models for how to write your own paper. While your writing style (vocabulary, sentence construction) and analysis should be no means be expected to match that of a professionally trained historian, you can apply their techniques to your own work on a scale that is appropriate for college-level work. Use their methods of organization, presentation of evidence, and posing questions.
- start with a really good outline, then flesh that out section by section. Don't worry if you feel the impulse to write the fourth section before the second. Follow your gut, there's a reason why you want to do that, and it will usually become clear as you are writing.
- do not start out by trying to write a polished thesis and introductory paragraph first. Just briefly sketch that out and move on; as you are writing the other sections, keep building the thesis and intro step-by-step. It will evolve and change as you write the other sections.
- **WHATEVER ELSE YOU IGNORE FROM THESE SUGGESTIONS, DON'T IGNORE THIS:** Do not try to make the evidence fit into some predetermined thesis. If, as you are fleshing out the particulars of your evidence, you find that your argument no longer works, then by all means change the argument! Don't try to "massage" the evidence to fit it.