

Suggestions for Writing History Papers

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Thesis

Be sure your paper presents a thesis that clearly answers the question(s) posed. Each paragraph should further that thesis. A well-written topic sentence for each paragraph will improve your writing and the level of your analysis. For example, compare the following two sentences: "Jane Addams was born in 1860," vs. "Jane Addams decided before the age of seven that she wanted to do something to aid those living in poverty."

Verb tense

In general, it is best to write history papers using the simple past tense of verbs and to avoid the passive voice. For example, "Narrhaganset warriors captured Mary Rowlandson," is better than "Mary Rowlandson was captured by Narrhanganset warriors."

Quotations

- All direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks and precisely referenced by footnotes (bottom of the page) or endnotes (end of the paper). Parenthetical citations will be accepted for papers in history **121/122**.
- Quotations should be used sparingly, for emphasis, when the particular words carry special punch. Otherwise paraphrase. Avoid the cut-and-paste approach.
- When you do quote, integrate the quotation into the prose. Do not simply drop quotations in without identification or connection. Phrases like "he said," "Turner argues," or "she asserted" are often sufficient.
- Note that periods and commas go inside the quotation marks.

Proofreading

Proof your final work carefully. If your essay was worth spending hours to create, it is worth a few minutes more to proof-read it. *A sloppy paper reflects upon you.* When a student shows no respect for his or her own work, professors seldom will.

Plagiarism

The use of someone else's work as your own is plagiarism and will result in serious penalties. *Any idea not your own should be properly cited.* Passages lifted from books, paragraphs composed by another student, and papers borrowed or purchased from others violate the Presbyterian College Honor Code and copyright laws.

The Writing Center

Take advantage of this valuable resource! Make an appointment to talk through any part of the paper-writing process, from discussing your general strategies to polishing your final draft. Several tutors are history majors. E-mail writingcenter@presby.edu if you have questions.

Library

Students should be able to identify sources beyond those found in "Thomcat." Do not be discouraged if you cannot find enough sources in our library's holdings--our library has access to numerous other resources. For further help, consult with a reference librarian.

Paper Format

Type and double-space papers with approximately 250 words per page. Allow enough space for the reader's comments in the margin.

Allow enough time to solve potential computer glitches.

Put page numbers on each page in case they become scrambled.

Staple pages together in the upper left-hand corner.