

A Brief Guide to Writing History Papers

All academic history papers require adherence to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Common reference guides to this format include Jules R. Benjamin's *A Student's Guide to Writing History* (available in the campus bookstore), Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, and the online resource <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>.

Basic Requirements

I. Cover Page

- A. The first page of your paper must be a cover page that includes the following information: the title of your paper, your name, your professor's name, the date, and the title of the class.

II. Format and Structure

- A. For a history paper, print must be double spaced in 12-point font, and the margins must be set at one inch on every side. A page number must also appear in the top right corner of each page.
- B. A history paper requires an introduction paragraph in which the general structure of your paper is mapped out and the thesis statement is clearly expressed, an appropriate quantity of supporting/body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph which ties your argument together and comments on the significance of your findings in the historical "big picture."
- C. Though optional, using a heading to separate different topics, when necessary, is permitted. For example, in a research paper discussing the individual military campaigns of Attila the Hun and Napoleon Bonaparte, using a heading such as "Napoleon's Conquest" to separate the analysis of Napoleon from the previous analysis of Attila the Hun is acceptable.

III. Citations

- A. Since using other writers' ideas without crediting them is plagiarism, citing the information gleaned from outside sources is crucial to any academic paper. In a history paper, citations are made through the use of footnotes (notes appearing at the bottom of the page) or endnotes (notes appearing at the end of the paper). Within the body of the paper, these citations are represented by a raised number (a superscript) at the end of a sentence or the end of a paragraph.
- B. Proper format for citing a book with a single author:
Author's first and last name, Title (Place of publication: Publisher, Date), page number.
For the second use of the same source:
Author's last name, Title, page number.
- C. In history papers, certain information is not necessary to cite (e.g. the dates of battles or other major historical events). These dates are considered "common knowledge" by historians and do not need citations. However, always remember to cite any theory or idea that is not your own. Also cite specific statistics, such as the size of an army or the amount of munitions used in a

battle. Different studies lead to varying statistics, so any such statistic should be cited. If you cannot determine whether a piece of information must be cited, cite it. It is better to over-cite than not cite something important.

IV. Bibliography

- A. Every source that appears in a paper must appear in a bibliography on the last page (this includes all the works that are cited as well as any that are merely mentioned). Each entry in a bibliography uses the same information as its corresponding citation, but the format differs slightly.
- B. Proper bibliographic format for a book by a single author:
Author's last name, first name. Title. Place of publication: Publisher, Date.
- C. All bibliographic entries must appear in alphabetical order of the authors' last names.

General Tips

1. Be sure to check your paper several times for errors. Use spell check and grammar check, but also read the paper yourself to find any mistakes the software might have missed. If possible, have someone else read your paper as well.
2. Make sure you meet all the requirements for your paper (word count, specific questions, etc.).
3. Ensure that your thesis statement is clear and specific.
4. Be aware of any tangential statements or paragraphs. Make sure you are only addressing issues related to your thesis.
5. Do not begin your conclusion with "In conclusion..."
6. Do not introduce new information in the conclusion.
7. Keep verb tense consistent.
8. Avoid using passive voice wherever possible.
9. Do not use first-person voice.
10. Do not use contractions or informal language (slang, clichés and colloquialisms).
11. Do not let quotes speak for themselves. Explain the significance of the material you have quoted.
12. Do not begin or end a paragraph with a direct quote.
13. Provide sufficient evidence for all your assertions.
14. Acknowledge contrary views to your argument. Never ignore significant opposition to your ideas and expect it to go unnoticed.