

LIB399 Writing a History Research Paper

"...A series of factual statements about the past, however precise they may be, does not constitute a history paper....A history paper explores *how* and *why* something happened and explains its significance." Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*

Asking Good Historical Questions

Remember http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ppascoe/407/what_is_a_good_question.htm

Note: Peggy Pascoe's class is "Gender, Race & Sexuality in U.S. History" so her suggestions will be related to those topics.

"Pick a topic that students in the class and average people walking down the street could find interesting or useful. If you think interracial relationships are an interesting topic and you find the 1940s to be an equally fascinating time period, come up with a question that incorporates both these interests.

For example: "How did white and African-American defense plant workers create and think about interracial relationships during World War Two?" This question investigates broad issues - interracial romance, sexual identity - but within a specific context - World War Two and the defense industry.

Warning: Avoid selecting a topic that is too broad: "How has war affected sex in America?" is too broad. It would take several books to answer this question."

Rampolla 1a (pp.2-4) Historical Questions

This section leads you away from simple yes or no questions and starts you thinking about *how* historians create context through analysis.

Go back and review the article you read for assignment #2. Find the writer's thesis statement and think about how you might state yours. Is theirs a good model?

Narrowing Your Topic

Rampolla p.41 "Narrow Your Subject Down to a Workable Topic"

Read this and put it into practice!

Packer & Timpane p.27

"You would have to narrow the subject to a size commensurate with your knowledge, your interests, the time you can allot, and the number of pages the instructor has requested." Good, practical things to consider.

Articulating a Thesis—Do you sense a theme here?

A thesis should make an argument and be *persuasive*.

For examples of effective and ineffective theses see Rampolla p.28 and Packer & Timpane pp.29-33

Packer & Timpane

p.29 “Try to make your thesis statement hard, tight, unmistakable.”

p.31 “If something is not worth arguing about, it is unlikely to be worth writing about.”

p.33 “Because the reader will assume the ideas belong to the writer, phrases such as *I think* or *I feel* are unnecessary.”

Rampolla 3b-4 (pp.27-29) History Papers

"A thesis informs the reader about the *conclusions* you have reached. Moreover, a thesis is always an arguable or debatable point. In fact the purpose of a history paper is to present the reader with enough evidence to convince him or her that your thesis is correct."

Also read section 4d (pp.50-51) Developing a Working Thesis

English professor, Ron Ganze, shares some good advice on thesis statements:

“Your thesis should provide a clear focus for your essay. That is, it should narrow the field of your discussion from a broad topic to a specific line of reasoning/argumentation within that topic. Your thesis should be limited to what can be accomplished in the specified number of pages. It should announce the general topic as well as offer an argument/analysis that your essay will support and develop. You should provide a thesis early in your essay in order to establish your position and give your reader a sense of direction. Generally speaking, readers expect your thesis statement to come at the end of an introductory paragraph.... Your thesis statement should *naturally* follow from the sentences that precede it. It should not appear out of nowhere. *Unity* is the key to a successful paper.

The thesis is the anchor for your entire argument. It is a single declarative statement which represents the focus of the essay. The thesis must *not* be a summary statement: it must not introduce the essay as a “book report” or a description of the text in question.”

Pulling Your Sources Together

Rampolla 2b-4 (pp.14-21) Looking at Historical Sources

Uses several sources surrounding the Scopes Monkey Trial to illustrate how a historian uses his or her sources pulling them logically together.

Observe how other authors do this in the secondary sources you select for your paper.

Creating an Outline

4e Making an Outline could be useful in step III of the final assignment.