

GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC ESSAYS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, LATIN AND POLITICAL SCIENCE, LANGARA COLLEGE

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Introduction

As a student in the History/Latin/Political Science department, you will invariably be asked by your instructor to write an essay. This will require you to review the works of other scholars before developing an argument of your own about your chosen topic. Your instructor will expect you to craft an essay that reflects your own ideas, but that also acknowledges how the research of other writers has shaped your thinking. This task is a critical component of your education and as such deserves considerable attention on your part. We in the History/Latin/Political Science department have developed this booklet to assist you with this process. Most importantly, we remind you of what **plagiarism** is, and explain how you can ensure that it does not occur in your essay. Then, to help you learn how to acknowledge the research you have done, we explain the purpose of **notes (footnotes or endnotes)**, and provide many examples of how to use them. Our examples are based on *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition.

We hope that you will find this booklet helpful, but you should realize that the guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive. We list further references at the end of the booklet, and you should consult these for additional information. Always remember, too, that your instructor is available to assist you with any questions you might have – do not hesitate to seek him or her out for further assistance.

Plagiarism: what it is

Plagiarism means taking another person's work or ideas and presenting them as your own. It can take many forms, including:

- a) using another person's words without enclosing them in quotation marks;
- b) using another person's words without citing their author and source with a footnote or endnote;
- c) paraphrasing improperly. This occurs when you change a few words or rearrange the order of a sentence, but continue to rely on the basic structure of your source's phrasing. Acceptable paraphrasing requires that you use your *own* words and sentence structure;
- d) using the original ideas of another person without citing them;
- e) submitting the same work for two different courses;
- f) submitting work written by someone other than yourself;
- g) submitting work that has been corrected by someone else. While someone may point out to you where your work needs correcting, you need to make the corrections yourself. Plagiarism is a *serious* academic offence and may result in a failing grade, a formal reprimand, or suspension or expulsion from the College. Further information on the College's policy on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty can be found [here](#).

Main parts of an academic essay

Title Page: A title page should include the essay's title (capitalized and centred 2 inches from the top of the page), your name with your student number below it (not capitalized, 1 inch below the title), and the course and instructor's name with the date below it (not capitalized, 1 inch from the bottom of the page).

Introduction: The introduction has three goals: (a) to introduce the topic of the essay; (b) to present your thesis (which is to say the particular approach or argument the essay will make); and (c) to tell the reader how the essay will be structured.

a) You may choose to introduce the topic by providing some brief background information or context, a brief story, or a surprising fact or statistic that engages the reader's attention and suggests the significance of the topic.

b) Once you have focused the reader's attention, present the thesis or argument of the essay. Depending on the complexity of your thesis this may consist of one or more sentences.

Remember: a thesis statement is not the same as your topic (i.e. something you want to talk about). A thesis, in contrast, is an argument, generally reduced down to one or more sentences.

c) You should end your introduction by giving your readers a preview of the main points you will make to substantiate the claims made in your thesis.

Body: In the body of the essay you will present the evidence and analysis that will substantiate your thesis. It is essential that the body of the essay be developed in a logical and orderly fashion following the preview that you presented in the introduction. The overall goal of this section is to develop your analysis and defend your argument – it is the main part of the essay.

This logically ordered body of the essay will consist of a series of **paragraphs**. Each paragraph should develop one central theme that helps you further your argument. Introduce this theme in a topic sentence; expand on the theme through the use of evidence or examples; and analyze the evidence to show how it contributes to the specific point you are making in the paragraph and to the thesis as a whole. Paragraphs should consist of several sentences rather than one, long sentence.

Conclusion: The conclusion is designed to bring together your essay's main points and to reassert or emphasize the strength of the thesis or argument. A conclusion is more than a summary, in that it is important to indicate why there is merit to your thesis or argument – what has been shown as a result of your investigation or exploration of the topic.

Notes (*Footnotes or Endnotes*): All academic essays will use information found in books, scholarly articles, electronic sources, or other sources. All academic essays must also inform the reader of which specific sources this information came from. This source of this information is "cited" in "notes" – either "footnotes" (which appear at the bottom of the page) or "endnotes" (which appear on a separate page near the end of the essay). Information about when to "cite" using a "note" and how to format footnotes and endnotes is provided in other sections of these guidelines.

Bibliography: Most academic essays require a bibliography at the end of the paper that includes all sources (written or otherwise) used in the composition of your essay. Information about how to format the bibliography is included in the "Formatting" section of these guidelines.

Formatting

Paper and binding: Use only 8.5" by 11" paper. Staple the paper in the upper left corner. Do not use binders or plastic covers unless your instructor requires them.

Fonts and printing: All essays must be typed with print on only one side of the page. Black is the standard colour for printed ink and generally Times New Roman or Arial 12 point font is used. A single typed page, regardless of font size, should contain approximately 250 words.

Margins, line spacing, and paragraphs: Use margins of one inch on all sides. The essay should be double-spaced (but not the notes or the bibliography which are usually single-spaced), with no extra blank lines between paragraphs. The first word of each paragraph should be indented one-half an inch.

Direct Quotations: Brief direct quotations (i.e. less than three lines) should appear in quotation marks (“”) but otherwise should follow the format used in all other paragraphs in the paper. Where you need to alter a direct quotation to make it fit grammatically within a given paper, you may include new or altered words (that do not alter the meaning of the quotation) in square brackets. Where you need to leave out a words from the direct quotation indicate with a series of three periods where words have been removed. Where direct quotations contain grammatical or spelling errors include the word “sic” in parentheses next to the error.

Long direct quotations (i.e. longer than three lines) should appear as “block quotes.” All text of block quotes is to be indented one inch from the left margin (with no extra indentation for the first word). Block quotes do not appear in quotation marks.

Pagination: All pages, with the exception of the title page and bibliography, should be numbered sequentially in the upper right-hand corner of the paper, flush with the right margin.

Emphasis: For emphasis and titles of books, use either italics or underlining. Choose one and be consistent.

Notes (*Footnotes or Endnotes*): All notes are numbered, following the note numbers used in the text. *Footnotes* occur at the bottom of each page and are numbered in normal text (not superscript). The first line of the note is indented a half-inch (or five spaces); subsequent lines are flush left. *Footnotes* are single-spaced, with a blank line separating them. *Endnotes*, on the other hand, are gathered together at the end of the essay, beginning on a new page with the word *Endnotes* centred on the first line (subsequent pages do not have a title). In the *Endnotes* the numbers are in normal text (not superscript). The first line of the *Endnote* is indented a half-inch (or five spaces); subsequent lines are flush left. As with footnotes, *Endnotes* are single-spaced, with a blank line between notes.

Bibliography: The word *Bibliography* is centred on the first line (subsequent pages of the bibliography do not have a title). Sources are listed alphabetically by author’s name or by corporate/government name and are single-spaced.

Style and Mechanics

Spelling and grammar: You should spell-check and proof read your essay before submitting it. It is also generally a good idea to have a friend or family member read the essay as well to check for spelling and grammar mistakes and to ensure that your essay is clearly written.

Language: Writing well does not mean that you should adopt an exaggerated reverence for formality. Learning to write a college level essay means learning to write plainly and clearly. However, as a general rule you should avoid overly colloquial terms as well as overly sensational or inflammatory terms. Your essay should also be free of language that reflects gender or racial bias. Contractions should be avoided (e.g. can't, shouldn't) in academic writing.

Structure: The focus of your essay and its thesis must be clearly presented in the introduction and the rest of the essay must follow logically from this introduction. The ideas and sections of the essay must be clearly linked to the introduction and to each other. Repetition and duplication are to be avoided and the essay must consistently remain focused on the topic at hand.

Intended audience: Write the paper as if it were directed to a general, reasonably well-educated audience. Accordingly, you should be sure to define key terms. If a term has several accepted meanings (e.g. democracy, socialism), you should specify the meaning you intend.

Use of Quotations: Use quotations sparingly and only if they illustrate a point that you have already made in a particularly engaging manner. Review the writing guides indicated in the "Reference Works on Essay Writing" section to get a good sense of how to make effective use of quotations. You should explain how the quote supports the argument you are advancing.

Make a copy: Keep a copy of your essay on disk or photocopied.

Citation: When to Cite

Knowing how and when to cite a work (i.e. insert a footnote or endnote) is the key to avoiding plagiarism.

But citation is important for other reasons, too:

- a) citations indicate how much research has gone into your paper. Frequent citation can be a sign of a strong paper;
- b) citation directs readers of your work to sources which may help them in their own studies. To this extent citation is an academic courtesy that helps to further the scholarly debate in which we are all involved.

The lesson here is, if in doubt, cite.

Direct quotations

You must *always* cite a text or author when you are using direct quotations (eg. repeating exactly what is in a book or article). These quotations must be placed in quotation marks (“ ”) and will be followed by a footnote or endnote with the reference information.

When quoting, always be sure to copy the quote *exactly* as it appears in the text.

Take the following example from a work by Robert Dahl. The following passage is quoted directly: “a key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals.”¹

Observe that at the end of the quotation the number 1 (in this instance) appears in superscript immediately after the quotation mark. A correspondingly numbered note (either footnote or endnote) will appear elsewhere in the paper as follows:

¹ Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1971), 1.

Paraphrasing

You may decide to paraphrase a text, which means to rephrase something you have read by putting it in your own words. Bear in mind that even if you are re-stating something you have read in your own words, you still need to credit the author of the original text. In this case, you do not use quotation marks, but you still need to use a footnote/endnote.

Example (using a paraphrase of the above direct quotation):

According to Dahl, democratic governments can be characterised by their regard for citizens' preferences, and their commitment to the principle of political equality.²

² Dahl, 1.

Citing the source of an original idea

A third place to be aware of plagiarism is when you have incorporated or included the ideas of a source into your essay. This is neither a direct quote nor a paraphrase; in fact you are just bringing the idea or insight of an author into your own work. To make this transfer of ideas legitimate you need to give credit to the original author.

Example (again using the same source by Dahl but dealing with a far larger section of his work):

Democratization has frequently been seen as a series of historical transformations beginning in Europe in the nineteenth century and continuing through the 1930s and finally culminating in the increasing democratization of developed industrial states in the contemporary context.³

³ Dahl, 10-11.

An idea is not considered original if it can be found in more than three different sources or if it can be considered common knowledge. In these cases, you do not need to cite a source.

Example: Generally, the United States and Canada are considered stable democracies.

Citing statistics or other data

Statistical information or any other form of data needs to be referenced so that the reader may, if they so choose, locate the information for themselves or verify your data.

How to Cite

Our note style is based on *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition.

Purpose of notes:

Notes (footnotes or endnotes) lead the reader to the sources of the information and ideas you use in developing your essay. The section titled “Main parts of an academic essay,” on page 4, explains to you the differences between endnotes and footnotes and where to place them. What follows below are samples for both notes and bibliographic citations.

Footnote or endnote:

1. Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 145.

Bibliographic citation:

Prentice, Alison et al. *Canadian Women: A History*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

First citation:

The first time you cite a book, you must include the author’s full name, the full title of the book, the place of publication and the publisher’s name, the date of publication, and the page number from which you gained your information. See the sample above.

Subsequent references:

Once you have cited a source, you need include only the author’s last name and the page number in subsequent references.

5. Prentice et al., 201.

Subsequent references to authors with more than one source in your bibliography:

If you have citations for more than one work by the same author, you must include a partial title along with the author’s last name in subsequent references so that the reader knows which work you are making reference to.

9. Prentice et al., *Canadian Women*, 35.

An online guide to Chicago style with up-to-date examples of note and bibliographic citations for all kinds of sources is available [here](#) from: *Research and Documentation Online*, 5th ed.

Reference works on essay writing

The following works will provide you with a great deal of useful information about how to write a History or Political Science essay. They do not necessarily use the Chicago style for citations, however, so you should always follow the department's *Guidelines* for formatting your notes and bibliography. Many of these sources can be found in the Langara College Library.

Benjamin, Jules R. *A Student's Guide to History*. 8th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

Berkin, Carol and Betty S. Anderson. *The History Handbook*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.

Browne, M. Neil and Stuart M. Keeley. *A Prentice Hall Guide to Evaluating Online Resources: Political Science*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003.

The Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers. 16th ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Furberg, Jon and Richard Hopkins. *College Style Sheet*. 6th Canadian ed. Vancouver, BC: 49th Avenue Press, 2005.

Marius, Richard and Melvin E. Page. *A Short Guide to Writing about History*. 5th ed. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 2005.

Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. 5th ed. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007.

Storey, William Kelleher and Towser Jones. *Writing History: A Guide for Students*. 3rd Canadian ed. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Essay Checklist

Before submitting your essay, you may wish to print this checklist to ensure that you have followed the *Guidelines* as closely as possible.

- The essay has a properly formatted title page that includes
 - essay title
 - my name and student number
 - instructor's name and course name
 - date submitted
- The essay pages are numbered
- The essay includes properly formatted footnotes or endnotes
 - if endnotes, they are included on a separate page with the title "Endnotes"
- The essay includes a properly formatted bibliography on a separate page following "Endnotes"