Researcher’s Manual: Academic Research, Writing and Presentation

Department of History and Art History

Jacco Pekelder, Coordinator (j.pekelder@uu.nl)
History is the discipline of researching the past in a rigorous, scholarly manner and reporting on your results in oral and written form. The Researcher’s Manual covers the skills you will need as a researcher of history. It contains pointers on the following:

- setting up and conducting academic historical research;
- preparing and writing a paper or thesis about this research;
- orally presenting the resulting paper or thesis.

These seemingly disparate skills are presented in a single manual because, for today’s scholars, conducting academic research and reporting on it go hand in hand. As a student, you will become aware of this as you begin to write research papers and a thesis. You will start by picking a topic and formulating a main research question and subquestions. To find answers, you will look for monographs, compendiums, articles in academic journals and primary historical sources, both on the Internet and in libraries and archives. You’ll be reading (and reading and reading) and taking notes. Hopefully this will spark your own thoughts, which can contribute to existing knowledge about history. You will try to formulate these thoughts as best you can, explaining them to yourself at first and then to others as well.

Trying to find the right words forces you to think out loud. This will reveal which subquestions your argument answers and which it does not. Many students discover that the main research question needs to be rephrased or split up into more subquestions. At this point, you might have to temporarily suspend the writing process to do more research; later, you can resume writing to incorporate your additional findings. In short, the process of doing research and writing about it is a feedback loop.

This manual is two things in one:

- a full instructional manual for students who are about to write their first history paper; and
- a reference guide for Bachelor’s and Master’s students who have written papers before, but could use a reminder.

If you belong to the first target group, read the manual from cover to cover. More experienced students can simply click on the section they would like to review.

The pointers in this researcher’s manual can help you write a great research paper or thesis.

Good luck!

Jacco Pekelder
Table of Contents

1. Getting Started 5
   • 1.1 Choosing a Topic 5
   • 1.2 Finding Sources and Preliminary Reading 6
   • 1.3 Writing Your Research Question 10
   • 1.4 Finding Additional Sources 12
     • Primary Sources 12
     • Archival Research 13
     • Internet Sources 13
   • 1.5 Synopsis 15

2. Academic Research 16
   • 2.1 The Research 16
   • 2.2 Evaluating Literature for Quality and Relevance 17
   • 2.3 Organizing 19
   • 2.4 Source Criticism 20
   • 2.5 Researching and Writing 22

3. Academic Writing 23
   • 3.1 Preparing to Write 23
   • Spelling and Style 24
     • Tips on Spelling and Style 25
   • 3.2 Structuring a History Paper/Thesis 33
     • Title 33
     • Introduction 33
     • Body 36
     • Conclusion 40
   • 3.3 Citation 41
     • Paraphrasing and Quoting 41
     • Notes 44
     • Citation Guidelines 47
     • Plagiarism 48
   • 3.4 Layout 49
     • Table of Contents 49
     • Bibliography 50
     • Illustrations and Tables 50
     • Appendices 51

4. Presentation 52
   • 4.1 Preparing Your Presentation 52
   • 4.2 Structure 53
   • 4.3 Presentation Skills 54
   • 4.4 Presentation Software 55

5. Examples 56
   • 5.1 Research Questions 56
   • 5.2 Sample Citations 58
     • Books 60
     • Articles 63
- Other Sources 65
- Primary Sources and Audiovisual Materials 67
- 5.3 Bibliography 69
- 5.4 Table of Contents 71
- 5.5 Synopsis 72
1. Getting Started

1.1 Choosing a Topic

Start by narrowing down your topic, location and timeframe:

- Topic: the pivotal event/figure/institution (e.g. the Great Depression)
- Location: the nation, region or city involved (e.g. the Province of Utrecht)
- Timeframe: the period you want to study (e.g. the Second World War)

In other words, ask yourself the time-honored 5 Ws and H questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. Initially, a broad definition will suffice. You will narrow the topic down further by defining and formulating your research question.
1.2 Finding Sources and Reading

Once you have picked a topic, you enter the reading phase. You should begin by finding secondary literature: texts that others have written and published about your topic or its context. This will provide an overall answer to two questions: What is your topic comprised of? And what is known about it up to this point? It is important to realize that your search for literature is completed in phases. The more you discover about your topic, the more you can narrow down your search and find relevant sources. The best advice is to start reading right away; it will be the first of many explorations into source material. This process will hone your skills at searching for, and pinpointing, relevant literature.

The Internet

Practically every research project starts with an Internet search. The Internet is unbeatable for obtaining publications in digital format, for locating publications (in the University Library, for instance) and obviously, for consulting online sources like Wikipedia. Before you start searching, make a list of keywords, names and topics that are relevant to your research. Make sure your search terms include alternative spellings, translations and synonyms.

More About Search Terms and Keywords

Many bibliographical tools are structured using keywords. Based on your topic, try to formulate a list of search terms and keywords that can be used to look for literature. In drawing up this list, try to be systematic and use the following aspects of your topic:

- timeframe (when: which period are you dealing with?)
- geography (where: which country, state, city?)
- people (who: who are likely to be the main actors?)
- societal sector (which sectors of society, institutions, organizations, level(s) of government are relevant to your topic?)
- concepts (which key concepts did you come across in the literature)

It is important that you use the right search engines to find academic publications. The Utrecht University Library website (www.library.uu.nl) provides an overview of the search engines that are useful for finding various types of sources. To begin with, there is the library catalog and database of journals, which will lead you to all the sources available at Utrecht University. In addition, search engines like Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science can help you find articles, books and PhD theses. Picarta gives access to articles, books and journal subscriptions in the public libraries of the Netherlands. Worldcat does the same worldwide.

The University Library (UB) has created a large number of what it calls ‘libguides’ to make it easier for students to search for and find sources, and to use the search system. Libguides provide tips, background information and training in searching for and dealing with academic sources. More specifically, these guides explain how to find a book or article, which medium to use, how to get your
hands on a publication if it is unavailable through the university library, and how to come up with relevant search strategies or search terms. For an overview of available libguides, click here.

The Library

Aside from searching in digital systems, it is wise to acquaint yourself with the university library’s collection. The library is an important hub of information. Students have access to the university’s entire physical collection and any digital subscriptions it is licensed for. Therefore, students should know what books and journals are part of the university collection and how the library classification system works. They need to know what materials are available, and where they are located. The library also houses catalogues and bibliographies with overviews of academic publications on a particular topic.

Found literature. Now what?

Once you have found some relevant books and articles, you need to scan through them. Start with the most recent publications. Read the abstracts or browse through the tables of contents, and read the introductions and conclusions. Your aim is to get a quick impression of what each publication is about and whether it could be helpful to you. You do not need to read them thoroughly at this point. Pay special attention to the notes and the bibliographies. These can point you to other literature (the famous, or infamous, snowball method).

The ‘Snowball Method’

A common way to find good reference works is known in Dutch academia as the snowball method. This is a top-down searching method, meaning you start at the most general level of literature, such as an encyclopedia or compendium, to get a broad idea of what is known about your topic. Then you start delving deeper into the subject, by consulting the sources listed as references in the general-level literature that you began with. Each book and article you find there will in turn contain its own bibliography that you can consult. And so on.

The snowball method is effective, but it has some drawbacks:

- You are completely dependent on some else’s references.
- Any literature published later than the bibliographies you draw sources from is automatically excluded from your research.
- There is no end to it; you can keep snowballing from reference to reference ad infinitum.

These drawbacks can be mitigated by relying on more than one work and including a few very recent publications.

Once you have gathered a good amount of literature, make a selection. Determine which publications are the most important and start by reading these. Take care to write down the title, author, date of publication and publisher of every publication you have found, including those you consider less important. After a while you might forget whether you have seen something before, or an article you thought was not important might turn out to be relevant after all.
When is enough enough?

It is impossible to be exhaustive in your literature research when studying a historical topic. Through reading you will continually gain more knowledge and this will prompt new questions, which you might be able to answer if you consulted more literature. This process can continue indefinitely, so you need to remain pragmatic as you search and try to define the scope of your research, that is, to determine which questions you are and are not going to answer.

Take care not to skip any key publications. These are publications that provide indispensable information about your topic or a particular aspect thereof. A key publication can take many shapes; it could a monograph, a compilation, a journal article, a special edition of a journal, conference proceedings and so on.

Tips for determining a publication’s relevance

When you find a publication, you have to decide whether it is relevant to your research. The following checklist can help you to determine this:

- What is the publication about exactly?
- Before you start reading, look at the table of contents, introduction and conclusion. Does the publication contain information you need?
- Check the index for topics you are interested in.
- Check the notes and the bibliography to see if they refer to other interesting publications.
- Check the appendices for interesting tables, images, maps and the like.
- Is your copy the most recent edition? Has it been revised over the course of time? Has it been translated into other languages?
- Do others frequently refer to this publication?
- Check whether the tone of the publication is overly populist or jargonistic.

Tips for recognizing key publications

Bibliographical and historiographical reviews tend to discuss the most up-to-date historical research on a particular topic, so these will often steer you toward key publications.

Key publications need not be recent. To identify them, pay close attention to other researcher’s references.

If you keep coming across citations of the same work, this is what you should do:

- Check the index of the books you have already selected for your research to see if it includes the name of this author and check whether the work in question is mentioned in a historiographical introduction or some other chapter.
- If this confirms your impression that it is a key publication, get hold of a copy and scan through it yourself.
- Try to find reviews of the publication from authoritative writers.
As you read, all sorts of questions will crop up. These questions are your first steps toward the core of your research: your research question. That is why you should take notes, both about the contents (facts, places, people) and their location (author, page numbers, etc.). The latter will be of crucial importance to your research at a later stage, when writing footnotes or endnotes and creating a bibliography.
1.3 Writing Your Research Question

A good research question enables you to place your topic in its historical context. It also allows you to contextualize it theoretically, that is, to draw connections to what other authors have said about it. Your research question shows you are engaging with existing historiographical sources and relevant theories on your topic.

A good research question has four characteristics:

• it is bounded in time and space;
• it requires extensive argumentation;
• it cannot be answered briefly or descriptively; and
• it requires a balanced conclusion.

One useful tip is to start your research question with the words ‘To what extent…’. For example: ‘To what extent did the building of railways contribute to the economic development of the Netherlands in the 19th century?’ or ‘To what extent was the high percentage of Dutch Jews deported during the Second World War due to the professionalism of the Dutch civil registration system?’

Questions that start with ‘To what extent’ allow room for you to arrive at a balanced answer (on the one hand... on the other hand). This guiding principle helps to ensure that your paper will be analytical and not merely descriptive. Keep in mind that the argumentation tends to count more than the actual conclusion in academic writing.

It is important to realize that you will need to rewrite your research question as a statement later on, as direct questions are rarely used in English-language academic writing and never instead of a thesis statement. Once you have researched and found answers to your research question, you should rephrase your research question as a thesis statement that reflects your main point or conclusion.

Tips for phrasing a research question

While reading, write down all the questions and ideas you have that relate to your main research question (which will later become your thesis statement) and subquestions.

Talk to someone, a fellow student for instance, about your topic. This is a good way of quickly organizing your thoughts. What is it that attracts you to this topic? Which problems or questions did you hit upon while scanning and reading the sources you found in your initial search?

Subdivide your main research question into subquestions

Once you have phrased your main research question, you can split up your topic and thesis into subquestions. This makes answering your main research question much easier:

• Subquestions will make your research systematic and manageable; each subquestion will help you focus on one particular aspect of your overall topic.
• Subquestions make explicit which questions your research needs to answer. This is indispensable for building a well-founded argument that fully explains your paper’s thesis.
The answers to subquestions are often very specific. They are also helpful for creating a division into chapters and/or sections.
1.4 Finding Additional Sources

Having read the main reference works and compendiums, you will have formed a general impression of your topic. You can use this new knowledge to phrase additional search terms that will help you uncover additional sources.

Ideally, the research process is as follows:

- You acquire more and more knowledge on your topic and this knowledge becomes increasingly specific.
- Based on the knowledge you have gained, you phrase additional search terms that will enable you to find more sources. Those sources in turn increase your knowledge.
- This improved understanding enables you to frame your subject and to answer your main research question, or helps you rephrase your main research question into a more answerable question.

Through this continuous interaction between knowledge acquisition and knowledge application, you eventually gain a comprehensive overview of the most important publications on your topic. In addition, you acquire the ability to synthesize these sources in arguing your main thesis.

Primary Sources

Roughly speaking, primary sources are pieces of ‘evidence’ dating from the period you are investigating, for example William the Silent’s Apology, the Proceedings of the Dutch States-General or the literal text of a treaty. The distinction between secondary and primary sources is not always clear, as books can function as primary sources in academic research.

Primary sources are mainly defined as:

- personal documents (journals, letters, memoirs, autobiographies, speeches, interviews, photographs, etc.)
- official documents (government documents, statistics, corporate records, etc.)
- art (poetry, music, paintings, film, literature, etc.)
- material culture (clothing, tools, buildings, toys, vehicles, monuments, etc.)
- news media (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, posters, etc.)

Primary sources are usually kept in archives, but there are collections of sources too: books or websites that have collected sources about a particular topic or from one particular medium, such as an out-of-print newspaper. Another helpful tool is a directory listing source locations. Directories are a good place to find out where particular sources are stored. Say, for instance, that you wanted to track down sources on the history of the Dutch East Indies. You could consult the ‘Directory of sources present in the Netherlands on the history of the Dutch East Indies/Indonesia, 1816-1942’. To locate these sources, you could consult compendiums, registers and directories of archives. It should be noted, however, that the Internet has made such directories less crucial for finding archival material.
In order to correctly use certain sources (e.g. archeological finds, old writing systems, coins, calendars, statistical data), you should use what are known as the auxiliary sciences of history, such as archeology and statistics.

Archival Research

Research using primary sources is one of the most fascinating and exciting aspects of historical inquiry. It offers researchers a chance to make interesting ‘finds’ and to supplement or correct the existing scholarly literature on a particular topic. One should always bear in mind, of course, that even archives containing primary sources are themselves not necessarily unbiased. The people who set up and maintain archives can use them as a means to leave behind a favorable history.

If you decide to do archival research for your history paper or thesis, you need to realize that this requires some prior knowledge. You need to familiarize yourself with how archives work and you will soon find that different sources make their own specific demands on the researcher. The best way to learn about that is by simply getting to work in an archive.

Below you will find a simple roadmap to help you get started.

Archival Research Roadmap:

**Step 1:** Do not dive into archives unprepared; start your research by doing a literature review. Determine, first of all, whether one or more institutions stored knowledge on your topic. Was it a government institution or private? In the Netherlands, different laws apply to private and government institutions. It is crucial to know whether the archives relevant for your research are open to the public.

**Step 2:** Using references in the literature, the directory to Dutch archives written by Bos-Rops et al., and the [www.archiefnet.nl](http://www.archiefnet.nl) website, determine which archives you need to consult.

**Step 3:** Once you know which collection you want to consult, you can check the overview of archives housed by the institution in question and see which catalogs and catalog numbers pertain to these archives. You can often find this information online. Write down the catalog number and the numbers of the items you need. Using these numbers and the visitor number you receive upon entering the archives, you can request the items to be delivered to the reading room. This usually takes a while, so be sure you set aside ample time to complete this step.

**Tips for Archival Research**

Check ahead of time when the archives are open to the public (opening days and hours).

Ask whether you are permitted to take photographs of the records. Archives often permit researchers to take digital photographs without a flash.

**Internet Sources**

The use of sources that are solely available on the Internet carries certain risks. It can be difficult to judge who is disseminating the information on the Internet, what their motives are and what the information is based on. There are no guarantees about the quality or the authenticity of online
Another problem is the instability of information on many websites. Information can change without notice and entire websites can disappear without a trace.

When using (historical) sources on the Internet (treatises, diplomatic documents, historic speeches, treaties, etc.) it is very important to trace which institution published a particular source and what original they used.

The Internet is a great source for quick fact-finding and getting a handle on your topic, but it does carry risks. When researching politically sensitive topics in particular, the Internet can be useful for finding divergent opinions about that topic, but it is seldom the most suitable place to find factual information.
1.5 Synopsis

Before you start on the bulk of your research, you need to write a synopsis. This helps you to organize your thoughts, delineates your research and is helpful for discussing and presenting your results.

A synopsis consists of a brief introduction of your topic, a precisely formulated main research question and subquestions, followed by a division into chapters that also specifies the order, manner and materials you are going to use to answer the above questions.

As you have not done any real research yet, your synopsis is based on expectations. However, you should make yourself write down as specifically as possible what you intend to do. Think about the best order for dealing with the subquestions; what must your readers know before they can understand the next step in your research? Your subquestions will likely function as chapters or sections of your paper or presentation.

Note: Because the main research question and/or subquestions may change over the course of your research project, you should not consider your synopsis etched in stone. If your line of reasoning changes or if you want to ask different questions, simply adjust your synopsis.
2. Academic Research

2.1 The Researcher

Carrying out academic research might take some getting used to. You are in fact expected to adopt a new attitude toward the past. The days of simply gushing over certain historic events or people are over. Obviously, it is good if your topic inspires you, but as a scholar you are also expected to approach it critically and analytically.

This entails acting like a researcher, even if you are just starting out and have a lot to learn about doing historical research. Be aware that becoming a researcher is not something that happens after you graduate, but during your studies. The sooner you flip that switch, the better. Like your fellow researchers, your mission is to learn more about the past by doing research, either alone or as a member of a team, and by writing papers, debating and passionately arguing your point – even if this means squarely opposing others’ ideas.
2.2 Evaluating Literature for Quality and Relevance

Quality

The literature you find when you start out serves mainly to track down facts and information. These facts are just the beginning, because no historical work consists merely of facts. Research papers are all about your interpretation of the facts: the way in which you structure them into a coherent narrative.

To evaluate literature, you need to distill the author’s interpretation from the facts. Although some historians make it look like they present nothing but facts, their work always contains a historical interpretation.

Make sure you know a little bit about the authors whose work you intend to use, about their methods and background. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the work structured chronologically or thematically?
- When was the work first published?
- Who is the author? (biography, publications, education, reputation)
- Has the author published extensively on this topic?
- Can the author be seen as part of a particular historiographical tradition and does s/he apply a particular method?
- Was the work written from a particular national, religious, political or ideological viewpoint?
- What is the author trying to achieve?
- Who is the target audience?
- How does the author substantiate his/her arguments? Did s/he use a particular academic model or theory? Are his/her arguments plausible?
- What sources and literature did the author use?

Book reviews can help you find the answers to these questions, but beware. A review reflects only the opinion of the person who wrote it. Therefore, it is wise to consult several reviews of the same book. This gives you more information to evaluate the importance of the works you are going to study and to put them in their proper context.

Relevance

You must evaluate literature not only for its quality, but also for its relevance. This will enable you to select the chapters, excerpts or sections with a direct bearing on your research. This seems fairly obvious, but many papers have been marred by the inclusion of extraneous information that could easily have been filtered out. Continually monitoring for relevance allows you to answer your main research question or subquestions in the most focused manner. To assess whether a text is relevant, you can ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the literature help you answer your main research question/subquestions?
- Does the literature answer the whole question/subquestion or just one aspect of it?
- To what extent does the thesis statement in the literature match your own main research question?
• How closely does the research topic or the analysis in this text resemble yours in your paper/thesis?
• Is the context of the research topic the same as yours?
• When was the literature first published and when was the research it is based on carried out?
• Do the findings and interpretation in this text correspond to those in other literature? Or do the findings and views in this text contradict other research?

Bear in mind that it is highly unlikely you will find scholarly literature that answers your main research question and subquestions in their entirety; you will seldom come across a text that reports on the exact same research or topic that you are tackling. If all your information could be taken from a single source, your research would be superfluous. In any case, sound historical research is always based on more than one source.
2.3 Organizing

Try to organize your notes as much as possible. You can approach this task structurally (i.e. for each book, article or source) or thematically. Be warned, however, that it is unwieldy and messy to use loose sheets of paper or notebooks for individual sources. Avoid chaos and use one of the many available programs for keeping track of your literature and sources, such as RefWorks, Endnote or Zotero. These reference managers or research tools can help you organize your sources by putting reference information in folders, for example, and by entering the pertinent page numbers. The ‘Managing data and literature’ tab on Utrecht University library website (www.library.uu.nl) provides links to such reference management tools. For information on how to use these tools, click the ‘More help with managing’ menu item to access the library’s ‘libguides’ on the subject. You can also use the University Library Personal Library tool, which allows you to store an overview of your references on the site. For more information, you can consult the libguide on the subject.

Whatever you do, make sure that everything you jot down – whether it is the title of a book or a note about some author’s views – is findable. There is nothing worse than coming across a crucial note in the middle of the writing process and not being able to trace its origin. Therefore, it is imperative that you include author, title and page number every time you make a note about a text; the archive, catalog number and item number when you make a note about a primary source; and the exact URL and access date when you jot down something about an online source.
2.4 Source Criticism

If you have found relevant archival documents, you need to determine their credibility. Assess the value of the information they contain by applying ‘source criticism’.

We distinguish two types of source criticism:

*External source criticism* is concerned with the source’s authenticity (Is this Hitler’s real journal?). Most historians will not have to deal with this very often. Below are a few different approaches:

- Textual criticism pertains to the contents of the original text. When a source turns out to be a copy, the historian searches for the original wording.
- Authenticity or provenance criticism establishes whether the purported author, date and geographical origin of a text are accurate.
- Derivation criticism examines whether the author personally worded the text or copied it from others.

*Internal source criticism* evaluates a source’s information value and is as such extremely important to historians. There are countless questions you can ask about any source. Below are a few different approaches:

- What is the exact meaning of the statement (words) used in the source? What precisely is the author trying to convey? Do we fully understand the expressions, metaphors and figures of speech in the text? This is relevant not only to 17th-century vocabulary, but also to words we use whose meaning has changed over time (interpretative or exegetic criticism). Take the word ‘soldier’ for example. These days, a soldier is someone who serves in an army. In the Middle Ages, the word soldier referred to anyone who collected pay (Old French sol, sou, from Latin solidum, soldum) for services rendered. So even if you think you understand a word, it may have had different connotations at the time it was written.
- Does the source’s author actually have first-hand experience of the facts? How and through which agent or media did the author learn of the facts described in the text? Look at the author’s biography: is it plausible s/he witnessed the events s/he described? (credibility criticism)
- How competent is the author? Is s/he sufficiently knowledgeable about the topic s/he discusses? (competence criticism)
- What were the author’s motives? To what end was the text written? Which hidden agenda might this source have? These questions pertain to the author’s/source’s position and the circumstances under which the text was written. For example, a description of a resounding electoral victory in a country under totalitarian rule must be analyzed and interpreted in light of that regime (criticism of orthodoxy).

Data

Data must also be approached with a critical attitude. This applies not only to existing data, but also to the data your own research generates. Moreover, processing data is no simple matter. It is an acquired skill for which you need to study the auxiliary science of statistics and consult good statistical manuals.
Be extremely careful in interpreting and presenting statistical data. Always subject data to both external and internal source criticism.
2.5 Researching and Writing

Read then write?

Writing is inseparable from researching. It is wise to start writing earlier rather than later. Writing forces you to organize your information and your thoughts, which generates new ideas. Do not postpone writing until you ‘know everything’, because no one ever reaches that point. You will only find the holes in your research once you start to write.

Only begin writing with most of the information on your topic, and definitely the most relevant information, at hand. As you write, you will likely find that you do not have enough information about a particular aspect of your topic after all. You will regularly have to consult the literature anew; you may even have to return to the library to find additional sources.
3. Academic Writing

3.1 Preparing to Write

You have gathered a lot of information. It is unlikely that your text is going to refer to every single scrap of material you have collected. You need to keep an eye on what is relevant to your research question. So before you write, it is important to get organized (yet again) and to take notes:

- Have you uncovered contradictory interpretations of particular subtopics in your research? If so, which interpretations are these and why are they contradictory? Write this down in a few brief and to-the-point statements. Also write down which interpretation you think is most plausible based on the information you have found.
- Critically review your main research question, subquestions and synopsis:
  - Adjust or narrow down your research question if necessary.
  - Next, check whether your subquestions still answer your main question. If not, adjust them and write a new synopsis.
- If applicable, change your synopsis and main question to reflect the results of your research.
- Identify the answers to your main question and your main findings. Review the structure of your synopsis for its internal logic and make sure one step leads logically to the next. This helps the writing process and makes your paper/thesis much easier to read.
- Using your subquestions, divide your work into chapters or sections.

In any case, you cannot begin until you have made enough progress on your research and source analysis. In other words, your research question, subquestions and findings have to be clearly delineated, even if certain problems still have to be solved during the writing process.
Spelling and Style

Academic writing

Academic writing can be learned. There is no single ‘right’ way of writing an academic essay. The main requirement is that you do your best to clearly put into words what you have discovered about the past and what your opinion on that is. Proper, effective use of language helps you to communicate your research results. Academic writing is primarily functional. It is a vehicle for conveying academically sound and honest research. However, it must also be consistent, explicit and credible. Even great content can be ruined by subpar wording.

A historical essay’s persuasiveness depends mainly on the quality of the text. Readers are not obliged to read your writing. One vague sentence, spelling error or ambiguous phrase will detract from your argument and sow doubts about your credibility. Some readers will simply stop reading. Therefore, you should never expect your readers to ‘get what you mean’. It is not about what you intend; it is about what you put on paper. Do not hesitate to use several sentences to explain what you mean. More than one sentence and complete clarity are preferable to one sentence with lots of ambiguity.

Although everyone has their own way of writing an essay, there is a common denominator: no one produces a great text from beginning to end in one sitting. A good paper is usually the result of extensive editing (rereading, improving, deleting). There is a reason why academic journals use editors or peers to correct authors’ papers.

Every student has strengths and weaknesses in writing; you must know your own weaknesses if you are to improve your writing ability. One of the greatest problems in producing texts is that people tend to overlook their own errors. This is true of both spelling and style. You tend to know exactly what you mean while writing, but to ensure your message reaches your audience you need to reread your text with a very critical eye.

Tips to Improve Your Writing

Staring at your screen for too long causes you to lose perspective. Print your text and then put it aside for a while. Go do something else. Then return to it later to reread it critically.

When you get back a section you have handed in to your instructor, carefully study their comments. Look at what you did right, what needs improving and what errors you made.

Make a list of your own ‘weaknesses’ and continue to update this list. Which mistakes do you tend to make (see below)? The sooner you recognize them, the sooner you can correct them.

Always use a spelling checker. This will at least catch simple typos, but beware: it will not catch typos that form another word (‘there’ instead of ‘their’, ‘form’ instead of ‘from’). Do not rely on the spelling checker completely either. It can make strange suggestions if it does not recognize a word (‘Methuen’ instead of ‘Mauthausen’) and correct words that are not errors (‘Men in Gate’ instead of ‘Menin Gate’). The same goes for grammatical tense. Even if you use the ‘check grammar’ option, the spelling checker will not catch mistakes in tense (where you have used a present perfect instead of a past simple, for example) or even a simple error like an erroneous past tense after auxiliary ‘do’ (‘did he managed’ instead of ‘did he manage’).
Originality and Clarity

Good writing is mainly a matter of being critical of your own work. George Orwell once wrote some great advice for writers. The following quote can help you develop the right attitude toward your own writing:

A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: 1. Could I put it more shortly? 2. Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? — George Orwell, Politics and the English Language

Academic papers and theses are supposed to contain original thought. According to Orwell, originality is harder to achieve when writing about abstract issues. Unlike concrete matters, which immediately conjure up images in our mind, abstract issues are couched in words. We think about these issues in words rather than images. Therefore, we are much more likely to resort to existing phrases and similes when writing about such issues. This distracts us from our original thoughts about the topic and we end up repeating other people’s ideas. To avoid this, Orwell came up with six useful guidelines:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

— George Orwell, All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays

Tips on Spelling and Style

How to Avoid Frequently Made Errors

You can learn from others’ mistakes. Consult our style guide to avoid frequently occurring mistakes.

- Choose either UK or US spelling and apply those spelling rules consistently.
- Use the tips mentioned under the heading ‘Be precise’ to pre-empt teachers’ most frequently made comment: ‘your phrasing is too vague’.
- Use our style tips to increase the readability of your text.

Spelling and Syntax

Spelling

Obviously, spelling mistakes are unacceptable in academic writing. This research manual does not provide extensive spelling rules. If you need help, consult an online dictionary (www.oxforddictionaries.com, www.merriam-webster.com) or one of the many websites and online forums (grammarist.com/spelling, forum.wordreference.com)
Subject-verb agreement

The general rule is that subject and verb must agree: a singular subject takes a singular verb, a plural subject takes a plural verb:

*The King issues a decree.*
*The Franks were a union of Germanic tribes.*

Some combinations of nouns and verbs are exceptions to the rule. For example, the names of some countries may be plural, but when they are the subject, the verb is singular.

*The United States is a democracy.*
*The Netherlands was a Republic.*

Similarly (and unlike Dutch usage): The United Nations has adopted a resolution.

Most collective nouns can take either a singular or plural verb: (*The government is of the opinion.... or The government are raising taxes...*). In formal writing the singular verb form is preferable. One exception is ‘the police’, a collective noun that always takes a plural: *The police were late to arrive at the scene.*

Although ‘a number of’ and ‘a lot of ’ are grammatically singular, they often take a plural verb when the noun that follows denotes a plural, hence:

*A lot of people were present.* (but: *A lot of money was spent.*)
*Only a small number of slaves were able to buy their freedom.*

Percentages are either singular or plural, depending on whether they refer to a singular or plural.

*Some 25% of the GDP was diverted to military spending.*
*About 90% of the residents were against the proposed changes.*

Pronouns

Which or who?

‘Who’ refers to people, while ‘which’ refers to groups or things.

*Gavrilo Princip was the man who started the First World War.*
*Many people in former East Germany were keen to read their Stasi files, which were opened to the public in 1992.*

That or Which?

‘That’ introduces an essential clause. Essential clauses add information that is vital to the point of the sentence. ‘Which’ introduces a nonessential clause, which adds supplementary information.

*The bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were designed to force Japan to surrender.*
*The two bombings, which killed at least 129,000 people, remain the only use of nuclear weapons for warfare in history.*
Note that essential clauses do not have commas introducing or surrounding them, whereas nonessential clauses are introduced or surrounded by commas.

Which or What?

Which and what both refer to a choice, but ‘which’ refers to a choice from a limited set of options and ‘what’ refers to a choice from an unlimited supply. Therefore, both of the following examples are correct:

We need to assess which changes are required. (which of a given set of changes)
We need to see what changes are necessary. (what changes from all possible changes)

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns (his, her, its, their) must agree in number with the noun they refer to. Most nouns that do not refer to people are referred to as ‘it’, using ‘its’ as the possessive pronoun. Only ships are referred to as ‘she’ and ‘her’.

The government and its relationship with Poland....The United Kingdom is changing its tax system.

Tense

Simple Past or Present Perfect?

Historians tend to write about the past. However, the English rules for writing about the past differ from the Dutch rules. One key rule is: if the sentence describes (or even implies) an occurrence or series of events from a specific time in the past (which is now over), you must use the simple past.

WRONG During the war, Churchill has continued as First Lord of the Admiralty.
RIGHT During the war, Churchill continued as First Lord of the Admiralty.

WRONG He has been the Prime Minister from 1940 to 1945.
RIGHT He was the Prime Minister from 1940 to 1945.

WRONG Thatcher has signed the contract a few minutes ago.
RIGHT Thatcher signed the contract a few minutes ago.

Present Perfect

Another important rule for writing about the past is: when something started in the past, but it is still the case or going on, you must use the present perfect (rather than the present as many native speakers of Dutch tend to do). The words ‘yet’ and ‘since’ (in a temporal sense) are a clear signal that you need to use the present perfect.

Mark Rutte has been Prime Minister of the Netherlands since October 2010.
He has not yet told the full story.

‘For’ may also be a clue that you should use the present perfect, but ‘for’ can also be used in conjunction with the simple past. Using a different tense changes the meaning of the sentence.
David Cameron was Director of Corporate Affairs at Carlton Communications for seven years. (it is no longer the case)

He has been Director of Corporate Affairs for seven years. (he started 7 years ago and he still is now)

Present

Limit your use of the present tense to the content of documents that can still be consulted today:
‘His memoirs show’ or ‘In his overview, the author mentions...’

Sometimes the present tense is used to list a series of past events. This use of the present tense is known as the ‘historic present’. It gives the narrative an immediacy it would lack in the past tense: ‘Minutes later, a second plane crashes into the other tower. It is clearly no accident, but a deliberate attack.’ Although this technique is acceptable, its use is far more limited in English than in Dutch. Use it sparingly and only for short passages of text.

If and When

If and when have distinct meanings. ‘If’ is used to express a possibility, ‘when’ to express a certainty.

If they win the election, they will lower taxes. (they might lose)
When the polls close in Wyoming, the Republicans will surely come out winners. (The polls will close; there can be no doubt about that)

Both ‘if’ and ‘when’ are used to write about the future, but as you can see only the main clause takes the future tense (will). The ‘if/when’ clause takes a present tense.

If Drees wins, he will keep his electoral promises.

Note that when you write about the past, the difference between ‘if’ and ‘when’ is visible in the tenses as well. Using ‘if’, the main clause takes a past future tense (would), while the ‘if’ clause takes a past tense:

If the Conservatives had won the 1945 elections, Churchill would not have become leader of the opposition.

Using ‘when’, both clauses take a past tense:

When the Conservatives lost, Churchill was relegated to the opposition.
Introducing Individuals

When you first mention a person in your text by name, it is good practice to briefly introduce them. For example: ‘British historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote extensively about....’

- At first mention, it is preferable to include the person’s first and last names (Eric Hobsbawm). Subsequently, use their last name only. ‘As Hobsbawm argues, .....’ Do not include people’s academic titles in your main text, unless the title itself is pertinent to your research.

*Wrong* ‘British historian Eric Hobsbawm, PhD. wrote extensively about....’

- Introducing someone only by their first initial followed by their last name, as is still frequently done in Dutch academic writing (e.g. E. Hobsbawm), is no longer common practice in English.

When to use italics

- Italicize the titles of magazines, books, newspapers, academic journals, films, television shows, long poems, plays, operas, musical albums, works of art and websites.

- Use italics for words in a foreign language and include a translation or explanation in English in square brackets at first mention:

  ‘The Romanians passed the information on to the Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS [the intelligence wing of the SS and the Nazi party].’

- The names of hotels and famous buildings are capitalized: ‘The Ritz’ and ‘The Flatiron Building’, for instance. The same goes for names of ships, trains, aircraft and spacecraft, but they are italicized as well: USS Missouri, Soyuz, The Orient Express. Note that the tag USS preceding Missouri is not italicized.

Translation

- Do not translate the titles of well-known non-English institutions, books, operas, films and so on, unless there is already a commonly used translation; the ‘Bundestag’ and ‘Der Ring des Nibelungen’ for instance, require no translation. ‘Die Zauberkünstler’, however, is generally known in English as The Magic Flute. More obscure titles can be translated if the wording or meaning of the title is particularly relevant to your paper. Should you need to translate such a title, do so only at first mention [in square brackets] after the original name. Alternatively, give a short explanation of the title or name if you think this is important for the readers’ understanding. See: Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS, above.


- Always use the original English or existing translations into English if you can find them and include these in your notes and references. If you make your own translation, include the original text in a note. Do not assume that your readers can read French, German, Dutch or ancient Greek and Latin, and always provide a translation. In English, fewer Latin phrases are
used than in Dutch. Some of those that are common in Dutch do not appear at all in English. For example, ‘quid pro quo’ and ‘ex post facto’ are common in English, but ‘cum suis’ is never used. When in doubt, just rely on plain English.

Abbreviations

• Generally avoid using abbreviations in running text. Use generally accepted abbreviations such as etc., e.g. and i.e. in parentheses only. Write names in full (Second World War, not WW2). Do not use contractions (don’t, can’t) either.

• Never use non-existent abbreviations of your own making (‘a.o.’ for ‘amongst others’). Amongst others is overused by Dutch academics anyway; try using the verb ‘include’ instead: ‘A total of 53 leaders including the Prime Ministers of India, Spain and France were at the funeral.’

• The first time you introduce a concept or proper name, write it in full, followed by its abbreviation or acronym in parentheses, e.g. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Thereafter, refer to this organization by its abbreviation.

In a paragraph where the acronym UNHCR appears four times, you could opt to replace it once or twice with the phrase ‘the UN refugee agency,’ as long as this alternative description cannot be confused with any other entity mentioned in your text. Similarly, many other bodies have a commonly used description which you can use to vary your prose.

• If your paper or thesis is full of abbreviations, consider adding a list of abbreviations. Also remember that the more abbreviations a text contains, the less readable it becomes.

When to Use ‘I’

• You may use ‘I’ when describing the research process, your personal interest in the research or your personal conclusions, i.e. in the preface, introduction and conclusion to your paper or thesis. Never use ‘we’ to refer to yourself unless you are part of a team.

Gender-Neutral Language

• Unnecessary gendering of your text can be avoided by using gender-neutral pronouns. One tip is to use ‘their’ to refer back to a generic singular noun in order to avoid the cumbersome possessive ‘his or her’.

  A global citizen is anyone who sees it as their responsibility to build a sustainable world community for all.

However, English has better ways to avoid gendered language. It is no longer acceptable to include a disclaimer stating that ‘the male pronoun is intended to include women’. Use plurals instead. It is one of the simplest ways to avoid sexist language. Rather than writing ‘Every historian should take his responsibility seriously,’ write ‘Historians should take their responsibility seriously.’
Be Precise

Active, Not Passive

• Writing in the active voice forces you to name who the ‘actor’ is in your sentence: the one who is doing something. Do not make your readers guess who it is by writing passive sentences; this will only irritate them. As soon as you catch yourself writing a passive sentence (it was assumed that…), ask yourself who did the assuming. It is almost always possible to rewrite such a sentence and turn it into an active one (the government, the minister, the people assumed that…).

• Be precise in your wording. Do you actually mean ‘all of the nobility’ when you write ‘Prince Frederick of Prussia was responsible for destroying the German nobility’? Perhaps you mean ‘part of the nobility’ or even that Frederick merely curtailed the German nobility’s political power.

• It is very imprecise to invest nations’ capital cities with agency, therefore do not write ‘London instructed its ambassador in The Hague’ or ‘The Hague’s surprised response…’. Who do you mean when you write The Hague: the government, Parliament, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the King, the Queen or some other person or organization? The more specific you are, the better.

Cui Bono? For Whose Benefit?

• A sentence like ‘The Triest issue was a bone of contention in the relationship with Italy’ is very imprecise and does not tell your readers what was actually going on. Explain who stood to gain (or lose) and what they stood to gain (or lose). In other words, tell your readers exactly what was at stake.

• Similarly, when you write about a ‘clash’ or a ‘conflict’, specify what type of clash or conflict you mean: military, verbal or otherwise. And do not forget to specify who clashed over what, and when.

• What are your readers supposed to think of the following sentence? ‘In their 3000 years of history, they had to deal with the Persians, Romans, Turks and Russians.’ What does this mean? Did they have the same type of relationship with all these different peoples? Did they trade with them? Were they at war with them? Were they occupied by them, or did they look down on them?

• Avoid vague wording like ‘The natives had been restless for a long time.’

About Time

• Be as precise as possible when you mention a time or timeframe. For example, when writing about the ‘first post-war elections’, include the date of those elections.

• Even statements like ‘a long-standing conflict’ or ‘a brief war’ deserve clarification. Why do you consider this long, why brief, and what are you comparing them to? It is always good to mention how long an event or situation lasted: ‘The war in the Dutch East Indies lasted a long time’ should be followed by a sentence specifying the period in which it took place.
Stylistic tips

• Avoid tendentious, populist or journalistic language. Be consistent in terms of tone. Use formal language, but not overly formal language: ‘In my opinion...’ rather than ‘I am of the opinion that...’ Academic writing contains neither slang (unless this is part of a relevant quote), nor archaic expressions like ‘asunder’ and ‘the fruit of his loins’. Your goal is to inform, not to impress. Emphasize clarity and avoid needlessly complicated sentence structures.

• Explain complicated concepts and historical terms; do not assume that your readers will know what you mean.

• Do not use bullet points and lists, as these do not work in a running text. Bullet points suggest that every point has equal weight. Try incorporating these into the running text and you will find you have to prioritize and emphasize one over the other. This will benefit the logic of your argument.

• Vary the length of your sentences. Take care not to write run-on sentences with lots of subordinate clauses, but also avoid ‘telegramese’. Always write full sentences. These contain at least a subject and a verb. Without a verb, you do not have a full sentence.

• Try to avoid using the same word in two consecutive sentences. Look for synonyms. Instead of ‘administration’ use ‘cabinet’, ‘government’, ‘ministry’, ‘the King and his ministers’, ‘government officials’. Be aware of possible differences in meaning though. ‘Cabinet’ is not exactly the same as ‘government officials’. The latter may include Deputy Ministers, who are not Cabinet members.

• Texts that lack conjunctions can strike readers as stilted. To understand your argument, readers need to see the logical relationship between one sentence and the next. Therefore, pay close attention to your use of conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs. Use coordinating conjunctions (and, or, but), correlating conjunctions (not only...but also, neither... nor) and subordinating conjunctions (although, because, even if), and include conjunctive adverbs (subsequently, meanwhile, therefore) wherever appropriate.

• By using signposting, you can ensure your readers do not get lost in the text. If you use ‘firstly’, make sure you follow up with ‘secondly’, ‘thirdly’ and perhaps ‘finally’. If you use ‘on the one hand’, start your next sentence with ‘On the other hand’. If you use ‘not only’, make sure to follow up with ‘but also’.
3.2 Structuring a History Paper/Thesis

A history paper or thesis generally consists of a catchy title, an introduction, a body and a conclusion. Your title is important, but it is normally the finishing touch which you complete only after you have written and rewritten your text. Writing an introduction can be helpful to provide yourself with an overview of what you are going to research, but you will definitely need to rewrite the introduction after you have done your research and written the body. The body is the core of your paper. This is where you answer your main research question and subquestions. The conclusion is a summary of the findings you described in the body; it reiterates your introduction. By adhering to this tripartite structure you ensure that your research paper or thesis is clearly structured, includes all the necessary elements and meets the criteria for sound research.

Title

A good title both reflects the contents of your text and draws readers’ attention. A catchy title is usually the icing on the cake; you add it once your paper is completely finished.

Some writers use a catchy title whose full meaning is not immediately apparent. Such titles require a subtitle to clarify the actual topic.

Sample titles

Inge Mans, *A Sense of Folly: 500 Years of Cultural History of Fools, Idiots and Lunatics*  
[original title: Zin der Zotheid (catchy title); Vijf eeuwen cultuurgeschiedenis van zotten, onnozelen en zwakzinnigen. (subtitle: explains what the book is about)]

[original title: Geschiedschrijving als opdracht. (title) Abel Herzberg, Jaques Presser en Loe de Jong over de Jodenvervolging (subtitle)]

Introduction

The introduction serves to familiarize your readers with your topic, your thesis statement and the theoretical justification of your research. Your introduction must reflect the argumentation you use in the body of your paper. Therefore, some authors write their introduction only after they have finished the body. In practice, many writers start out by writing an introduction that they adjust as the rest of their paper progresses. This, too, illustrates the interaction between research and writing about research.

An introduction usually includes the following elements:

1. Introduction of the Topic

A few sentences is enough to familiarize lay readers with the context of the paper’s thesis statement. There is no need to go into great detail. Write enough to introduce your topic and to ‘hook’ non-expert readers.
2. Research Question / Thesis Statement

After sketching the context, clearly phrase your thesis statement. In draft versions this statement can be phrased as a question with subquestions. Your final version should only contain declarative sentences. It is good practice to put your thesis statement at the end of the introduction so you can use it to lead into the body of your paper.

In *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, 6th edition*, Mary Lynn Rampolla defines what a thesis statement is. She lists four things it is not: it is not a description of the topic, a statement of fact, a statement of opinion or a question:

**A thesis is not a question.** Although historians always ask questions as they read . . . and a thesis statement arises from the historian’s attempt to answer a question, a question is not, in itself, a thesis. "Why were Mohandas Gandhi’s methods successful in the movement to achieve Indian independence from Great Britain?" is a valid historical question, but it is not a thesis statement.

In short, . . . *a thesis is a statement that reflects what you have concluded about the topic of your paper, based on a critical analysis and interpretation of the source materials you have examined.*

. . . [.T]he following is an acceptable thesis: “From the moment that Mohandas Gandhi decided to respond to force with acts of civil disobedience, British rule of India was doomed: his indictment of British colonial policy in the court of public opinion did far more damage to the British military than any weapon could.” — Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, 6th edition*, 44

Hence, the research question used earlier as an example will also need rephrasing:

- ‘To what extent was the high percentage of Dutch Jews deported during the Second World War due to the professionalism of the Dutch civil registration system?’

This preliminary question needs to be turned into a thesis statement:

- ‘Contrary to the assertions of several contemporary Dutch historians, the professionalism of the Dutch civil registration system had little impact on the number of Jews deported from the Netherlands during the Second World War.’

This rephrasing is essential. Your research paper will not be complete unless you have taken this step.

3. Theoretical Justification

Explain to your readers why your topic warrants research by briefly explaining its academic significance in relation to existing research. Your justification explains:

- the relevance of your research (why is it worthwhile?); and
- the fact that your topic, or your research question and method have not yet been (sufficiently) researched.

Provide a brief historiographical and/or theoretical framework that broadly outlines existing research into your topic and summarizes existing interpretations. A gap or ‘blind spot’ in the historiography
can be a convincing justification for your research if you can provide arguments why it is important to do so.

4. Methodological Framework

Apart from introducing your topic and giving the reasons why you conducted your research, you also need to present a methodological framework: your reasons for using a particular research method, your selection of sources and the ways in which you used those sources.

Sometimes your methodology does not need much explanation, for example when your paper is structured chronologically.

Do not be too quick to assume that the methodology you have used is self-evident or that you have not applied any specific method. Any explanation of how you carried out your research, any accounting for your method will almost certainly benefit the transparency of your research.

If necessary, you can include technical information at the end of your methodological framework. Tell your audience if you have used certain calendars or why you included maps, tables and graphs, and how to read these.

A good introduction contains all four of these elements. Moreover, a good introduction is closely linked to a good conclusion. You do not need to specify the structure of your paper or thesis ("Chapter 1 will discuss...., Chapter 2 will deal with ...., etc.").
Body

The body is the core of your historical paper or thesis. This is the main argument that answers your research question and clearly substantiates your answer. Make sure your argument is well-structured, logical and easy to follow for readers. It can be helpful to divide the body into two main parts:

A Contextualization of Your Topic

Usually, the body starts with an extensive introduction of your topic. There are no hard and fast rules for how to do this, as this depends greatly on the type of topic. There are, however, two main points you need to tackle:

• The historical context of your topic, that is, the circumstances your readers need to know in order to understand your argument
• A summary of the main factors and developments that play a role in your argument (these could be the topic sentences from each of your paragraphs)

Your Main Argument

The actual body of your text must explain which events took place, how they changed surrounding circumstances, which factors exerted their influence and how, how these factors supported or counteracted each other and so on. Your main argument shows how the factors pertinent to your topic developed and what this led to. You also need to make clear how your argument developed and how you reached your conclusion. Readers should come away with a clear picture of your thesis and how you proved it. So structure your argument clearly.

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the building blocks of your text. If sentences are the smallest unit, paragraphs are the next to smallest. Using them correctly will make your text easier to read and understand.

• Start a new paragraph either with a line break and an indented first line, or with two line breaks (adding a white space between lines) and no indentation.
• A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. As soon as you are ready to move on to the next idea, start a new paragraph. Avoid writing excessively long paragraphs.

The importance of the paragraph cannot be stressed enough. The paragraph is the cornerstone of essay writing. There are many online resources explaining how to write paragraphs. The following is taken from www.time4writing.com:

The cardinal rule of paragraph writing is to focus on one idea. A solidly written paragraph takes its readers on a clear path without detours. Master the paragraph, and you’ll be on your way to writing “gold-star” essays, term papers, and stories.

A basic paragraph structure usually consists of five sentences: the topic sentence, three supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. But the secrets to paragraph writing lie in
four essential elements, which when used correctly, can make an ‘okay’ paragraph into a
great paragraph.

1. Element #1: Unity. Unity in a paragraph begins with the topic sentence. Every paragraph
has one single, controlling idea that is expressed in its topic sentence, which is typically
the first sentence of the paragraph. A paragraph is unified around this main idea, with
the supporting sentences providing detail and discussion. In order to write a good topic
sentence, think about your theme and all the points you want to make. Decide which
point drives the rest, and then write it as your topic sentence.

2. Element #2: Order. Order refers to the way you organize your supporting sentences.
Whether you choose chronological order, order of importance, or another logical
presentation of detail, a solid paragraph always has a definite organization. In a well-
ordered paragraph, the reader follows along easily, aided by the pattern you’ve
established. Order helps the reader grasp your meaning and avoid confusion.

3. Element #3: Coherence. Coherence is the quality that makes your writing
understandable. Sentences within a paragraph need to connect to each other and work
together as a whole. One of the best ways to achieve coherency is to use transition
words. These words create bridges from one sentence to the next. You can use transition
words that show order (first, second, third); spatial relationships (above, below) or logic
(furthermore, in addition, in fact). Also, in writing a paragraph, using a consistent verb
tense and point of view are important ingredients for coherency.

4. Element #4: Completeness. Completeness means a paragraph is well developed. If all
sentences clearly and sufficiently support the main idea, then your paragraph is
complete. If there are not enough sentences or enough information to prove your thesis,
then the paragraph is incomplete. ... The concluding sentence or last sentence of the
paragraph should summarize your main idea by reinforcing your topic sentence.

Headings and Subheadings

Shorter papers rarely have subheadings. A thesis, however, not only needs a title, it needs to be
subdivided and its individual chapters or sections need headings and subheadings too. Like titles,
headings serve a dual purpose; they summarize the chapter or section’s content and at the same
time attract readers’ attention. However, they need not be as catchy as your overall title and rarely
get a subtitle. Their main goal is to accurately reflect the chapter’s content.

Chapters can and should be subdivided into sections with their own subheading. Subheadings are
useful to introduce a new subtopic. They provide structure and increase readability and
understandability. Below are a few pointers on subheadings:

• Keep subheadings brief and catchy. Their main function is to reflect the next section’s
  content.
• Do not include an excessive number of subheadings. Refrain from breaking up your text too
  much.
Make sure your headings and subheadings are consistent in level and layout. Use bold and/or increase your font size for chapter headings and use italics for subheadings. Word processing programs generally have preprogrammed heading levels that you can simply apply to selected text. Note that in English-language humanities, it is not common to number your sections and subsections. Usually, chapters, section headings and subheadings are distinguished by layout and typesetting.

Preferably, titles and headings should be kept short. Leave out articles and forms of the verb ‘to be’. Be careful, however, about leaving out prepositions as these provide crucial information about the relationship between nouns. In English, when two nouns are juxtaposed, the first is assumed to modify the second. In Dutch, for example, the second noun modifies the first. This is a commonly occurring pitfall for non-native writers of English. Example: a heading stating ‘Indictment Commander’ does not imply that the section below it will be about the indictment of a commander, but that the commander is in charge of indictments. The correct way to head this section would be: ‘Indictment of Commander’.

Sample chapter, section and subsection headings:

**A.J. van der Aa: Man of the Hour**
(Word, heading 1, chapter level)

**Disorganized Memories**
(Word, heading 2, section level)

**Disorganized Memories**
(Word, heading 3, subsection level)

or

**Chapter 1 A.J. van der Aa: Man of the Hour**
(Arabic numeral, bold, 14 pt)

1.1 **Disorganized Memories**
(Arabic numeral, bold, italics, 12 pt)

1.1.3 **Disorganized Memories**
(Arabic numeral, bold, 12 pt)

or

1.1.3 **Disorganized Memories**
(Arabic numeral, italics, 12 pt)

Note: Numbering sections and subsections is not common in the humanities. It is generally reserved for technical papers and theses. Preferably use typographical means to distinguish headings and subheading (font size, bold, italics).

Body (normal):

In 1835, Van der Aa published his....
(normal, 12 pt, preferably Times New Roman or Arial)
Structuring a Chapter

Before you start writing a chapter, it pays to make an outline of the topics you want to cover. Like your thesis as a whole, each chapter needs clear structure and coherence. Keep the following in mind:

• Define what this chapter is about; make sure the period and the topic you select form a good combination.
• Try to limit yourself to one topic.
• Distinguish between main points and subpoints and try to eliminate irrelevancies.
• Make sure there is a coherence between the various sections of your chapter.

Apart from the division into an introductory section and the main body of your text, the body itself needs to be structured logically. Roughly speaking, historians can choose between two organizing principles:

• A chronological structure: your argument develops in pace with your topic’s development over time.
• A thematic structure: you divide your topic into themes, which you then discuss consecutively.

In fact it is advisable to combine these two structures. You could, for example, divide your topic into themes and then put these in a more or less chronological order.
Conclusion

Your conclusion should be a logical outcome of your argument. It should also reflect your introduction. In general, a conclusion provides a concise answer to your research question. In other words, it either proves or disproves your thesis statement. In a sense, it is a brief reiteration of your entire argument and your introduction.

• A good conclusion is a concise answer to your research question. It summarizes your arguments without reiterating every single logical step. It reminds your readers of your thesis statement and the topics you discussed in the body of the text.
• By definition, a conclusion may not contain any new information. Stylistically speaking, however, it is better to avoid verbatim repetition of your phrasing. Even though the content is not new, try to vary the wording.
• A conclusion is more than a straight summary, however. It should place the events and your findings in the historical context and theoretical framework described in your introduction. Often, the full importance of your topic only becomes clear when you draw the connection to a wider framework.

Conclusion and introduction need to cover more or less the same ground. They need to be written in such a fashion that readers who only read the introduction and the conclusion still get a clear idea of your entire argument.
3.3 Citation

Transparency and accountability are an indispensable part of academic writing. As the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th Edition (2010) puts it: ‘Ethics, copyright laws, and courtesy to readers require authors to identify the sources of direct quotations of paraphrases and of any facts or opinions that are not generally known or easily checked.’ (p. 655)

Any time you base yourself on information from an external source, you must refer to that source. This enables readers to see exactly what your opinion is based on. It also allows them to see which opinions are yours and which are someone else’s. This makes your research verifiable, which in turn makes it a sound basis for other researchers to build on.

In short, you ensure that the distinction between your own information, opinion or thoughts and those from external sources is crystal clear. You can do this by paraphrasing (part of) the source text, that is, summarizing it in your own words, or by quoting the source text, that is, copying it verbatim in the original language and placing it in quotation marks (or using an English translation in quotation marks and including the original quotation in a note). Each and every paraphrase and quotation is followed by a reference to its source. These references may be footnotes or endnotes. For more information, see the citation guidelines included in this manual.

If you fail to properly reference your sources, you open yourself to accusations of plagiarism. Neglecting to properly reference runs counter to the rules of transparency and accountability. It is bad for scholarly debate and stymies academic research.

Paraphrasing and Quoting

In your paper or thesis, you build an argument using your own logical steps. This is your central topic and the core of your paper. You can enliven, clarify or substantiate your argument by citing or paraphrasing external sources. Keep an eye on how you use paraphrases or quotations, however. Do not overdo it. If you quote too much, you lose your grip on what you are trying to convey to your readers. After all, you are handing over your voice to other authors. Paraphrasing reduces that risk, because at least you use your own words. Integrate quotations into your running text as much as possible and keep them short. Every quotation or paraphrase is followed by a reference to the source (as a note).

Quoting Properly

Stay true to the source text:

- A quotation is a literal copy from the source text, including possible archaic or regional spellings. If the source text contains an error, you may add [sic] in square brackets after the error. Limit your use of ‘sic’ to cases that could cause confusion.
- Include only English-language quotations. If your source text happens to be written in a different language, try to find an existing, published translation. Only translate the original yourself if you cannot find an existing translation, or if you feel the existing translation(s) are wrong on some crucial point. Do not forget to include a note indicating that you personally translated the quote (‘my translation’) and the original text. Also include the original source in your list of references.
• Do not blindly trust others and do not copy their quotations without checking the original source. If you think another author’s quotation is particularly apt and you want to include it in your own paper or thesis, then try to locate the original text (or a photo or PDF of it) and quote from this. Only if you are unable to find the original, are you allowed to quote ‘indirectly’ and only on condition you mention that you have found this quote in someone else’s work (‘cited in ...’).
• If you want to emphasize one or more words in a quote, you can italicize them. End the quote by adding [my italics] in square brackets or by adding [my italics] to the note accompanying the quote.

Use the correct format:

• Quotes that are integrated into running text are always enclosed in double quotation marks: “...”
• Single quotation marks are used to enclose quotations within quotations: “’..’”
• In British English, it is more common to use single quotation marks (or ‘inverted commas’) for quotations and double quotation marks quotations within quotations: ‘”’ “’.
• A colon is used to introduce a quotation of more than one complete sentence, while a comma is used to separate an introductory phrase from a quotation of one sentence or less.

As FDR put it: “This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

As FDR put it, “[T]he only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

• Use brackets around the first capital (or lower case letter) to indicate that the original text started with a lower case letter (or capital).

Original quote: “Learning from experience is a faculty almost never practiced.”
Barbara Tuchman wrote that “[l]earning from experience is a faculty almost never practiced.”

• If you quote a complete sentence, the period (or question mark or exclamation point) that ends the sentence in enclosed within the final quotation mark, as follows:
As Gerritsen put it, “This is the best way.”

• If you quote just a phrase (incomplete sentence) and make it part of your own sentence structure, the punctuation belongs to your sentence and goes outside of the quotation marks, as follows:
Jansen agrees with Gerritsen, who had argued that it “was the best way”.

• Ellipsis: if you want to condense a quote by leaving something out, use three periods or dots in a row, separated by extra spaces: . . . Do not use square brackets to enclose the dots.

• If for reasons of clarification you want to add something to a quote, enclose this in square brackets, as follows:
One professor complained, “The hours [university] teachers are expected to work have grown exponentially over the past decade.”

• Quotations of more than three lines are not incorporated into the running text, but formatted as block quotations set off from the rest of the text, without quotation marks. Block quotations are set off by:
- inserting an extra line break above and below the quotation to create extra white space;
- indenting all lines from the left;
- using a 1 pt smaller font or single-spacing the text while maintaining the same font size as the body;
- If your block quotation itself contains a quotation, this is reflected by the use of double quotation marks.
Notes

Notes are numbered pieces of information you have chosen not to include in the main text. You include note numbers in your text to refer to this information. The extra information in your notes is either documentary or explanatory (substantive). Documentary notes contain information about the sources you used and give readers the opportunity to check the facts and opinions presented in your paper or thesis. Substantive notes contain information that does not fit into your main argument. Try to limit such notes. It is actually not such a great idea to burden your readers with information that falls outside the scope of your paper.

The main concern in annotation is that it is complete, consistent and error-free. Careless annotation renders your argument untransparent, unverifiable, unconvincing and hence useless to other researchers. Moreover, if you do not make clear when and where you are using someone else’s research or opinions, you are committing plagiarism.

If you follow the guidelines in this Researcher’s Manual, you will end up with consistent and correct notes and references. This system is in line with the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition (CMOS), today’s international yardstick for annotation in the humanities. CMOS is a system that is well suited to both textual and archival sources.

Outside of our department, you are free (and sometimes required) to use a different system. After all, there are no universal annotation principles. Each discipline and each journal can set its own rules. And within each discipline, the rules may differ from country to country. However, they all share the underlying principle of transparency and accountability.

When to Use Notes:

• when quoting or paraphrasing a source;
• when including information not considered general knowledge;
• when including information your readers may want to check.

Where to Put Note Numbers and Notes:

Note numbers come at the end of a sentence, or at least at the end of a clause that needs a reference, outside all punctuation marks. In case of quotations, note numbers are included immediately after the quote.

Notes are numbered consecutively in papers and theses. In dissertations and books, note numbering starts anew in every chapter.

Notes are incorporated either at the bottom of the page (footnotes) or at the end of your paper or thesis (endnotes).

What Should Be Included in a Note?

A documentary note contains all information necessary to find both the source itself and the information therein. The order and layout of this information is standardized (see Citation Guidelines).
Mandatory Elements:

- **Author:** first and last name(s) of author(s) or editor(s); if unavailable, the name of the institution responsible for publishing the text.
- **Title:** full title (i.e. title and subtitle, separated by a colon). Note that titles must be capitalized in English.
- **Editor(s), compiler(s) or translator(s):** first and last name(s) if mentioned on the title page.
- **Edition:** if not the first (e.g. ‘2nd edn’ or ‘3rd rev. edn’).
- **Series:** if the text is part of a series, include the series title.
- **Facts of publication:** Place: publisher, year. Note the colon after place.
- **Page number(s):** if applicable.
- **Electronic publications:** URL or DOI (digital object identifier) for online publications; description of the medium used (DVD, CD-ROM) in other cases.

How to Format a Reference

You first need to sort your sources into publications and all other types of sources, such as archival documents, photographs, interviews and so on. There are many different types of publications, but there is a standard annotation format for most of them. Other sources can be anything, which complicates standardization. Archives have often devised their own preferred annotation method, which you can adopt. You can usually find this on their website.

Where to Find Data

For books, compilations or collections of sources, look at the title page (or page iii) and the copyright page rather than the cover. That is where you can find all the data you need. Journals often have a title page too. When dealing with journal articles, use the title as published above the article, not the one in the table of contents.

Use the exact information on the title page or the article’s actual title. Use the exact spelling even if that deviates from your preferred spelling (e.g. ‘behaviour’ instead of ‘behavior’). Otherwise, your readers will not be able to identify the publication you are referring to.

The same goes for authors’ names. Although English has a preference for ‘first name last name’, many Dutch authors are identified by their initials and last name. Copy whatever is on the title page and do not abbreviate full names or expand initials on your own. People may have initials you would not immediately expect (R. (Richard) for Dick) or may be using an abbreviation you would not immediately recognize (Daisy for M. (Margaret)).

For titles in languages other than English, keep the following in mind:

- If you are dealing with a book or article in a foreign language that uses the Latin alphabet, use the exact information on the title page or at the top of the article, followed by an English translation [in square brackets], if appropriate.
- Note that English capitalizes titles. Maintain the original capitalization in the original title, but capitalize your English translation, if supplying one. For examples, see Sample Citations.
Titles of books and journals are italicized. Title and subtitle are separated by a colon, unless the original uses a period as is the case in Dutch. Titles of articles, memoranda and other non-independent publications are not italicized, but put between double quotation marks.

**How to Format a Note or Reference to a Publication**

First of all, determine what type of publication you are dealing with:

- Book with a single author (i.e. monograph);
- Book with two or more authors;
- Book with one or more editors;
- Article (written by one or more authors) in an edited book;
- Journal article;
- Article in a periodical;
- Article on a website;
- Collection of sources;
- Source within a collection of sources;
- Volume (book, collection) in a series;
- ...

>> For more details, see Citation Guidelines
Citation Guidelines

- There is a specific notation for each type of publication (book, journal article, online publication, etc.) when referred to in a note (see also Sample Citations).

- All publications mentioned in your notes are also collected in your Bibliography. A bibliography contains the last names of the authors (in alphabetical order), followed by their first name or initials, separated by a comma. When a book has two or more authors, only the name of the first author is inverted, because this is the name that determines its alphabetical place in the list. There is no need to invert names in notes, as these are not ordered alphabetically.

- If you refer to the same publication more than once in your notes, use the full title in your first reference only. Use a shortened reference in all subsequent notes.
  - At first mention, include the author’s/editor’s name, full title, publication facts and page number.
  - The second time, use only the author’s last name, a shortened title and the page number(s).
  - When referring to the same work in two consecutive notes, your second note can be even shorter. Just type ‘Ibid.’ followed by the page number (if different from your earlier reference), separated by a comma.

In short:

- First reference to publication in documentary note: in full.
- Second reference: short title (and page number(s))
- Reference to same publication in consecutive notes: ‘Ibid.’ (plus new page number if applicable).

- A single note can contain references to various publications. Use a semi-colon to separate individual publications. Never follow one sentence or clause by several note numbers, because this muddles the relationship with the source.

- To indicate that the argument you are quoting is the subject of debate or that opinions vary in the publications you are quoting, use ‘Confer’, or rather ‘Cf.’, in the sense of ‘compare’.
Plagiarism

According to the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary, plagiarism is “the act of using another person's words or ideas without giving credit to that person”. The online Oxford Dictionaries define plagiarism as “the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one's own”. In the field of history, you are always dealing with other people’s ideas and publications. It is advisable, inevitable even, that you use other people’s words and ideas. However, you need to consistently and accurately attribute these words and ideas to their original author. Be wary of the slippery slope from quoting and paraphrasing to plagiarizing.

Avoiding Plagiarism

To avoid plagiarism, include a reference to the source (either directly in the text and/or in a note) each and every time you quote, paraphrase or use someone else’s ideas or facts. Create a note

- when you quote someone’s written or spoken words verbatim; this requires you to place the quotation between quotations marks or set it off from the text in some other (typographical) way (e.g. block quotations are indented from the left);
- when you paraphrase someone’s written or spoken words;
- when you use someone else’s arguments or ideas;
- when you incorporate facts or factual overviews that are not common knowledge.

How to Prevent Plagiarism

- Make sure that you ‘stay in charge’ of your own text and that you incorporate other people’s material into your own argument. Often, plagiarism is a consequence of being too dependent on the sources you use and the language used in those sources. Ensure that your own argument and your own ideas win out over other people’s words and ideas. Stay in control of the structure and choice of words in your text.
- Always use quotation marks when citing someone else’s words, phrase or clause. Do this even when you are just jotting down a note or summarizing someone’s ideas, taking care to also write down the author’s name and the source. Plagiarism is frequently caused by (inadvertently) confusing information you have gathered from other sources with your own thoughts.
- Always use your own words when taking notes or phrasing other people’s ideas. Try to use your own words for what you have read at the earliest possible stage, so immediately after reading the information. This also applies when you translate a foreign writer’s ideas into English. If you find this hard to do, try reading a paragraph or a section and then summarize it without looking at the text. Then check whether your summary covers the content of the original.
- Always use quotation marks when you copy and paste from a digital source, even if you are ‘just temporarily’ putting it in your notes. Always copy the URL or some other source information from the source and add it to the copy-pasted text in your notes.
- When paraphrasing, take care not to change just a few words. It is much better practice to rephrase the whole idea in your own words. Do not forget to compare your own words to the original.
3.4 Layout

When you have written your last word, it is time to put on the finishing touches. Make sure your paper or thesis looks neat and that everything is traceable.

Layout and graphic design is a matter of taste, but there are a few key requirements any text you hand in has to meet:

- **Font:** Times New Roman or Arial 12 pt., double spaced
  (Note: Double spacing leaves your teacher room to make comments).
- **Page setup:** paper size A4, printed either single-sided or double-sided. Left and right margin approx. 3 cm (1.25”), top and bottom margin approx. 2.5 cm (1”)
- **Your title page must include:**
  - headline-capitalized title and, if applicable, subtitle, separated by a colon
  - your name and student number
  - your home address and email address
  - type of thesis or paper and for which class (include course number)
  - submission date
  - name of your teacher
  - number of words
  - page numbers
  - division into chapters and/or sections
  - table of contents (for theses only)

*Table of Contents*

A table of contents is mandatory for almost every substantial text. Only papers shorter than 5 pages can do without a table of contents.

- **Put the heading ‘Table of Contents’ at the top of the page.**
- **Do not include the table of contents itself in your table of contents, so do not make a separate heading and page number. Simply start your Introduction on page 2.**
- **A table of contents includes chapter headings, section headings and, optionally, subsection headings. When using Word headings, you can automatically create a table of contents that is easy to update when you make changes to the body of the text.**
- **The numbering in your table of contents should be consistent with the numbering in your text. Do not number sections and subsections in your table of contents if you have not done so in your text.**
- **A table of contents consists of a list of chapter headings, section headings (and subsection headings), followed by the (right aligned) page number that marks the start of the chapter/section/subsection.**
Bibliography

A bibliography is a list of all the literature you consulted for your paper or thesis plus all other sources, such as collections of sources and unpublished sources, if any. Have your bibliography reflect these different categories, preferably by subdividing it into different sections headed ‘Sources’, ‘Collections of Sources’ and ‘Literature’.

A bibliography includes the same information as the notes, but formatted slightly differently and with two important exceptions:

- Unlike notes, the bibliography lists the last name of the (first) author first, followed by a comma and the first name or initials. Additional authors are listed in the ‘normal’ order (first name or initials + last name).
- Unlike notes, a bibliography does not include page numbers unless referring to articles in journals or collections (see Sample Citations).

Arrange the authors’ names in your bibliography in alphabetical order. If you cannot find an author’s (or institution’s) name, use the first word in the title that is not a number or a definite or indefinite article (‘a’, ‘the’).

- Use hanging indents to make authors’ alphabetized last names easier to find.
- When including multiple works by the same author, only use their last name once. Use the 3-em dash (—) to replace authors or editors’ names who hold multiple, successive entries in your bibliography.

List collections of sources alphabetically wherever possible. Again, go by author’s name or, if none is available, the first word in the title (no numbers, ‘a’ or ‘the’).

Group your archival sources by archive and lists those archives in alphabetical order. If you are using sources from a limited number of archival collections, you could also list the sources chronologically.

Start your bibliography with a brief overview of abbreviations of periodicals, archives and newspapers.

Illustrations and Tables

Photographs, Maps, Charts, Graphs and Tables

Photographs, maps, charts, graphs and tables can make useful supplements to your thesis. Some information can be quite difficult to put into words or can be made much easier to grasp by means of a visual summary. Keep in mind that all illustrations have to be relevant to your argument and keep whatever images you are using as clear and concise as possible.

- Any and all illustrations must be accompanied by a caption and a credit. Number your photographs, maps, graphs and tables, and include a list of credits at the end of your thesis, if necessary.
- Preferably draw a topographical map yourself, or adapt an existing map. Limit the information on the map to what is indispensable for your argument. If you use an existing
map, clearly indicate where you have found the original and include this information in your list of credits.

- Use maps from the proper period. Avoid drawing 16th century migration flows on a map showing 20th century national borders.

Graphs and tables are used for quantitative data. Make sure they are clear, spacious and easy to read at first glance. Always accompany tables and graphs with captions.

**Appendices**

Appendices (singular: Appendix) include copies of archival documents, illustrations, graphs, tables, figures and the like.

The same principle applies to appendices that applies to illustrations: use only if necessary for clarifying your argument. Ask yourself whether copies, graphs, and the like should be included in the body of your text or added as an appendix. Use the following criteria:

- Relatively concise items that support the development of your main argument should preferably be included in the main text.
- Items that illustrate a minor point, or that have a bearing on several sections in the body should be appended.

Whatever you decide, always provide clear titles or captions, credits (sources) and proper notes for each of these materials.

Appendices are included at the end of your paper or thesis. Do not forget to include them in your table of contents.
4. Presentation

4.1 Preparing Your Presentation

Presentations require good preparation. They are fundamentally different from a paper or thesis. A bad presentation is an ordeal for the speaker and the audience. A good one, however, enlightens the audience and helps them understand the conclusions drawn from the research. Below you will find some pointers that can help you prepare a good presentation.

Before you start, ask yourself what your aim is. The most common aims are transferring information, receiving feedback and testing the validity of your conclusions through debate. Once you have established which goal you aim to achieve, think about the type of presentation needed to accomplish this. Are you going to talk about your whole paper or thesis, or zoom in on one particular aspect? The best approach depends in part on the allotted time. Keep all these considerations in mind.

Start by writing down what you wish to convey. There are many ways to prepare in writing. Some people write out their whole story from beginning to end and bring that to the presentation. Others use just a number of key sentences or key words, and some even learn their entire text by heart.

It is best to practice your presentation several times before the actual event. This helps you take some distance from your written version and enables you to talk about your research more loosely and confidently. Practicing will teach you where to pause, when to switch to the next slide (if you use them) and when to ask your audience a question. Bring your written version to the real presentation as a ‘crutch’.
4.2 Structure

A presentation cannot convey nearly as much information as a paper or thesis. Your audience has too short an attention span to take it all in. Therefore, you need to keep your key message foremost in mind. To ensure your audience remembers your key message, you must be able to express your hypothesis and conclusion in three sentences or less.

The beginning of your presentation is crucial. Starting out by saying ‘My presentation is going to be about...’ or ‘I want to talk about...’ is far too predictable. It is important to capture your audience’s attention right from the outset. Therefore, you are better off beginning with a captivating image or quote, or a clear, provocative question, and then linking this to your topic.

A live audience cannot rewind or turn the page back and read your story over again. Therefore, the structure of your presentation must be crystal clear. Deliver your key message (your hypothesis and conclusion), move on to context and examples, and then return to your key message. This ensures that no one will miss the core of your presentation.

Be explicit about the structure of your argument: ‘This raises three questions. The first one is whether......, etc.’ Also build in moments where you explicitly recap what you have just argued: ‘I just discussed two ways in which .... Now I want to move on to ... ’

Remember the power of repetition. It is a tool you can use to order your presentation, and it serves your audience too. Repetition ensures that information sticks; your audience will come away remembering your key message. Obviously you should take care not to overdo this.

Depending on the goal of your presentation, you can make time for feedback from the audience or for debate.

To support your structure, you can use a visual element like a copy of an important archival document, TV images, photos or objects. You can write or draw something on a whiteboard, hand out copies of a document or use a slide presentation.

End your story with a memorable closing statement in which you summarize your key message once more and, if possible, indicate its wider implications. For example, if you are planning to write another paper or your thesis on this topic, you could describe which aspects you are planning to research. Never end by saying ‘Well, that’s all.’ If you have little to add, at least show gratitude toward your audience: ‘Thank you for your attention.’
4.3 Presentation Skills

Be prepared and stay calm. Make sure you are in the room early enough to check technical aids well before you have to begin.

Think about when you are going to distribute any handouts you may be using. Once given a handout, your audience will likely start reading this and stop paying attention to what you are saying. Therefore, you should tell your audience when the information on the handout is going to be discussed, or tell them they will receive a handout summarizing the main points after your presentation. This will reassure them that they will not miss anything, so they can focus on your presentation.

Adopt a comfortable yet authoritative pose, preferably standing and facing your audience. Mind your posture and do not put your hands in your pockets. If public speaking daunts you, make sure you have something to hold on to with one hand, for example, a rostrum or table.

Never read text verbatim from a piece of paper; present your story ‘impromptu’ or by heart (see Preparing your presentation). Make sure you know the story so well that you can tell it without having to resort to your written version. This version is for you to fall back on in case you lose track.

Do not speak too quickly. Be sure to enunciate clearly. Look at your audience, not at the floor or the ceiling. It might be helpful to find a focal point just over your audience’s heads.

Check your watch or the clock now and then; do not exceed your allotted time. Otherwise, your audience might come away with the idea that it took ‘forever’ instead of remembering your key message.

Use quotations sparingly; people quickly stop listening. If you do use them, select short quotes or excerpts that exemplify your point. Always announce that what follows is a quotation. Use only English quotes (translate foreign language quotes into English if necessary) and make sure that you know how to read them well.

Do not cram your presentation full of dates. Whenever you use a date, make clear why you are using it: “In 1869, so just forty years later, the government ...”.

Explain complicated concepts, using an etymological explanation or synonyms, for example.

Humor works well in presentations, but your basic story needs to be serious and academic. Take care not to appear laconic, cynical or indifferent about your topic, because this will backfire. If the presenter does not even consider the topic important, then why should the audience?

Leave some pauses in your presentation. Take a breath or a sip of water, or change a slide. Gradually build up your argument. Do not be afraid to remind your audience why the things you are telling them are important or interesting.

Be aware that the audience may ask questions. Think ahead of time what these might be and how you could answer them. Answer fully without adding too many details.

Consider ending with a hypothesis or a question for debate.
4.4 Presentation Software

Presentation software such as PowerPoint and Prezi are a great aid for giving a presentation, but they are not mandatory. Below you will find a few pointers on the Do’s and Don’ts of using presentation software:

- **Less is more** in digital presentation: do not include too much text per slide (8 lines is a lot) and do not use too many slides.
- The first slide of your presentation includes your name and the title of your presentation.
- Use effects, animation and sounds sparingly. Your spoken words are the core of the story; everything else is an aid.
- Write short sentences or keywords, not full sentences. This prevents you from having to read the slide with your back to the audience.
- Give visuals space: use the full screen. Enlarge relevant details.
- If you do not have a relevant image or text for part of your presentation, make sure the screen is blank too. Insert a black slide (or press the letter b or the period <.> during your presentation). Otherwise your audience will remain mentally stuck on the point you covered in your previous slide.
- Always bring a hard copy of your presentation, or at least of the key slides. Your presentation should never be dependent on whether the projector, digital screen or computer is working.
- The last slide should display your hypothesis or your question for debate. If not, project something neutral like a black screen, your name or a list of references.
- Consult Google Video and/or YouTube for presentation tips and many good pointers on how to use presentation software.
5. Examples

5.1 Research Questions

Sample Research Questions

*Note:* In practice, research questions are often partly descriptive and partly explanatory. Sometimes they are partly hypothetical.

Bear in mind that before completing your paper or thesis, you need to turn your research question into a clear thesis statement (see 3.2, 2. Research Question / Thesis Statement).

**Descriptive (providing an overview):**

- ‘What were the motives and methods of the editors-in-chief of the 19th century *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden* [Biographical Dictionary of the Netherlands]?’
- ‘How did Dutch news weeklies and pamphlets report on women’s suffrage between 1860 and 1920?’
- ‘How did the Republic respond to Jonathan Swift’s satirical literature?’

**Explanatory (explaining some phenomenon):**

- What were the causes/consequences of <an event>?
- How did <a person> influence <an event>?
- ‘What caused the Irish Potato Famine?’
- ‘Why was Louis Napoleon King of Holland for only four years?’
- ‘How did Gilles Schotel, an editor-in-chief of *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden* [Biographical Dictionary of the Netherlands], contribute to the professionalization of Dutch historiography in the late 19th century?’
- ‘How did Dutch philologists Nicolaas Heinsius and Isaac Vossius contribute to the realization of the scientific ideal formulated by Queen Christina of Sweden?’

**Hypothetical (testing whether a theory is valid)**

- ‘Is the marriage of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt to Maria van Utrecht (1575) an example of marriage as ‘a tool to manage social capital’ as formulated by Luuc Kooijmans in his 1997 Dutch-language publication *Vriendschap en de kunst van het overleven* [Friendship and the Art of Survival]?’

**Comparative (comparing and contrasting nations, periods, phenomena)**

- ‘What similarities, if any, exist between the discomfort about social morality in bourgeois circles as voiced in the late 19th century editions of Dutch literary magazine *De Gids* and the late 20th century debate about social cohesion in the Netherlands?’

**Historiographical (tracking how a historic event has been portrayed and assessed over time)**

- ‘How did Dutch Protestants in the 18th and 19th centuries view the story of the Gorcum martyrs?’
• ‘How has the attitude of the Dutch during the Second World War been portrayed and assessed over the past 50 years?’

Statistical (looking for a correlation between historical phenomena)

• ‘What was the ratio of women to men working in the 17th century book trade in the Netherlands and Britain and what does this imply about the position of women in the book trade in those two countries at that time?’

NOTE: If you intend to use a statistical research question, you need to be well versed in statistics. You need to know exactly what research method is required and which criteria you are going to apply. It is unethical to change these criteria over the course of your research. If the method you opted for does not work, the only right course of action is to halt the research, find a new method and rephrase your research question. To narrow the chances of such a setback, it is best to carry out some preliminary research using a limited yet representative part of the material. This can help you phrase an appropriate research question.

Avoid research questions like these:

• What would have happened if ..... ? (you will never find out)
• Who was .....? (bound to become a biography devoid of focus or analysis)
• What are we to think of ...? (an attempt to describe a consensus that will never be reached; a very imprecise question too)
5.2 Sample Citations

Sample Citations

Publishers may use different style guides to format notes and bibliographies (see also the general information on notes). English-language papers and theses written for the Department of History and Art History at Utrecht University should follow the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition.

The following examples provide some sample documentary notes referencing different types of publications, and sample bibliographical entries. When in doubt, consult The Chicago Manual of Style (University of Chicago Press, 16th ed.). Other extremely useful resources include Purdue Online Writing Lab (CMS NB Sample Paper) and Kate L. Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (7th edn). When formatting notes, pay special attention to the following:

• order of information (author, title, place, publisher, date of publication)
• capitalization in English titles
• commas, spaces, periods, colons
• italics, quotation marks, parentheses, brackets
• standard abbreviations like ‘Ed.’ ‘Eds’ (no period), ‘et al.’

Reference type

BOOKS:
1. Book with one author (monograph)
2. E-book (from library or webstore)
3. Book with two or three authors
4. Multivolume work
5. Volume in a series
6. Edited book (one or more editors/compilers)

ARTICLES:
7. Article/titled chapter in an edited book
8. Journal article
9. Article in a special issue of a journal
10. Article in periodical or other media
11. Online article (other than via JSTOR or the library’s electronic journal subscriptions)

OTHER SOURCES:
12. Collected works
13. Parliamentary proceedings
14. Unpublished material
15. Date or place of publication unknown

PRIMARY SOURCES AND AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS:
16. Collections of sources
17. Source within a collection of sources
18. Archival sources
19. Audiovisual materials
# Books

1. **Book with one author (monograph).**

   Note, full citation:
   

   Note, shortened citation:
   
   Tuchman, *Distant Mirror*, 169.

   In Bibliography:
   

2. **E-book**

   Note, full citation:
   

   In the Bibliography, include the type of e-book as follows:
   
   
   


   Note:

   - Because e-books may have unstable pagination, it is wise to refer not only to page numbers but also to chapter numbers or other location numbers (e.g. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York 2008) Kindle-e-book, Chapter 23).
   - If you have accessed a publication online, also give the URL or DOI and the date (e.g. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, (2008, https://books.google.nl/books?id=aFbcDw8CcuAC&hl=nl&source=gbs_book_other_versions, accessed Oct. 30, 2015).
3. Book with two or more authors

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:


In Bibliography:


Note that only the first author’s name is inverted, because the bibliography lists sources alphabetically by last name of the first author.

When dealing with a book with four or more authors or editors, list only the first author, followed by ‘et al.’ (Latin for ‘and others’).

Note, full citation:


In the bibliography, list all the authors as follows:


4. Multivolume work

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:


In Bibliography:


Note that in English ‘De’ and ‘Van’ are considered an integral part of a last name. Therefore, in an alphabetical list, all names starting with ‘De’ are categorized under D and names starting with ‘Van’ are listed under V (whereas in Dutch these names would be alphabetized under the second part of the last name).
5. Work in a series

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:


In Bibliography:


Note that the series title and the volume number are not italicized.

6. Edited book (one or more editors/compilers)

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:

Röhl and Sombart (eds), *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 175.

In Bibliography:


Note that for edited volumes, you follow the editor’s name with (ed.) (or (eds) for more than one editor)
7. Article/titled chapter in an edited book

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:

Sneller, “Reading Jacob Cats,” 23.

In Bibliography:


Note that a documentary note refers to the individual page number, while the bibliography refers to the chapter’s first and last page.

Also note the difference between ‘in’ (note) and ‘In’ (bibliographic entry) and ‘ed.’ (note) and ‘edited by’ (bibliography). Note there is no colon after ‘in’.

8. Journal article

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:


In Bibliography:


When referring to journal articles, include the following:

- Volume (here: 49);
- Year or Month Year in parentheses (here: (2014)) or (October 2014)), followed by a colon; If a journal is paginated consecutively across a volume or if the month or season appears with the year, the issue number may be omitted.
- Number of the issue (here: 4), followed by a comma;
- Page number to which the note refers (here: 629), or first page-last page of the article in the bibliographic entry (here: 627-651).
9. **Article in a special issue of a journal**

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:


In Bibliography:


10. **Article in periodical or other media**

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:

Biedermann, “Damascus.”

In Bibliography:


If you have accessed a newspaper article online, give the URL of the site you used and the date you accessed it (see **Online article**).

11. **Online article (other than via JSTOR or the library’s electronic journal subscriptions)**

With author:


No author (use institution instead):


Note: when referencing online articles, include the author’s name (if known), date of publication or last modification, URL and access date.
### Other Sources

**12. Collected works**

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:

Freud, “Interpretation of Dreams,” 327.

In Bibliography:


---

**13. Parliamentary proceedings**

Reference to a plenary debate, full citation:


*Verslag der handelingen van de Eerste Kamer der Staten Generaal* (hereafter: HEK) [Parliamentary Proceedings, Senate], 1952-1953, 1256.

Reference to a plenary debate, shortened citation:


Reference to a debate on draft legislation, full citation:


Reference to a debate on draft legislation, shortened citation:


Note:

- You could also include where you found these records (e.g. www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl), but if you have downloaded PDFs, you have actually used a printed (or printable) version and there is no need to include the URL.
- Parliamentary proceedings are an exceptionally rich source, particularly because there are so many appendices to draft laws supplying in-depth treatises on key social issues.
14. Unpublished material

Note, full citation:


Note, shortened citation:

Pekelder, "Klapwieken," 27.

In Bibliography:


15. Date or place of publication unknown

No place:


No date:


When the place of publication or the publisher is not identified, use ‘n.p.’ in a note (‘N.p.’ in the bibliography) instead. When the date of publication is not known, substitute ‘n.d.’ and ‘N.d.’ in the note and the bibliography respectively.
### Primary Sources and Audiovisual Materials

16. **Collection of sources**

Original author identified:


No original author (bibliographic entry):


Collection of sources as part of a series (bibliographic entry):


17. **Source within a collection of sources**

*Report (note):*


*Letter (note):*


*Pamphlet (bibliographical entry):*


**Note:** Referencing historical documents can be complicated, even when they have been incorporated in a collection of sources. The most important rule is to be consistent and to make sure that readers can trace the materials you are referencing.
18. Archival sources

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (not yet stored in the Nationaal Archief [Dutch National Archives]):


Nationaal Archief (NA, [Dutch National Archives], formerly Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA) [Dutch General State Archives]):


Private archival institution:

Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, Sammlung Ulrike Meinhof (hereafter HIS, Me, U), 015, 005, letter dated Dec. 9, 1976 from Wolfgang Wiedenmann, student pastor of the Evangelische Studentengemeinde Hamburg, to Rechtsanwalt Klaus Croissant in Stuttgart.

Private archives:

Archives of the Stichting Pariteit (housed at Ben Buskes, Utrecht, hereafter: Pariteit Archives), File 11A Media IV, draft version of Pieter de Lange’s interview with Ben Buskes, Spring of 1989.

Note: Archives often have their own clear instructions on referencing. Follow these wherever possible in the context of your research paper or thesis.

19. Audiovisual materials

Sound recordings (vinyl, CD or other audio carriers) (note):

Mort Subite, “Ich liebe Ulrike” (1980), I’m Sure We’re Gonna Make It: Dutch Punkrock ’77-’82, compilation, 6486-2, Epitaph, n.d., Audio CD.

Film or TV recording (DVD, VHS, or other visual carriers) (bibliographical entry):


Note:

• References tend to be to an excerpt of a concert, film or other audiovisual recording. Locate the excerpt as accurately as possible, for instance by including the time codes (2’30” - 4’15” ) or a chapter number (e.g., Ch. 2).
• When referencing an online recording, take care to include the URL and all other information necessary to locate the recording, as well as the access date.
5.3 Bibliography

Sample Bibliography

List of Abbreviations:

Sources:
GAM Gemeentearchief Maastricht
NL-HaNA Nationaal Archief, The Hague

Collections of sources:
RGP Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën

Journals:
TvG Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis
DNE De Negentiende Eeuw

Bibliography

Sources


Collections of Sources


Literature


# 5.4 Table of Contents

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Art dealers in the Netherlands 1600-1800</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Street merchants, markets and fairs (subheadings)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Professional art dealers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Amsterdam. Fat years on the Breestraat</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Rembrandt in Amsterdam</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Saskia’s testament</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Hendrickje Stoffels’ first years in Amsterdam</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Hendrickje Stoffels as a model</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hendrickje Stoffels and Rembrandt van Rijn’s image</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Rembrandt’s image in the 18th and 19th centuries</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· From saving Grace to passive victim</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Legal trick or financial need?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Overview of documents pertaining to Hendrickje Stoffels</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Names of 17th century female art dealers</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: List of professions practiced by Amsterdam women in the 17th century</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bibliography | 67 |
5.5 Synopsis

Sample synopsis based on the following research question:

‘How did the professionalization of Dutch historiography in the late 19th century influence Gilles Schotel, an editor-in-chief of *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden* [Biographical Dictionary of the Netherlands]?’

**Introduction**

Why does this topic deserve to be researched? (justification)

Which literature and which sources, if any, will you use?

What is your research question?

What theoretical framework and methodology will you use?

Summary of topics your paper will deal with

**Chapter 1**

*Gilles Schotel’s biography*

Provide a short biography of Gilles Schotel: when was he born, what did he do before he became editor-in-chief of *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden*?

**Chapter 2**

*Historiography until 1850*

What was it like? What sort of people were practicing historiography? What was published and in what media? Was historiography a coherent academic discipline?

**Chapter 3**

*Biographisch Woordenboek*

List what information you will need about *Biographisch Woordenboek*

**Chapter 4**

*Historiography after 1850 and Biographisch Woordenboek*

Historiography matured into an academic discipline. What effect did this professionalization have? How did academic historians view *Biographisch Woordenboek*?

**Conclusion**

Your conclusion summarizes your argument (including subtopics) and in so doing answers your research question.
Obviously, when you draft your synopsis you do not know all the answers yet. However, you do have some information about your subtopics and a general idea of what the answer to your research question is going to be. Use this knowledge to fill in the synopsis to the best of your ability. Then, take your synopsis to your instructor and discuss whether it seems like a workable plan.

Note: a synopsis may change over the course of your research project, either because you find new information or because you cannot find the information you felt you needed. New information may even shed new light on your research question, or change the outcome you had predicted. In such cases, you simply need to make the necessary changes to your synopsis. This is not a sign of failure; a synopsis is no more than a first attempt to get a grip on the research you will conduct and the paper or thesis you are about to write.