DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

GUIDE TO USING AND REFERENCING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

One of the most important skills you develop in History is learning how to identify, evaluate, use and cite scholarly sources, both primary and secondary. In this guide we explain the principles of referencing, and some principles for determining how reputable, scholarly and authoritative a source may be – whether primary or secondary, written or visual, print or digital. Scholarly sources allow you to assess and verify the status of the information and views they contain. Using such sources, and citing them correctly, will in turn allow your reader to check the information and evidence on which your own interpretation of a topic is based.

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1 This guide has been updated in March-June 2016, by Dr Cindy McCreery, Dr Hélène Sirantoine, Prof Penny Russell and Dr John Gagné.
Understanding Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary sources are texts (documents, books, films, images or any other kind of evidence) that were produced by someone who directly observed or participated in a specific era or event. Primary sources may range from texts produced in the immediate context of an event (eg a travel diary; propaganda films or newspaper reports in wartime) to accounts written after the event (eg a photo album assembled after the trip is done; a memoir of war by a person who experienced it). For example, the October 1962 issues of the New York Times provide insight into the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought the USA and USSR to the brink of war, by showing what ordinary people were told about the crisis as it unfolded. Victor Klemperer (1881–1960), I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years (published 1998) discusses Klemperer’s first-hand experience of life in Nazi Germany (1933–45). The lapse of time before Klemperer’s was published is significant in itself. When using a primary source you should ask not only when, how and why it was originally produced, but also when, how, why and how widely it was disseminated.

Secondary sources comprise the many texts that are produced after and outside the context of the period or event they describe. They are not a direct source of evidence – that is, they are written not by participants in the events described, but by later scholars and others who seek to make sense of those events. Secondary sources are not all created equal, but may range from simple overviews in encyclopaedias (including Wikipedia), almanacs and school texts, through popular narratives or polemical rants to books, journal articles and websites created by recognised scholars and published by scholarly presses, universities and research institutions. Your task is to recognise the differences between such sources, and to be discriminating in the ways that you make use of them. This does not mean you should never again read a Wikipedia page: an encyclopaedic overview may be exactly what you need to read first, if only to orient yourself in relation to a plethora of detached pieces of information. It does mean that you shouldn’t cite the Wikipedia page as a reference in your essay: because by the time you submit your work for assessment, you should have moved well past that initial moment of confusion and discovery, and have found better, more reliable and more scholarly sources from which to draw your evidence and on which to build your arguments. High quality secondary sources will usually have a clearly identifiable author; they will appear in books published by university presses (eg Harvard University Press; Melbourne University Press) or in journals hosted by universities and managed by academic editors (eg American Historical Review or History Workshop Journal); and they will use scholarly referencing – footnotes or endnotes, bibliographies and the like – to show exactly what evidence and arguments have informed their own conclusions. Scholarly journal articles are ‘peer-reviewed’, i.e. rigorously vetted by other experts in this field, usually in a process of ‘double-blind review, where the whole process is carried out with anonymity. (Hint: most scholarly journals mention this peer review process on the first page/s or inside front cover of each volume.) Your ability to identify, understand, and critically engage with scholarly sources of this kind is a key measure of your own training as a scholar.

A Note on Internet Sources

In the past decade there has been a virtual explosion of historical sources on the internet – both primary and secondary. Much of this material is incredibly useful for students, bringing rich archival sources from all around the world into your reach, and providing access from your desk or phone to the most outstanding scholarly sources on your topic. Much of it is rubbish. So how do you tell the difference?

An article in the Journal of American History is a scholarly source for that reason; whether you encounter it in hard copy in the library, or online via J-STOR makes no difference to its scholarly status. The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia is quite another matter. Anyone can contribute to it, and the content is not reviewed by experts. Thus, a Wikipedia entry is not a scholarly source (and thus not an acceptable source for a university essay) because it has not been subjected to rigorous expert assessment before being made available online.

Scholarly (and thus acceptable) internet sources include primary source material that has been placed
on the web by a recognised academic, government or other institution (such as the Internet Modern History Source Book, which is hosted by Fordham University in the USA) as well as online collections of primary sources (eg ECCO) and, of course, internet sources recommended by your unit of study co-ordinator. Remember that when you do cite an internet source, you must provide sufficient details so that your reader can find the source easily. If you are not able to find this information, this is probably a fair indication that it is not a scholarly source.

Some scholarly journals are available to you only online, through databases such as J-STOR. Of course, these are also legitimate sources. When citing articles from online databases, do not quote the URL. Cite the article as if you had used the print version.

Footnotes

Why give references?

References show the reader where you found the ideas and evidence that shaped your analysis. Accurate references enable the reader to go back and check the exact sources and the evidence that led you to your conclusions. In that sense, the references—the bare citations themselves—are a key part of your argument. Essays without references, or with inadequate ones, do not meet the basic requirements of scholarship and will not receive a passing grade.

Footnotes vs Endnotes and In-text References

There are three main academic referencing systems: footnotes, endnotes and in-text references. Essays submitted to the Department of History should always use footnotes. The in-text referencing system, sometimes known as the Harvard system, is used mainly in the social sciences. It takes the form ‘Brown argues that the sky is blue (Brown, 2001: 245)’. In historical scholarship, where sources are often complex (eg a series of documents in a unique archival collection), in-text referencing can be difficult to use, clumsy and awkward. For this reason, footnotes are the preferred form of referencing in History. (You’ll notice that book publishers tend to prefer endnotes, which place the references at the end of the document, keeping the pages of text free from clutter. But journal editors usually prefer footnotes – and so do we, because they enable us see at a glance how you are backing up your arguments.)

Footnotes, which place the references at the bottom of the page, should always be used in essays submitted to the Department of History. A footnote number is inserted in the text at the end of the sentence that needs a source citation, and the information on that source is placed at the bottom of the page, as illustrated below.

What should be footnoted?

In general, the following information should be footnoted. If you are unsure, then please ask your tutor, lecturer or seminar co-ordinator for further guidance:

- Facts that are not widely known. For example, the statement that the First World War began in August 1914 needs no footnote, BUT the statement that Corporal Bill Smith enlisted in Melbourne on 8 July 1915 does need a footnote. If you include information that is not widely known in your essay, then you MUST footnote it.
- Statistics always need a footnote. A footnote needs to be placed at the end of the sentence so that your reader can verify the statistic you have quoted. For example, you might write: ‘Although they were among the most powerful members of eighteenth-century French
society, the aristocracy represented only 1% of the total population’.  

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Footnote number. See bottom of this page for what the text of a footnote looks like.

- Ideas or arguments that are not your own need a footnote, even if you have summarised or paraphrased them in your own words.
- Direct quotations always need a footnote.

Preparing footnotes

When preparing footnotes, please remember:

- Use ‘footnotes’ not ‘endnotes’ when creating your references.
- Footnotes are placed at the bottom of each relevant page of your essay.
- The footnote number normally goes at the end of the sentence (see next point).
- There should not usually be more than one footnote for any given sentence. You can put multiple references into the same footnote.
- Do not stack up your footnote numbers (eg 17 18).
- Footnotes are numbered consecutively from the beginning to the end of the essay.
- Each footnote is a new sentence and therefore begins with a capital letter.
- Each footnote ends with a full stop.

How to footnote

To create a footnote in Microsoft Word, go to the Insert menu and choose Footnote (or, if you are using a PC, Reference and then Footnote). Each footnote, in the text and at the bottom of the page, is numbered automatically. All you do is enter the details of your source.

Essential information within the footnote

You must provide the following information within footnotes: name of the author; title of the source; name of the city and publisher of the source; the date of publication; and the page number(s) you used. The full information is given in the first citation, and a shorter version is given in subsequent citations. The format for the footnote information varies according to the type of source used; for example, book, journal article, book chapter/essay in an edited book, or website.

Citation style

The Chicago referencing style


Detailed examples of how to cite and footnote references are given on the online Chicago-Style

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Citation Quick Guide: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Note that you can access the entire Chicago manual of style via the university Library subscription: http://opac.library.usyd.edu.au:80/record=b5030247~S4

In the following pages you will find examples of how to cite the most common kinds of sources used in History assessments.

**Footnoting a Book**

For example:


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Subsequent citation of this source:

3 Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*, 68.
Footnoting a Chapter/Essay in an Edited Book

For example:


Subsequent citation of this source:

5 Clarke, “Northern Amputees”, 363.

Footnoting a Journal Article

For example:


Subsequent citation of this source:

7 Keene, “A Catalan Anarchist Autodidact”, 313.
Footnoting an Internet Source

The Internet is extensive, and there are many resources, scholarly as well as unscholarly, available. Choose only scholarly sources for your research. The Chicago Manual of Style provides some information about how to cite the Internet. Here is guidance which will help ensure that you are citing your Internet Sources in the best possible way. For citation purposes, you should also make a distinction between:

A. Websites that provide the reproduction of a source created previously.
   1. Some websites/databases provide digitized versions of previously printed texts: eg the Eighteenth Century Collections Online, for 18th c. printed texts.
      - Follow the website’s guidelines on how to cite the source (usually given at the bottom of the page).
      - If there are no citation guidelines, indicate first the referencing details of the original work, followed by the name of the website, its creation/updating date if provided, its <URL> (website address; this must be accurate and presented within two enclosures as shown) OR the identification number within the database, and the date you viewed the source.


OR

2. Other websites provide only the encoded text of previous publications: eg the Gutenberg Project.
   - Indicate first the referencing details of the original work, as indicated on the website, followed by the name of the website, its creation/updating date if provided, its <URL> (website address; this must be accurate and presented within two enclosures as shown), and the date you viewed the source.


B. Websites that are sources themselves (eg the website of a Museum exhibition).
   - Make sure first that the Internet source you intend to cite is scholarly. A scholarly source will clearly indicate who created the webpage or who is responsible for its contents (eg a university, a museum, an educational institutions are usually reputable hosts)
   - Be very wary of collaborative wikis (where authorship is unclear and the information is transient and continually shifting), individual blogs, websites hosted by political action groups or religious organisations.
   - If you are not certain, please check with your UoS coordinator or tutor.
   - Once you have determined that your Internet source is scholarly, indicate in your citations:
     1. The title of the webpage, in quotation marks (eg the title of an online exhibition within a museum website).
     2. The full name of the author(s). This can be the name of an individual, eg Adam
Smith, or an institution, eg American Museum of the Moving Image.

3. Date of the webpage creation and/or updating.
4. <The Uniform Resource Locator (URL)> (website address). This must be accurate and presented within two enclosures as shown.
5. The date you viewed the source (this is important because websites change frequently).


Footnoting a Source Read in Another Source

If you want to cite a source (Source A) that is quoted and/or discussed in another source (Source B), make sure you indicate in your footnote that you read Source A in Source B. The example given below indicates that you have read Bakunin (Source A) in McKercher’s book (Source B). If you cite only Source A, the reader will assume that you read Bakunin directly—in French!

Footnoting an Edited or Translated Primary Source With Numbered Sections

Historians—especially those who work on premodern topics—often find themselves working with primary sources, or translations of primary sources, that are broken up into numbered books or sections. You can make life easier for your reader by providing not only the standard information specified above, but also the number of the book and/or section concerned. A reader who has a different edition/translation, with different pagination, will then still be able to trace the reference without difficulty. Place the book/section numbers after the title:


An alternative, when referring to a work whose scriptural status is common knowledge, is not to state the author at all: eg ‘Exodus, 22.9’ is sufficient to refer to the Bible’s Book of Exodus.

Footnoting Other Primary Sources (archival material, newspapers, visual sources, etc)

As you progress in your study of history, you may find yourself using primary sources that are not covered by the examples above. The key point to remember is that the purpose of footnotes is to tell the reader (1) what the source is, and (2) where it can be found. That becomes particularly important where only one copy of the source exists, as with archival sources. Some types of source that historians regularly use are: newspapers and magazines, pamphlets and other 'ephemera', letters and diaries, government and other archives, films, paintings, artefacts and interviews. All need to be cited in footnotes if you refer to them in an essay.

For example, for a letter conserved in archives:

13 Letter from J. K. Moir to Frank Clune, 28 November 1938, Clune Papers, Folder 57, Box 10, MS4951, National Library of Australia.

For newspaper articles, provide the title (if any) of the newspaper article, the title of the newspaper, date of publication, followed (if appropriate) by details of the source where you viewed the article. Here is an example of an Australian colonial newspaper article viewed on the National Library of Australia’s website Trove:

For visual sources such as **paintings**, indicate the artist’s name, title of the work, date of creation, and current location, followed by the references of the source where you viewed the image:

1. If it is on a website: the name of the website, its creation/updating date if provided, its <URL> (website address; this must be accurate and presented within two enclosures as shown), and the date you viewed the source.


2. If it is in a printed source: see details of the publication as indicated above (book, journal article, etc)


**Subsequent citations and the use of ibidem**

The ‘short title’ system is the department’s preferred usage for subsequent citations. It is, however, acceptable to use ‘Ibid.’ (with no quotation marks and no italics), as long as you use it correctly and appropriately. ‘Ibid.’ is short for the Latin word *ibidem*, which means ‘the same.’ When you use ‘Ibid.’ in a footnote, you are telling the reader that the reference is identical to that in the footnote immediately preceding it. Thus if you cite McKenzie *Imperial Underworld*, p. 6 in note 8, and again in note 9, note 9 can simply read ‘Ibid.’. If your second citation is from p. 12 of the same work, note 9 can simply read ‘Ibid., p. 12.’. You cannot use ‘Ibid.’ if you have cited more than one source in the preceding note.
The Bibliography

You must include a bibliography for every essay that you submit to the History department. A bibliography is a list of sources you have used to prepare your essay. It is arranged in alphabetical order of the authors’ family names (eg ‘Aldrich…, Hillard…, Moses…, Russell…’). The bibliography should appear at the end of your essay on a separate page.

Separate the primary and secondary sources in your bibliography. If you have used only one type of source (eg only secondary sources), put all of them under the heading Bibliography.

Sample bibliography

Primary sources


Secondary sources

