General Dos and Don’ts
- History writing is professional writing – most professors do not want conversational prose
- correct and honest citations are crucial – avoid plagiarism by citing all information that isn’t common knowledge
  - Pearl Harbor occurred on Dec. 7, 1941 (no citation needed)
  - Pearl Harbor was decisive in determining the American strategy in the Pacific during World War II. (cite unless student came up with it)
- all papers need a strong argument, an introduction laying the groundwork for the essay, and a conclusion that wraps up the argument neatly
- always, always, always past tense

I-III are typically undergraduate writing assignments, IV-VI are largely graduate-level work

I. Exam Essays
- critical thinking – dissect lectures or sources and reassemble them to create an argument with ample evidence to prove it
- needs strong argument/thesis
- needs developed organization – students should be prepared to build an outline or skeleton BEFORE writing

II. Document Analysis
- show ability to read an analyze primary and secondary documents – students given a text or a few documents and a question to answer
- argumentative paper – thesis should answer question with clear argument and plan of attack
- evidence should relate to argument – students should avoid piling on quotes
- if only one document, parentheticals are usually fine, but with multiple texts, a safe bet is footnotes, Turabian style – MOST professors will give specific citation instructions

III. Book Reviews
- students asked to write between 1 and 5 pages on a given book – comes in two general forms
  - class-based – paper should clearly state the argument of the author, discuss critically the evidence the author uses to prove his/her point, and describe the impact or relevance of the work in general
  - publication – essay should focus more on the argument and evidence used and the utility of the work – with publication in mind, student should strive for clarity and brevity above all

IV. Historiographies
- longer, comparative book reviews that describe the general trends in a certain area of scholarship
- students have a tendency to “list” book arguments without integrating into the form of an essay
- good historiographies provide very brief synopses of books included, but integrate them into a larger argument about the direction that scholarship is going – main question is “How does [insert book here] fit in the history of [insert field here]?"

V. Annotated Bibliography
- a list of works on a subject accompanied by short paragraphs giving quick summaries of scholarly works
- takes the form of a list – doesn’t need the larger argument of a historiography
- goal is being concise – in as little space as possible, note the argument and importance of a work – students doing an annotated bibliography usually have a larger paper in mind, and judge the works by relevance to their topic and argument
- citation is important – Turabian/Chicago bibliography style – if quoting in the summary, use parentheticals, but usually unnecessary, since summaries should be as brief as possible

VI. Research Paper
- longer argumentative paper in which student creates a unique argument and uses a combination of primary and secondary sources to prove that argument
- primary concern is argument – student should be very clear in stating his/her purpose in writing the paper, and very specific as to how his/her evidence works to support the argument
- evidence should be thorough but relevant – danger is to rely too heavily on quotes, or to include inappropriate citations – student’s voice should be foremost, with quotes to prove points, add an interesting phrase
- flow is also important – with longer papers, students can tend towards choppiness – paper should read well from intro to conclusion
Introduction to History Writing
Jill Cooley, History Writing Fellow
History Writing Center, 238 ten Hoor
HWC e-mail: hacohistory@gmail.com
Personal e-mail: coole015@bama.ua.edu

Types of History Writing
- Basic Student Essay
- Exam Essay Question
- Book Review
- Historiographic Essay
- Original Research Paper

Citation Format

Elements of History Writing
- Respond to Question/Assignment
- Strong Thesis
- Logical Organization
- Evidence to support the argument (usually in the form of primary source material)
- Proper Citations (usually footnotes)

Common Errors
- Failure to respond to the professor’s question and/or assignment
- Failure to clearly articulate a strong, focused thesis
- No logical organization/missing introduction, conclusion, or transitions
- Missing information/failure to connect the dots between ideas
- Failure to use primary sources or to integrate evidentiary material with argument
- Frequent use of quotations/improper use of quotations/failure to introduce quotations
- Incorrect use of past tense—use past tense for describing events that occurred in the past, but use present tense to discuss a historian or writing.
- Use of passive voice
- Other mechanical issues—vary word choice, use simpler sentence structures, never use first person or abbreviations, avoid the use of metaphors
**Historiographic Essay**

**What is a Historiographic Essay?** All scholars build on the work of those who have come before them. Historians are no exception. If you look at review articles in professional historical journals, the introductory chapters of history books you will find comprehensive overviews of the prevalent debates on a given topic. Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris define "historiography" as "the study of the way history has been and is written--the history of historical writing... When you study 'historiography' you do not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians." Thus, a historiographical essay is one which summarizes and analyzes the arguments and interpretations of writers on a given topic.

What distinguishes a historiography paper from a regular research paper? The former critically examines scholarly works on a given topic, historical period, or event. It may also critique the works of a specific historian or a specific "school" of historiography. A traditional "content" research paper focuses on an actual historical event, process, or question. We refer to the scholarship (secondary sources) written about an event, process, or historical question as historiography. You examine the debates, questions, and positions relating to interpretations of past events. You refer to specific events themselves only in relation to an author's interpretation of those events. Again, the study and criticism of existing interpretations of past events is "historiography."

**Historiographic Essay Instructions:** Historiography could be described as "the history of how history gets written." You will be analyzing the historiography of the topic you have chosen. This will require that you have completed reading all of your secondary sources, so that you can compare and contrast what each historian has written about your topic. The class writing assignments are intended to facilitate the writing of the historiographical essay.

1. As you complete the historiography assignments for your particular topic, you should be thinking about these questions:
   a. Who are the major historians for your topic?
   b. How can these historians be organized into schools of approach or methodology?
   c. How has the historiography of your topic evolved over time?
   d. How have the major developments in historiography (such as the Annales school, postmodernism, the new historicism, Marxism, feminism, etc.) had on your topic?
   e. How have they caused historians to ask new questions or take their research in new directions?

2. Read: “Exploring Changing Interpretations: The Historiographic Essay,” in *Going to the Sources*

3. Analyze the secondary sources that you have read. Consider the following questions:
   a. What point is the author trying to make in this article or essay?
      i. What is he/she trying to contribute to our understanding of the past?
   b. What new idea or interpretation is the author trying to support or develop?
      i. How does his/her interpretation compare with those of other historians?
   c. How has the author and the study or interpretation of this particular topic been influenced by some of the developments in historical study that have taken place in the twentieth century?
      i. For example, how have the approaches offered by the Annales school, Postmodernism, Comparative history, Psycho-History, "Cross fertilization" from other disciplines?
   d. How have the interpretations of the topic changed over place and time? Why?
e. Compare the way the authors approach their material.
   i. How do they use evidence?
   ii. What kinds of arguments do they make?
   iii. What motivated their interpretations?
   iv. What kinds of evidence most impress them?

f. Identify any social, economic, political and technological factors that influenced the historians.

g. In what ways are their approaches to history similar?
   i. In what ways, and why, do they diverge most significantly?

4. Don’t Forget the historiographic essay focuses on scholarship, interpretations, or points of debate and consensus concerning the analysis of an historical topic or event.
   a. A historiographic essay is a piece of discursive prose, not a list describing or summarizing one piece of literature after another. It is usually a bad sign to see every paragraph beginning with the name of a researcher. Instead, organize the historiographic essay into sections that present themes or identify trends, including relevant theory. You are not trying to list all the material published, but to synthesize and evaluate it according to the guiding concept of your thesis or research question.

5. If carefully done, a revised and improved version of this essay might be usable as a portion of your paper for the Research Seminar.

Paper Requirements:

1. Logically organized, well written, grammatical, active-voice prose.
   a. You must review treatment in general works on the broader period you are studying, as well as in sources more directly related to the specific topic.
   b. The essay must outline past and current historical interpretations advanced about the topic.
   c. In order to trace historiography adequately, you will need to analyze approximately 18 to 24 secondary sources.
      i. The list should include works covering the general field in which you are working, as well as sources specifically addressing your more narrow historical topic.

2. Length: The paper should be 6-8 pages in length (no more, no less) not including notes and bibliography or cover page, double-spaced, one inch margins, and written in a font that allows approximately 250 words per page, page numbers.

3. Title: Your paper should have a title and a cover page that provides the title as well as your name, class, etc. (you don’t need fancy folders, a staple will do)

4. Number of sources: Somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 secondary sources should prove adequate for writing a thoughtful, well-argued historiographic essay. You must make reference in the text to at least 10 of the scholarly sources—this does NOT include any references you may make to dictionaries, encyclopedias, news magazines, other unscholarly sources, or book reviews. You MUST refer to at least five scholarly journal articles in the essay; you MUST refer to at least five scholarly monographs in the essay.
   a. You may not organize your paper article-by-article or book-by-book.
   b. Do not treat each source in isolation.
   c. Each section of the paper should refer to several different sources.

5. Documentation: This paper must be meticulously footnoted (or endnoted). You must foot/endnote using the Chicago Manual of Style rules, which are contained in Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Revised by John Grossman
and Alice Bennett (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996)—by now this style should be so familiar to you that you can do it in your sleep.

a. Footnotes or endnotes—either one is fine, I have no preference

b. Bibliography

Some online undergraduate historiographic essays you might want to look at:
http://userpages.wittenberg.edu/alivingstone/411/carrollhistoriography.html
http://userpages.wittenberg.edu/alivingstone/411/cusickhistoriography.html
http://userpages.wittenberg.edu/alivingstone/411/olesonhistoriography.html