

A HISTORY STUDENT'S GUIDE TO GOOD ACADEMIC CONDUCT, ESSAY WRITING AND REFERENCING

Every essay must be written in your own words, with any quotations clearly indicated.

Writing an essay is a way of conveying your opinions about a particular issue to your reader. Your opinions will have been informed by those of other historians, but you should aim to paraphrase your sources rather than repeating them word-for-word. This shows your readers that you have understood and processed everything that you have read.

From time to time, it may be appropriate to quote the exact wording of your sources. You should only do this:

- a) if you want to highlight a specific detail from a source;
- b) if another historian has expressed a particular idea in an especially interesting or useful way.

In both cases, the quotation needs to be enclosed in double quotation marks (" . . . "), to distinguish it clearly from those parts which you have expressed in your own words. Quotations of more than 40 words should also be indented. Both kinds of quotation are shown in the example below:

Attempts to reconstruct Aztec religious practice depend in large part on the information contained in Bernardino de Sahagún's *Universal History of the Things of New Spain*. This text has been prized for its rich depictions of elaborate ritual events, apparently described in all their detail and complexity:

"After having torn their hearts from them and poured the blood into a gourd vessel, which the master of the slain man himself received, [the priests] started the body rolling down the pyramid steps. It came to rest upon a small square below. There some old men, whom they called Quaquacuiltin, laid hold of it and carried it to their tribal temple, where they dismembered it and divided it up in order to eat it."¹

Such accounts cannot, however, be accepted uncritically. One difficulty, observed by Inga Clendinnen, is that the scribes who recopied Sahagún's text had "little respect for a far-away world in ruins before they were born".² They regularly allowed their own expectations and prejudices to intrude upon Sahagún's account of Aztec culture.

¹ Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, ed. and trans., *Florentine Codex*, 12 vols. (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1952–82), 3:3.

² Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 395.

Whenever you use something that you have found in someone else's work, you must provide a full reference to the source which you used.

Regardless of whether you are paraphrasing something that you have read, or quoting it directly, you must also provide a reference to show the reader where you got your information. We do this in order to leave a 'paper trail' that readers (and examiners) can use to get back to the original source.

The place to put these references is in a footnote, which should be keyed in to the appropriate sentence in your essay, as shown in the following example:

According to Ian Wood, the kings of Francia may have enjoyed brief periods of overlordship in southern Britain.¹ If so, then this would show that medieval rulers had aspirations beyond their own borders. Some recent historians have, however, remained unconvinced by Wood's argument.²

¹ Ian N. Wood, *The Merovingian North Sea* (Alingsås: Viktoria, 1983), 12–18.

² Daniel G. Russo, *Town Origins and Development in Early England, c.400–950 AD* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 170; Roger Collins and Judith McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow: three viewpoints on Augustine's mission,' in *Cross, Crescent and Conversion*, ed. Simon Barton and Peter Linehan (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 33–6.

In this example, the first and third sentences are paraphrasing the ideas of other people, and so have been supplied with footnotes. The second sentence has no footnote, which shows that the opinion contained within it is the author's own interpretation.

Both references in the example have been keyed in to the text with a superscript number placed after the full stop. The reference itself goes at the bottom of the page, identified by a matching number and printed in a smaller type. Your word processor probably has an 'Insert Footnote' button which will do these things automatically.

Sometimes it is appropriate to cite more than one source in support of the same point. In the example above, the second footnote makes reference to two separate sources in a single footnote. They have been listed in chronological order (oldest first), and both has been supplied with its full bibliographic information.

If you need to refer back to a source that you have already referenced in full, you can use a short title to save words.

After you have given your reader the full reference to a particular source, you do not need to waste words by repeating the same information every time. All that you need to provide now to identify the work is the author's surname and a short title, together with the specific page(s) which you used.

If you were citing the following pieces of scholarship, you would give the reader their full details when you make your first reference to them...

Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 81.

Ann Waswo, 'The transformation of rural society, 1900–1950,' in *The Cambridge History of Japan. Volume 6: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Duus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 604.

Nicholas Guyatt, 'America's conservatory: race, reconstruction and the Santo Domingo debate,' *Journal of American History* 97 (2011), 978–9.

...after which, you would simply identify them by short titles like those below if you used them in any subsequent footnotes:

Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 109.

Waswo, 'Transformation,' 555–6.

Guyatt, 'America's conservatory,' 981.

All references should refer accurately and honestly to the specific source which you used.

Sometimes you will wish to make use of information which you have obtained at second hand. This might be through one historian's summary of another's work, or through a lecture handout containing a useful extract from a source that you have not otherwise read.

Second-hand information of this kind is perfectly acceptable, as long as it is accurately and honestly acknowledged in your footnotes. The following examples show some of the ways that you can indicate this to your reader:

Extracts from the trial of Joan of Arc (1431); quoted in course handout.

Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Stanford, 1983); summarized in Susan L. Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 60.

Nelson Mandela, letter to Winnie Madikizela (1969); reproduced in Matt Liddy, 'Nelson Mandela: 12 letters from the desk of a freedom fighter' (2013), <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-06/nelson-mandela-letters/2900788>> [accessed 24 August 2016].

Citing websites

The third of the examples above cites a document from a website. Although external websites should not constitute the bulk of your reading, there is absolutely no problem in using them when they are genuinely appropriate.

In order to assess an electronic source, you need to identify its origin. Are you reading a scan of an article that was previously published in a physical format, or an ebook which you have found through the library? If so, then you can simply handle it as if it were a physical article or book, and cite it like the examples in the previous pages.

If instead you are reading a third-party website, then you need to take extra care and provide more information for your examiner. Any references to such websites need to be provided with their exact URL address, and a note of the date at which you accessed that site (in case the site is updated in future). Ideally, you should also provide the name of their author(s) and their date of publication. You should cite these in the manner shown above. If a website does not provide such information, it can often be a sign that you should treat its contents with caution.

Failing to give an accurate and honest account of your sources, or failing to provide a reference for information which you have taken from elsewhere, are examples of plagiarism.

By following the steps above, you will be able to show the examiners that you can distinguish your own ideas from those of others, and that you can accurately document all the sources which helped you produce the essay.

Essays which do not accurately cite their sources will be guilty of plagiarism – that is, they will have passed off the work of others as their own. This is a form of dishonesty that runs counter to the principles of academic study, and is therefore taken very seriously by the University. This is true regardless of whether or not there was any deliberate intention to cheat. Unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism, and all suspected cases will be reported to the School Academic Conduct Officer, and may be investigated by the College Academic Misconduct Officer. Plagiarised work may lead to a heavy deduction of marks, or result in the essay being given a mark of zero.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- copying the exact wording of sentences without marking them as quotations;
- paraphrasing someone else's work without referring to the source of that material in a footnote;
- closely following the stages of another person's argument without also offering original opinions of your own;
- using another person's material without acknowledging it (regardless of whether or not that person gave permission for re-use);
- letting another person write all or part of your essay for you;
- buying or being allowed to copy another person's essay, whether in whole or in part.

Self-plagiarism is still plagiarism.

Students should also be aware that the University also considers self-plagiarism to be a form of academic misconduct. If you have already submitted a piece of work for assessment, you cannot submit it again, nor copy any section of it into a new piece of coursework. Every student who submits a piece of work signs a declaration to that effect, and is expected to hold to this rule. If you are concerned about potential overlap between different pieces of coursework, then this is something which you should discuss with your tutor or supervisor at the earliest opportunity.

Accurate note-taking and citation is essential for avoiding plagiarism.

You must ensure that you take full and accurate notes when conducting research for your essays. Make sure that you know whether you have copied down someone else's words, or whether you have paraphrased them in your own words. Whenever you make a note of anything you find in a book or article, make sure that you have also kept a record of exactly where that information came from (which book or article? who wrote it? which page?).

You may also find it useful to consult the EUSA student guide on how to avoid plagiarism, which is available online:

https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/support_and_advice/the_advice_place/academic/citeright/