

# Tips on Writing History Papers

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1. Place a period or comma before, not after, the closing quotation mark; but keep footnote no. outside of the quote:  
Wrong: “This is the wrong way to place the closing quotation mark and the period or comma”<sup>1</sup>.  
Right: “This is the right way.”<sup>1</sup>
2. Page Numbers: Be sure to insert page numbers for every page of your paper, except for p. 1 if you use cover sheet.
3. Make sure that you distinguish between these words:  
knew vs. new    know vs. now    there vs. their    where vs. were  
it’s (“It’s a great paper.”) vs. its (“Its page numbers are missing.”)  
to (“To write is to re-write.”) vs. too (“You can never have too many revisions.”)
4. Make sure that you *italicize* book or journal/magazine titles (*Time*); put “article titles” in quotes.
5. Use subsection headings (bold, centered) if the paper is five pages or longer.
6. History students generally should learn to use footnotes. But in some cases you can use in-text citations, for example, in exam essays. Use the following style for in-text citations in combination with a bibliography: “There is, quite simply, no such thing as a ‘definitive’ treatment of any topic.” (Brundage, 55)
7. Plagiarism: Avoid copying other authors’ words or ideas without citations; avoid long quotes.
8. In general, use quotes from your primary sources (such as letters and newspaper articles) but paraphrase ideas from secondary sources (scholarly books and articles) and provide corresponding citations. It’s often desirable to have a paragraph or more of historiographical discussion (what arguments other scholars have made on your topic) and how your own thesis statement agrees or disagrees with the existing views within the first page or two of the paper.
9. Follow a chronological order in your narrative; it’s easier for you to handle and for the reader to follow.
10. Try to write a topical sentence at the beginning of each paragraph and make sure that they flow well from one to the other.
11. For most history papers you should be able to use both primary sources (published or unpublished correspondence, government records, newspaper and magazine articles, oral history interviews) and secondary works by other scholars. The JStor database and [www.historycooperative.org](http://www.historycooperative.org) are perhaps the best sources to find scholarly articles on history topics. Avoid using only one source for long sections of your paper.
12. How to write essay exams: Be sure to address all aspects of the examination question. You can usually give a direct answer to the question in the first paragraph or two, then develop your argument in the body of the essay by providing examples, quotations, or other types of evidence for each period or for each group of people you cover. Be sure to relate all your specific pieces of evidence to your main argument as articulated in the first paragraph. You should then briefly summarize your argument in the last paragraph and can usually conclude the essay by offering

some personal reflections on what you have learned and what's been most striking to you in studying this topic.

13. If you have any questions regarding the writing process, discuss them with your instructor.