University of Basel

Department of History

History: A Toolkit for Students

Departement Geschichte | Department of History

PDF-Version of the texts:

Academic Skills

Practical Knowledge

The History Toolkit is provided by the Assistants of the Department of History. It is a thoroughly revised online version of the 2010 study guide by Almut Höfert, Anja Rathmann-Lutz and Christiane Sibille. Beat Stüdli and Benjamin Hitz are responsible for the current version (from 2016). The English translation was done by Patrick Grogan.

Quote: Hitz, Benjamin; Stüdli Beat, Werkzeugkasten Geschichte, Basel 2016 (transl. Patrick Grogan), <https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/en/studium/history-a-toolkit-for-students>.

Table of Contents

Academic Skills

In history, an academic assignment engages with a historical question on the basis of historical sources and specialist academic literature. Fundamental to any work of academic research is the principle of verifiability, according to which you as the author must cite the origin of each piece of information which you provide as well as all the sources on which your argument is based. Writing an academic text thus always involves a wide-ranging search for sources and secondary literature as well as subsequent analyses of the literature and sources which you have consulted. Each academic assignment – whether in the form of a written (Pro)Seminar paper or an oral-visual presentation – must observe the general conventions of the discipline as well as any specific lecturer's instructions.

This section on "Academic Skills" provides an overview of the most important phases and methods of historical research. It follows the basic sequence for working on a research assignment. In practice, however, the historical research process is often circular rather than linear: you may need to adapt your research question retrospectively or return to certain sections of your text after conducting additional research and/or analysis.

Further Reading on Academic Skills

For a current list of further literature on the subject, see here.

Formulating a Research Question

Whether for a Proseminar paper, a doctoral dissertation or a large-scale research project, the task of formulating a research question stands at the beginning of every academic assignment. A research question must be developed in relation to the existing research and the available source material and should be modified throughout the research and writing process.

What to Consider When Formulating a Research Question

A historical research question is formulated on the basis of the existing research and an appropriate academic approach and is answered by consulting a range of relevant sources. Developing a pertinent research question along these lines is a demanding task which must be constantly practiced over the course of your degree. Finding appropriate sources represents a particular challenge; the most interesting of research questions is of little value when you can find no relevant sources to answer it. You should thus make an effort to find pertinent sources from as early a stage as possible; one option is to look for references to stimulating sources among your seminar notes or reading lists. A research question can also be developed by testing arguments or research methods from your secondary reading on source material which has seldom been examined before or which you can easily access. This will mean that you will not have to formulate a new research question from scratch.

Bear in mind the following key factors when formulating a research question:

The Existing Research and Appropriate Academic Approaches

A research question is developed on the basis of the available research literature. For example, ask yourself: “Which findings have been made and which debates have taken place in relation to my research topic? Which aspects and viewpoints have been overlooked in the process? In relation to which points, if at all, are existing arguments unconvincing?” Historical research can be understood as an ongoing debate: by deciding on a research question, historians select the debates in which they would like to participate and the kind of contributions which they would like to make to these.

Available Sources

Sources lay the foundations for every historical insight. They make the investigation of concrete questions possible, but they also set the limits of what can be researched: a topic for which no relevant sources exist cannot be pursued. On the other hand, very large or overly complex source collections can also complicate research.

A Model Research Question

The following template illustrates how a research question can be formulated on the basis of the existing research, the available sources and an appropriate academic approach:

In research on phenomenon AB, CD’s views have long been regarded as definitive. Recently, however, CD’s argument has come under increasing criticism, especially from EF, who places more emphasis on GH. By examining source material IJ and by following approach KL, I would like to investigate whether

more recently devised methods can lead to a more conclusive explanation than that offered by CD. In doing so, I rely primarily on the following literature: MN

The Development of a Research Question as a Circular Process

A research question is generally developed in a circular process. An initial idea or the selection of a topic or object of research steers your investigation in a particular direction. After working your way through the introductory literature (typically in the form of encyclopaedia and handbook articles) and assessing potential sources, you will then be in a position to formulate a preliminary research question. This will shape your subsequent research and help you to evaluate which literature is and is not relevant.

You should refine your research question as your research progresses. As such, your literature research, literature analysis, source research and source analysis will all be engaged in a constant exchange with your research question. While the latter steers your research in a particular direction, it will also be influenced by the results of your research. For example, it can often be the case that key aspects relating to your topic only become apparent after you have already formulated your research question. It can also become clear during your research that a lack of relevant sources may leave certain questions unanswerable.

This back-and-forth between formulating a research question and conducting research can continue indefinitely, since each new answer to one aspect of your research question throws up new questions of its own. It is therefore important that you draw boundaries around every piece of research which you conduct and that these are made clear to your readers, for example in your introduction. These boundaries can relate to your topic itself (which aspects can be investigated, which must be overlooked?), the time period under investigation, and/or the secondary literature to be consulted. Important to consider here is how much time you have to complete your study.

A useful technique when working on a research question can be to maintain a written list of important themes which emerge from your literature and source research. These can take the form of findings, suppositions and/or open questions recorded as a series of claims to be subjected to more stringent subsequent analysis. This intermediate step can help to ease the transition from research to writing.

Narrowing Down Your Research Question

Narrowing down your research question marks a crucial step towards writing a successful academic paper; a research question which is too broad can cause you to become lost in a sea of literature and sources. A (Pro)Seminar paper is always focused on a narrow research question. A handbook article, in contrast, primarily seeks to provide broad background knowledge (e.g. “England in the Late Middle Ages”). In practice, a research question can never actually be too narrowly defined and should, as a rule, be spatially, temporally and thematically circumscribed. This means that a research question should focus on a particular topic as it relates to a specific time period and/or geographical area, as is often indicated in a study’s (sub-)title.

Examples:

- “The wave of strikes in the Basel chemical industry in the immediate post-war period.”
- “Which similarities and differences were there between communist movements in Switzerland and those in other countries at the end of the Second World War?”

- "How does the conception of an 'Industrial Revolution' change in relation to sources from rural parts of the German-speaking world?"

Characteristics of a Good Research Question

A good research question fulfils several of the following criteria:

- It awakes the author's interest.
- It is relevant to the topic under investigation.
- It aims to distinguish itself from or refute the results of previous research (e.g. "previous studies argue that…, in contrast this study posits that…"). Alternatively, it seeks to establish a link between topics or debates which have hitherto been seen in isolation from one another, or it attempts to fill a gap in the existing research.
- It includes a claim which can be debated or discussed.
- It allows a conclusion to be drawn.
- It is written in the form of a question or an assertion.
- It comprises a main question (and related sub-questions)
- It is precisely formulated.
- It is stated succinctly (in approximately 10 lines or fewer).
- It connects with related topics and contexts and opens up further points of discussion.

Literature Research

The ability to conduct literature research is one of the most demanding skills required during a history degree. The challenge is to identify precisely those fifteen to twenty key books and articles which represent the most relevant and up-to-date knowledge on your topic from within library collections and databases which can contain several million books and journals. Strategies for achieving this can be roughly divided into systematic and unsystematic forms of literature research. The quality of your assignment, especially in the case of Proseminar papers, rests to a large degree on whether you can find relevant literature.

Online Literature Research

Literature research requires you to make use of specific search aids, most of which are available online. Always keep in mind, however, that you should never search for academic literature using ordinary online search engines, no matter how justifiable and useful it can be to use websites such as Google and Wikipedia in everyday life. Although surfing the internet can stimulate new ideas and, in some circumstances, even provide useful literature references, it cannot lay a solid foundation for academic engagement with a historical topic. Unsystematic and/or systematic literature research represent the only reliable means of locating relevant academic literature.

Unsystematic Literature Research

Unsystematic literature research entails using the literature reference lists of a selection of well-known and recently published works (e.g. books from the library, publications on your seminar reading list or recommended by your lecturer or fellow students) as a starting point for identifying further relevant literature. The references provided by each extra publication which you consult can then be used to locate additional literature.

Unsystematic literature research – also known as literature research by the snowball principle – is usually a quick method of compiling a bibliography. It does, however, have its own shortcomings. First, it allows the work of other researchers to dictate your own literature list, thereby not only opening the door to chance but also to the risk that you may overlook important publications which they have ignored. Second, there is a particular danger that you may neglect more recent works, especially when you are using older literature as your initial bibliographic point of departure.

Other useful starting points for unsystematic literature research include:

- Library catalogues
- Recent articles or monographs with extensive literature reference lists

Systematic Literature Research

Systematic literature research involves compiling a bibliography with the help of carefully selected bibliographic aids which are relevant to your topic. By identifying and working your way through these resources, you should be able to draw up a detailed bibliography covering the most important literature.

The most critical step when conducting a systematic search for literature is to decide on which bibliographic aids to consult. Because no bibliography ever contains a complete list of all literature relating to a given

topic, it is essential that you make use of a number of different resources. Besides bibliographic databases and library catalogues, selected academic journals can also serve as useful bibliographic aids.

When you employ an unsystematic approach to literature research, you follow in the footsteps of previous publications. When you approach your literature research systematically, however, you take control of your own research. Rather than making yourself dependent on the literature lists of other researchers, who may have overlooked or wilfully ignored key publications, you thus grant yourself the freedom to compile your own selection of literature.

Bibliographic Aids

Library Catalogues

A library catalogue only contains books which are physically present in or accessible through the same library; books which a library (or, where applicable, its partner institutions) has not acquired are thus absent from its catalogue. Extra online services, such as access to digital texts, have expanded the offerings of most catalogues. Often these additional services are only available if you access the catalogue via the university network (or via a VPN from your private computer). However, even catalogues with advanced search functions are still incomplete. Library catalogue searches thus represent only one component of a successful literature research strategy and should be supplemented with other search methods. This applies especially if you are searching for articles in academic journals and edited collections.

A basic search in the main search field, as many library catalogues allow, typically yields far too many results. Most catalogues provide the option of restricting or filtering search results via the so-called faceted search function. An advanced search using other search fields, especially the headword field, can yield better results than a basic search. Every catalogue has its own range of options for advanced searches. Literature research via online catalogues requires practice, especially as headword searches come with their own vagaries. For example, headwords are not always allocated in a consistent manner by different subject experts at the same library, while headword classification systems are liable to change. As a result, you should experiment with various headwords and headword combinations, including alternative spellings. When searching for the title of a book or article, you should also search for alternative versions in other languages. It can also be helpful to look up which headwords are used for the publications which you have already consulted and to conduct further searches with these. The Basel University Library (commonly known by its German abbreviation as the “UB”) maintains a very well-stocked collection: if you cannot find any literature on a particular topic, it is worth asking the library staff whether there really is a gap in the library’s collections, or whether you have merely used the wrong headwords in your search.

Bibliographies

Unlike library catalogues, bibliographies are not linked to a specific collection. Bibliographies attempt to provide a complete list of relevant literature for a particular subject area. This task, of course, can never be fully realised, but a quick glance through a few bibliographies still illustrates how comprehensive their coverage can be. If a specialist bibliography is available for your topic, it is always worthwhile using this as a starting point for your literature research. However, as a bibliography does take some time to compile, very recent publications are often not included in even the most up-to-date bibliography. The annual editions of the Bibliography on Swiss History, for example, are usually released some three to four years after the actual year under review.

Journal Repositories and Specialist Portals

Searching in a journal repository (e.g. JSTOR) or on a specialist portal can yield many useful results. However, it is often unclear according to which criteria these platforms select journals and other publications for inclusion in their databases. Legal rather than academic considerations frequently determine which digitised or genuinely digital texts are held in a repository. Moreover, as with library catalogues, the problem of obtaining too many search results is especially common when making use of journal repositories with a full-text search option.

Search Aids and Methods

There are various ways of finding the same publication. (See the section on research resources for an overview of bibliographic aids.) A book, for example, can be found via a title or headword search in a library catalogue or by making use of the abstract, title or headword search functions in a bibliographic database. An academic journal article can be located by searching in a bibliography of journals, via a full-text search in a journal repository, or in a bibliographic database.

Whereas bibliographies were generally published in print or as index card catalogues up until the 1990s, bibliographic research is conducted almost exclusively on computers today. Because computer searches are very similar in appearance across a range of different search aids and options – typing a search term into a search box yields a list of results – it is important to give careful consideration to the various types of bibliographic data which can be obtained via different search functions. These can be classified according to the following criteria:

By Collection

Which collections are being searched? The catalogue of a small library will yield fewer results than a general bibliography or a meta-catalogue covering multiple large collections. It is always worthwhile casting an eye over which collections are covered by a catalogue or database, especially in the case of bibliographies and journal repositories.

By Text Type

Which types of texts can you expect a catalogue or database to find? Books, journal articles, reviews and/or various other text types? Details of the individual articles in an edited collection are usually not included in a library catalogue.

By Search Criteria

Which elements of a text are being searched? Titles, headwords, abstracts or the whole text itself? A full-text search usually yields more (but less precise) results than a title or headword search. Some specialist history databases provide the option of filtering search results by the historical period under investigation (e.g. the Historical Abstracts database).

How Up to Date are These Literature References?

It usually takes a certain period of time after a text has been published for it to be included in a library catalogue. Libraries do not receive brand new publications immediately after their release. As such, very

recent works are not included in library catalogues, although they are sometimes listed as being "on order". Bibliographies, especially those such as the Bibliography on Swiss History which cover a particular reporting period, lag even further behind. Reviews, meanwhile, take time to compile and are published months or even years after the text which they critique. It is not serious if you overlook a recently published book for a Proseminar paper; indeed, students are not expected to buy secondary literature for the purposes of a Proseminar paper. Recently published articles and reviews, however, should still be taken into account to a certain extent. You should therefore consult the most recent editions (i.e. those published in the last three or four years) of academic journals which you believe could contain articles or reviews pertaining to your topic. The current edition of a wide variety of journals is always available in unbound form in the respective reading rooms at the History Department library and at the UB. Many German-language journals also publish their tables of contents on the H-Soz-Kult website.

General Information on Literature Research for a Written Paper

It makes no sense to spend four weeks conducting systematic literature research for a Proseminar paper before you begin actually reading the texts which you have found. Keep in mind the following basic rule: the longer your research assignment is and the more time you have available to complete it, the more systematic your literature research should be.

Unsystematic literature research thus forms the standard approach for students writing a Proseminar paper, but even here this strategy should be supplemented with some systematic elements. This will allow you to compile a more autonomous literature list and thus to approach your topic from a more independent perspective. The systematic elements of literature research are more important when it comes to writing a master's thesis – a good reason to practice these when writing a Proseminar paper! Above all, always consult a range of different bibliographic resources, as no single bibliography can ever provide a complete list of literature.

You can only conduct literature research when you already know something about the topic which you are researching. This also means that you will need to carry out further literature research as you work your way through the different stages of the research and writing process and your knowledge of your topic becomes more advanced. As you begin your research, first familiarise yourself with the relevant introductory knowledge. This will put you in a position to compile an initial reading list with which you can work your way deeper into your topic. After you have read these texts, a further round of literature research should follow during which you should compile a more comprehensive literature list (i.e. the works which you will read during your main reading phase). Once you have moved on to the writing stage, new questions may arise which could require you to conduct further phases of targeted literature research.

In order to carry out your literature research in the most confident, efficient and time-effective manner, you need to have a feel for the most important specialist encyclopaedias, handbooks, academic journals, bibliographies and other research resources. The introductory literature in the handbook section of the History Department library (call number section HB 6) includes numerous useful guides to literature research and other key skills of the discipline.

Literature research also involves making a decision about which literature to consult and which references and search results to ignore. In this regard, it helps to have a precisely defined research topic. Also helpful is to keep a regularly updated list of relevant-sounding texts which you have already deemed unnecessary to read.

The Literature Research Process for a Written Paper

Literature research for a (Pro)Seminar paper should ideally adhere to the following sequence:

1. Acquire an initial overview of your topic

- Consult encyclopaedias, handbooks and specialist historical dictionaries (e.g. Encyclopedia of the Medieval World, The Cambridge History of South Africa, The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History)
- Go through any relevant readings which are already available without a search, e.g. texts on your seminar reading list or which you have already consulted in preparation for a presentation, reading recommendations from your lecturer, etc.

These initial readings should provide you with a list of key topics, headwords and authors which you can use as a point of departure for subsequent searches.

2. First phase of literature research

Search for literature in:

- 1-2 library catalogues
- 5-6 academic journals (consult recent editions from the last 3 to 4 years; begin by studying the current edition online or in the History Department library or UB reading rooms)
- 2-3 bibliographies or bibliographic databases (e.g. International Bibliography of Periodical Literature, Historical Abstracts)
- 1-2 full-text journal repositories

3. Second phase of literature research

After working your way through your initial reading list, your next step should be to compile a more comprehensive list of literature. (This can also be done during your initial reading using the snowball method.) Your introductory reading should have furnished you with a list of additional topics for which you can now conduct a targeted literature search. More journals and bibliographies can be added to your list of bibliographic aids as you come across them. Further literature research may also be required during the writing phase as and when any specific questions or issues arise.

Analogue and Digital Resources

Although most bibliographic aids – and even much secondary literature itself – can now be accessed digitally, the basics of literature research have not changed: academic texts continue to be published in a variety of forms, and there remains no single location where all texts can be found. Online bibliographies and bibliographic databases, however, have negated the effects of physical distance. As a result, paths into the tangle of research literature which were previously subject to a variety of limitations are now accessible almost at will. This places its own new demands on researchers: it may sound trivial, but the huge range of literature which is now available can appear so vast and confusing that it is worthwhile paying attention to where a library book or journal actually comes from. In a previous era, conducting literature research for an assignment would have first required you to visit the UB, where you would have

looked up bibliographic references in the library's card catalogue or in the volumes of the International Bibliography of Periodical Literature (known by its German abbreviation as the IBZ), before ultimately obtaining a call number with which to locate a printed edition of a book or journal on the library's shelves. Today, none of these steps is necessary, and the entire ordering process can be completed online. Indeed, in some cases, whole publications are even available online. As such, the internet has sped up academic research and made it easier to conduct. There is, however, a disadvantage to these supposedly more efficient and standardised research methods in that you may find yourself asking in a confused tone: "What am I looking at now? A library catalogue, an online database, a digital article repository, or just some other website?"

Source Research

Every historical study is based on sources. It is often more challenging to find relevant sources than it is to identify relevant literature. Many studies rely on original sources which can only be consulted at an archive. Selected archival sources, however, have been published in source editions, while others have been reproduced in digital form (as scans or photographs) for inclusion in archival catalogues or on online databases. Moreover, published texts can be treated as sources, while you can also compile your own sources using the methods of oral history.

Searching for Sources for a Written Paper

For a Presenting Your ResultsProseminar paper, it is usually a good idea to rely on published sources (or on sources recommended or provided by your lecturer). Working with sources which have to be viewed at an archive is a demanding and time-consuming activity, not least because knowledge of palaeography is often required (i.e. you must be able to read old scripts). Archival research is certainly not necessary (albeit absolutely doable) for a Proseminar paper, for which sources in source editions as well as other more readily accessible sources such as digital copies are usually used. Archival research makes more sense for a Seminar paper or, in particular, for a master's thesis. Nevertheless, it is still a good idea to familiarise yourself with the demands of archival research from an early stage in your studies by attending one of the History Department's regular introductory Übungen (tutorial courses) on archival research.

The most important question to consider when searching for sources is what types of sources might be available which are relevant to your topic. It may sound obvious, but you need to be aware, for example, that you will not find any photographs from before the second half of the nineteenth century. Private medieval writings, meanwhile, are highly unlikely to have made the journey into modern public archives. Some knowledge about the political institutions which existed during the time period which you are studying can provide clues as to which records may be available in the archives. Indeed, with some contextual knowledge (and an awareness of which types of sources could be relevant for your research question), it is possible to gauge what types of sources you could find. The different kinds of sources tend to become more varied as the period which you are investigating becomes more recent. Alongside the aforementioned "conventional" sources found in archives and source editions, a diverse range of other types of documents and material objects can also serve as sources, including literature, artwork, films, posters, postcards, etc. These are often held in special collections (at archives or other institutions).

Searching for Archival Sources

Before you can begin your archival research, you need to make sure that you are at the correct archive. Knowledge about which archives are responsible for which types of collections can help you to assess where the most relevant records for your research may be held. Archival collections are typically indexed in an archival catalogue. Most (larger) archives boast their own online catalogues through which their collections can be searched. Smaller archives often have only a printed and/or card catalogue which must be consulted on site. Different online catalogues offer different search options. An archive plan search (displayed in the form of a fold-out tree diagram) offers a hierarchical overview of all collections held in an archive. Further search options include a full-text search as well as searches by various predefined fields (e.g. by call number or date of creation). The success of any search in an archival catalogue depends on how extensively the archive's collections have been indexed. Archives usually boast both very well-

catalogued collections (sometimes even listing the details of the individual documents within a collection) as well as collections which have been only very roughly catalogued (e.g. by archival container). Many archives possess older handwritten or printed (but not digitised) catalogues which offer a detailed overview of individual collections or collections relating to specific topics. Archival staff can provide you with information about these and other finding aids as well as general guidance on how well-catalogued their collections are. It is always a good idea to approach staff members with any specific questions.

Besides archival catalogues maintained by individual archives, there are also meta-catalogues. These allow you to search through the catalogues of multiple archives in a single search. The most important archival catalogues and meta-catalogues are listed in the section on research resources. In the course of ongoing efforts to digitise their collections, many archives have made their collections available in digital form. These digital copies can often be accessed via an integrated viewer within an online archival catalogue, thus potentially saving you an actual trip to the archives. Normally, however, you will need to order the records which you have found in an archival catalogue on site and/or view them in the archive's reading room. Most archives allow you to photograph their archival documents.

Searching for Published Sources

Since archival sources are often difficult to access (not least because they usually demand a visit to an archive), numerous source edition projects have been established with the aim of making sources more readily accessible to historians.

When is it worth your while to search for a source edition? You are more likely to find one for sources written by well-known authors, for frequently consulted collections, for widely read manuscripts, or for certain types of source (e.g. legal documents). As a general rule, the further back in time which you venture in your research, the more published sources you are likely to find.

Conventional source editions in book form can be found in libraries (and, as such, in library catalogues). Footnotes in relevant secondary literature are usually another good place to find references to source editions. It can also be useful to search through the registers of major source edition projects. For some time now, there has also been an effort to digitise older source editions and to publish new editions directly in digital form. Digital source editions are especially helpful because they allow for the option of a full-text search. Online source databases also give you the option of searching for (printed and digitised) source editions.

Searching for Digitised Image Sources

Because the digitisation of image sources has proven especially advantageous for researchers – who are thus spared the often onerous task of reproducing printed or original images – there are currently several large projects attempting to make extensive collections of images available via online databases. Many archives with large image collections have also been making an effort to make these collections accessible via their archival catalogues (or other search tools).

Examples of Large Image Databases:

- BM Archives. Visual and cartographic material from the Basel Mission Archives, 1550-2000.
- Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, 1860-1960. Photographs from the colonial period, East Africa.

- Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Institute for Realia of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age.
- Digitaler Portraitindex (Digital Portrait Index).
- Artstor.
- Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur. Based on the Marburg Picture Index. Access to approximately two million images relating to art and architecture.
- Das prometheus-Bildarchiv: High-quality images relating to art, culture and history.

Literature Analysis

Knowledge of the different forms which academic publications can take will help you to get to grips with the secondary literature which you need to consult for your research. Making systematic notes of key passages and compiling your own summaries also form part of an effective approach to literature analysis. Managing a well-ordered filing system or making use of a professional data management program, meanwhile, should ensure that you retain permanent access to your notes in future.

Academic Reading

Reading academic texts involves actively absorbing and processing knowledge, which in turn requires you to be able to relate any newly acquired information and insights to what you already know. Academic reading is thus a process which requires you to follow an organisational principle, namely to systematically place new and relevant knowledge (e.g. historical theories, concepts or facts) in its broader context. This can be achieved through conventional reading methods or by making use of special reading techniques. Conventional as well as special reading techniques should be continually trained and developed over the course of your degree.

Your academic reading should be guided by the questions which you ask of a text. Reading can be supplemented by note-taking strategies, such as making excerpt notes, compiling summaries or drawing visual aids (e.g. diagrams or mind maps), which can all help you to internalise new knowledge over the medium- to long-term.

Principles of Academic Reading

When you read an academic text, it is important to engage actively with what you are reading, rather than merely registering what it says. Active reading is a deliberate process which includes preparing for, reading and reviewing every text. It can be helpful to make use of visual aids (and/or their digital equivalents) during this process, such as underlining and/or highlighting key passages, adding marginal notes and symbols, and/or drawing graphs.

Academic reading should also aim for maximum efficiency, i.e. the effort which you put in and the results which you get out should be optimally balanced. Careful reading demands a lot of time, but it is necessary when engaging with a text which is both highly relevant to your research and very complex. When this is not the case, you can work your way through a text much more rapidly or even skim through it. In some circumstances, speedreading a text repeatedly can also be an efficient strategy.

Before reading a text, you should make a list of some key details: Is there any information on the author's area(s) of expertise and academic background? When was the text published? In what form was it published: as a monograph, in an edited collection or academic journal, or as part of an academic series? What type of text is it: an article, a chapter or an introduction? These details provide us with clues as to how we should situate a text within the relevant research debates and what we can expect from it.

As you read a text, you should ask yourself which parts are relevant, and which are not. Your answer here will depend to a large extent on your own perspectives as well as on the aims of your research. If you are only interested in part of a text, the rest of the text may well be irrelevant. This assumes, however, that the relevant passages remain comprehensible when read in isolation from the rest of the study.

When reviewing a reading, it is important to check whether the questions which you posed of the text have been answered, and whether your reading aims have generally been satisfied. Compiling a short summary is a good way to ensure that you have identified a text's key points. Finally, remember to transfer your summary and excerpt notes into the correct file or onto a data management program.

Special Reading Techniques

Developing your own reading techniques can help you to meet the diverse challenges of academic reading. You can also make use of other well-known special reading techniques. For example, the SQR3 method, which was devised by Francis P. Robinson in 1946, is described in many student handbooks:

The SQ3R Method

- S = Survey
- Q = Question
- R = Read
- R = Recap
- R = Review

Posing Questions of a Text

Thinking about the following questions while reading and reviewing a text will help you to capture its most important aspects.

Reading Objectives and Publication Details

- What do I want to learn from the text?
- Do publication date, publication form and text type match my expectations?
- Is the author's academic profile what I anticipated?

Argument and Structure

- Research Question: What is the author attempting to investigate and/or discover?
- Structure: How is the text structured? Does this tell me anything about the development of its argument? An academic argument is usually composed of a theory, an analysis and a conclusion.

Empirical and Theoretical Foundations

- What type of sources has the author consulted (see footnotes, list of sources)?
- To which fields of research does the secondary literature consulted by the author belong (see list of literature references)?
- Which theoretical and methodological approaches have been employed (see introductory paragraphs)?

Key Findings

- Is the author's argument plausible? Are there any alternative arguments?
- What are the text's most important findings? Are they plausible?

Excerpt Notes and Summaries

- If you want to engage closely with a text, it can sometimes be necessary to take detailed written notes; excerpt notes and summaries are particularly useful in this regard. There is simply not enough time, however, to do this for every reading. Instead, you must be able to assess whether a text corresponds to your research interests and/or contains relevant information. Even if you answer in the affirmative here, however, you still need to consider whether taking comprehensive written notes is an efficient means of realising your research objectives. If so, ensure that your notes remain permanently accessible in future by filing them away in the correct file or by uploading them onto a professional data management program.

Summaries

For purposes of efficiency, a summary should list only a study's most important points and features. These include its topic, research question, methodological approach, theoretical basis and academic context as well as its most important findings. Abstracts, which are commonly published in academic journals, provide a useful template for short summaries.

Excerpt Notes

Taking excerpt notes involves transcribing selected passages from a text or source which are most relevant to your research interests. As you will read a text in relation to specific questions or issues, your excerpt notes may differ starkly from those taken by other researchers on the same text. Excerpts should be ordered by page number (of the original text), which should also be recorded for referencing purposes. The structure of the original text should be reflected in your excerpt notes. Because excerpts are removed from their original context, it is important that you ensure that their meaning is not obfuscated in the process. Quotation marks must be used to distinguish direct quotations from passages which you have paraphrased.

There are different ways of compiling excerpt notes depending on how much you already know and/or need to learn about your topic or the issues raised in a particular text. These techniques include:

Detailed Excerpt Notes

A very detailed excerpt note serves as a comprehensive summary of a reading. It is useful to compile when you know little or nothing about the issues raised in a text, but still feel that these could be very relevant to your research. You should not only make use of this form of excerpt note at an early stage in your degree, but also when needed for subsequent, more complex assignments.

Argument Excerpt Notes

An argument excerpt note reproduces the structure of a reading so that you can critically follow the course of its argument. This type of excerpt note is required when engaging in in-depth textual criticism.

Text Notes

If you do not deem it necessary to record detailed excerpt notes for a reading, you can simply write a short note describing its most important content. Remember to also file away your text notes in the correct file.

What Should be Included in a Detailed Excerpt Note?

1. The reading's research question
2. Details of its structure
3. A description of the course of its argument as well as its key claims
4. Key concepts, terms and definitions
5. Details of relevant facts, occurrences, structures, persons, etc.
6. If necessary, add your own well-researched explanations of concepts, terms or facts which are not fully explained in the text
7. Any other additional comments and questions

Example of a Detailed Excerpt Note:

Christoph Auffarth: Die Ketzer : Katharer, Waldenser und andere religiöse Bewegungen [The Heretics : Cathars, Waldensians and Other Religious Movements], Munich 2005, Ch. 5: "Erlöschen oder Erwürgen : Das Ende der Katharer, die Waldenser und der Aufstieg der Bettelorden" [Expire or Strangle : The End of the Cathars, the Waldensians, and the Rise of the Mendicant Orders], pp. 84-108. Excerpt from page 84:

- Destruction of the Cathars
- The Cathars: largest medieval religious movement
- Both the Roman Catholic Church as the ruling power and Catharism as a religion in its own right with its own institutions succeeded in raising their respective profiles in their mutual conflict.
- Even though Catholicism (i.e. medieval, Roman Catholic-dominated Christianity) and Catharism could be classified as two separate Christian denominations, from the perspective of religious studies it is correct to classify them as two distinct "religions".
- Three stages of religious separation and differentiation: 1) At first Catharism represents catch-all phrase for anti-clerical reform movements; 2) Cathars then develop their own distinct rituals; 3) Catholics und Cathars now possess their own separate doctrines – Catholicism: emphasis on lessons from purgatory; Catharism: creation myth as battle between a good God and an evil God, mirroring the struggles of good men (boni homines) against evil Catholics. Only at this final stage do missionaries from the east also play a role.

See the linked example for a somewhat less detailed excerpt note (in German).

Literature Management

When you work on a historical topic, you will gather together a wide variety of readings, excerpts, copies of sources, notes, etc. It is important that you can easily access these documents, not only for the duration of your ongoing research, but also when you need to refer back to them at a later stage in your studies.

It is easy to lose track of all the texts which you have read over the course of your degree. Correctly filing away your notes and other documents is the most efficient way to keep track of all the work which you have done. This can help you, for example, to avoid rereading the same text unnecessarily. Maintaining a systematic filing system has become much easier now that most documents can be generated in a digital form. Digital filing systems currently come in two varieties: you can either create your own system of digital folders, or you can make use of a literature management program.

Customised Computer Filing Systems

Maintaining a personal digital filing system can make it easier for you to find your documents whenever you need to refer back to them. Establishing a digital filing system requires you to create a main folder for each project (e.g. for each (Pro)Seminar, lecture course or academic assignment). You should then create subfolders for different document types (secondary literature, sources, bibliographies, your own notes and draft writings, etc.) within each main folder. It is important to name your documents in a careful and consistent manner. After completing a project, you should transfer all associated files and (sub)folders into appropriately named master folders (e.g. “History Readings”, “Academic Assignments”, “Excerpt Notes”).

Literature Management Programs

Literature management programs help you to keep track of your research documents and can provide valuable support when you are writing an academic assignment. Although they can be difficult to use at first, they will save you time once you have grown accustomed to their individual features. They are particularly useful when it comes to capturing bibliographic data, searching for excerpt notes, adding references and compiling bibliographies.

A wide range of literature management programs is available. The University of Basel Library provides an overview of these on its website as well as details on related introductory courses. See infoclio.ch for detailed instructions in German on using the Zotero and Citavi programs. See the support pages on the Zotero and Citavi websites for instructions in English.

Literature management programs allow you to assign headwords to your notes and documents, enabling you to search for them in a more targeted manner. In contrast to a filing system, your documents can therefore also be stored within multiple groups, allowing you to access them via various pathways. By imposing their own structure, literature management programs also make it easier for you to file away your documents in the correct place.

Literature management programs also help you to create footnotes and compile bibliographies for your academic assignments by automatically importing bibliographic data from linked library catalogues every time you cite a new reference. A range of referencing styles is available, and these can easily be switched.

Source Analysis

Sources, i.e. records from and of the past, form the basis of historical research by providing historians with the evidence which enables them to make claims about the past. Since every source has a past of its own, historians must first examine the history of their sources (a process known as source criticism) before turning to source interpretation. Source criticism was originally developed in relation to written sources, but can also be adapted to other source types, such as image or audio sources.

Further Reading on Working with Sources:

For a current list of literature, see here.

Source Criticism

Source criticism, which represents a first analytic step in your engagement with a source, is an attempt to acquire the relevant background knowledge which you will ultimately need to assess a source's validity and its significance for your own research question. The key questions to consider here are: "Under which circumstances and with which intentions was the source created? Which information might it or might it not convey? Which leanings and biases is it likely to betray?" Only once these aspects have been considered can a source be made to "speak for itself".

Methods of source criticism are outlined in numerous introductory guides for history students, where they are occasionally also illustrated in diagram form. In this section, the recommended approach to source criticism is introduced via a series of example questions on various topics. Source criticism, of course, does not involve working your way through every question on this list one by one. Some questions may already be answered in the introduction, annotations or footnotes of a published source or source edition, while others may not be relevant to every source or research question. For example, the name of the clerk who transcribed a legal document is usually of limited historical significance, but contextual knowledge about the author of a diary is always imperative for its interpretation.

Source History

- Archival History: How has the source been handed down over time: as an original or as a transcription? Was it altered in any way in the process? In which archive(s) and collection(s) has it been held?
- Authenticity: Is the source genuine? A falsification is not without value; it can provide clues as to when and why the original was forged.

Source Context and Content Description

- Text Type: What type of text is it (official document, letter, chronicle, legal document, etc.)? Which function did or does it fulfil?
- External Characteristics: Out of which material is it made? Which format does it follow? Is it handwritten or printed?
- Authorship: Who wrote the source? What do we know about this (or these) person(s)? In which capacity did the author compose it? Was he/she an eyewitness or a contemporary witness?

Remember to distinguish between the author's "horizon" (what could he/she have known?) and his/her "standpoint" (what did he/she want to report?).

- Time and Place of Creation: When, where and under which circumstances was the source written? Undated sources can be roughly dated by formal criteria (e.g. handwriting, paper) and/or substantive criteria (e.g. references to historical events, etc.).
- Context: What role did the historical (social, political, economic) context in which the source was written play in its creation?
- Objectives and Intentions: Which practical objectives and intentions underlie the source? Which personal interests permeate it?
- Target Audience: To whom is the text addressed? What is known about this readership?
- Reception (cf. Source History): What do we know about the source's reception, impact, dissemination and treatment over time?

Language and Content

- Linguistic Features: Do you understand the source's content and language? If not, consult contemporary and/or specialist encyclopaedias and dictionaries.
- Which persons, institutions and circumstances are mentioned in the source? What is known about them? Biographical literature is especially useful for finding details about historical figures.
- Content (adhere as closely as possible to the text without interpreting it): What are the source's key claims (formulated in your own words)? How is the text structured? Which passages are particularly striking? Which sections are unclear?

Source Interpretation

After the source criticism stage, your next step is to interpret the source by relating it to your own research question. As such, the passages which are most relevant to your research should be subjected to particularly close analysis. Any background knowledge obtained during source criticism should serve as the basis for your analysis here: for example, you can expect that a chronicle written on behalf of a city government will attempt to portray the local authorities in the best possible light. Source criticism thus serves as an initial means of evaluating the historical accuracy of a claim and of situating a source in its historical context. For you to arrive at a sound interpretation of a source, however, it is important that you go on to compare it to other sources as well as to relevant secondary literature, taking care to identify any similarities and differences. Other texts can add to – or even explain – the claims made in a source; however, they can also shift the focus on to other aspects or refute its claims. Similarly, you should also use relevant source interpretations provided by other researchers in secondary literature to critically reflect upon and evaluate your own interpretations.

As a researcher, you will often find that your interest in a source does not correspond to its author's original intentions, as may very well have already become clear during the source criticism stage. As a result, it can sometimes be difficult to find answers to your specific questions. For example, trivial comments recorded in an interrogation protocol may be of more relevance to your research question than those statements which address the actual offence. As such, source interpretation represents a quest for hidden, implicit meaning.

To this end, it is important that you consider the following aspects:

- Key Concepts: What are the central concepts employed in the text?
- Language and Rhetoric: Use of tropes (metaphors, metonymies, etc.), figures of speech, symbolism, technical terms and expressions, etc.
- Patterns of Argument
- Gaps, Omissions and Rejections: What is not mentioned? What is refuted? Always bear in mind the following rule which applies to every text: "To write is to silence".

Working with Digitised Sources

In recent years, more and more sources have been made available in digital form. The result is that researchers now have access to more sources than ever before, with historians spending less time working in archives. Analysis of digitised sources, however, should not necessarily be approached any differently.

Nevertheless, digitisation does allow for new forms of source analysis which are no longer based on conventional hermeneutics. These often involve (statistical) analysis of large, digitally accessible text collections. These approaches all fall within the emerging field of "digital humanities".

Analytic approaches based on the methods of digital humanities include:

- Quantifying the use of certain words and concepts (word field analysis, semantic analysis, text mining). These approaches all form part of the already well-developed field of computational linguistics.
- Using georeferencing and cartographic representations to identify spatial patterns.
- Depicting relationships in the form of networks and subjecting these to statistical analyses (historical network analysis [HNA]).
- Simulating historical processes using mathematical models.

Many of these approaches are not completely new. However, digitalisation and the development of specialist software now make them much easier to carry out, thereby ensuring that they are available to a much wider research community.

Nonetheless, electronic sources – whether created in genuinely digital form or subsequently digitised – do come with their own drawbacks. Their instability presents a particular challenge for source criticism, since they can be altered at any time in ways which are barely detectable. A further danger is that the proliferation of digital sources may encourage researchers to neglect non-digitised sources, even if only because the latter are more difficult to access.

Image Sources

Written records are not the only sources which can be subjected to source criticism and source interpretation. Both techniques can also be applied in appropriately adapted forms to non-written sources such as images.

When describing an image, begin by specifying its type (painting, photograph, cartoon, etc.). Then identify its format as well as the technique used by its originator (for paintings: watercolour, oil etc.; for photographs: colour slide, daguerreotype, etc.). Also consider whether it is an original image or a reproduction (if so, what type?). You should also seek to find out more about the technical and economic conditions in which

it was produced as well as its subsequent history as a source. An approach developed by the art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), which distinguishes between pre-iconographic description, iconographic analysis and iconological interpretation, is helpful when describing the visual content of images.

Pre-iconographic description, which assumes a certain degree of general and practical knowledge on your part as the observer, focuses on how you perceive and identify the objects, figures and motifs in an image and the way in which these are expressed by the artist. Iconographic analysis, which aims to reveal deeper themes, ideas, motifs or allegories in an image, requires a profounder knowledge of similar works, motifs and styles. It examines the composition of an image (its foreground, background, centre, perspective, use of light and shadows, etc.), juxtaposing individual sections or elements in relation to each other and the image as a whole. Iconological interpretation attempts to relate the intended meaning or the content of an artwork to its historical context.

Example: Describing a Cartoon

Pre-Iconographic Description

A female figure is in the foreground. Her eyes closed, she is holding a broken scale. A large, domed building stands in the background, from the windows of which two women and five men look out, laughing.

Iconographic Analysis

The woman with the scale is Justitia (Lady Justice). The building in the background evokes the Federal Parliament in Bern; the seven-member Swiss Federal Council currently comprises two women and five men.

Iconological Interpretation

Justice in Switzerland has been damaged or even destroyed, but the Swiss government appears indifferent or at least has not let this dampen its mood. Some aspects remain unclear: Why is the scale broken? Is the government responsible for the pursuit of justice? Is the cartoon trying to say that the government is jeopardising the independence of the judiciary?

Further Reading:

For a current list of literature, see here.

Oral History

Oral history involves historians interviewing contemporary witnesses about their past experiences, thereby generating new sources. The benefit of this method is that interviewees can provide information which may not be available in any written documents. Moreover, a lot more is known about the context in which an oral history source is produced than is the case for most archival sources. (Indeed, this contextual knowledge must be taken into account when interpreting oral history sources!) The challenge of interpreting an oral history source lies less in the subjective nature of a contemporary witness's account – all testimony is subjective after all – than in the amount of time which may have passed between the oral report and the events which it purports to describe. Source criticism for oral history must thus also always engage with both individual and collective forms of memory. If, in addition to serving as a means of investigating memory processes, an oral history interview is also meant to clarify historical facts, it is

essential that you not only test the coherence and plausibility of your interviewee's statements but also compare them to the testimony of other contemporary witnesses and/or the claims of written texts.

Further Reading:

For a current list of literature, see here.

Writing Academic Texts

Even before you begin the actual writing phase, you should have a clear idea of the form which the end product of your research (e.g. a (Pro)Seminar paper) should take. Do not leave it too late before you start writing, as the writing process requires you once more to engage deeply with your topic. Plan the structure of your text and, if necessary, discuss this with your lecturer before you commence writing. Writing is a fundamental skill for any historian. Above all, your writing needs to be precise and well-reasoned, but there is no one set method which must be followed when writing a text. Personal preference is important: some writers choose to construct a paper in a strictly linear fashion, beginning with the introduction and ending with the conclusion; others prefer to complete the various sections of their paper in no particular order until they have a complete text. There are concrete instructions, however, which govern the way in which a written assignment is to be presented.

Writing, Language and Developing an Argument

Writing involves using language to record your thoughts in a permanent and logical form. This requires a set of skills which transcend the discipline of history. “Narrative competence” is an especially important skill for historians which should manifest itself in both your speech (e.g. in (Pro-)Seminar discussions) and written assignments. Numerous student handbooks have been composed on the topic of writing.

If your thoughts are muddled, this will be reflected in your writing – and vice versa. Only once your ideas have been expressed in precise language can they be objectively evaluated. Connections between different issues must be carefully explained, while terms and concepts – technical and nontechnical alike – should only be employed when you are fully aware of their meaning and how they differ from related expressions or ideas.

All in all, it is very important that you present a clear and well-reasoned argument in your writing. Different elements of your argument should be kept separate and remain clearly distinguishable. For example, it should be obvious whether a statement in your text pertains to background knowledge from the secondary literature or to empirical findings from your sources or whether it is an expression of your own judgement. You can become an expert in a historical topic by immersing yourself in it, but the ability to form independent and well-reasoned arguments and to reflect critically upon your claims is also required.

Writing as a Process

The more substantial your written assignment is, the earlier you should begin writing; writing requires you to engage in a deeper fashion with key themes, a process which may throw up new questions requiring further research within the limited timeframe available to you to complete your assignment. An introduction to a written paper can only take on its definitive form at the conclusion of the writing process, i.e. once it is has become absolutely clear what your findings are and how your argument is structured. The same applies to the structure of your text: certain paragraphs or sections which were included in your original research outline may no longer seem to fit once you have actually written them. If this is the case, it can be helpful to move around sections of text (usually individual paragraphs, but sometimes longer passages). Any resulting adjustments (adding connecting passages, eliminating contradictions and repetitions) are often less demanding than initially feared.

Writer's block is an affliction which can sometimes affect writers. This is relatively normal but should be tackled head-on as soon as possible. The self-help books on academic writing in the departmental library provide some useful tips to counter this condition. For example, rather than starting from the very beginning of your paper, it can help to start by writing another part of your text first. Alternatively, try at first to write freely without worrying about making any errors in language or argument, or try regularly switching the location where you work.

It can also be helpful to discuss your work and exchange experiences with your fellow students. Ideally, once you think your text is complete, you should ask someone to proofread it. As an author, you are typically too close to your writing to be able to spot a wide variety of mistakes – whether in the form of typographical errors, inconsistencies in language, or gaps or contradictions in your argument. The curiosity and critical eye of a neutral reader can help you to identify these errors.

Structuring an Academic Text

After you have finished analysing your sources and before you begin writing, you should outline a draft structure for your text. This should reflect both your conceptual preparatory reading as well as the findings of your literature and source analyses. The ability to structure a written text is an important skill for any author, because it not only requires important initial conceptual decisions to be taken, but also gives direction to any piece of writing. Furthermore, a structure which clearly spells out the course of your argument serves as a very useful guide for readers.

One method of ensuring that your text has a logical structure is to adopt the following approach: divide the different sections of your paper – whether they are still in planning or already written – into distinct thematic units and arrange these into the most logical sequence. This will help to reveal whether your argument is logically structured, or whether there are any passages which need to be supplemented, modified or removed.

Introduction

The introduction is key to any written paper. It describes and explains the aims and interests of the text. It defines, delimits and problematises the focus of the investigation. It situates the research topic in its wider context and highlights its broader relevance. It explains the research question and clarifies its key terms and concepts. It substantiates the author's methodological approach, particularly in relation to the secondary literature and source material which have been consulted. A section on the current state of research discusses relevant contemporary debates and theories. Finally, the introduction outlines and explains the text's structure.

Main Body

The main body of your text should concern itself with the results of your source and literature analyses. It can be structured according to linear criteria (the sequence of your argument or the chronology of the events it discusses) and/or by thematic criteria. The main body should not provide a step-by-step description of your research but should bring together in the most meaningful form the most significant findings from the secondary literature and sources which you have consulted. As such, you should only discuss or quote what is essential to your argument. As a general rule, sources and secondary literature should be examined concurrently in your text. Source analysis should thus be incorporated into the flow

of your argument to avoid unnecessary repetition. In specific cases, however, it can make sense to devote a separate section to the analysis of a paradigmatic source.

Conclusion

The conclusion of a paper briefly summarises the main findings and provides answers to the questions which were raised in the introduction. Critical reflections on methodology can also be included here, while any questions requiring further investigation which may have arisen during the course of your research can be identified.

Academic Referencing

In principle, every statement in an academic text which contains more than general historical background knowledge must be accompanied by a reference (usually in the form of a footnote). References acknowledge that a quotation, paraphrased passage or piece of information has been obtained from another text. Quotations are passages which have been borrowed word for word, while paraphrasing involves rendering a borrowed passage in your own words. A case of plagiarism is said to occur when a quotation or paraphrased passage is not accompanied by a reference indicating its origin. Plagiarism can lead to disciplinary action.

References (Footnotes)

References – usually in the form of footnotes – serve to indicate that you have quoted, paraphrased or referred to information from a source or a work of secondary literature. Your text should be comprehensible without references, but its claims should be verifiable by looking up its references. To a limited extent, footnotes can also be used to elaborate on or explain issues which can only be touched upon in the main text. These additions, which must be consistent in style with the rest of your text, should be written in complete and clear sentences which are fully comprehensible to your readers. The section on recommended referencing styles provides detailed information on the formal conventions governing the layout and writing of footnotes.

The Function of References:

- To indicate the sources which you have consulted
- To indicate literature which you have quoted or paraphrased
- To indicate literature which has provided you with ideas and/or literature which you have used as a basis for (part of) your text
- To provide details of other relevant sources and readings
- To make source critical observations which do not necessarily fit into the main text
- To provide additional information on relevant persons and facts
- To translate quotations in another language
- To identify notable research debates
- To indicate errors and/or misconceptions in the existing research literature

Quotations

Quotations, i.e. word-for-word citations, reproduce a passage (from another text) which you are subjecting to critical analysis and/or which supports your argument. Quotations cannot be left to simply speak for themselves but must be analysed and discussed. A quotation from a source serves as evidence for your claims. It should be incorporated into your argument and, when necessary, be accompanied by source critical discussion. Appropriately inserted quotations from sources lend a text an air of vividness. Quotations from secondary literature are useful when you are engaging with a specific passage; you

may be criticising it or using it to support your own argument, or it may simply represent a particularly incisively worded statement. Quotations should not be overused; employ them selectively at points in your text where they will be most effective.

When inserting quotations, the following aspects should be considered:

Accordance with the Original

A quotation must be identical to the corresponding passage in the original text. When a quotation is incorporated into a sentence, however, small grammatical changes (in case, tense, etc.) may be necessary. Any such changes must always be indicated. Omissions from a quoted passage are indicated by [...] (i.e. an ellipsis within square brackets), while additions are also placed within square brackets. Square brackets should also be used for any clarifications which may be required for understanding due to the quotation's removal from its original context. For example, clarifications are usually provided for pronouns: "As a result, they [the Venetians] concluded a peace treaty with the French crown."

Example 1:

Jacob Burckhardt was of the following opinion about the Greek people's settlement of the area which became known as Ancient Greece:

"The supremely gifted people whom we know as the Greeks arrived in the area which they call their homeland as a diverse number of tribes, perhaps only very gradually, in much the same way as the Slavs, Teutons, Celts, Celtiberians and Italians elsewhere, only within an even smaller area."[1]

[1] Translated from: Burckhardt, Jacob: Griechische Culturgeschichte, Bd. 1 (Jacob Burckhardt Werke 19), Munich 2002, p. 5.

Example 2:

Jacob Burckhardt argued in his Griechischen Culturgeschichte that the Greek people might have entered the area of Ancient Greece, "perhaps only very gradually" and "as a diverse number of tribes", like "the Slavs, Teutons, Celts, Celtiberians and Italians elsewhere, only within an even smaller area". [1]

[1] Translated from: Burckhardt, Jacob: Griechische Culturgeschichte, Bd. 1 (Jacob Burckhardt Werke 19), Munich 2002, p. 5.

Example 3:

In his Griecheschen Culturgeschichte, Jacob Burckhardt did not want to commit himself immediately on the question of which peoples had first inhabited the area of Ancient Greece: "We may learn more about which inhabitants they [the Greek tribes] encountered by studying prehistoric monuments." [1]

[1] Translated from: Burckhardt, Jacob: Griechische Culturgeschichte, Bd. 1 (Jacob Burckhardt Werke 19), Munich 2002, p. 5.

Example 4:

Jacob Burckhardt argued in his Griechischen Culturgeschichte that "prehistoric monuments" could provide more information about which peoples were already settled in the area of Ancient Greece before the arrival of the Greeks. [1]

[1] Translated from: Burckhardt, Jacob: Griechische Culturgeschichte, Bd. 1 (Jacob Burckhardt Werke 19), Munich 2002, p. 5.

Contextual Fidelity

A quotation must remain true to its original context. If its context is distorted, its meaning can be misinterpreted.

Quotation Marks

All quotations (even those which only represent the names of specific terms or concepts) must be placed within quotation marks. Quotations which are longer than one sentence (or, alternatively, longer than three lines) should be set aside from the rest of the text in an indented paragraph (if so desired, also with a smaller font size). These so-called block or displayed quotations are not enclosed within quotation marks.

Typographical Errors

Typographical errors (commonly known as “typos”) – including incorrect, falsely positioned or missing punctuation marks – which appear in the original text must be reproduced in a quotation. The term “sic” (a Latin abbreviation for “thus was it written”) should be added in square brackets directly after an error to indicate that this was not the result of your own negligence, but a letter-for-letter transcription of the original. Alternatively, you can add an exclamation mark in square brackets [!] immediately after an error. You can also use [sic] to indicate a factual error or inaccuracy in the original.

Punctuation and Quotation Marks

If you quote a sentence in full, the closing punctuation mark (e.g. the full stop, comma, question mark, etc.) should be placed within the quotation (i.e. before the closing quotation mark). If only part of a sentence is quoted, the closing punctuation mark follows the closing quotation mark. There is only one exception to the aforementioned rule that a quoted passage must be reproduced as it is in the original (including all its punctuation marks and errors): double quotation marks in the original are to be replaced with single quotation marks in a quotation which is already enclosed within double quotation marks.

Original Language

All sources must be quoted in the language in which they were originally written. In Switzerland, an academic readership in the field of history can be expected to be able to read German, French and English. Quotations from sources in other languages should be accompanied by a translation, which is usually placed in a footnote. If you include a translation by another researcher, you should list all relevant details (e.g. “translated by”, publication details).

Secondary Quotations

Sometimes you will find a relevant quotation in the secondary literature which has been taken from another text. If you cannot find this original publication but still want to include the quotation in your own text, add the phrase “As cited in” in the corresponding reference.

Secondary quotations are viewed in a critical light, because you as the author cannot guarantee their authenticity or accuracy. As such, quote from the original text whenever possible!

Example:

Ernst Bassermann: Aus der Jugendzeit : Lebens-Erinnerungen, Mannheim 1913, pp. 166-7. As cited in: Gunilla Budde: Auf dem Weg ins Bürgerleben, Göttingen 1994, p. 91.

Citation styles

Historians can use various citation styles to reference the secondary literature which they have consulted during their research. Above all, apply the same style consistently to ensure that your readers can actually locate the literature which you have referenced.

A written paper should contain two lists of references, one for secondary literature and the other for sources. Both should be listed alphabetically by author's surname. Your references should also be included in your footnotes, but use an abbreviated format for references which you have already cited in full in an earlier footnote.

Referencing rules not only apply to written papers, but to all assignments for which you have consulted secondary literature, including presentation handouts, position papers or PowerPoint presentations.

The History Department recommends that its students adhere to the referencing style outlined on infoclio.ch (i.e. the referencing style used in this Toolkit) when following German referencing styles. This can not only be used for literature and archival sources, but also for images, interviews, audio documents, websites, blogs and other document types. It is also well-suited for working with digital documents. When following Anglophone referencing styles, choose an appropriate style as detailed in Richard Pears and Graham Shields' comprehensive guide to referencing (Pears, Richard; Shields, Graham: Cite Them Right : The Essential Referencing Guide, London 2016 or its accompanying website).

More information on referencing styles and examples thereof can be found here.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is preferable to quoting directly from the secondary literature, because it gives you the opportunity to incorporate the ideas expressed in the original text into your own argument and to articulate them in your own words. Paraphrasing also stimulates a thought process which cannot be replicated by simply transcribing a passage. As with quotations, you should only resort to paraphrasing when this is necessary for your argument.

Paraphrased text, like a quotation, must accurately reproduce the meaning of the original passage. Moreover, the style of the original should not be altered. Still, a correct paraphrase only borrows those words from the original which are necessary to produce an accurate rendering of its meaning. A "plagiarised" paraphrase, in contrast, is based overwhelmingly on the original. It reproduces sections of text word for word even when an alternative formulation could have been employed without any shift in meaning.

An Example of Paraphrasing

Original Passage

When searching for the underlying reasons for the papacy's rejection of the revolution and the post-revolutionary state, it may be helpful to examine one further item from the long list of papal complaints: the collapse of the monarchy. That the popes condemned this turn of events is not surprising; after all, the monarchy had been viewed in Rome since time immemorial as the best form of government.

Although there were undoubtedly also theological reasons for the popes' position, most significant was that the papacy itself resembled a monarchy in two respects: both the universal church and the State of the Church, with the papacy at their respective heads, were hierarchical – and thus monarchical – in structure. The twin concerns of the pope, as spiritual head of the universal church and as ruler of the State of the Church, to safeguard the interests of both institutions also played a role here.

A Correct Example of Paraphrasing

Birgit Emich emphasises that the papacy rejected both the revolution and the post-revolutionary state, not least because these developments brought about the collapse of the monarchy, which according to Roman tradition was generally regarded as the best form of government. Moreover, Emrich argues, the papacy represented a form of double monarchy in its own right. As such, in his dual role as spiritual head of the universal church and political ruler of the State of the Church, the pope denounced the new political forms.[1]

[1] Translated from: Emich, Birgit: Papsttum und Staatsgewalt : Roms langer Weg in die Moderne, in: Mörschel, Tobias (ed.): Papsttum und Politik : Eine Institution zwischen geistlicher Gewalt und politischer Macht, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 2007, pp. 35-58, here pp. 42-43.

An Incorrect, Plagiarised Example of Paraphrasing

Birgit Emrich has illustrated that, when searching for the underlying reasons for the papacy's rejection of the revolution and the post-revolutionary state, it is useful to examine the collapse of the monarchy as another example from the long list of papal complaints. While it is not surprising that the popes condemned this turn of events – monarchy had been viewed in Rome as the best form of government since time immemorial – decisive in this regard was that the papacy itself represented a monarchy in two respects. Both the constitution of the universal church as well as the political structure of the State of the Church, with the papacy at the head of both, were hierarchical in nature. As such, it is clear that the twin concerns of the pope, as both spiritual head of the universal church and ruler of the State of the Church, to safeguard the interests of both institutions played a role here.[1]

[1] Translated from: Emich, Birgit: Papsttum und Staatsgewalt : Roms langer Weg in die Moderne, in: Mörschel, Tobias (ed.): Papsttum und Politik : Eine Institution zwischen geistlicher Gewalt und politischer Macht, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 2007, pp. 35-58, here pp. 42-43.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the improper appropriation of another author's work or ideas. Plagiarism occurs if you reproduce or paraphrase in part or in full a passage or idea from the writing of another author without acknowledging this. This rule applies to all types of texts and sources, naturally also including those found on the internet. Plagiarism can have serious consequences but can be avoided by always referencing the origin of any ideas or passages which you incorporate into your own writing. When compiling excerpt notes, it is particularly important that you clearly distinguish between your own ideas and those passages which you have transcribed or paraphrased from other texts.

Philosophical-Historical Faculty of the University of Basel: Rules for Upholding Academic Integrity (in German)

Recommended Referencing Styles

Recommended Referencing Style for a List of Literature References

Each type of publication is cited differently in a list of literature references, as the following examples illustrate. The History Department recommends that its students adhere to the referencing style outlined on infoclio.ch (as used in this Toolkit, including in the examples in this section) when following German referencing styles or, when following Anglophone referencing styles, to an appropriate style as detailed in Richard Pears and Graham Shields' comprehensive guide to referencing (Pears, Richard; Shields, Graham: Cite Them Right : The Essential Referencing Guide, London 2016 or its accompanying website).

References to genuinely digital texts (e.g. articles in e-journals) should include both the web address through which the text was accessed and the date on which it was accessed. References to digital or digitised texts which were first published in print usually cite the details of the printed version, even when you have consulted the electronic version. Referencing the printed version comes with the distinct advantage of detailing the date of publication.

A literature reference can list up to three authors, editors or places of publication. If there are more than three authors, editors or places of publication, only the first is usually listed, followed by the phrase "et al.". When applicable, series titles and/or volume or edition details are included after the publication title.

A list of literature references is ordered alphabetically by the surname of each publication's lead author. Sub-ordering should generally be avoided, especially when this creates separate sections in your list which are ordered by publication type. This also means that printed and digitally accessible literature should not be listed separately.

Example References

Monographs

Arnold, Guy: Africa : A Modern History, London 2005.

Daston, Lorraine; Lunbeck, Elizabeth: Histories of Scientific Observation, Chicago 2011.

Keller, Evelyn Fox: Refiguring Life : Metaphors of Twentieth-Century Biology, New York 1995.

Wiesner, Merry: Gender in History : Global Perspectives, Malden 2001 (New Perspectives on the Past).

Edited Collections

Beinart, William et al. (eds.): Social History & African Environments, Oxford 2003.

Article in an Edited Collection

Leiss, William: The Domination of Nature, in: Merchant, Carolyn (ed.): Ecology : Key Concepts in Critical Theory, Atlantic Highlands N.J. 1994, pp. 55-64.

Article in an Academic Journal

Bank, Andrew: The Great Debate and the Origins of South African Historiography, in: The Journal of African History 38 (2), 1997, pp. 261-281.

Article or Chapter in a Handbook

Hanretta, Sean: New Religious Movements, in: Parker, John; Reid, Richard (eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History, Oxford 2013, pp. 298-316.

Article in an Encyclopaedia

Altermatt, Urs: Bundesrat, in: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz, 11 vols., vol. 3. Basel 2004, pp. 13-16.

Mahiou, Ahmed: Arab League, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, URL: dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23762 [accessed 3 May 2018].

Review in an Academic Journal

Kuniholm, Bruce R.: review of Petersen, Tore T. (ed.): Controlling the Uncontrollable? The Great Powers in the Middle East. Trondheim 2006, in: The International History Review 30 (3), 2008, pp. 652-653.

Recommended Referencing Style for a List of Sources

Archival sources are listed with their respective archival call numbers. The names of the archives where the sources are located are usually abbreviated, with their full names given in a separate list of abbreviations. An archival document's precise call number (including page and/or folio numbers – e.g. p. 35, fol. 46v – when available) should be listed in your footnotes, but your list of sources should only contain references to whole collections, not to each individual document or page which you have consulted. If necessary, you can provide explanations of call numbers in an additional note in your list of sources. The location and call numbers of the original paper versions of digitised documents (i.e. scans of archival documents which are available online) should be listed; the call numbers for original archival documents are usually more permanent than the links to their digitised copies.

Published sources and documents in source editions are listed according to the same principles as secondary literature. As such, your list of sources should be divided into two sections, one containing details of the published sources and source editions which you have consulted (listed in the same way as secondary literature) and the other detailing your unpublished archival sources (including digitised copies) and their call numbers. This reflects the long-standing practice of differentiating between unpublished and published sources, a distinction which is fast losing its meaning due to the increasing number of sources which are now being published in digital form online.

Example:

Mgadla, Part T.; Volz, Stephen C. (eds.): Words of Batswana : Letters to Mahoko a Becwana, 1883-1896, Cape Town 2006 (Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents, Second Series No. 37).

Example List of Sources:

National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria [SAB], Native Affairs records [NTS]

SAB NTS, Series 1

SAB NTS, Series 4

A more detailed example list of sources can be found here.

Recommended Referencing Style for Image Sources in a List of Sources

Image Sources

As many details as possible should also be provided for image sources, including the artist, photographer or originator of the work, its date of creation and, when available, the publication in which it appears and/or the collection in which the original is to be found.

If you have been working with a large number of images, you can subdivide your list of sources into image and text sources.

Example: A Photograph or Cartoon in a Newspaper

1) If you have consulted an original of the newspaper:

Cummings, Michael: Macmillan, Eisenhower and Khrushchev, in: Daily Express, 13 November 1957, p. XX.

2) If you have consulted a reprint of the image in a book:

Cummings, Michael: Macmillan, Eisenhower and Khrushchev, in: Daily Express, 13 November 1957, in: Hanhimäki, Jussi M.; Westad, Odd Arne (eds.): The Cold War : A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts, Oxford 2003, p. 289.

Example: Widely Circulated Photographs

Laika, shortly before the launch of Sputnik 2, 3 November 1957. Agency image from Novosti, reprinted in Gerhard Paul (ed.): Das Jahrhundert der Bilder, vol. 2, Göttingen 2008, p. 203.

Recommended Referencing Style for Footnotes

When your text refers to a publication in a footnote for the first time, a full reference should be provided (i.e. as it appears in your list of literature references). Thereafter, an abbreviated form should be used; a short form title, for instance, generally consists of only the initial noun of the full title.

In your list of literature references, always provide the full page span (i.e. the opening and closing pages) for non-standalone publications (i.e. those such as journal articles, reviews, edited collection chapters etc. which are published inside another publication). In-text references can also be used to provide the page number details of a specific passage which you have summarised, paraphrased or quoted. In such instances, add the word “here” after the page span to indicate the exact page on which the relevant passage can be found (e.g. “pp. 247-258, here p. 251”). Short form references usually only indicate the page number of the passage in question.

For passages which extend over more than one page, the page span can be indicated with a hyphen (“pp. x-y”).

If the same reference is repeated in an uninterrupted sequence, it can be substituted with “ibid., p. x”.

Short Form Footnotes

Surname, short title (of the monograph, article etc), p(p). x(-y).

Examples

Arnold, Africa, p. 54.

Keller, Refiguring Life, pp. 71-74.

Wiesner, Gender, p. 30.

Ibid., pp. 57-58.

Bibliographic Abbreviations

This section provides an overview of the abbreviations commonly used in footnotes and literature reference lists.

cf.	compare
f.	and the following page
ff.	and the folowwing pages (precise page references, however, are preferable)
(ed.)	editor
(eds.)	editors
et al.	and others ("et alii" in Latin); used in combination with the name of the lead author, editor or place of publication if there are more than three authors, editors or places of publication
n.p.	no page numbers (if the publication has no page numbers)
p.	page
pp.	pages
s.l.	sine loco (Latin for "without a place"; i.e. if the place of publication is unknown)
s.n.	sine nomine (Latin for "without a name"; i.e. if the name of the publisher is unknown)

Presenting Your Results

You are expected to adhere to specific academic conventions when presenting the results of your research. For students, this applies in particular for (Pro)Seminar papers and presentations, but also for handouts, position papers and protocols. Furthermore, you are also expected to observe general good practice in all your work, such as ensuring that your writing is neatly presented and correctly spelt.

(Pro)Seminararbeit

How to structure and write a text has already been discussed in the section on "Writing Academic Texts".

A (Pro)Seminararbeit should adhere to the following instructions, although your lecturer may add to or adapt them accordingly.

Title Page

- Title, type and time of the course
- Name of the lecturer
- Title and, when applicable, subtitle of the assignment
- Closing date of submission
- Your name, physical address and email address
- Your degree, major subjects and semester number
- The History Department recommends that you use this document as a template for your title page.

Table of Contents

- Clear, logical structure
- As few sub-sections as possible

Introduction (1-1.5 pages)

- Describes your research interests
- Defines and delimits the focus of your investigation
- Discusses the wider context of your topic
- Formulates your research question
- Explains key concepts
- Explains your methodological approach, especially in relation to the secondary literature and sources which you have consulted
- Discusses the current state of research in relation to your topic Outlines the structure of your paper

Main Body

- Develops your argument
- Incorporates your source and literature analyses
- Structures your topic chronologically and/or thematically
- Provides you with the opportunity to present your own arguments as well as to discuss those of other researchers

Conclusion

- Provides a brief summary
- Provides answers to your research question
- Critically evaluates your research methodology
- Raises questions for further research

Source, Literature and Illustration Lists

- Provide a complete and correctly formatted list of all the literature, sources and images which you have consulted

Declaration of Academic Integrity

Criteria for Critiquing and Evaluating a Written Assignment

The critique and evaluation of a written assignment is based on the following criteria:

Formal Criteria

- Presentation (title page, table of contents, design and readability)
- Source and literature lists (layout and structure, comprehensiveness)
- Correct referencing of sources and literature
- Correct and reasonable use of footnotes and references
- Language (spelling, grammar and punctuation, clear and intelligible mode of expression, correct use of abbreviations, etc.)

Substantive Criteria

- Selection of Research Question, Theory and Methodology: Does the research question make sense? Is it clearly recognisable and precisely formulated? Is it relevant? Does the methodological approach correspond to the research question? Is the investigation theoretically well thought out? Are the categories of analysis compelling and identifiable? Can the sources which have been consulted provide adequate answers to the research question?
- Logic of the Argument, Authorial Expertise: Does the text's structure and argument correspond to the research question, the focus of the investigation and the methodological approach? Is the investigation

seen through to its logical conclusion? Does the text have a central theme running through it? Are the questions which were posed answered thoroughly? Are the analysis and interpretation of findings logically compelling, plausible and free of contradiction? Is evidence provided? Are argument and evidence based rationally and sufficiently on the relevant research literature and related academic debates?

- Have the author's original aims, the implications of the research question as well as the chosen research methods, sources and theoretical approaches been respected?
- Written Expression and Style: Have the correct technical terms and concepts been used (with sufficient knowledge of their meaning)? Is the text precisely worded?

Presentations

Presentations are formal oral-visual contributions to a (Pro)Seminar. They often form part of your final course mark. Presentations give you the opportunity to convey your in-depth knowledge of a topic and to surprise your fellow seminar participants with interesting and unusual insights. As the presenter, you are expected to confront a historical research question by condensing your topic into a few key points which will remain in the memory of your audience and stimulate ideas and discussion amongst them. Preparation

Preparation

1. Conceptualise your presentation

- Define the focus of your investigation, draft a research question, and look for relevant literature and sources

2. Discuss your topic with your lecturer

3. Prepare your presentation

- Plan and carry out your research
- Collate, analyse and discuss your results
- Prepare the oral and visual elements of your presentation
- Integrate all relevant bibliographic data into your presentation and/or handout using a consistent referencing style Complete your handout; print a sufficient number of copies or email it to your lecturer

Structure

1. Introduction

- Awake your audience's interest, e.g. with a thought-provoking image or quote
- Identify key question(s) and argument(s)
- Outline the structure of your presentation
- Provide details of relevant secondary literature

2. Main part

- With reference to the literature and sources which you have consulted, discuss and evaluate key questions and arguments. Which questions and issues you choose to engage with will determine the course of your presentation.
- Only discuss background information which your audience must be aware of in order to fully understand your presentation
- If relevant, introduce one of your sources as a brief case study and analyse it in relation to your main questions

3. Conclusion

- Briefly reflect on the results of your investigation and situate them in their wider context
- Move smoothly on to your discussion section, e.g. by raising a series of relevant open questions

4. Discussion

- Give your fellow seminar participants the opportunity to ask you questions on your presentation
- Moderate the discussion by raising further questions and/or referring back to key arguments and/or sources

Presentation Tips

- Speak clearly and not too quickly. Your audience will be able to follow your presentation better if you speak freely – using only key words as cues – than if you read out a prewritten text.
- Maintain eye contact with your audience
- Arrive at the venue in good time so that you can set up and test any technological equipment which you may need to use during your presentation

Handouts and Position Papers

During your presentation, you may refer to a number of important concepts, terms, names, events, facts and figures as well as key source and literature references. However, as there is seldom enough time to go through such information in detail during your presentation, it is helpful for your audience if you compile a written handout providing a clear and succinct overview of all this information.

A position paper lists the points or arguments which a presenter or presentation group would like to raise for discussion with the rest of the class. A position paper usually focuses on current and/or controversial debates relating to the presentation topic. A position paper is especially well-suited for kickstarting a class discussion or groupwork project.

What Should be Included in a Handout?

- Concise summary of the presentation's main claims and content
- Definitions of key terms and concepts
- Biographical information on important historical figures
- Key facts and figures
- Dates of important events

- Bibliographic details of key literature and sources

Minutes

Minutes, also known as protocols, are chronological accounts of a seminar session and its most important discussion points and conclusions. They are a useful exercise if you are the author, because writing minutes helps you to internalise what you have learnt during the course of the session. For the rest of the class, especially for any absentees, minutes serve as a valuable record of what was discussed. As such, minutes are also very useful for revision purposes, helping students to connect the dots between the different topics discussed over the length of a semester or whole course. Furthermore, they also provide lecturers with valuable feedback on each session.

Detailed minutes provide a blow-by-blow account of a seminar session, sometimes even reporting all the views expressed by individual participants. A results protocol, on the other hand, provides a more concise summary of a session and is often arranged by topic rather than chronology. In practice, however, seminar minutes usually combine elements of both formats.

Content

- Name of the course; title, date and time of the session
- Organisational information and list of assigned tasks
- Important comments relating to the previous session's minutes
- Content covered during the session: summary of the session's main topics and discussion points; brief summary of the presentations; key points from the subsequent discussions; summary of important findings and unanswered questions
- If appropriate, the author can include his/her own critical comments
- Details of any documents pertaining to the session
- Bibliographic details of relevant literature and sources

Practial Knowledge

An understanding of the basic terms and categories of academic language is crucial when undertaking research in the discipline of history. Equally vital is knowledge of relevant research resources and text types as well as awareness of important research facilities and institutions. Historians distinguish between academic literature, with its various publication forms and text types, and the actual objects of research – sources – which can be found in archives, libraries and elsewhere.

Academic Publication Forms and Text Types

The results of historical research are recorded in academic texts. Together, these texts are known as specialist or secondary literature. The different forms which secondary literature can take are introduced below, as are specific types of academic text. A search for secondary literature will differ according to which publication forms you are attempting to find.

Publication Forms

Essays and Articles

Essays and articles are relatively short academic studies written by a single author or by two or more co-authors. They are published in edited collections or in academic journals.

Introductions

An introduction usually takes the form of a monograph which provides an overview of a particular topic. Introductions often illustrate key issues by discussing typical examples.

Handbooks

A handbook is typically more detailed and comprehensive than an introduction. Unlike those of the latter, the individual chapters of a handbook are usually written by different authors. This allows handbooks to cover a wider range of topics, with many comprising multiple volumes.

Encyclopaedias

An encyclopaedia differs from a handbook primarily in its very contrasting structure. Encyclopaedias are ordered alphabetically by headword, each of which are detailed in short articles.

Monographs

Monographs are studies which are written by a single author or several co-authors. They are released as standalone publications.

Reviews

Academic reviews are critiques of one or more academic studies. They are published in journals or on online review portals.

Edited Collections

Edited collections comprise a series of articles written by different authors on a narrow or more broadly defined topic. They are compiled by one or more editors.

Academic Series

Edited collections and monographs can form part of an academic series. These bring together studies which are focused on the same topic or field of research.

Academic Journals

Articles, reviews and various other information pertaining to particular areas of research are published in historical journals.

Text Types

Abstracts

Abstracts are short summaries which provide readers with a brief overview of a text. They are often found at the beginning or end of articles in academic journals. Abstracts of academic texts are also available on specialist online portals, occasionally also in bibliographies.

Introductions

An introduction to an edited collection or monograph (not to be confused with an introduction as a form of publication in its own right – see the above sub-section on "Publication Forms") often serves as a useful point of entry into a particular area of historical research. Introductions summarise the existing research, discuss relevant criticisms thereof, and provide information on sources and methodology.

Encyclopaedia Articles

Written by specialists in their areas of study, articles in historical encyclopaedias provide a brief but comprehensive overview of a particular topic. Most encyclopaedia articles also include a list of literature references. General knowledge encyclopaedias with anonymous authors, such as Encyclopædia Britannica, should only be cited in exceptional circumstances.

Essays

An essay is less confined to the prescripts of academic writing than other types of scholarly texts. It gives its author the freedom to raise, discuss and take a personal position on research questions in a more experimental manner.

Library Catalogues and Bibliographies

In order to find your way through the vast amount of books and articles that are published every year, help is required. Two of these aids, namely library catalogues and bibliographies, are presented here in more detail.

Library Catalogues

A library catalogue details all books and academic journals available (e.g. for use in literature research) at a library or through a library association. Catalogue entries are generally assigned headwords. Many catalogues now also offer access to digital and/or digitised material, such as e-books or scanned copies of books and journal articles.

Most academic libraries are part of a library association with a shared catalogue. The University of Basel's libraries, for example, participate in the Swissbib Basel-Bern association. Because a catalogue entry generally only refers to whole books or academic journal titles, individual articles in edited collections or journals are usually not listed in a library catalogue. An edited collection article must thus be located by finding the edited collection in which it was published, while the correct journal title and edition number are needed to locate a journal article. This has begun to change, however, as a result of digitalisation, with the services of many library catalogues having been expanded to include provision of access to texts in digital form. This makes a full-text search of articles possible in some catalogues (e.g. in the UB Basel catalogue). Some catalogues also provide access to electronic documents which have been made available by other service providers or partner institutions.

Catalogues which index the collections of a single library but also offer the option of searching across a range of other library catalogues are known as meta-catalogues. These catalogues are less subject to the individual purchasing policies of participating libraries than standard catalogues, but they do tend to offer less precise search options (e.g. headwords are not assigned uniformly). Swissbib is the most important meta-catalogue in Switzerland, while the Karlsruher Virtuelle Katalog (KVK) and WorldCat are recommended for a worldwide search.

Bibliographies

Bibliographies are systematic compilations of references to academic literature (monographs, journal articles, articles in edited collections, etc.) published within a particular subject area. There are three main types of bibliography: current bibliographies (which are regularly updated), closed bibliographies and specialist bibliographies. Because it takes some time for a bibliography to be compiled, the most recent publications are not listed. Bibliographies are the most important guides for researchers to the vast number of academic books and articles which are published every year. This section briefly introduces the various types of bibliographies.

Other sources of bibliographic data include specialist encyclopaedias which provide literature references at the end of each article as well as academic journals which list recently published books or include a review section.

Current Bibliography

Continually updated bibliographies are published at regular intervals. In the past, it was common for new editions to be published annually; each edition would list all publications within a particular area of study which had been released during the course of the corresponding calendar year, usually in chapters divided by topic. Today, current bibliographies typically take the form of online databases which can be searched by title and headword. Some online databases also provide full-text access to academic texts. Many current bibliographies have a spatial and/or temporal focus. Examples thereof include the Swiss cantonal bibliographies or the Bibliography on Swiss History.

Closed Bibliography

Closed bibliographies, which are usually compiled as part of a project, are generally published in print, but are now also being made available as online databases. Most closed bibliographies boast a specific thematic focus. Closed bibliographies come with the disadvantage that, by their very nature, they exclude relevant literature which is published after the completion of the associated project.

Bibliography of Journals

A bibliography of journals is limited to the indexing of academic journal articles (articles in edited collections are occasionally also included). Many German- and English-language journals make the contents pages of their most recent editions available on the H-Soz-Kult website.

Specialist Bibliography

Specialist bibliographies are characterised by their specific thematic focus. A bibliography of reviews can also be classified as a specialist bibliography.

Sources and Archives

Sources represent the substance of historical investigation. This section explains the process by which a historical document becomes a source. There are different types of sources as well as various approaches to dividing sources into different categories. Sources can be found in archives in their original form, in libraries as published sources, and elsewhere. Some sources are published in source editions or made available as digital reproductions. Historians can also compile their own sources by conducting oral history research. Various historical auxiliary sciences are concerned with specific types of sources.

Sources

Literature and Useful Tools on Working with Sources: For further reading, see here .

What Are Sources?

In historical studies, sources are records which grant us insights into the past. Texts, images, interviews with contemporary witnesses, sound recordings and physical artefacts, among others, can all serve as sources. Crucial for any historian is an understanding of the basic difference between historical sources and secondary literature. In everyday speech, the word “source” is often synonymous with the term “source of information”, an expression which encompasses all potential persons or things from which knowledge can be obtained (conversation partners, books, television programmes, old documents, etc.). In history, however, a distinction is drawn between primary sources and specialist academic literature (also known as secondary literature), which also relies upon sources when investigating the past.

The dividing line between secondary literature and sources is sometimes unclear, especially in relation to more recent history. Whether a text should be classified as secondary literature or as a source depends not only on its quality or age, but above all on the perspective from which we view it. For example, a study on Basel church history will use Rudolf Wackernagel’s book Beiträge zur Geschichte des Basler Münsters (Basel 1881-1885) [Contributions to the History of the Basel Cathedral, Basel 1881-1885] primarily as secondary literature. A study on regional historiography, however, will view Wackernagel’s work first and foremost as an example of historiographical representations of the late nineteenth century, and thus as a source.

The term “(water) source” evokes an image of naturalness and purity, thereby suggesting that a “return to the sources” (ad fontes) can allow the past to be accessed directly and understood immediately. In reality, however, this is impossible for two reasons. First, each record of the past is produced in very specific circumstances for specific purposes by specific persons. Second, each source comes with its very own history stretching right up to the present during which it would typically have undergone a number of transformations. As such, a source does not simply speak “for itself”; to enable it to do so – i.e. to be able to understand it and accurately interpret it – we must know the context in which it was created as well as its subsequent history as an artefact. Establishing these facts is the function of source criticism.

In principle, all artefacts from the past which have survived into the present can be regarded as a source. In practice, however, a record from the past only becomes a source when it is used to answer a historical question or to glean information about the past. Source selection is a critical step in this process; the sources which you consult will strongly influence the nature of the claims which you can make about the past.

Source Typologies

As the quantity and variety of potential sources is enormous, there have been and continue to be various attempts to impose a sense of order on this mass of information by compiling source typologies. Some of these approaches will be introduced briefly in this section. In doing so, a distinction will be drawn between typologies which base themselves on the material properties of sources and those which relate to source content.

Given the extraordinary variety of written sources, it is neither possible nor worthwhile to list or classify all source typologies here; nevertheless, Hans-Werner Goetz's attempt to provide an overview of medieval text sources is worth noting (Hans-Werner Goetz: Proseminar Geschichte : Mittelalter, Stuttgart 2014, pp. 109-217). Knowledge of the key types of written sources is useful for source interpretation, a process which involves relating a source's original aim and purpose – its "bias" – to your own research question.

Material Properties

The historian Paul Kirn (1890-1965) classified sources according to their material characteristics, defining them as texts, objects or facts. For example, a Roman-era battle may have yielded reports about the battle (texts), archaeological artefacts left behind on the battlefield such as coins, weapons and skeletons (objects), and the legacy of a Roman imperial border running to the south of the battle site for centuries thereafter (historical facts). Most abstract is the notion of historical facts, which can also include linguistic features, names (place names, in particular, often testify to the dominant local language at the time of a settlement's founding), institutions or customs.

Source typologies which draw from the field of media studies reflect the growing significance of audio-visual media by distinguishing between texts, images, audio documents and material objects. Digital sources pose new challenges both for history as a discipline and for archives as institutions due to their sheer mass, the difficulties of ensuring that they remain permanently archived, and their instability (they can be altered at any time in ways which are barely detectable).

Substantive Criteria

Substantive criteria for source typologies are derived from the distinction between vestiges and traditions which was drawn by the German historian Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), a difference later expanded upon by Ernst Bernheim (1850-1942). This distinction assumes that there are a) records of the past which were only created for contemporary purposes and which happened to survive into the present merely by chance (vestiges); and b) records which were consciously produced for the sake of posterity with the aim of conveying a particular image of the contemporary era to subsequent generations (traditions). Sources which can be classified as vestiges, however, still do not provide unfiltered access to the past, because each new source would have been created with particular intentions in mind and/or for a specific purpose. As such, these objectives must still be considered when interpreting vestiges. However, because it is often difficult to draw a strict dividing line between vestiges and traditions (are personal diaries or newspaper articles, for example, written for the sake of posterity or with only the present in mind?), this distinction has come to be regarded as outdated. It does remind us, nevertheless, that for every source which we analyse, we must always carefully consider what its creator sought to convey to future generations and which information is revealed rather more inadvertently. More recent theories also reflect this distinction based on purpose of production, distinguishing, for example, between monuments or messages (i.e. traditions) and documents or traces (i.e. vestiges).

The idea that sources can be categorised according to how they relate to reality was first posited by Gerhard Theuerkauf (1933-2014). He proposed three categories of sources: factual sources (i.e. those

which describe what happened), fictional sources (what could have happened), and normative sources (what should have happened). According to Theuerkauf, however, these categories can overlap within the same source.

Source Groups

Besides attempts to compile source typologies, scholars have also sought to divide sources into groups on the basis of other common characteristics identifiable during source analysis. These efforts, which divide sources into genres, do not reflect an attempt to compile a more comprehensive classification system for sources.

Notable here, for example, is the genre of self-testimony (also known as ego documents), i.e. sources which are primarily written to provide information about their author. These sources have received increasing attention from historians in recent years.

Serial sources are related sources which are systematically produced over an extended period of time, for example by bureaucrats or bookkeepers. The individual documents within a source series often follow a similar format.

Archives

The Archive as a Repository for Sources

"Archives are institutions which systematically collect, store and provide access to written, audio and image sources" (Translated from the Historische Lexikon der Schweiz: "Archive"). As such, archives hold many of the original sources which historians consult during their research. Archives are run by state institutions or private organisations such as voluntary associations, companies or foundations.

The most important archives are those which are overseen by the state. In Switzerland, each level of government (municipal, cantonal and federal) operates its own archives. Alongside the records generated by public institutions, state archives often hold additional collections, including those belonging to private individuals or organisations (often referred to as private archives). Other types of archive include company archives (e.g. the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) Heritage Foundation) or specialist archives (e.g. the Swiss Social Archives in Zürich or the Swiss Economic Archive in Basel). Many large libraries also possess their own so-called manuscript collections, which can incorporate books from the pre-printing press age as well as many other manuscripts. An overview of important archival catalogues can be found here.

Every archive has its own archival structure which evolves over time in line with its collections and as a result of the attempts by its staff to bring order to these. Earlier cataloguing methods followed the so-called principle of pertinence, according to which documents were classified by topic (or occasionally by document type). This meant that documents were often removed from their original context. Newer archival practices, in contrast, adhere to the principle of provenance, by which documents are catalogued in a way which corresponds to the context of their production (e.g. by the institution which produced them). Because documents which have been archived according to the principle of pertinence can no longer be classified by provenance, most archives possess older collections catalogued by pertinence as well as newer collections catalogued by provenance. In the Basel-Landschaft State Archive, for example, collections which were catalogued before about 1950 follow the principle of pertinence, while newer collections are ordered by provenance.

Which Archives Hold Which Collections?

To the extent which they have been preserved, the written records of the medieval corporations which ultimately became part of today's institutions of state (e.g. the city of Basel) are usually held in their corresponding modern archives (i.e. the Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft state archives). Many universities, meanwhile, continue to operate their own archives. Although the Basel guilds also remain in existence, guild archives have been transferred to the state archives in order to guarantee the preservation of their collections and to enable researchers to access them more easily. Researchers should check on a case-by-case basis whether the records of defunct institutions, such as former monasteries, have been preserved and, if so, in which archives these can be accessed. In Switzerland, a municipal, cantonal or federal archive is always responsible for archiving the printed and digital records of the contemporary institutions of state. Recently produced documents remain classified to the public for a retention period. This usually lasts for 30 years in the case of general records and 100 years for records relating to natural persons. Although classified collections may be viewed during this period, a viewing application must first be submitted, and specific conditions of use may apply (e.g. names appearing in the documents may be anonymised). Private archives, such as company archives or aristocratic family archives, each maintain their own set of rules. Unlike state archives, they are not legally obliged to provide public access to their collections.

The Difference between Archival Documents and (Medieval) Manuscripts

After Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable type printing press in 1454, libraries were inundated with ever greater quantities of books which had been produced with this new technology. Before the arrival of the printing press, which was able to print books in hitherto unimaginable numbers, books had been published in the form of manuscripts which had to be produced individually and by hand. Strictly speaking, the technical term "manuscript" ("Handschrift" in German) refers only to these hand-produced works. Because only some medieval "books" have been reprinted – whether in the form of early modern printed editions or as more recent source editions – medievalists are sometimes required to consult the original manuscripts. Manuscripts are generally to be found in institutions which also collect books, such as national, regional, municipal or monastic libraries which also boast a medieval manuscript collection. A manuscript collection can also incorporate written documents which should actually be classified as archival material. Indeed, manuscripts, which always take the form of a single copy of a book, should not be confused with handwritten archival documents: legal documents, letters, inventories, municipal assembly books, etc. are original archival documents in their own right which are typically held in federal, cantonal, municipal or monastic archives.

Source Editions, Digital Copies and Source Databases

Source Editions

In archival science, a source edition is an original source or series of related original sources which has or have been published alongside accompanying critical commentary. These comments draw readers' attention to errors in the original or to inconsistencies between different versions of a source. They also provide background information and identify aspects of a text which may not be apparent to readers. Source editions can cover a specific collection of sources, the collected works and writings of a particular individual, or assorted sources relating to a specific topic (known as a sourcebook).

Source editions, especially sourcebooks, are by their very nature incomplete; they can never incorporate more than a fraction of the available source material. Nevertheless, source editions do come with a number of benefits for researchers. An introduction can shed light on the context in which the original sources were created, while the marginal comments provide explanations of key terms, informative commentary, and references to further interesting sources.

Because a carefully compiled source edition represents a major undertaking, most source editions are produced as part of larger projects which can run for decades or even centuries. Most nation states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries promoted their own source edition projects. Alongside those in Switzerland and Germany, these included the "Muratori" project in Italy, France's "Recueil des Historiens de Gaule et de la France" and the "Rolls Series" in England. Source editions vary in terms of their structure, their scholarly standards and the type of sources which they select. Because key features of source editions have evolved over time, the same large source edition project may have produced publications of varying academic quality. For a lack of alternatives besides much more demanding archival research, historians often continue to work with older source editions which do not conform to present-day academic standards. As a general rule when consulting a source edition, consider its aims and corresponding selection of sources.

In recent years, source editions have also been released in a variety of new digital forms. To be classified as source editions, these digital publications must fulfil the same criteria as source editions which are published in print: above all, they must offer a precise reproduction of an original text with accompanying critical commentary. Ideally, digital source editions should also conform to new digital standards, for example by adhering to the Text Encoding Initiative. Genuinely digital publications enjoy many advantages over printed source editions (see also the section on working with digital sources). Most significantly, digital texts can be subjected to a full-text electronic search. Furthermore, headwords can easily be assigned, while other information (such as names of persons and places) can be inserted into the commentary to promote more precise search results and to establish links with related passages and texts. The digitised annual accounts of the city of Basel (1535-1610) provide a good example of the opportunities and benefits which a digital source edition can offer researchers. Users can search for different financial records using various freely combinable search criteria. Within very little time it is thus possible, for example, to trace the development of one specific tax receipt across the whole reporting period. This example illustrates that the availability of source editions in digital form can significantly reduce the workload of researchers and stimulate new avenues of research. On the one hand, this is a very positive development (which you should certainly take advantage of during your studies), but it also carries with it the danger that other equally interesting source collections which have not been published in (digital) source editions may be overlooked and thus ultimately end up ignored by research.

The two linked examples from source editions – the first a reproduction from a medieval manuscript and the second a copy of a diplomatic note from the records of the Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland (Dodis) project – illustrate how source editions are structured as well as how they should be read.

Calendars

A calendar (also known as a regesta) is a special form of source edition which does not reproduce original texts in full, but briefly summarises their most important points. Typically used to provide a synopsis of legal documents, calendars usually offer a paraphrased version, but occasionally incorporate selected quotations from the original. Calendars also contain information on where and when a source was created as well as details on relevant persons (especially in the case of individuals mentioned in legal documents), the call numbers with which the original sources can be located in an archive, and

references to related source editions. Older source edition projects in particular were often published in a hybrid form, combining elements from both conventional source editions and calendars (e.g. the "Eidgenössische Abschiede" or the "Basler Urkundenbücher").

Digital Copies

Not to be confused with source editions, digital copies are scans or photographs of sources which have been made available online. While these may also spare you the need to visit an archive, they lack the transcriptions and critical commentary of a quality source edition. Image sources are also made available in digital form in some databases. The quality of the so-called metadata (i.e. information about a source, such as the date of its creation or the name of its author, which is not necessarily provided in the source itself) can vary significantly from digital copy to digital copy. Those with more complete metadata come closer to fulfilling the standards of a source edition.

Digitisation projects can generally only capture a fraction of the available sources in archival collections. As such, they digitise a selection of sources chosen according to various criteria, e.g. their content, how well they are preserved, legal considerations and/or available funds. Many archival catalogues, including that of the Basel-Stadt State Archive, also offer access to digitised records in their collections. Catalogues of digitised sources are listed under "Source Databases" in the section on research resources.

Digital copies of printed sources are sometimes also available in a hybrid form as documents which are fully searchable, albeit with some degree of error, using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. However, these texts are often not checked for errors, nor are they accompanied by any critical commentary. Although the original source is available as a text (and not just as a mere scan thereof), such texts do not meet the standards of a source edition.

Source Databases

There have long been efforts among historians to compile comprehensive registers of archival holdings. The old auxiliary science of source studies has been rendered obsolete in recent times by the proliferation of source databases, which has made searching for sources significantly easier. The value of a database depends on the accuracy and detail of its headwords and source descriptions; a database does not search through the actual content of its sources, but through the meta-details recorded for each source (i.e. any information on content, author, date of creation, archival location and/or source editions in which it has been published). More and more databases now provide direct access to digitised copies (i.e. scans or photographs) of sources. More specialised databases allow advanced searches by source type (e.g. images, manuscripts or early printed works).

Depending on the aims of your research, it can also be worthwhile to search for smaller, more specialised databases. A good example thereof is the self-testimony database developed at the History Department (see here). Source databases are not to be confused with digital source editions.

In the Literature, Bibliographic Aids and Research Resources section of this toolkit, source editions and source databases are listed separately.

Auxiliary Sciences for Working with Sources

Specialist sub-disciplines, the so-called auxiliary (or ancillary) sciences, have developed within the discipline of history to study specific types of written or material sources (e.g. official documents, coins, seals, heraldry, etc). These include:

- The study of official documents: diplomatics
- The study of coins: numismatics
- The study of seals: sigillography
- The study of emblems and other armorial bearings: heraldry
- The study of historical handwriting: palaeography
- Historical geography
- The study of the sequence of past events: chronology
- The study of family lineages and ancestry: genealogy
- Related disciplines such as archaeology, art history, sociology, etc. can also offer crucial findings and insights, both for historical research in general as well as for our engagement with specific sources.