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Writing in History

This resource provides a brief introduction to writing in the field of **History** through the lens of threshold concepts. It includes:

- 1. An overview of what writing characteristics are valued in History
- 2. Examples of disciplinary vocabulary common in History
- 3. A brief overview of primary source analysis

What does History value in writing?

The field of **History** values sensitivity to **context and historical perspective**:

Writers are considered credible when they develop **original, clear, succinct, well-supported arguments that engage in larger scholarly debate**.

History’s citation practices embody these values, and you can see that in examples of how the field **deeply engages and interrogates primary and secondary sources**.

Effective writing in History: Uses **signposting**, explicates **relevance/context**, and **balances larger argument with fine-grained analysis and pithiness**.

Concerning their writing, History majors should expect to: **get feedback, pay attention to writing, treat writing as a process and appreciate it, and recognize their own place in the larger conversation**.

What vocabulary and approaches are common in History?

Writing in History often draws on common **disciplinary vocabulary** and **approaches to analysis**:

As you write as a History major, some **common disciplinary vocabulary** you might see and use include:

- identity
- agency
- periodization
- change over time (contingency v. teleology, process, revolution)
- narrative
- presentism, anachronism
- modernity
- nation & empire
- top-down v. bottom-up

These are some of the common **analytical approaches** to History you will use and encounter:

- political
- military
- economic
- social

- cultural
- environmental
- women/gender
- race/ethnicity
- big, deep
- micro- vs. macrohistory
- digital (mapping)
- information/technology
- emotions/senses

What does primary source analysis look like in History?

Primary source analysis refers to analyzing firsthand historical evidence. History places a high value on working with primary sources. As you progress in your education, the complexity of the primary source analysis you will be asked to complete will increase. For instance, you can expect to learn progressively how to:

- complete close-readings of short passages and read for basic content
- analyze the genre/value of a primary source
- analyze an author’s perspective/value of a primary source
- compare multiple sources
- ask historical questions of primary sources

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