



Information Literacy Guidelines and Competencies for Undergraduate History Students

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Introduction & Purpose

Historical research presents unique challenges in understanding, identifying, acquiring, evaluating, and using information. It also requires understanding and respecting the ethics of the historical discipline as well as a concern for examining all aspects of historical scholarship and the body of historical literature. These guidelines, which are to be used in conjunction with the Association of College and Research Libraries' "[Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#)," are a measurable set of proficiencies required for successful historical research by undergraduate students.

This document has multiple purposes. It is intended to inform students of basic skills required for historical study; to provide a framework for faculty and librarians to assess those skills; to aid faculty in designing research methods classes, assignments, and projects; and to encourage collaboration between librarians and faculty in teaching, course design, and assessment of undergraduate history education.

1. Understands the structure of historical information and the historical research process.

- 1.1 Understands the difference between primary and secondary sources.
- 1.2 Understands that primary sources exist in a variety of formats, including books, periodicals, manuscripts, audio, still images, maps, and moving images. Primary sources can be in digital and/or analog or physical formats, and some unique materials can only be accessed at specific locations.
- 1.3 Understands that secondary and tertiary sources are produced and disseminated in a variety of types and formats, including monographs, scholarly journal articles, conference proceedings, scholarly lectures or talks, dissertations, historical catalogs, indexes, encyclopedias, handbooks, and statistical data.
- 1.4 Differentiates between serious and credible popular treatments of a historical topic and peer-reviewed, scholarly analyses written by and for historians.
- 1.5 Distinguishes resource types and formats in standard citations.

2. Identifies and locates historical research sources through appropriate methods, techniques, and tools.

- 2.1 Identifies appropriate tools and resources for specific research questions, recognizing and distinguishing the differences between online library catalogs, WorldCat, and general and subject-specific periodical indexes.

2.1.1 Effectively identifies and uses relevant online databases and print sources, both at the researcher's institution and at other institutions. Understands the differences between these types of resources and an Internet search.

2.1.2 Consults reference resources that are authoritative, current, and most relevant to the topic.

2.2 When searching databases and search engines, considers and applies the most suitable techniques. Examples include:

2.2.1 Uses appropriate search techniques in the right circumstances (e.g., Boolean searches, keyword, and subject or controlled vocabulary searches, truncation, wildcards, and phrase searches).

2.2.2 Knows when to narrow or broaden terms; uses synonyms when original terms do not bring results; utilizes new terms as found.

2.4.3 Uses subject headings/controlled vocabulary to discover related resources.

2.3 Applies specific search strategies to locate primary sources.

2.3.1 Uses appropriate subject headings such as "sources" or "diaries," or searches by a corporate author, such as "Great Britain. Parliament," in online or print catalogs or databases.

2.3.2 Utilizes print indexes to identify sources when appropriate.

2.3.3 Identifies archives that may contain useful sources and uses finding aids to identify material in archival or manuscript collections.

2.3.4 Recognizes the need to use historically appropriate terms when searching full-text primary source databases.

2.4 Distinguishes between types of sources when results include multiple types (e.g., between primary and secondary sources, or between books and articles).

2.5 Mines references from secondary sources and uses source-appropriate tools to locate them.

3. Critically evaluates and interprets the body of historical research uncovered.

3.1 Evaluates each source and determines if it is primary or secondary, scholarly or popular.

3.2 Recognizes that there are gaps in the historical record.

3.3 Thinks critically about the credibility of sources.

3.4 Determines and considers the credentials and intent of all authors before using any source.

3.5 Considers how the historical context in which the information was originally created, accessed, and distributed affects its message.

3.6 Contextualizes primary and secondary source materials within the larger historiographical debate.

4. Uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose and to develop a historical argument.

4.1 Develops a clear historical question and addresses it with an organized thesis.

4.2 Synthesizes information from a wide range of sources, including a variety of formats and viewpoints.

4.3 Substantiates argument with evidence from primary and secondary sources.

4.4 Acknowledges, concedes, or refutes evidence that runs counter to an argument.

5. Understands and respects the ethical conventions of the historical discipline.

5.1 Does not fabricate, falsify, or willfully misrepresent sources, evidence, and ideas.

5.2 Understands that documents and evidence (primary sources) used to make a historical argument must be properly cited so that other researchers can verify sources and research methods.

5.3 Understands that the work of other researchers and scholars must be acknowledged and properly cited.

5.4 Respects the rights and welfare of individuals during the research process by following the Human Subjects requirements associated with oral history interviews; adheres to privacy policies concerning confidential and sensitive information when examining and using private records.

5.5 Respects preservation concerns related to handling and using historical materials and makes every effort to ensure their use for future researchers.

References

Association of College and Research Libraries. "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education." Accessed March 15, 2012.

<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency>

Association of College and Research Libraries, Literatures in English Section. "Research Competency Guidelines for Literatures in English." Last modified June 2007, accessed March 15, 2012. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/researchcompetenciesles>.

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Smith College Libraries. "Smith College History Majors Research Skills." Last modified May 15, 2007, accessed March 15, 2012.

<http://www.smith.edu/library/services/faculty/infolit/ilprograms/historyskills.htm>.