

HIS 301 Guide to Research

Conducting research is an important set of skills that will help you in any future career. Although researching and writing a paper on history may seem like a narrow project with little real-world application, it is a very good preparation for future projects such as preparing a presentation to a corporate office, or organizing and planning a trip overseas. In those tasks and everything in between, you will need to use reliable sources to inform your decision and then decide how best to present the material in a clear, accurate, and organized manner. This Guide is a series of definitions, tips, and pieces of advice designed to help you get the most out of your research project.

Part I: Different Kinds of Sources

Primary Sources

Definition: Any document or object produced during a period of history by those historical people.

Examples: Newspapers, letters, diaries, laws, religious texts, art, architecture, and anything created or left behind during the period of study.

The inclusion of primary sources allows the historical people to speak and act in our studies. Ultimately, all scholarly works trace their knowledgeable pronouncements to a set of primary sources, without which we cannot know anything about history. Studying the historical documents and created objects of a people allows us to investigate the evidence that all historians must use to create any work of history.

Secondary Sources

Definition: Any written work or production that reflects the content of primary sources. There are two distinct types of secondary sources: scholarly and casual.

Examples: Articles, books, and textbooks; movies, documentaries, and television shows; casual sources such as blogs, journalism, or Wikipedia articles.

Fun fact! A student's paper about history can be a secondary source if it discusses historical records produced in the period of study.

Scholarly Sources

Definition: Works of scholarship done by professional academics.

Examples: Articles and books

Professional academics obtain permission to publish their work through a rigorous evaluation process called "peer review." Peer review is a system in which historians send their papers to an anonymous review process where their colleagues read and evaluate their work based on different levels of expertise. This is highly important, as without peer review, historians could claim anything—and this is precisely what makes Wikipedia a poor choice for a source, even if its contents are technically correct. Without expert peer review, anything could be contained in its articles.

Fun Fact! Some books are not scholarly sources! Look for university presses or the polished books of Ashgate and Brill.

Casual Sources

Definition: General information sources by journalists, bloggers, amateurs, or professionals trained in other fields.

Examples: blogs, newspaper articles, encyclopedias, documentarians, the History Channel, John Green's *Crash Course in History*

A casual source provides us with general information. A journalist, blogger, or encyclopedia writer would qualify as "casual." This information is usually well written and may even go through a rigorous editorial process, but this process is overseen by someone who wishes to produce a well-written and not necessarily accurate piece for public consumption. Any websites or newspapers, no matter how helpful, fall into this category and should be used sparingly.

Part II: How to Find These Sources

Primary Sources

Google is your friend, but it can be a difficult barrier to finding the best sources. To find a series of primary sources, try searching for an adjective (dynastic name or historical person) plus terms like these:

Poem	Writings	Diary	Propaganda
Statue	Letters	Castle	Sculpture
Laws	Building	Clothing	Decree
Will	Art	Journal	Primary Source

Use context clues to determine which of these words or which synonyms would be most useful. The term "primary source" tends to send you to teaching resources, but sometimes those sources can be a great start.

Even better is the use of online databases of growing primary sources. There are hundreds of them with different areas of focus. Feel free to use the following databases to find an ideal primary source for your project, or to search "primary source database" and the name of your topic to find your own:

Name	URL	Description
Fordham Internet History Sourcebooks Project	https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu	Paul Halsall began collecting primary source texts in 1996 while still a graduate student at Fordham University. He graduated and moved on, but he continues to work on his collection today. Transcribed texts from China, Japan, India, Greece, and beyond are organized by theme, region, time period, and more.

Columbia University: Asia for Educators	http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/ps/ps_china.htm	This collection of primary sources contains a series of introductions and context as well as the historical document translated into English. Columbia University also links to timelines and related information so you can make the best choice based on this context. Also included are questions for discussion, but you can ignore those in favor of the primary sources themselves.
Yale University: The Avalon Project	http://avalon.law.yale.edu/	Yale University has collected a wide variety of legal documents pertaining to the history of developing a legal system. These laws, decrees, and codes allow us to see what challenges people faced the past—perceived or real—and how authorities tried to deal with such problems.
LIFE Magazine Photo Archive	http://images.google.com/hosted/life	<i>LIFE</i> magazine has been capturing the world in pictures for the past century. Google and <i>LIFE</i> have teamed up to make <i>LIFE</i> magazine's images searchable. Use images to make your paper come to life! Propaganda posters, advertisements, interactions, and staged photographs can be found in this amazing database.
British Library	http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/index.html	The British Library collected documents related to the British Empire and beyond. Its website has many of the more significant holdings scanned and available online. Explore the "Help for Researchers" section to find information on British Africa, British India, or British relations abroad.

Scholarly Sources

Like primary sources, scholarly sources are found in hundreds or even thousands of places. However, the best place to start as a SNHU student is with the Shapiro Library. There you will have access to scholarly books and articles online.

In addition, you may use EBSCO journal articles as available through the Shapiro library. Use the Live Chat feature for personalized help!

Casual Sources

The online articles, blogs, newspaper reviews, and encyclopedia passages can make or break your essay. How? The best material can be reviewed by smart bloggers in a relative and cogent way. But it can also lead you down a path of confusion when someone tries to impersonate an informed professional but

fails to give you the right information. Avoid all student sharing websites as you seek general information about your project.

Tip: use “site:edu” in your search terms in Google. For instance, “Mughal Empire site:edu” will return only websites from universities. This can help you find professor websites about a certain region, historical theme, or time period. It will even uncover great scholarly articles available online and primary source documents.

Be careful to review what you find, though! Wikipedia has been copied and pasted to the Princeton University server, for instance, and you don’t want to use something you found at “Princeton” that is really just a surreptitious version of Wikipedia. Use your best judgment when assessing whether a university website is a good source for your general information background.

Part III: Bibliography

Now that you have a long list of resources that fall into all three categories—primary sources, scholarly sources, and casual sources—you are ready to create a bibliography in the Chicago style of Turabian footnotes! Here is a list of websites that can help you create a bibliography.

Name	URL	Description
Chicago Manual of Style	http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html	The Chicago-style citation system is updated annually as new technology changes the sources we use to conduct our research. This website describes the latest developments. It can be somewhat difficult to use at times, so while it is the most direct source, sometimes it can be a little hard to follow. Perhaps a good place to start.
Bibme.com	http://www.bibme.org/	A citation generator. You’ll need to check the generated citations for accuracy.
The Citation Machine	http://www.citationmachine.net/chicago	The second generation of this website allows you to punch in the related information for your source—a chapter, website, book, film, etc.—and then generates the footnote and the bibliographic entry for you to copy and paste directly into your document. Be sure to check its work!
Purdue University: OWL Guide	https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmoseformatting_and_style_guide/chicago_manual_of_style_17th_edition.html	Purdue’s Writing Lab has produced an excellent interactive guide to citing footnotes in the Chicago style. Sometimes the website is finicky, but the information is accurate and easy to read.



Best of luck! Remember to contact your instructor for any help you might need.