

Department of History National University of Ireland, Galway

Stylesheet and Guidelines for Written Assignments

This document sets out guidelines for the presentation of written assignments in History. Failure to follow these guidelines may result in the loss of marks.

Written assignments are a normal aspect of the examination process for many modules offered by the Department of History. You should make sure that you submit all written assignments that are required. Many students who fail courses do so because they have not submitted written assignments.

If you are submitting a **repeat exam** and have not already submitted a mid-term assignment for the course, it is **your responsibility** to contact the Course Convenor well in advance of the exam, to arrange an appropriate assignment.

Presentation and Layout

- All written assignments must be **typed** or **word-processed**.
- All written assignments must be **double-spaced** and in a **12 point font**.
- Leave 2.5 cm (1 inch) **margins** on both right and left-hand sides of the page to facilitate correction.
- Print only on **one side** of the page.
- Print your **name** at the top or bottom of **every page**.
- Be sure to include **page numbers**, on the right-hand side of each page, either at the top or bottom.
- Every written assignment should be submitted with a **title page** giving the following information:
 - Title of Essay
 - Name of Student
 - Student ID
 - Course Name and Number
 - Name of Course Convenor
 - Word Count
 - Date of Submission
- For every written assignment, also fill out **one copy** of the official **History Assignment Appraisal Sheet** and staple it to the front of **one copy** of your assignment. Copies of the sheet are available from your Course Convenor and from the History Department Secretary. Read the sheet carefully before you write your essay, as it indicates the general criteria for assessment of written work.
- **Staple the pages of your assignment together** so that pages do not become detached. It is not necessary to use any expensive form of binding, or to enclose

- your assignment in a plastic cover. If you are submitting two copies of a mid-term assignment, **DO NOT** staple the two copies together – staple the pages of each individual copy, and then use a paper clip to fasten the two copies together. Do not leave sharp points of staples pointing out where they might cause injury.
- Always **proof-read** your essay carefully before handing it in. This means looking out for spelling and grammar mistakes and typos. If you leave any of these in your work it will result in penalisation.
 - For most mid-term assignments cases you will need to submit **two** copies of your assignment, so that one can be given back to you with comments to help you improve future work, and the other retained for the external examiners. For dissertations and most extended essays, you will only need to submit **one** copy, which will be retained for the external examiners.
 - Always **retain an additional printed copy** of your assignment.
 - Always **backup your work as you write**. Floppy disks are not a reliable means of doing this. Backup to the University servers, use USB memory devices, and archive files to writable CD or DVD regularly.
 - **Follow any specific guidelines given by your Course Convenor**, particularly relating to how and when you should submit your assignment.

Late Submission of Assignments

If you submit an assignment late you may be penalised. For details please see the History Department Policy on Late Submission of Assignments.

If for any reason you think you are going to miss a deadline for an assignment, contact the Course Convenor before the deadline elapses to discuss your options.

Writing Technique and the Nature of Essays

A number of useful guides have been published which can help you with your writing technique. It is well worth reading one. The following are available in the University Library (there are many others):

John Peck and Martin Coyle, *The Student's Guide to Writing* (London, 1999)

Brian Greetham, *How to Write Better Essays* (London, 2001)

The website of the School of Geography at Birkbeck, University of London, provides a useful **short guide to writing essays** – you can access it online at:

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/geog/current/study_skills/essay_writing/

An essay is a particular type of written assignment that has its own rules. In general, in a History essay you will attempt to convey to the reader your own ideas about a very specific subject, in the form of a reasoned, logical and balanced argument. History as a

discipline involves understanding that there are many valid perspectives on any one issue. Different people at the time you are writing about had a range of viewpoints on the world around them. Part of the task of the historian is to exercise powers of **empathy** and reflect the diversity of those past perspectives. Thus you must write a **balanced** essay which discusses a range of different viewpoints and interpretations. However, at the same time the historian must acknowledge that she is writing from her own particular viewpoint. Thus in your essay you must **make it clear what your own viewpoint** is, and **argue the case** for why this is the most useful way of seeing the subject.

Course Convenors will generally set specific titles for essays, designed to encourage you to argue a case on a particular issue. Titles will often take the form of a question, and may focus on controversial or difficult aspects of a topic. **It is thus vital that you take the title and use it exactly as it has been set by the Course Convenor. You should aim to answer the question, or address the issues raised by the title, as explicitly as possible.**

At all times, your essay should focus on analysis and argument – **NOT** narrative or a simple chronology of events. Why? Because you are trying to write in the style of a scholarly academic historian. You are **NOT** trying to write in the style of a popular historian, or attempting to write a section of a textbook, or just telling a story.

In brief, if writing an essay, you should be sure that it includes three substantive parts:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

In the **Introduction** you need to set out your own arguments, and show how you will develop them over the course of the essay. You should ensure that your arguments directly answer the specific question that has been set. You may also wish to use your introduction to define any terms or phrases which are integral to the essay and which may require clarification.

The **Body** of your essay will be composed of multiple paragraphs, and will develop the ideas set down in your introduction. Each paragraph should in general deal with one main point, which is clearly and logically connected with the paragraphs and points that precede it and follow it, and thus contributes to the overall flow of your argument.

The **Conclusion** of your essay must show how you have fulfilled the promise of the introduction, how you have supported your arguments, and how you have answered the specific question that was set. You may also use the conclusion to acknowledge any ambiguities or points of debate that must remain unresolved.

You should aim for a clear, concise and accurate writing style. You should avoid using overly complex language, and make sure that you know the meaning of all the words that you use. Short sentences are often better than long ones.

Only include material that is relevant to your argument. Avoid vague, general statements, and include only points and ideas that help you answer the question. Use enough evidence (examples, case studies, statistics) to back up your argument, but do not fall into the trap of providing evidence merely for its own sake.

Acknowledging your Sources – Avoiding Plagiarism

All work that you submit for assessment purposes is accepted on the understanding that it is your own work and written in your own words, except where explicitly referenced using the accepted norms and formats of the discipline of History. When you submit your assignment you certify that this is the case by signing the History Assignment Appraisal Sheet. A breach of this trust is a form of cheating and is a very serious matter. The History Department follows the **University's Code of Practice for Dealing With Plagiarism**, and students may be disciplined accordingly.

Plagiarism, as understood in the University's Code of Practice, **is the act of copying the work of another without adequate acknowledgement**. This can apply to both direct quotes and paraphrased material, to student essays as well as academic and other sources, and can be inadvertent as well as intentional. The submission of plagiarised materials for assessment purposes is fraudulent and suspected cases will be investigated and dealt with according to University procedures for implementing the Code.

Course Convenors are good at detecting plagiarism, and now also have access to sophisticated software which can check essays for plagiarism, including the *Turnitin* service. This is built on an international database of sources and essays, including material from the internet and material submitted by other students.

How do you avoid plagiarism? In writing History assignments, you will inevitably be drawing on the work of other authors. You indicate your debts to these sources by using quotation marks, footnotes and bibliographies, and thus by acknowledging all material used in the preparation of your own work.

To facilitate referencing in footnotes and bibliography, you need to take good notes as you read. You should make sure that for every book, chapter or article you read, you keep a note of all publication details. In your notes you should also make it clear to yourself when you are writing something down verbatim, and when you are summarising something in your own words. Keep track of the page numbers on which points or quotes appear.

Then, when you write your essay, **always** put quotation marks around someone else's words, and acknowledge the source in a footnote too.

If you insert a word or a short phrase of your own into a quote, include it in square brackets.

For example:

‘The atrocities in the Congo Free State [publicised by Roger Casement] raised a storm of protest.’⁹

If you omit words from the quote, use square brackets and three dots to indicate this.

For example:

‘London, presented to me in books and pictures, was much more vivid to me than any New Zealand town except Auckland [...] English politics loomed larger than New Zealand.’¹²

Avoid long quotations. Do not use too many quotes: as a *very* rough guideline, use no more than one quote in each paragraph. Instead, paraphrase wherever possible. According to Diana Hacker, ‘A paraphrase reports information in roughly the same number of words used by the source, [but does not borrow] extensive language from a source [...] you must restate the source’s meaning in your own words.’¹ So you should change the structure of the sentence, as well as the words being used. When you paraphrase, you **MUST** also include a footnote and an entry in your bibliography, just as you would for a quotation.

Ideas borrowed from other people should still be acknowledged, even if expressed in your own words.

Here are some examples:

Original Quotation: ‘With his treasury overflowing with American silver, the King of Spain could credibly aspire to world domination. What else was all that money for, but to enhance his glory?’²

Unacceptable Paraphrase: According to Ferguson, with a treasury overflowing with American precious metals, the King of Spain could reasonably hope for world domination. Why else did he want all that money, but to give him more glory?

This is unacceptable as a paraphrase, because a) there is no footnote reference to the original source, b) it uses too many of the same words used by the original author, and c) it adopts much the same sentence structure. Using Ferguson’s words and ideas in this way would amount to plagiarism.

Acceptable Paraphrase 1: According to Ferguson, the Spanish King hoped for glory and world domination, as he had grown rich on silver from the Americas.³

This is an acceptable paraphrase, as when you compare it with the original you can see that it uses both different wording and a different sentence structure. It also includes a footnote reference to the original source.

¹ Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual* (Boston, 1993), pp. 84-85.

² Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London, 2003), p. 7.

³ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London, 2003), p. 7.

Acceptable Paraphrase 2: The Spanish King had grown rich on American silver, which he saw as a means to increase his political power in Europe and overseas.⁴

This is also acceptable. Although it is not such a close paraphrase as paraphrase 1, it is clearly coming from the same source and thus needs the footnote.

Good referencing will improve your grade. Bad referencing may lose you marks. It is better to err on the side of over-citation than under-citation.

You may find yourself discussing an assignment with another student. If you do so, ensure that when it comes to the writing stage, you work alone and use your own ideas and words. Do not allow another student to copy your work. **Replicating the work of another student, or allowing your work to be so replicated, is an offence under the University's Code of Practice for Dealing With Plagiarism**, and will result in penalisation.

Be extremely wary if using non-academic websites, including *Wikipedia*. They may contain information plagiarised from other sources. This might inadvertently lead you to commit an act of plagiarism yourself. In general, remember that **non-academic internet sources** can be unreliable. Think about who put the information on the net, what their credentials are, and what their purpose was. Prior to publication, scholarly books and articles (including those available through databases like JSTOR) are read by other historians to assess their accuracy and interpretation. Non-academic internet sources usually are not. They can be posted by anyone and may include serious errors. They should thus be avoided.

Formatting your Footnotes and Bibliography

It is easier for the reader if you use **footnotes** rather than endnotes. Most word processing packages will allow you to insert a footnote into your document automatically. This should be inserted after the quote or the sentence containing the idea you wish to reference, and should come after the quote mark or the full stop. A superscript number appears in the text, and a reference to that number in a note at the bottom of the page.

Each note should contain an abbreviated reference to the work you are citing, including (as a minimum) the author's surname, a short form of the title of the work, and the page number in the source in which the words/idea that you are using appears. To indicate a single page, use 'p.' – to indicate a range of pages, use 'pp.'

For example:

9. Mulgan, *Making of a New Zealander*, p. 107.

⁴ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London, 2003), p. 7.

For full details of the book, the reader may then refer to your **bibliography**. This should come on a separate page at the very end of your assignment, and include an entry for every book, article etc. you have used, even if you have not quoted from each source directly in your work. This allows the reader to see what you have found useful in putting your assignment together, and to follow up with their own reading. In your bibliography you should list all works in alphabetical order according to the surnames of the authors. For an entry for an anonymous work, alphabetize the first word of the title and list under that letter. Do not put into your bibliography works that you have not consulted, simply to pad out your list. This is dishonest and will be obvious to the reader.

The following are examples of the information that you should include for each entry in your bibliography, and how this information should be presented. Pay particular attention to the punctuation and use of *italics*, and make sure that you follow a consistent form of referencing for every entry in your bibliography. Course Convenors may require you to construct your entries in specific ways; if in doubt, please ask them for guidance.

- For single-volume books:
Mulgan, Alan. *The Making of a New Zealander* (Wellington, 1958).
or, if the name of the publisher is also required,
Lewis, Bernard. *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).
- For multi-volume books:
Morrison, Samuel Eliot. *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1942).
- For anonymous works:
The Annals of Ulster, Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds.) (Dublin; Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983).
- For essays in edited collections:
Jeffery, Keith. 'The Second World War', in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (eds.) *The Oxford History of the British Empire volume 4: the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999).
- For articles in scholarly journals:
Louis, Wm. Roger and Robinson, Ronald. 'The Imperialism of Decolonisation', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 22, no. 3 (September 1994), pp. 462-511.
- For articles in newspapers:
Clarity, James F. 'Immigrants Turn Tables on Ireland. An Illegal Influx Searches for a Taste of Economic Success', *International Herald Tribune*, 16 June 1997.

- For websites:
National Library of Australia, 'Year in Review, 2001',
<http://www.nla.gov.au/pub/yearinreview/2001/index.html>, accessed 27 August 2007.
- For primary sources:
Citation styles for primary sources vary considerably, according to the nature of the source material being used and the conventions in the field. Consult related books and articles to see how other historians have cited similar primary material, or ask your Course Convenor.

HISTORY ESSAY CHECKLIST

CONTENT - Have you:

- Included an introductory paragraph? This should avoid vague general statements and instead show the reader how you intend to answer the specific question set, and what your overall arguments are.
- Made sure that every paragraph of your essay is directly relevant to the specific question set, and that you explicitly tell the reader how the material in that paragraph relates to your overall arguments?
- Either paraphrased in entirely your own words the ideas you are citing from books and articles, or used quotation marks whenever you have included direct quotes from these books and articles?
- Included full footnote references **BOTH** for paraphrased ideas cited from books and articles **AND** for direct quotes from books and articles? And a bibliography at the end?
- Finished with a full concluding paragraph that explicitly answers the specific question set, summarises your own overall arguments, and points to any further important issues that you think your essay has raised?

PRESENTATION – Have you:

- Printed a title page for your essay including the question **EXACTLY AS SET** as the title for your essay?
- Proofread your essay thoroughly and eliminated all typos?
- Printed out your essay double-spaced?
- Printed your name on and numbered all sheets, and stapled all sheets together?
- Formatted your footnotes and bibliography correctly, as set down in the History Department Stylesheet?
- Stapled a **SIGNED** official History Department Assignment Appraisal Sheet to the front of **ONE COPY** of your essay?

**IF YOU HAVE NOT DONE ALL OF THESE THINGS
THEN YOU WILL LOSE MARKS!!!**