

### Note to the Fifth Edition

This is an updated version of a booklet first published in 1962 and used by many generations of undergraduate history students. I am indebted to those students and to faculty colleagues and other friends who made suggestions for improving the booklet from edition to edition. Reference librarians and other computer experts have given generous assistance, too, as I sought to bring the directives in this new edition more fully into accord with modern computer technology. I thank especially Roland Teske, John Jentz, Keven Riggle, and Phillip Naylor. I owe a debt, also, to the late Livia Appel, who, as book editor at the Wisconsin Historical Society, first alerted me to the fine points of scholarly historical writing.

I have relied on *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 2003), and Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), for the forms of footnotes and bibliography that I have adopted. I have adamantly insisted, however, on keeping the booklet strictly limited in size.

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## RESEARCH PAPERS IN HISTORY

Research papers are an essential part of a history program, for they give students an opportunity to become, in a limited way, historians themselves. By writing research papers in which historical events are reconstructed from actual contemporary remnants of those events, students learn the skills and techniques of historians. Such knowledge not only develops them as creative writers but enables them to understand and appreciate more deeply the work of historians whom they study.

This introductory guide supplements the principles of writing research papers learned in first-year English courses. In particular, it deals with writing techniques and the proper documentation of sources in scholarly historical writing. In doing so, it directs the use of footnotes and a formal bibliography, not the entry of citations within parentheses in the text with a reference list of the works cited at the end. This latter form, MLA Style (promoted by the Modern Language Association), and a similar style, APA Style (promoted by the American Psychological Association), are widely used in disciplines other than history. For answers to questions about footnotes and bibliographies not considered in this booklet, see the *Chicago Manual of Style* and Turabian's *Manual for Writers*.

### CHOOSING A TOPIC

**1 Topics.** No research paper can turn out well unless the topic is carefully chosen. If the topic is too broad, the paper will be no more than a general summary or will be made up of scattered pieces of information that do not make a unified whole. Choose a topic or problem that interests you and one that has value in illustrating important events or movements. Do not choose a topic simply because you find material about it on the Internet.

**2 Narrowing the topic.** Begin with a broad field, then progressively narrow it until a workable topic is attained. In many cases the exact limitation of your topic will not come until you have started to gather the material. Then a better knowledge of available sources and of questions and problems involved in the topic will help you to make a proper decision. In selecting a topic, seek the advice of your instructor, who can help you to judge if the topic is too broad, suggest ways of limiting it, and point to available source materials.

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