



Start Here!

Thank you. If you're reading this, it's because you've agreed to volunteer your time to answer questions at AskHistorians, and if you're a working historian, we know how busy you are. That's because we're historians, too. We created this space to connect people who have questions about history with experts who have answers.

Why Reddit? Well, [it's one of the largest websites on Earth](#), and it offers an unprecedented opportunity to connect with specialized and lay audiences around the world. As of July 2015, we had more than 416,000 registered users and untold numbers more who visit daily through links on Reddit.

While regular volunteers (mostly professionals or students) answer questions on a daily basis, we also enjoy opening this forum to historians whose work we admire. If you're promoting a new book or TV series, it's also a good way to reach an audience already interested in history.

Regardless of why you're here, we're glad to have you. We've found (and we hope you will, too) that asking and answering questions here can be as rewarding for the answerer as the questioner. Our goal is to make this process as easy as possible for you.

Your first step

At least 15 minutes before your scheduled AMA, you'll need to create your own unique Reddit account to identify yourself. Open an Internet browser on your computer. In the address bar, type in www.reddit.com/r/askhistorians and hit enter.



A quick guide to local slang

AMA: "Ask Me Anything." It's Reddit's term for an online Q&A.

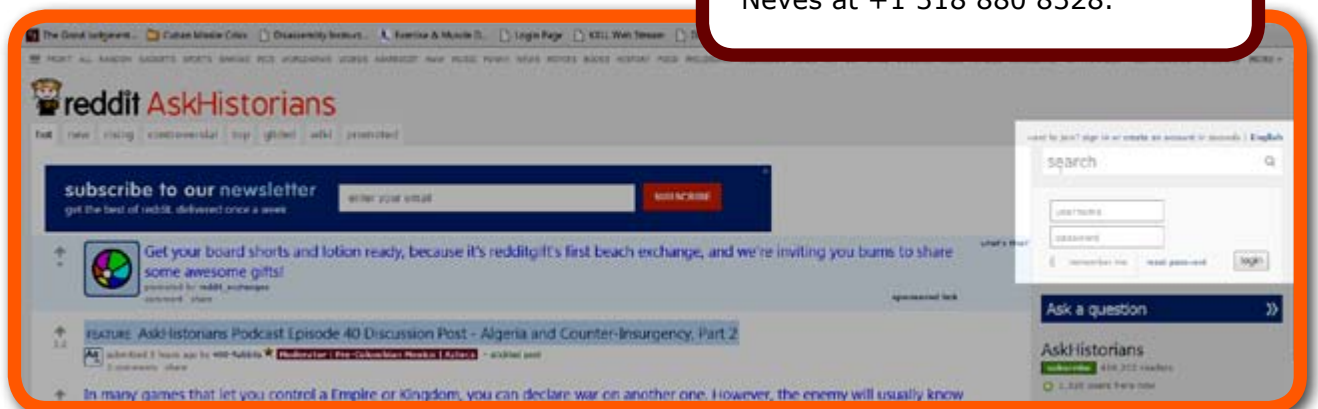
Subreddit: A Reddit channel, like AskHistorians, for discussing a particular topic. There are thousands of subreddits on Reddit.

Flair: On AskHistorians, a colored box next to a username or login that identifies the user as an expert in a particular subject.



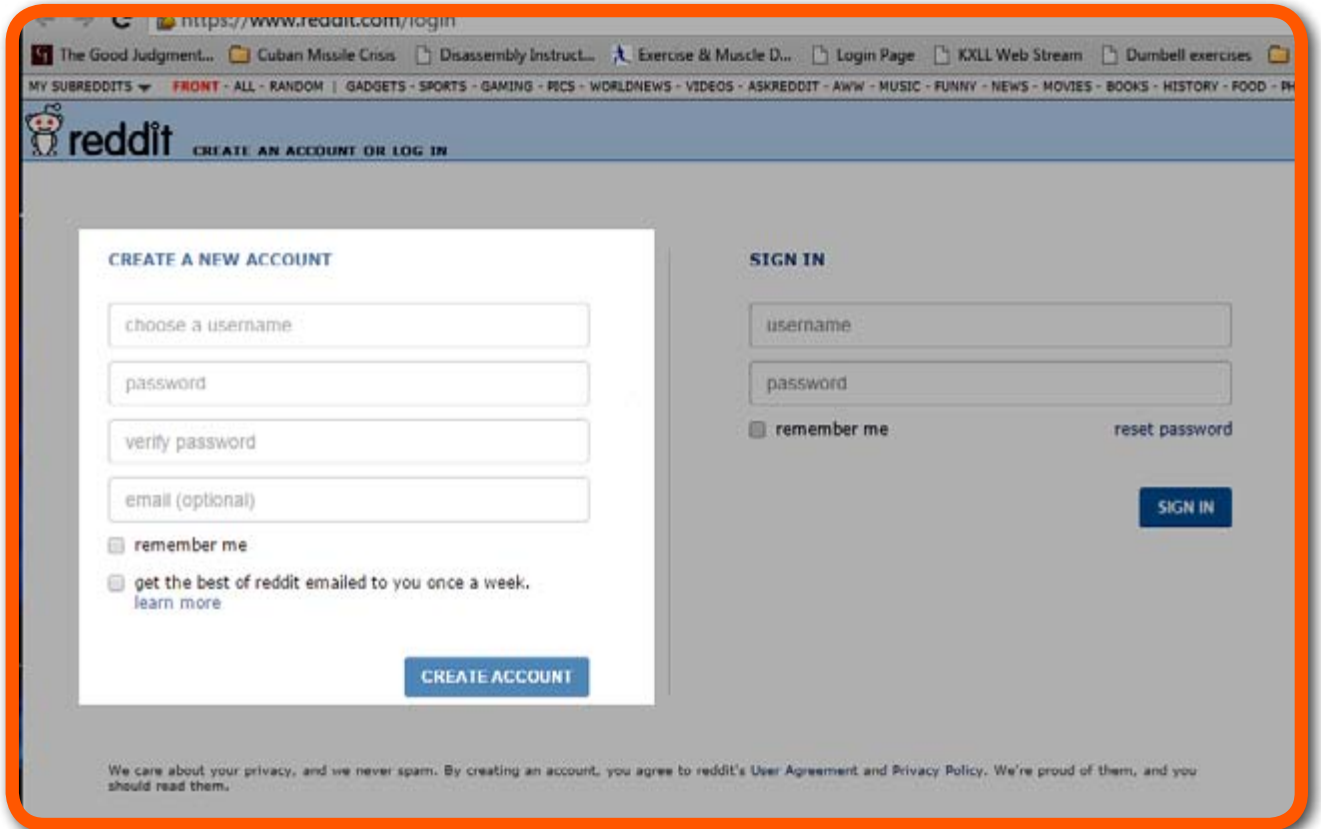
Having trouble?

If you find yourself stuck creating your AMA, contact AMA coordinator James Brooks at +1 907 419 7732 or assistant coordinator Chris Das Neves at +1 318 880 8328.



When the page loads, the above image is what it should look like. On the right margin, find the login box and the small link that says [“create an account.”](#)

When you click that link, you'll either (depending on your Web browser and settings) be presented with a new Web page like the one below or by the same information in a small popup box on your screen. In either case, follow the instructions to create a new account. For your username, we suggest the format *Firstname_Lastname*, but feel free to choose whatever identifying name you prefer. You do not have to provide your email address, but it is useful in case you forget your password.

A screenshot of the Reddit website's login and account creation page. The browser address bar shows 'https://www.reddit.com/login'. The page has a blue header with the Reddit logo and navigation links. The main content area is divided into two sections: 'CREATE A NEW ACCOUNT' on the left and 'SIGN IN' on the right. The 'CREATE A NEW ACCOUNT' section includes input fields for 'choose a username', 'password', 'verify password', and 'email (optional)', along with checkboxes for 'remember me' and 'get the best of reddit emailed to you once a week'. A 'CREATE ACCOUNT' button is at the bottom. The 'SIGN IN' section includes input fields for 'username' and 'password', a 'remember me' checkbox, a 'reset password' link, and a 'SIGN IN' button. At the bottom, there is a small text block about privacy and terms of service.

As soon as you press “create account,” you’ll be automatically logged in and redirected to Reddit’s front page. Retype www.reddit.com/r/Askhistorians in your Web browser’s address bar to return to AskHistorians.

You should still be logged in to your new Reddit account, but if not, enter your new username and password in the login box at the upper-right corner of the AskHistorians front page. You should be now logged in and ready for the next step!

Broken link?

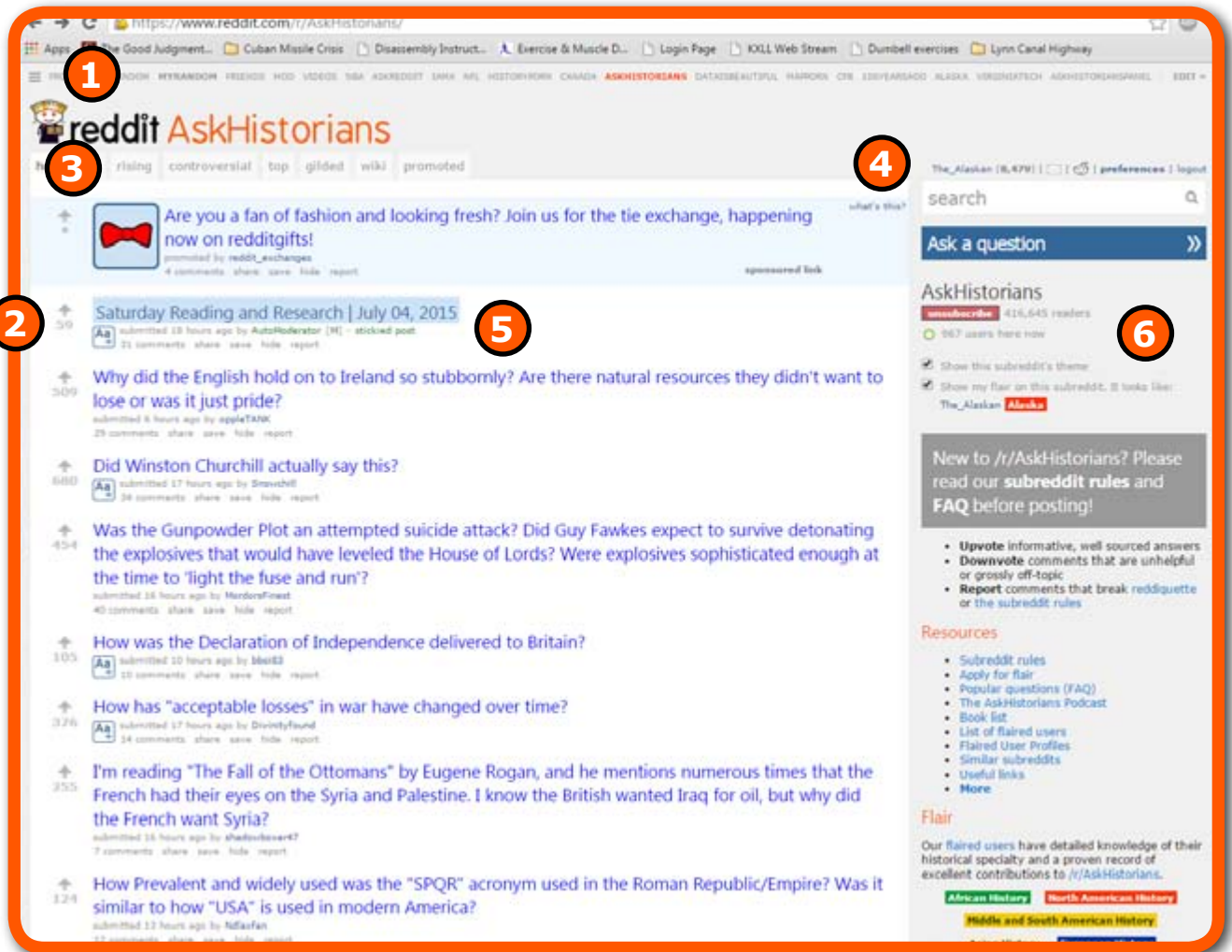
Do you keep getting a “page not found” error when you type in the Web address for AskHistorians? Don’t forget the /r/ in the address!
www.reddit.com/r/askhistorians

What is Reddit, anyhow?

Now that you’re logged in to your own account, let’s take a minute to discuss Reddit in general. AskHistorians is only one part of a larger website, just like your Facebook page is part of Facebook as a whole.

The idea behind Reddit is a social network based on *shared interests*, not personal connections like Facebook is. That means there are channels called *subreddits* devoted to arcane topics ranging from Subaru cars to funny cat pictures, world news headlines to the latest video games. If you get lost in these channels, just remember to come back to AskHistorians by typing the address into your Web browser’s address bar.

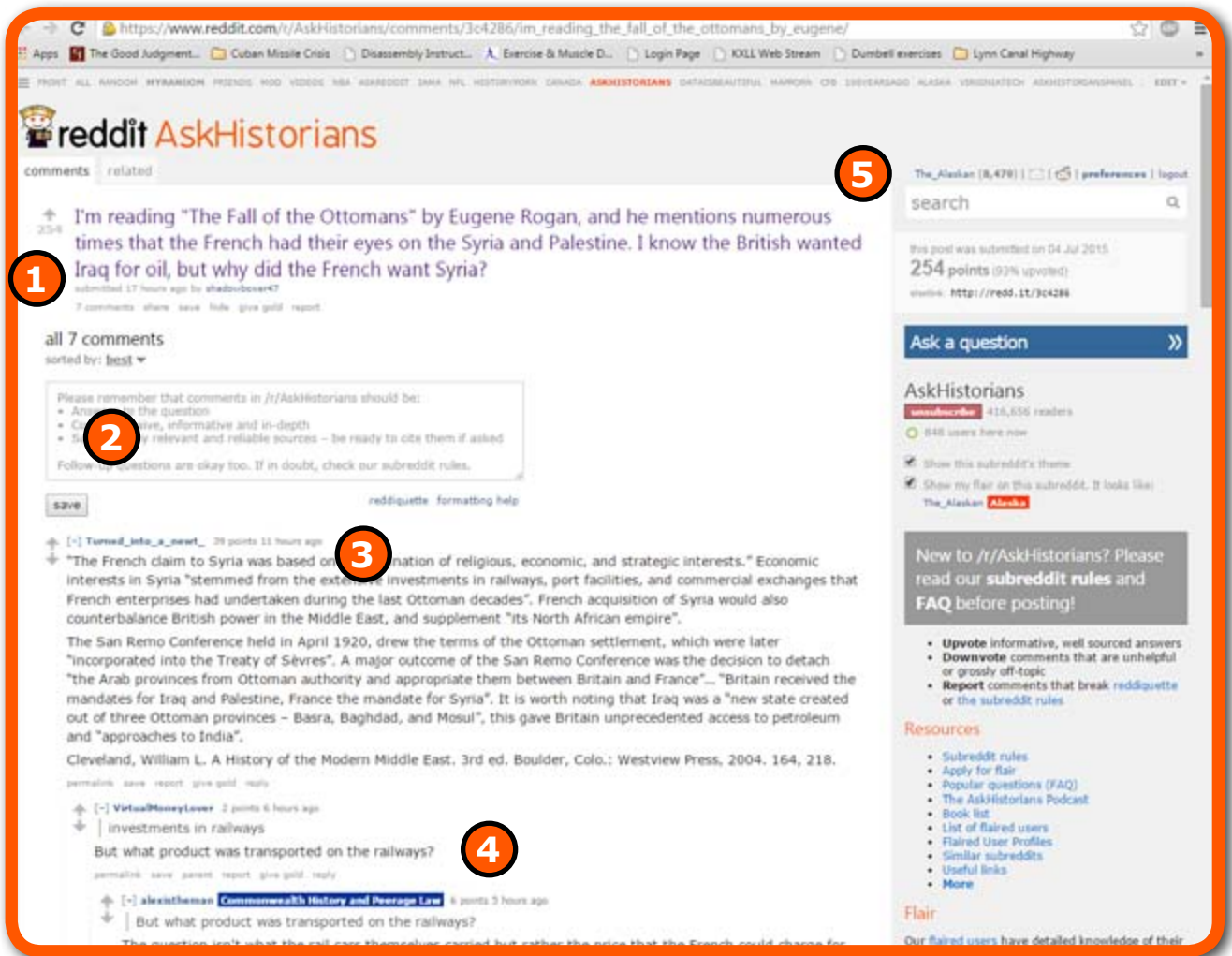
What is all of this?



At first look, Reddit and AskHistorians can look complicated. It's actually really user-friendly. If you're logged in and looking at the AskHistorians homepage (www.reddit.com/r/askhistorians), here's a quick overview.

- 1** At the top of the page, you'll find Reddit's navigation bar. If you only use AskHistorians and don't bother visiting any of the other subreddits Reddit has to offer, this won't affect you.
- 2** Along the left margin of each Reddit page, you'll see numbers bracketed by an up-pointing arrow and a down-pointing arrow. One of Reddit's most popular features are these "upvotes" and "downvotes." Think of them as Facebook's "like" buttons if that website also had a "dislike" button.
- 3** Highly "upvoted" posts rise to the top of the page according to Reddit's formula, but you can use these buttons to filter items by how new they are and other criteria.
- 4** At the upper right, if you're logged in, you'll see your username and some other user tools. We'll get into those later.
- 5** The main part of each Reddit page is the "queue," which shows each user-submitted item. On AskHistorians, each item is a question. Click on the question to see any additional details and answers left by users. On this page, the moderators, have "pinned" a particular discussion topic to the top of the page. This is the space where AMAs are posted.
- 6** At the right side of the page is a list of resources and administrative items for AskHistorians.

What is all of this? (continued)

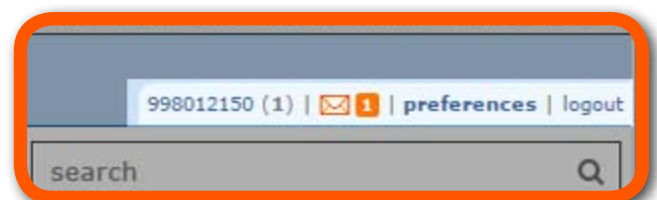


If you click on one of the questions in the queue (Go ahead! Try it!) your screen will look something like this. Comments are nested in tree-branch format beneath each question on AskHistorians, and if you're logged in to your account, you can answer a question.

- 1 At the top of each question page is the original question and any additional text the question-asker provided.
- 2 If you are logged in, you will see a dialogue box that leaves you space to answer the question. Below the box is the "save" button, which submits the comment.
- 3 This is a typical top-level answer, containing a reference to another work. Atop the answer is the writer's username and a score listing the number of upvotes that answer has received.
- 4 Below that top-level answer, another user has clicked the small "reply" button to reply directly to it with a follow-up question.

- 5 The right-hand margin stays mostly the same whether you're looking at an individual question or the AskHistorians main page.

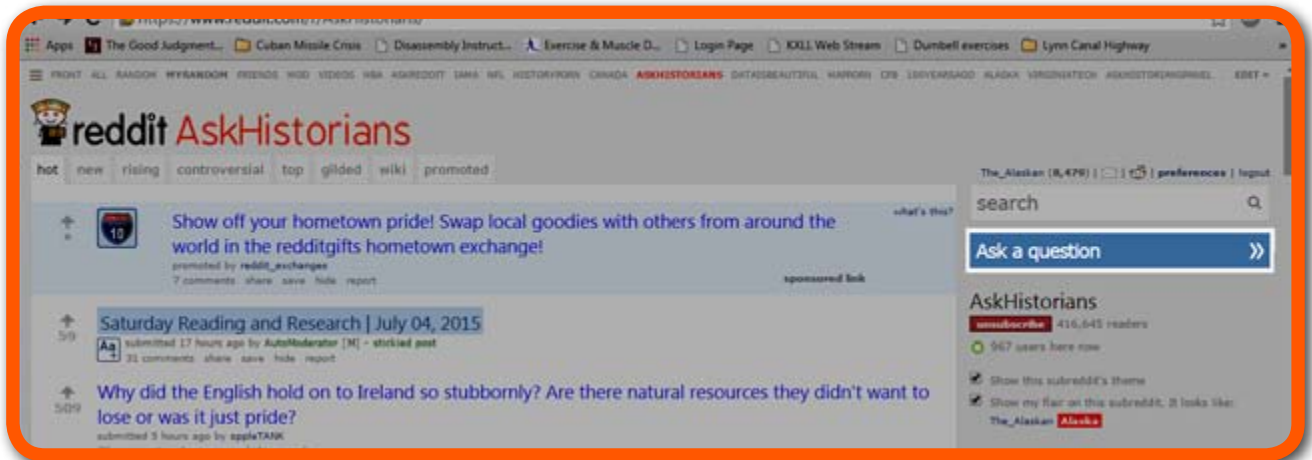
If you are logged in, your username will be displayed near a small envelope icon. This icon indicates whether anyone has sent you a message or responded to a post you have made. It turns orange-red if that happens:



Simply click the envelope to access the message's contents.

Starting your AMA

Now that you have an account and are logged in, it's time to let the AskHistorians readers know that you're online and ready to answer questions. From the main AskHistorians page, click the "Ask a question" button. It's in blue, directly below the search bar, if you're logged in properly.

A screenshot of the "Ask a question" form on the AskHistorians subreddit. The form includes fields for "title" and "text (optional)". The title field contains the text "AMA: Alaska and the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake". The text field contains a paragraph: "I'm James Brooks, author of 9.2: Kodiak and the World's Second-Largest Earthquake, and I'm here today to answer your questions about the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake and any other Alaska-related subjects you're interested in." Below the text field is a "submit" button. There are also sections for "Questions should be about history..." and "options" with a checkbox for "send replies to my inbox".

When you click the "Ask a question" button, you'll be taken to a new screen that prompts you for a title and text.

Normally, this is the form readers use to ask questions. We're going to use it a bit differently. For a title, type "AMA:" followed by a description of what you'd like people to ask you about.

In the text box, identify yourself and your background. It's a good idea to use this space to post links to your material, to the museum or agency you work for, or to your other social media.



How do I post a link?

Formatting text on Reddit is easy. To **bold text**, surround it with ****double asterisks****. To *italicize text*, surround it with **single asterisks**.

Put a blank line between paragraphs to help readability.

To post a link, put the words you want to link in brackets, then put the address in parenthesis.

[Example.](http://www.example.com)

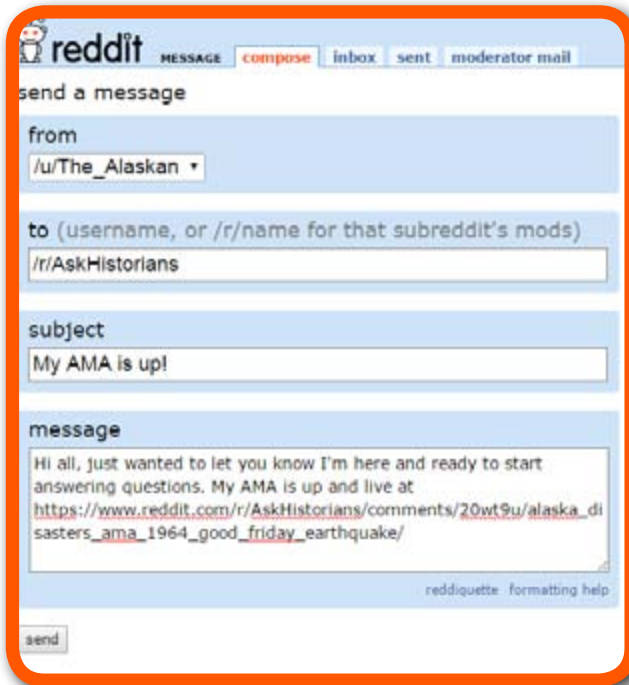
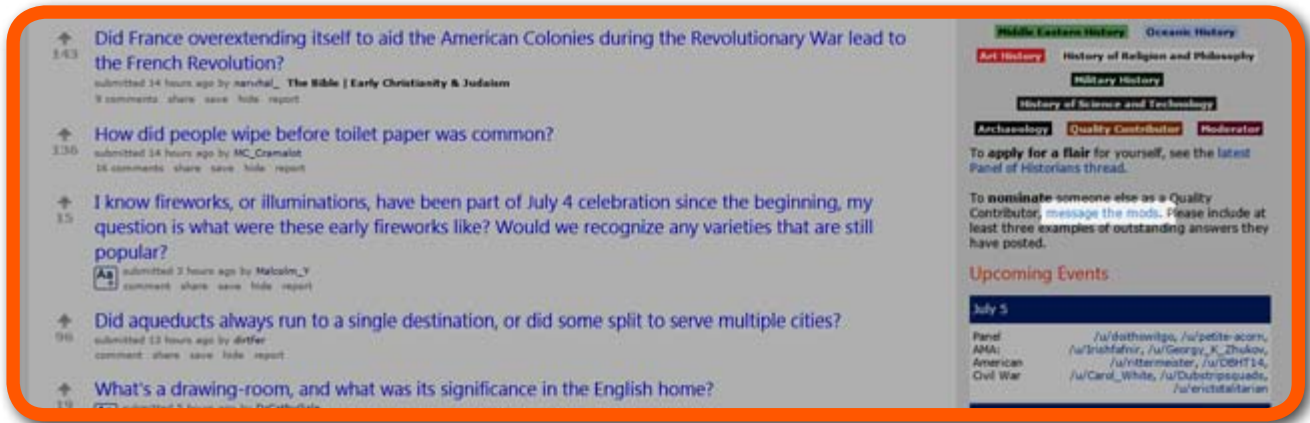
For more, [visit Reddit's official guide](#).

Once you're satisfied with your introduction, click "submit" at the bottom. If your account was just created, you'll be prompted to enter a captcha to ensure you're not a spammer. Once you've entered that and clicked OK, the AMA will. You'll be taken immediately to the page of questions, but keep in mind that it will take time for others to see that you are online and available for questions.

There's one other important step to take before the questions start pouring in.

Inform the moderators

You have your account, you've posted your AMA, and now it's time to spread the word. Navigate to the AskHistorians front page. (Remember, www.reddit.com/r/askhistorians). Scroll down the page, looking at the information in the right margin. You're looking for a small link that says "[message the mods.](#)" If you miss it, there's a second, larger link farther down the page that says "[message the moderators.](#)"



If you click either one of those links, you'll be greeted with a messaging screen like the one to the left.

Fill out the subject and message to let the on-duty moderators know that you're online and ready to start answering questions. (Hint: copy and paste the Web address of your question to save time.)

With this notification, the moderators will be able to "pin" your AMA to the top of AskHistorians, ensuring everyone who visits the page sees it as the first thing when they visit.

After you click "send," start spreading the word on your social media. If you have a Twitter, Facebook or other account you use for business, share it there. We will share it widely in other Reddit channels as well.

What to expect

After you send the moderators a message, navigate back to your AMA. From time to time, refresh the question page (Hint: Pressing the F5 key on your keyboard will refresh the page on most Web browsers.) to see if any new questions have been posted.

Expect things to start slowly. Past AMAs have taught us that the first hour typically sees few questions. In fact, you may find it helpful to step away from your computer and do other work for a time, then return to answer questions.

By the second and third hour after your post, you should be seeing many questions.

According to [our latest census \(taken in February 2015\)](#), our average reader is younger, male, white, and middle-class. Nearly half are students (graduate, undergraduate and high school), and all are passionate about history.

What to expect (continued)

Questions may wander from the given topic, especially if your biography mentions other works and subjects that readers may be interested in.

Our readers enjoy citations and references. Please suggest additional reading if you feel a reader could benefit from it. Online references are good, but hardcopy text is even better.

Don't feel obliged to answer every question. Popular AMAs will generate many more questions than any single individual can answer in a reasonable amount of time.

The AMA continues until you get tired of it. We generally ask that you stay available for three hours from the time the AMA opens, but we're not asking you to stay on the computer for that entire time; we just ask that you monitor it and stay available for questions during that period.

When you're ready to log off and end the AMA, please post that you are doing so. When you get engrossed with the Q&A, it's easy to forget that the readers can't see everything you're doing.

Also, feel free to return to the question even after you've ended the AMA. Readers appreciate responses, even if they come days after the fact.

Finally, remember to have fun. AMAs can include the common bugaboos and typical questions about a subject, but with so many interested people, there's always the chance of a unique question, something you haven't thought about before and inspires you to look at a subject in a new way. We enjoy those moments, and we hope you do, too.

Past participants and examples

While past performance is no guarantee of future outcomes, we've had plenty of successful AMAs in the three years AskHistorians has been operating. Here's a quick list of examples to help you know what to expect:

- In 2014, [Dr. James McPherson](#), author of "Battle Cry of Freedom" and over a dozen other books on the American Civil War fielded questions in an AMA.
- In April 2015, Eric Cline, historian and archaeologist at George Washington University, [answered questions about his new book](#), *1177 BC: The Year Civilization Collapsed*.
- In March 2014, [we organized a panel of geologists and historians to field questions](#) on the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill and the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake, each of which celebrated significant anniversaries in the same week.
- Dr. Elaine Chalus, professor of British History at Bath Spa University [participated in an AMA in 2014](#) and still occasionally answers questions on AskHistorians.
- In August 2014, Dr. Richard Jensen, author of *The Battle Against Anarchist Terrorism*, still [pulled off an excellent AMA](#) even after being delayed by a conflict in his schedule.

Want to maximize your participation?

The key to maximizing the number of readers you get and the number of people who see your new book or paper is to **start early**.

The AMA coordinator will generally set a date for your participation, but we recommend that you post your AMA the night before that start date. That allows readers to submit questions in advance, and it exposes you to the entire world, rather than just the people who are awake when you are. Simply follow the instructions above before you go to bed and explain that you're posting in advance. Let the moderators know, and they'll take it from there. When you wake up, you should have a list of questions from eager readers.

