



AMA Guide

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 AskHistorians? Well, as an historical community on Reddit.com, which is [one of the largest sites on the internet](#), it offers an unprecedented opportunity to connect with specialized and lay audiences around the world. As of January, 2019, we had more than 880,000 subscribed users and averaged more than 2,000,000 unique visitors per month.

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.

Getting Started

The first step to take is creating your own unique Reddit account to post with and identify yourself. Open your Internet browser on your computer and head to www.reddit.com/r/askhistorians.

When the page loads, in the upper right hand corner, shown in the image here, you'll find the options to 'Log In' and 'Sign Up'. As this is your first time here, click on 'Sign Up'. Once you have an account, you'll want to go through 'Log In' next time.

A quick guide to the local slang

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

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

Flair: On AskHistorians, a colored box next to a username the user as an expert in a particular subject. Also refers to the users themselves.



When you click on the ‘Sign Up’ button, you’ll be presented with a pop-up that walks you through the process, first asking you for an email address (1). That isn’t required, but we do suggest it as it is useful in case you forget your password. On the next page (2), it will ask you to choose a username. We recommend something that clearly states who you are, but feel free to choose whatever identifying name you prefer!

The image displays three sequential screenshots of the Reddit sign-up process, numbered 1, 2, and 3. Screenshot 1 shows the initial sign-up screen where users are prompted to enter an email address. Screenshot 2 shows the 'Choose your username' screen, which includes a text input field for the username (currently showing 'Dr_First_Last'), a password field, a CAPTCHA, and a list of suggested usernames. Screenshot 3 shows the 'Find Communities' page, which displays various subreddit recommendations.

Finally you’ll be taken to the “Find Communities” page (3), which is intended to highlight other communities on the site that algorithms have judged “similar”. You can skip over this and just complete your account creation by hitting “Sign Up”.

You’ll now be automatically logged in, and you should still be on AskHistorians, but if you were redirected to the Reddit homepage, just retype www.reddit.com/r/Askhistorians in your Web browser’s address bar to return to AskHistorians. If you are logged out at any point, you can get back into your account by clicking the “Log In” button next to the “Sign Up” one. Now that you have your account and are logged in, we’re ready for the next step!

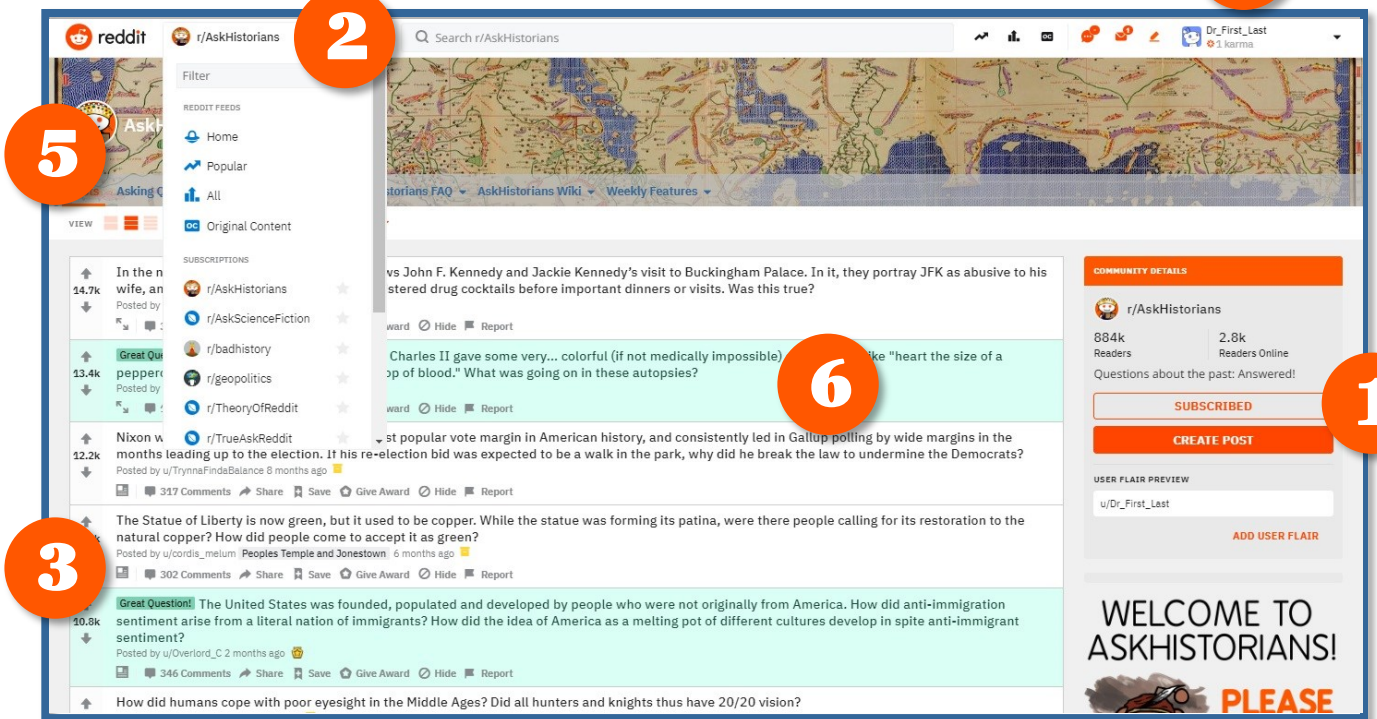
What Is Reddit, anyhow?

Now that you’re logged into your account, let’s take a minute to discuss Reddit overall. 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.

AskHistorians is one of these subreddits, and we pride ourselves for the reputation and unique culture that we have established both on the site, and the wider internet community. We are known for our strictly enforced rules and public history advocacy. Check out our Slate.com OpEd at bit.ly/2TDqBTN!

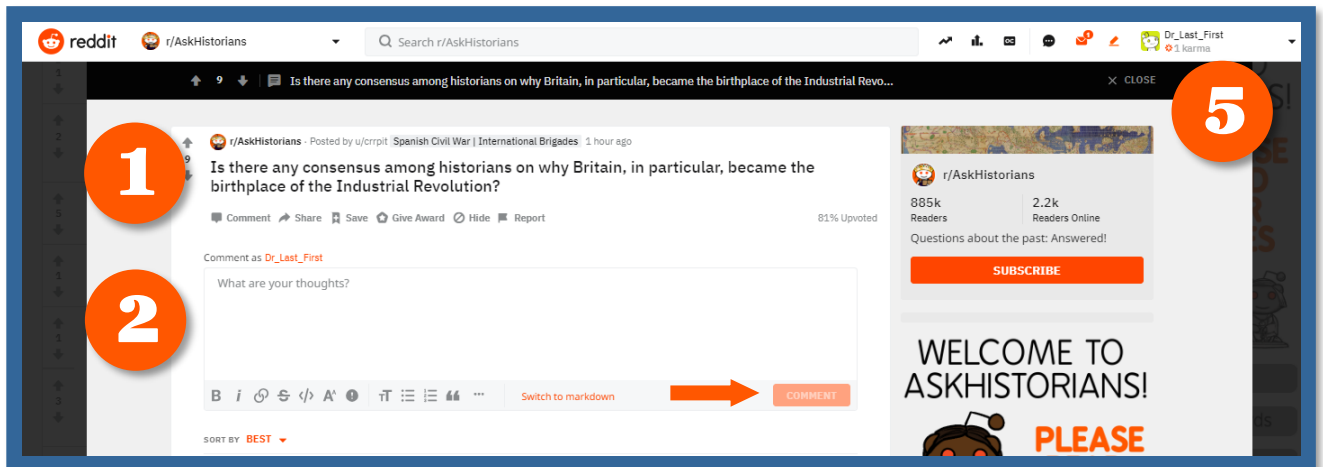
What is all of this?



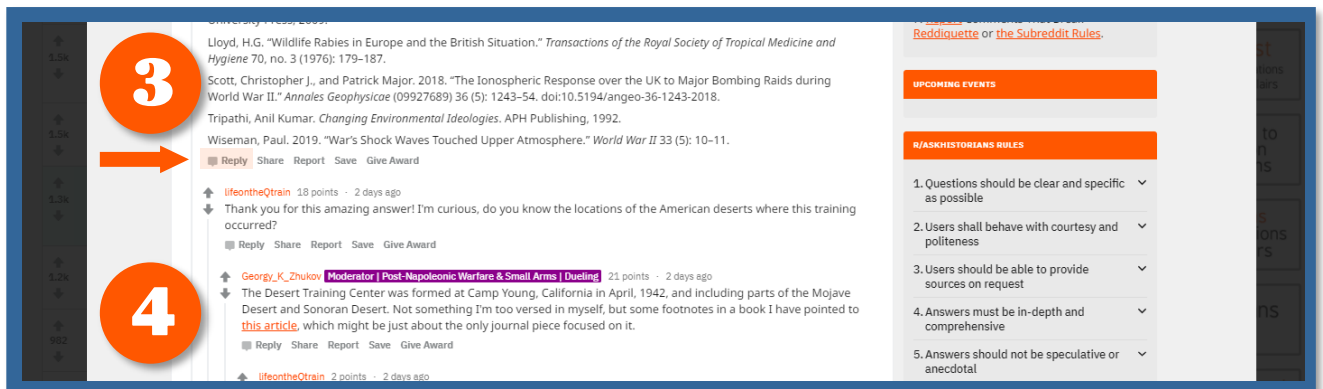
At first look, Reddit and AskHistorians can look complicated. It's actually very user-friendly. If you're logged in and looking at the AskHistorians homepage (www.reddit.com/r/askhistorians), here's a quick overview.

- 1** Along the right hand side you'll find the 'Subscribe' button, as well as other resources and administrative items. If you click "Subscribe" it makes it easier to navigate back to AskHistorians in a pinch.
- 2** At the top left you'll find Reddit's navigation menu. Clicking on it unfurls links to various parts of the Reddit website. If you only use AskHistorians, this won't affect you much, but if you're subscribed, you'll find the quick link to return here.
- 3** Along the left hand 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.
- 4** In the upper right you'll find your user tools. When you're logged in, your username appears here, as well as your inbox and a link to your user-profile.
- 5** To the left, you'll find the "View" options. For this preview it is set to "Classic", but you can also choose "Card" and "Compact" depending on your preference.
- 6** The main part of each Reddit page is the "queue", which shows the user-submitted items. On AskHistorians, most items are questions, as well as announcements from the moderators, or AMA posts. Clicking on an item here will open it up, which we'll go over on the next page. This page can be sorted in several ways, and moderators can 'pin' important items like AMAs to the top.

What is all of this? (cont.)



If you click on one of the questions in the queue (Go ahead! Try it!) your screen will look something like the picture above, and if you scroll down, you'll see the comments like in the image below. If you're logged in, you are able to respond as well. If you haven't logged in, the comment box will prompt you to do so.



1 At the top of each question page is the original question and any additional text the question-asker provided. In an AMA, this would be information about the guest and their work.

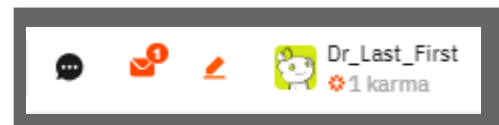
2 Right below that is the dialogue box where you can write and format your response. When your response is ready, hit the 'Comment' button to post. Remember to log in to comment.

3 If you scroll down the page, this is where other users' replies to the original thread show up. A reply that is written in the dialogue box at the top will display like this one, a 'top-level' comment. To reply to the comment, click the 'Reply' button and the same dialogue box will open up

below it.

4 Each reply to a reply is 'nested' like shown here, so that the lower in the chain, the further indented each comment displays.

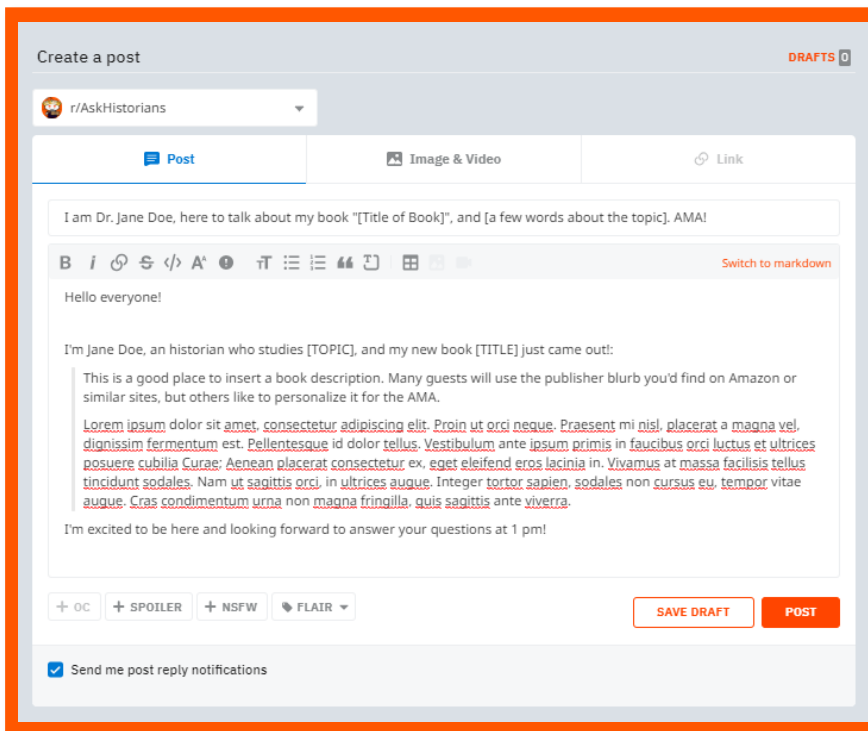
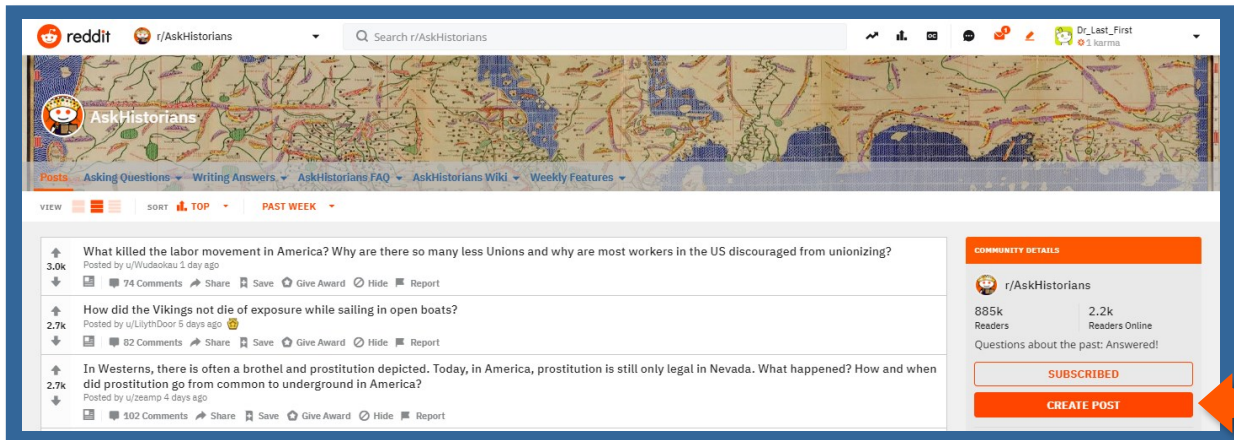
5 The right-hand and top margins are the same as before. If you've made a post/comment, the inbox in the upper right will show if someone has replied to you by turning orange-red and displaying a number.



Click the envelope to access the message!

Starting Your AMA

Now that you've created an account, and familiarized yourself with the basic layout of the site, 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 'Create Post' button on the right hand menu. Make sure you aren't in a different subreddit though! The name and icon of the subreddit will always be displayed both right above 'Create Post'



Clicking the 'Create Post' button will take you to a new screen, similar to the comment dialogue before.

In the 'Title' space, we're going to put a brief description of who you are, and what you'd like users to ask you about!

A good title should include your name, a brief summary of your topic, and perhaps the title of your most recent, or best known, book. There is a 300 character limit, so don't get too wordy! Check the end of the guide for past examples.

In the 'Text' box, you can add some more information about you and your work. This is a good space to mention your books, your social media, or any projects you are working on. Some panelists like to copy over publisher blurbs of their books, while others customize it. That is up to you, but if you have any questions, the AMA Team can help!

Once you're satisfied, you can hit 'Post' and it goes into the queue as the newest post! Make sure that "Send me post reply notifications" is checked, so you'll get inbox notices of replies! Remember, when replies come in, the inbox is in the upper-right of your screen.

Feeling Lost or Confused!?

If anything isn't making sense, the AMA Team is standing by at AskHistoriansAMA@gmail.com during the AMA, and we are also happy to arrange Skype calls to walk you through everything prior.

During the AMA

You have your account, you've posted your AMA, and now it's time to spread the word. Let the AMA Team know that you've posted it at AskHistoriansAMA@gmail.com. We notice pretty quick anyways, but always good to be safe. We'll ensure that your post has the proper 'AMA' highlighting, and gets cross-posted to various social media. Be sure to also link it on your own social media as well! Don't forget to shout-out to [@AskHistorians](https://twitter.com/AskHistorians)!

Making the Most of Your AMA

Over the years of hosting many AMAs, we have noticed some practices that really help ensure you have the best experience possible! Keep these tips in mind during the day.

- **Post Early:** Questions won't always show up immediately, so we recommend posting your AMA a bit before you plan to sit down to answer them. If you post an hour or two prior, run some errands or grade some papers, you'll come back to find a few questions waiting!
- **Dive Deep:** Our readers love the little details and really appreciate seeing thought and depth in an answer. One line might be *correct*, but they are going to love the story behind it too, so don't hold back. Suggested further readings are always a hit.
- **Pick Your Questions:** Some AMAs receive a dozen or two questions. Others receive hundreds. Don't feel like you need to answer every one to be a success. Pick the ones which are most interesting and insightful to start off with.
- **It's OK Not to Know:** Our users can come up with some real headscratchers sometimes, and don't feel like you need to give them *something* even if you don't actually know. They are going to be fine with "That is a great question, but I haven't seen that in my research yet. Maybe in the next book!"

Things will start off a little slow as it can take some time for users to see the AMA and think of what question(s) they want to ask, which is why we recommend posting the AMA a few hours before you have penciled in the time you are planning to spend answering questions. If you are taking this approach, it is a good idea to add in the Text box what time you are returning to answer questions.

When questions do come in, you'll receive the Inbox Notification to let you know, and most browsers will also support a pop-up notification as well. You can respond to the questions both in the AMA itself, or by replying to the Inbox message. Either way, it will show in the AMA.

Given the nature of the AMA, the number of questions can vary from a dozen to the hundreds. No one is expecting every question to get answered, and our general rule of thumb is for a guest to be willing to devote three to four hours to answering questions in the AMA. Some prefer to do it in one sitting, while others might space it out over a few smaller sessions. There is no "right" way to do it, this is just a matter of personal preference, although we do encourage guests to log in briefly the next day for any trailing follow-up questions.

During the AMA (cont.)

As you answer questions, more will be coming in. Some will be new, and some might be follow-ups to your existing answers. Everything will show up in your Inbox, and if you view the AMA page itself, replies will be nested, while the new questions will be at the 'top level. Follow-up questions can be some of the most rewarding to answer, as they are

AMAs can be a balancing act between volume and depth. Don't feel like you need to write a dissertation on every question, but don't pass each one off with a sentence or two either. Try and find the middle ground that allows you to explore the question without devoting too much time to any single one.

When you're ready to call it a day, you can let everyone know that the AMA has ended by editing the original post to let them know that you are wrapping things up.

More important than anything else though, don't forget to have fun! AMAs can include the common and the groanworthy questions you might expect from someone with no familiarity of the topic, 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

In a final note, if you are looking for some examples of past AMAs, either for inspiration or just to get a sense of how they operate, here are a few of our favorites from years past:

- [Dr. David S. Anderson on the debunking of pseudo-archaeological claims](#)
- [Dr. David Andress on the French Revolution](#)
- [Dr. Ashley Farmer on African-American women's history](#)
- [Dr. Lorien Foote on honor and POWs in the American Civil War](#)
- [Dr. Roel Konijnendijk on the Peloponnesian War](#)
- [Dr. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld on cultural memory of the Holocaust](#)
- [Dr. Alex Wellerstein on the Manhattan Project](#)

What About the Trolls?

If you have ever been on the internet, you know some people try to ruin it for everyone else. AskHistorians is an actively moderated space, with a large team of volunteers who curate the space and keep out troublemakers. We can't always prevent them from showing up in the first place, but we can make sure they don't stick around. If you see this:



It is because the moderators have removed someone breaking our rules concerning civility, racism, and good-faith participation.