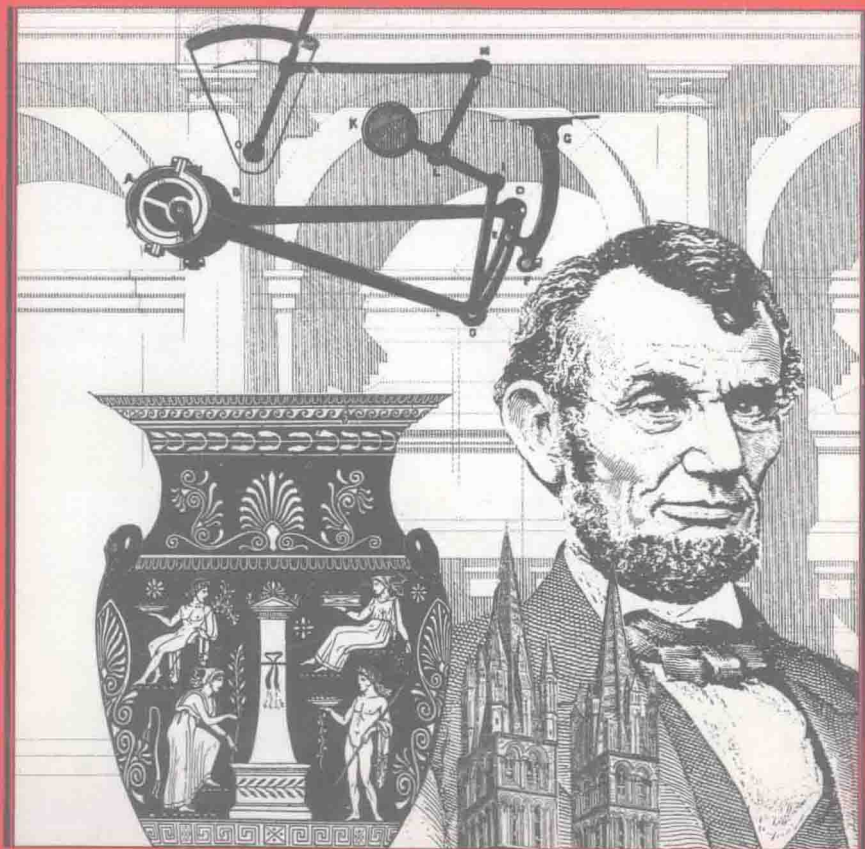


WRITER'S GUIDE

History



HENRY J. STEFFENS
MARY JANE DICKERSON

WRITER'S GUIDE

History

HENRY J. STEFFENS

MARY JANE DICKERSON

with TOWN

ARTHUR W. BIDDLE, *General Editor*
all of University of Vermont

D. C. HEATH AND COMPANY
Lexington, Massachusetts Toronto

Copyright © 1987 by D. C. Heath and Company.

Cover illustration by Karen Watson, copyright © 1987 by D. C. Heath and Company.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

Printed in the United States of America.

International Standard Book Number: 0-669-12002-2

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 86-82753

[[Preface]]

Writing is, after all an act — something that has to be done; and it is better to approach the teaching of it from the point of view of the creative processes rather than from the point of view of the created product, from the point of view of the doer rather than from the point of view of the thing done.

Carl L. Becker, *Detachment and the Writing of History*

The best way to learn history is by writing it — that's the principle behind this book. *Writer's Guide: History* applies current writing theory to the special needs of this rewarding discipline. Historian Carl Becker's words about writing history as a creative process for the writer (and reader) describe what this book is about. The result is a powerful aid for history students at every level.

TO THE STUDENT

Whether you are a committed history major or an engineer taking an elective, whether you are enrolled in your first history course or your final seminar, if you want to understand this challenging field, *Writer's Guide* is meant for you. This book shows you how to handle important historical concepts, explains why historical interpretation remains an ongoing process (and teaches you how to distinguish among varieties of evidence), and even demystifies the research essay. You'll find help with all your writing needs in history.

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

Written by a historian and a writing specialist, *Writer's Guide: History* offers a variety of resources adaptable to virtually any course in your curriculum. Introductory students might find the first three or four chapters most valuable, leading up to a short book review,

a transcribed piece of oral history, or more ambitiously, an annotated bibliography and a short essay written from a primary source. These same chapters would also prove useful for intermediate level students, but their major piece of writing might be a bibliographic essay or the short scholarly article, as explained in Chapters 5 and 6. Advanced students might propose a research project and write an extensively researched essay on their findings. Alternatively, they might prepare bibliographic essays on primary source materials in the campus library or nearby museums. Every student required to do library work will find that the chapter on library research and materials goes beyond the usual introductions. Keeping a journal (as explained in Chapter 2) seems to bring out the best in just about every student from freshman to graduate. Finally, concise guides to usage and punctuation provide handy reference aids.

Each chapter of *Writer's Guide* is designed to be self-instructional. Although the value of many assignments would be enhanced by class discussion, students can use this book independently. The purpose of several chapters is to guide the reader/writer through the steps of researching and writing a variety of papers. In the chapter on the short scholarly paper, for example, the reader learns how to select a topic from interests, then how to focus and substantiate that topic, and finally how to draw inferences and conclusions from that material. Each step culminates in a piece of writing, each piece of writing leads to the next, until the student has produced a finished essay. Undoubtedly, some instructors will simply assign a chapter as a means of assigning a paper. However you choose to use this book, we believe that it will improve your students' understanding of history, not just their writing ability.

Acknowledgments

Our special thanks go to two members of the Reference Department in the Bailey/Howe Library at the University of Vermont. Nancy Crane helped locate reference sources and Linda MacDonald provided very specific help with computer search information. We are also indebted to our students and our colleagues — especially students Patricia Tursi, Brian Cote, James Salengo, David Jamieson, and Eva-Marie Goy; and colleagues Marshall True, Littleton Long, Virginia Clark, Lynne Bond, Anthony Magistrale, Daniel Bean, Kenneth Holland, and Arthur Biddle.

Contents

1	<i>Writing to Learn History</i>	1
	What is history?	1
	Why write history?	2
	You and the writing process	4
	Prewriting	5
	Drafting	5
	Revising	6
	The writer's decisions	6
	Decision 1: Subject	8
	Decision 2: Purpose	9
	Decision 3: Audience	11
	Decision 4: Voice	13
	Further thoughts on writing history:	
	<i>Thomas Jefferson as Writer</i>	14
2	<i>Journal Writing in History</i>	17
	by Toby Fulwiler	
	Why keep a journal?	18
	What is a journal?	19
	Characteristics of journals	20
	Suggestions for keeping journals	22
	What to write	22
	Keeping a research log	29
	Studying for exams with your journal	30
	Further thoughts on history journals:	
	<i>Student Reactions</i>	31
3	<i>Approaches to Writing and Learning History</i>	33
	Getting started	35

CONTENTS

Journal writing	35
List making and free writing	36
Mapping	38
Organized questioning	38
Talking about writing	41
Creating historical contexts	41
Writing, revising, and editing	44
Using the computer	52
Interpreting history: narrating, explaining, and persuading	54
Writing about events	54
Writing about people	55
Creating closure	56
Further thoughts on writing history: <i>Edward Hallett Carr</i>	56
 4 <i>Writing Short Essays In and Out of Class</i>	 59
Reviewing books and articles	60
Organization	63
Reviewing lectures, films, and exhibits	68
Writing from primary sources	70
History through material culture	71
Analyzing documents and texts	75
History through place: Site and structure	79
History through people: Oral history	81
Writing essay examinations	84
Further thoughts on practicing history: <i>Barbara Tuchman on the Historian's Task</i>	86
 5 <i>The Research Paper as the Model for Short Scholarly Writing</i>	 87
The nature of historical sources	88
Primary and secondary sources	89
Objectivity and subjectivity	90
Selecting and developing a topic	93
Following your interests	95
Collecting material and focusing your interests	98

CONTENTS

Handling and organizing your research	102
Bibliography cards and note cards	102
Generating material	106
Creating context	107
Writing your paper	108
Planning	108
The prewriting process	110
Drafting to discover and revising to clarify	111
Reading your paper to yourself and others	112
Editing to share knowledge	113
Further thoughts on writing history: <i>Margaret Yourcenar's</i> <i>"Reflections on the Composition of the Memoirs of</i> <i>Hadrian"</i>	133

6 *Principles of Library Research and Basic Bibliographies* 135

The library	136
Starting your research at home	138
Card catalogue	138
Cataloguing systems	142
Periodicals	151
Two research strategies	152
The "Self-Propelled" mode of research	152
The "Reference" mode of research	155
Help from the reference section	155
Guides to reference books	155
Abstracts	156
Citation indexes	159
Periodicals	164
Newspaper indexes	165
Book review indexes	165
Atlases and chronologies	166
Interlibrary loan	166
The research log	167
Computer searching	169
Further thoughts on writing history: <i>Historians on Research</i>	175

7	<i>Documentation Techniques</i>	177
	Uses of bibliographic references	178
	Comprehensive bibliographies	179
	Selected bibliographies	180
	Guidelines to the evaluation of source material	180
	Annotated bibliographies	181
	Bibliographical essays	182
	What do you need to cite in your endnotes?	183
	Endnote citation format	184
	Guides to style	185
	Additional examples of documentation	186
8	<i>A Concise Guide to Usage</i>	189
9	<i>Make Punctuation Work for You</i>	199
	<i>Further Thoughts on Writing History</i>	207
	<i>Index</i>	209

1 Writing to Learn History

PREVIEW: The main way we learn history is to examine the available written records and artifacts from the past and interpret them by reading and writing about them. This chapter examines some basic principles for all kinds of writing and all fields of study with special attention to writing and learning history.

What is history?

Why write history?

You and the writing process

Prewriting

Drafting

Revising

The writer's decisions

Subject

Purpose

Audience

Voice

*Further thoughts on writing history: Thomas
Jefferson as Writer*

WHAT IS HISTORY?

History is the sum total of past human actions: everything human beings have done, all their actions, and even their inactions. History resembles nature in that we believe both exist, but our real fascination lies in studying and learning about them. This study of history — or doing history — is usually what we mean when we say “history.”

The only way we can do history is to examine the available written records and artifacts from the past and write about them. For example, studying the meticulous register of inquisition kept by the Bishop of Permiers enabled French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie to recreate life in a fourteenth-century French village in his

book *Montaillou*. In another example, American historian Robert Myers edited letters written by a Georgia family before, during, and after the American Civil War in *Children of Pride*. The Jones family letters reveal many facets of daily life and subtle nuances in attitudes toward “the cause” and toward slavery. In addition to documents, much of what we know of the ancient world depends on the many artifacts uncovered through the years such as the discoveries Schliemann made about Troy and Agamemnon’s buried treasure. These artifacts help historians by providing a context for the written inscriptions and records they examine.

WHY WRITE HISTORY?

Doing history always means writing history because there’s no better way to learn history. In this more familiar sense, we can define history as our written description of what we have discovered about the past. We have chosen to study specific aspects of the past because they interest us. Whether that interest be ancient China, women’s suffrage, the Declaration of Independence, or life in a medieval castle, we must turn to the information left us from the past in order to learn and to understand. Fortunately, since western civilization has been especially interested in recovering the past for some three centuries, we have a great number of available books and articles, in addition to artifacts. Instead of always needing to turn to primary sources themselves, we can turn to the writings of our contemporaries to learn both about the past and about the way current writers have studied and interpreted the past. **When we write about this secondary material, we are entering into the discourse of history by adding our own perspectives.**

But, why should *I* write if I don’t plan to become a professional historian?

After all, you enrolled in a history course, not a writing workshop. And now, you look at the course syllabus and find that you’re expected to produce a lot of writing — everything from brief biographies and book reviews to the research paper.

Why?

Writing will help you learn history. You’ve probably discovered the principle behind this fact already: we learn best, not as passive

recipients of lectures and textbooks, but as active participants, making meaning for ourselves. And writing is one of the best ways to get involved in your own education. That's what this book is all about — writing to learn.

Your personal involvement through writing will lead you to a fuller understanding of history. Reading, thinking, and writing go together in learning and doing history. Historian Edward Hallett Carr describes history as “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past.” Writing is the best way for you to enter that dialogue.

Writing clarifies your understanding of the subject. Let's say you read a chapter in your textbook or listen to a fifty-minute lecture on the significance of the Norman Conquest and understand most of it. Writing what you comprehend helps you review, organize, and remember the material. But some of the information still puzzles you. By putting your questions on paper, by writing about your confusion, you begin to see just where the difficulty lies. Often, you can write your way to understanding. Even if that doesn't work, you'll know which sections of the chapter to reread or which notes to review. You can ask your professor an intelligent question: for instance, if the Bayeux Tapestry was woven in France after the Norman Conquest, how reliable is it as a source for the Battle of Hastings? or, what other sources of information do we have about the Battle of Hastings in addition to the Bayeux Tapestry?

Writing reveals your attitude toward a subject. An assignment might be to read two articles about the significance of *The Federalist Papers* to the ratification of the U. S. Constitution. As you study one of the essays, you agree with that writer's position. Then you read another article and are persuaded to that point of view. Sound familiar? Professional historians can be persuasive in their interpretations — that's their line of work. That we readers sometimes have trouble assessing what we read shouldn't surprise us.

What should you do? Listing the pros and cons of a given thesis helps you see the strengths and weaknesses of each side. Writing can help you discover how you feel about each treatment. Then you're on the way to defining your own position about the impor-

tance of *The Federalist Papers* on the ratification of the U. S. Constitution.

Writing helps you synthesize large amounts of information. The human mind is a marvel unduplicated by the most advanced computer. Still, most of us don't seem to command the kind of memory we need, especially to sort out and keep track of the places, people, and events that make up any span of human history. Making notes supplements memory and provides access to limitless information. That's why note taking is an essential part of research. Further, you can understand how the information you have collected is related by writing about it. Writing allows you to discover new ways of solving problems, matters we cover in some detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Writing organizes your thoughts. Of course, you already know that. When you have a lot to accomplish, you make a list of "things to do today." When you prepare a speech or a class presentation, you jot down main ideas, then reorganize them into some sort of meaningful pattern. Combining invisible thoughts with the physical activity of forming words on paper helps you to see what you're thinking. Somehow the need to commit your thinking to the page focuses your thoughts.

Learning through writing leads to fuller understanding of the subject. You'll like this new-found control of your studies. Studying, thinking, and writing history are difficult. It takes thoughtful probing to develop a rich historical perspective. Many people are not able to sustain the effort it takes. You've taken charge when you are able to develop your own historical perspective for use in your daily life — an accomplishment that enriches a lifetime.

YOU AND THE WRITING PROCESS

Has this ever happened to you? Your professor assigns a paper in Nineteenth-Century African history, due at the end of the semester. You're not told much more about it — perhaps you get a list of acceptable topics or learn it's to be around 15 pages long. Then, despite your best intentions, you wait until a couple of days before the due date to get started. An old and sad story.

There are better ways of doing things. Whether you need to write a term paper, a seminar presentation, or a book review — virtually any communication, in fact — the most effective means is the **process approach**. Using this method of composition, you work your way through three broad stages: **prewriting**, **drafting**, and **revising**. Most experienced writers work this way, even though the stage model or linear representation of writing is not the most accurate way to represent what seems to happen: actually writing from beginning idea to finished essay or book looks a lot more like a drunken circle than like a straight line — in other words, it's full of stops and starts, backward and sideways and forward motions. Very messy! Still, student writers seem to make the greatest improvement when they practice composing in this fashion, knowing that there are many steps to go through before the finished piece of writing emerges.

Prewriting

All the preparations the writer makes before starting to draft — that's what we mean by prewriting. Among these preparations are finding a topic in such ways as free writing in a class journal, limiting that topic to manageable size, defining purpose, assessing audience, choosing a point of view, researching or interviewing, taking notes, and talking about your ideas with friends, classmates, and your teacher. This prewriting stage of the process is much more crucial than many realize. When you recognize that, you're ahead of the rest. And when you master these preparations, you win a new control over your writing. You'll take the first steps in the next section, *The Writer's Decisions*, and in Chapter 2, *Journal Writing in History*. You will also find help with prewriting in chapters 3, 4, and 5, as you learn how to jot down ideas, plans, and outlines and to write a discovery draft.

Drafting

The second stage of the composing process, drafting, is what most people have in mind when they think of writing. Drafting is getting the words down on paper, much easier when you use the process approach. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will also guide you through this

stage. Some people find that they start writing before they're absolutely sure about where the material is going; they need to write to find out, or to discover the focus for drafting.

Revising

Revising, the third stage, involves much more than most student writers suspect. Example: this chapter is now in its sixth draft. In other words, it has been revised five times. That's why professional writers have such big wastebaskets — they keep working on a piece until it's right. If you were to look up the word "revise" in the dictionary, you would find that it comes from the Latin *revidere* — to see again. True revision means just that, seeing again, looking once more at a draft with a willingness to consider changes, often big changes. This chapter has been totally reorganized from what its order was in the first draft, for example. You'll learn more about making these changes as you proceed through this book. Then, after you've revised your way to a good piece of work, refer to Chapter 8, *A Concise Guide to Usage*, and Chapter 9, *Make Punctuation Work for You*, for help with editing. Editing and proofreading are the final steps before submitting your work to reader, teacher, or editor.

THE WRITER'S DECISIONS

During the prewriting phase, before beginning to draft, the writer confronts several questions: Why am I writing this? Who's going to read it? What will they be expecting? How should my voice sound? Consciously or not, writers must answer these questions each time they sit down to write. Whether you are researching a term paper for your European Civilization course, or applying to law school, or writing a textbook for a course in South American history, the questions are the same. Only the answers are different.

What is this piece about?

Your answer to this question establishes the **subject**, the true topic of this piece of writing.

Why am I writing this? What do I want this to do?

In answering these questions you make decisions about purpose. **Purpose** is your intent, the reason that moves you to write and the desired result of that effort.

Who am I writing this for?

The answer to this question identifies your audience. **Audience** is the reader or readers you are addressing.

Who am I as I write this?

The answer to this question describes your voice. **Voice** is the character, personality, and attitudes you project toward your subject, toward your purpose, and toward your audience.

Subject, purpose, audience, and voice are controls in any job of writing. Once you make decisions or accept conditions concerning their natures, you establish certain parameters. Style, tone, readability, even organization and use of examples, are all governed by these initial choices.

The diagram below attempts to show how the four decisions relate to each other. At the heart of the large circle is **subject**, the focus of any piece of writing and usually the writer's first decision. The broken lines suggest the influence that subject has on purpose, audience, and voice, as well as the relationship they have to one another.

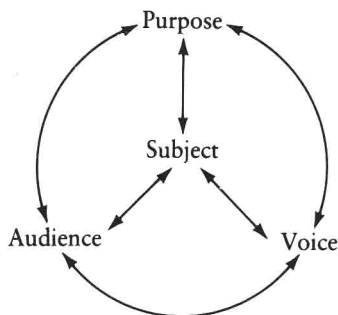


Figure 1.1 *The writer's decisions.*