

A Student's Guide to HISTORY

EIGHTH EDITION



Jules R. Benjamin

E I G H T H E D I T I O N

A Student's Guide to History

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To Elaine, Aaron, and Adam

Preface

The first edition of this book appeared twenty-five years ago. I was motivated to write it when I discovered, as have so many others, that there was an invisible barrier between my students and the material I was teaching them. This barrier differed from one student to the next, but at its core was the students' need to learn basic skills: study, research, and writing. Although many of my students had little background knowledge in history, the skills barrier was the more serious problem and was very time consuming. If my students could not take concise notes, if they could not understand what an exam question required of them, or if they could not write clearly, then my effort to explain the meaning of the past ran up against a wall of incomprehension. Today, the situation remains much the same.

I sought to attack the skills barrier outside the classroom so that I could devote my class time to teaching history. In this effort I turned to my students — I asked them why the course material seemed so formidable and what they needed to know to demonstrate their understanding of it. The first edition of the *Guide* was a kind of collaboration: the original structure, still discernable in this eighth edition, took the form of responses to their needs. The longevity of the *Guide* attests to its ability to meet students' needs. In a quarter-century, however, some of these needs have changed. New technologies have arisen to facilitate teaching and learning. Today, writing requires skill not only with language but also with word-processing programs. Research requires knowledge not only of the organization of a college library but also of the World Wide Web. In recent editions of the *Guide* I have sought to provide students with skills appropriate to an age of digital media.

Chapter 1 discusses why people study history and how we, as historians, go about our investigations. It examines the different interpretations of history and the differing directions of research in the discipline. This chapter also describes how the study of history can prepare students for a variety of careers. Chapter 2 teaches fundamental skills about reading a history assignment, taking notes in class, and studying for exams. The chapter includes annotated examples guiding students to the main ideas of a text; a section on reading maps, charts, graphs,

tables, and other nonwritten materials; and material on collaborative work and communicating online. Chapter 3 is new and focuses on writing skills. Using examples, it demonstrates clear and connected writing. It takes the reader through the steps of building an essay and provides guidance on matters of style and mechanics. Finally, examples of writing appropriate to the variety of history assignments are provided, including a sample book review. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with more complex tasks: preparing and writing a research paper. These chapters help students choose a research topic, narrow it down to a practical theme, use the library and conduct research online to gather information, organize their research, and present the results of their work. Chapters 4 and 5 also stress the importance of good writing skills and the dangers of plagiarism. The full-scale, annotated sample research paper that concludes Chapter 5 illustrates how to put together research findings and how to write footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography.

Appendix A describes the different types of information available for history research and lists hundreds of sources that can lead students to everything from a short definition of *feudalism* to a series of books on the history of medicine. Also included is a section on electronic resources available on the World Wide Web. This broad list of resources will help students with almost any assignment in almost any history course. Appendix B includes sections on local and family history research and provides lists of grammar and style manuals and common abbreviations.

New to This Edition

Each successive edition of the *Guide* has benefited from comments and suggestions from some of the hundreds of instructors who have assigned it and from some of the more than a quarter-million students who have read it over the years.

The last edition of the *Guide* was revised in ways that made it a more practical and flexible research tool. Following the recent changes in the study of history, I highlighted the latest directions in which the discipline is moving. Building on the changes of the last edition and responding to the growing influence of computers and the World Wide Web on the history classroom, I have strengthened the *Guide* in three fundamental areas. First, in response to our users' requests for more help on writing, I have completely overhauled the research and writing sections and added a new chapter on writing that covers the process of crafting an essay. This new chapter also includes material on the basics of style and mechanics. Second, in response to the needs of today's students, I have expanded and integrated my coverage of the computer as a tool for research and writing throughout. Acknowledging that many students today rely heavily on the computer, we are also offering a

companion online version of the *Guide* at <www.bedfordstmartins.com/history/benjamin> for free to give students quick access to particular skills and to succinct advice on carrying out assignments while they are simultaneously working online. Lastly, I have continued to improve the *Guide* in ways that make it an even more practical and flexible reference tool. New guidelines boxes, the inclusion of new skills such as collaborative work and communicating online, a new sample book review, updated documentation models, and a greatly expanded and updated appendix of reference sources for history students make the eighth edition of the *Guide* the most complete and helpful reference guide for history students. To keep pace with the varied needs of today's history students, I have added, expanded, or amended topics in every chapter.

A chapter on writing. In response to users' requests for the addition of material on mechanics and style, I have added a new chapter on writing that provides detailed instruction on the writing process and basic grammatical and mechanical advice. Chapter 3, "How to Write History Assignments: The Importance of Writing Skills," covers the fundamentals of good writing and includes sections on why clear writing is important, the components of clear writing, and how to build an essay. The chapter concludes with instruction on how to prepare the most common history assignments. In addition to the coverage of essay exams, book reviews, and short papers, the eighth edition now includes instruction on preparing comparative book reviews and comparative essays, and advice on comparing primary documents.

Greatly expanded and enhanced coverage of the computer as a tool for research and writing. In this edition, I have thoroughly revised the sections dealing with online research. I have integrated advice on working with computers throughout the book and added new sections on conducting research on the World Wide Web. Other new areas include guidelines for evaluating Web sites; help on using spell- and grammar-checkers; advice on taking notes on computers and downloading materials from the Web; and an in-depth section on communicating online, including advice on using e-mail, listservs, and chatrooms, and on participating in electronic conferences and seminars.

Online version of the eighth edition. Allowing students to consult the *Guide* while they work online, the online version of the *Guide* can be found at <www.bedfordstmartins.com/history/benjamin>. This site condenses important elements of the skills-based material from the *Guide* in an easy-to-use format for students.

New boxed guidelines. Because of the popularity of the guidelines boxes that serve as checklists for students, I have added boxed guide-

lines in four areas new to the eighth edition: taking lecture notes, the components of clear writing, evaluating print and Web sources, and guidelines for peer editing.

Updated and expanded reference sources. The more than six hundred basic reference sources and guides in Appendix A, categorized by type and subject, familiarize students with research materials available in the library and online. A greatly expanded and updated section on electronic sources will help students navigate the World Wide Web with lists of search engines, indexes and directories, online archives, and databases as well as a list of specialized sites for history research. I have taken care to provide students with access to the best of the Web and to exclude sites that are unreliable or superficial.

Section on incorporating visual materials in history papers. In response to the easier access that students now have to historically significant, nonprint documents on the World Wide Web, I have expanded on the existing coverage of nonwritten materials by including advice on downloading, incorporating, and citing visual sources in research papers.

New section introducing students to group work. Because of the growing use of collaborative work in the classroom and in the workplace, I have added a new discussion of group work that includes collaborative activities online. The eighth edition also includes a new guidelines box on peer editing.

New sample book review. The new sample book review, on the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*, shows students how to compose a book review.

I am always looking to improve the *Guide* and would appreciate any suggestions that you would like to share. The e-mail address for comments is <guidetohistory8@bedfordstmartins.com>.

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research assistant, Michael Clisham, whose work found its way into many sections of this new edition, most notably the new section on communicating online. My understanding of the World Wide Web was greatly enhanced by John Henderson, reference librarian at Ithaca College. I also want to express my great respect for those at Bedford/St. Martin's who have contributed to this edition of the *Guide*: Charles Christensen, Joan Feinberg, Katherine Kurzman, Laura Arcari, Karen Baart, Elizabeth Schaaf, Chip Turner, Amy McConathy, and Jamie Farrell. I am in their debt not only for their editorial skills but also for their commitment to this book and its mission.

Jules R. Benjamin
Ithaca College

A Note to Students

This book has been around for a long time. Since I wrote the first edition in 1975, more than a quarter of a million students have read it. Each year, students have written telling me how the book helped them to master some important part of their work in a history course. Many have offered suggestions for improving the book and some of their ideas have been incorporated into the book you are about to read. You can still write to me or the publisher. Now you can also send your comments to me via e-mail. The address is <guidetohistory8@bedfordstmartins.com>.

I have tried to make this book useful to you regardless of the kind of history course you are taking. You may be taking world history, Western civilization, ancient history, modern history, social history, economic history, or the history of a particular region or nation. This book presents the tools you need to succeed in your history course. It also gives you skills that will open the past to you.

Each section of the book discusses a specific kind of assignment. Clear guidelines, practical examples, and concise explanations guide you through reading, studying, researching, and writing tasks. Care has been taken to organize the book in a way that makes it easy to find the answers to your questions about history assignments.

In addition to its practical purpose, I have also written this book to introduce you to the enormous world that is our heritage. This world is as fascinating as the world you live in today, or as any vision of the future. I hope to convince you that the study of history is not an idle journey into a dead past but a way to understanding and living in the present. You can use these tools to succeed not only in your history courses but in your future career. Finally, you can use them to answer important questions about your own life and your relationship to the world in which you live. This larger use is what makes the study of history really valuable.

Jules R. Benjamin
Ithaca College

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C H A P T E R 1

The Subject of History and How to Use It

What Historians Are Trying to Do

Since the time when human beings invented writing, they have left records of their understanding of the world and of the events in their lives and how they felt about them. By studying the records that previous generations have left, we can find out about the kind of lives they led and how they faced their problems. We can use what we learn about the experiences of people who lived before us to help solve problems we face today. Though the modern world is quite different from the societies in which our ancestors lived, the story of their accomplishments and failures is the only yardstick by which we can measure the quality of our own lives and the success of our social arrangements.

All of us look into the past from time to time. We read historical novels or books about historical events. We gaze at old photographs or listen to the stories our grandparents tell. **Historians**,¹ however, make a serious and systematic study of the past and attempt to use the knowledge they gain to help explain human nature and contemporary affairs. Professional historians spend their lives pursuing the meaning of the past for the present. To amateurs, historical research is like a hobby, but their occasional journeys into the past may contribute to the store of human knowledge and can greatly influence their own lives. Your study and research as a student qualify you as an amateur historian. Your examination of the past is part of the same search for knowledge carried on generation after generation.

¹Terms in **boldface** are defined in the Glossary on page 217.