



Information Literacy Guidelines and Competencies for Undergraduate History Students

Developed by the Instruction and Research Services Committee, History Section, Reference and User Services Association, American Library Association, 2013.

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Introduction & Purpose

Historical research presents unique challenges in understanding, identifying, acquiring, evaluating, and using information. It also requires understanding and respecting the ethics of the historical discipline as well as a concern for examining all aspects of historical scholarship and the body of historical literature. These guidelines, which are to be used in conjunction with the Association of College and Research Libraries' "[Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#)," are a measurable set of proficiencies required for successful historical research by undergraduate students.

This document has multiple purposes. It is intended to inform students of basic skills required for historical study; to provide a framework for faculty and librarians to assess those skills; to aid faculty in designing research methods classes, assignments, and projects; and to encourage collaboration between librarians and faculty in teaching, course design, and assessment of undergraduate history education.

1. Understands the structure of historical information and the historical research process.

- 1.1 Understands the difference between primary and secondary sources.
- 1.2 Understands that primary sources exist in a variety of formats, including books, periodicals, manuscripts, audio, still images, maps, and moving images. Primary sources can be in digital and/or analog or physical formats, and some unique materials can only be accessed at specific locations.
- 1.3 Understands that secondary and tertiary sources are produced and disseminated in a variety of types and formats, including monographs, scholarly journal articles, conference proceedings, scholarly lectures or talks, dissertations, historical catalogs, indexes, encyclopedias, handbooks, and statistical data.
- 1.4 Differentiates between serious and credible popular treatments of a historical topic and peer-reviewed, scholarly analyses written by and for historians.
- 1.5 Distinguishes resource types and formats in standard citations.

2. Identifies and locates historical research sources through appropriate methods, techniques, and tools.

- 2.1 Identifies appropriate tools and resources for specific research questions, recognizing and distinguishing the differences between online library catalogs, WorldCat, and general and subject-specific periodical indexes.

- 2.1.1 Effectively identifies and uses relevant online databases and print sources, both at the researcher's institution and at other institutions. Understands the differences between these types of resources and an Internet search.
- 2.1.2 Consults reference resources that are authoritative, current, and most relevant to the topic.
- 2.2 When searching databases and search engines, considers and applies the most suitable techniques. Examples include:
 - 2.2.1 Uses appropriate search techniques

5. Understands and respects the ethical conventions of the historical discipline.

5.1 Does not fabricate, falsify, or willfully misrepresent sources, evidence, and ideas.

5.2 Understands that documents and evidence (primary sources) used to make a historical argument must be properly cited so that other researchers can verify sources and research methods.

5.3 Understands that the work of other researchers and scholars must be acknowledged and properly cited.

5.4 Respects the rights and welfare of individuals during the research process by following the Human Subjects requirements associated with oral history interviews; adheres to privacy policies concerning confidential and sensitive information when examining and using private records.

5.5 Respects preservation concerns related to handling and using historical materials and makes every effort to ensure their use for future researchers.

References

Association of College and Research Libraries.

Association of College and Research Libraries, Lightboxes in English Section. "Research Competency Guidelines for Lightboxes in English." Last modified June 2007, accessed March 15, 2012. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/researchcompetenciesles>.

Presnell, Jenny L. *The Information-Literate Historian*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Smith College Libraries. "Smith College History Majors Research Skills." Last modified May 15, 2007, accessed March 15, 2012.

<http://www.smith.edu/library/services/faculty/infolig/ilprograms/historyskills.htm>