



A HANDBOOK *for*
RESEARCH SEMINAR TUTORS

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY



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PREFACE

If you have received a copy of this handbook, it is likely that you have been appointed a Research Seminar Tutor. Congratulations! Your appointment to the Board of Tutors is, in no uncertain terms, an acknowledgement of your great skill and potential as a teacher. Our department's Research Seminars are in many ways our flagship courses, targeted to our most experienced students, and we hope that you will feel as proud of this opportunity as we are to list you among our tutors.

With that in mind, it should be no surprise that the old chestnut of Biblical wisdom—that from those to whom much has been given, much is expected—certainly applies to the Research Seminars. As this guide will explain, your work as a Research Seminar Tutor will begin well before the start of the semester, as you and the coursehead prepare the syllabus, the readings, and the library/archival resources to which you will direct your students as they begin their research projects. Then, once the semester is underway, you are expected to serve as your students' formal research and writing 'coach,' meeting with them perhaps as often as every week for one-on-one office hours, group library orientations, peer reviews, and the like—this in addition to the time you will spend in the weekly two-hour Seminar meeting led by the coursehead. This is not an easy job, and we hope that you will learn as much in teaching your Seminar as do the undergraduates by taking it—in your case, about the art and craft of teaching and mentoring.

To help you meet the challenges posed by Research Seminar teaching, we've prepared this handbook, which includes chapters on the structure and purpose of Research

Seminars, how to prepare for the semester, how to teach research and writing, how to grade research papers, and where to look for additional help. While we hope that this handbook will prove to be useful to you, in no way do we expect that it will be your sole source of ideas or support. We encourage you to use it in tandem with other resources like the department's Teaching Fellow Handbook (http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~history/forms/gr/TF_Handbook.pdf), and other aids found at the department's Graduate Resources iSite (<http://sites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=historyphd&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup50555>), which have valuable advice covering everything from responding to student writing to how to submit a grade sheet to the Registrar.

This book would not have been possible without the counsel and generosity of the Harvard Writing Project, and we thank them—and particularly, James Herron—for their unflagging support. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Bradley Zakarin for conceiving this guide; to Adam Beaver, John Gagne, and Katherine Grandjean for authoring the original version (the majority of which we have retained); and to Alston Wise for its elegant design.

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NO 1

RESEARCH SEMINARS: AN OVERVIEW

What is a Research Seminar?

Where Does It Fit in the Undergraduate Program?

The Faculty-Tutor-Undergraduate Triangle

Faculty as Graduate Student Mentors

Divvying up the Duties

Over the past few years, in coordination with the College's broader curricular review, the History Department has introduced several significant changes into the structure of its undergraduate concentration. One of the most significant is the overhaul of our Tutorial Program, which lies at the heart of the undergraduate experience. Among the

The Research Seminars' central purpose is to guide students through the process of historical research in primary sources.

many changes to the program is the replacement of the mandatory Junior Honors Tutorial, History 98, by the more flexible requirement that every student—even those not pursuing honors—take at least one Research Seminar. It is important, therefore, that you as a tutor understand not only what

your course is meant to achieve, but also how it fits into the larger scheme of your students' education. Such knowledge will enable you to evaluate more clearly whether

you are providing students with an appropriate level of instruction in an appropriate set of skills—skills that they need to round out their historical education and, perhaps, to write a Senior Thesis. We also feel that it is important that you know what is (and is not) expected of you as a Research Seminar Tutor, so that you can gauge how the experience is contributing to your professional development as a teacher.

WHAT IS A RESEARCH SEMINAR?

Though Research Seminars are new additions to the department's course offerings, making their debut in the 2007-2008 academic year, you should also take confidence from the fact that these courses are far from untested. In many ways, they merely refresh the successful model painstakingly worked out over more than a decade in History 98.

Like History 98, the Research Seminars' central purpose is to guide students through the process of historical research in primary

sources, a process that will still culminate in the submission of a substantial (ca. 20–25 page) research paper at the end of the term. More specifically, they are meant to:

- *expose students to the historical literature surrounding their topics,*
- *train them in the use of primary source materials, introduce them to problems of bibliography and historical method,*
- *encourage them to think critically about their sources as they gather them, and*
- *give them an opportunity to write history themselves.*

The most significant departure from History 98 is the fact that Research Seminars are topic-specific. Each year, the department's 20+ offerings likely will represent the whole range of interests and expertise of the History faculty, whether defined chronologically, thematically, or methodologically. It is therefore important that the tutors appointed to Research Seminars have a certain amount of expertise—at least of the sort obtained through a General Examination field—in the subject and/or time period which the Seminar treats.

WHERE DO RESEARCH SEMINARS FIT IN THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM?

Research seminars occupy an important position within a carefully thought out scheme for moving students through the concentration. While Reading Seminars and History 97 equip our younger students with a working knowledge of historiography and historical genres, Research Seminars take that training to the next level by asking students to perform original research in a field of their choosing. As such, the primary audience for Research Seminars will be junior and senior history concentrators, though other students with adequate preparation and enthusiasm may be admitted. The Seminars will be capped at fifteen students, who will be required to obtain the instructor's permission to enroll. In most cases, this requirement should serve to guarantee that

the students have some prior experience in the subject, most likely in the form of a lecture course and/or a Reading Seminar in the same general field.

In catering to advanced students, Research Seminars are designed to integrate smoothly with our Senior Thesis program—in a way that benefits all of our concentrators, even those who do not go on to write theses. For students who wish to write a Senior Thesis, the Research Seminar—which they must complete by the end of the Junior year—should serve to prepare them for the larger thesis project. For students who choose not to write a thesis, the Research Seminar—which, in this case, may be delayed to the Senior year—is no less important: for these students, the Seminar will represent an alternative capstone experience, allowing all concentrators to graduate knowing that they have learned and successfully applied a unique set of creative and critical skills.

THE FACULTY-TUTOR-STUDENT TRIANGLE

While all of this so far may seem pretty straightforward, things do get a bit more complicated when it comes to defining the respective roles of the coursehead and tutor. Because these courses are relatively new and tailored to specific fields of research, you should prepare for a modest amount of improvisation between you and the coursehead regarding both the design of the course and your role in it. What we hope to do in this section is to define some parameters within which you and your coursehead should work to define your role more specifically.

Not all research seminars are assigned tutors. Most, however, are staffed by one tutor, paid 3/10 or 2/5 depending on the enrollment for the term. Tutors are meant to be partners with their faculty courseheads, working together to provide their students the dual-track instruction in both topical content and research methods that Research Seminars are meant to offer. Research

Seminars meet once per week as a group, in a single two-hour class meeting presided over by the coursehead. This meeting will be dedicated to the Seminar's topical content, as explored through shared readings of secondary works or primary sources relating to this course topic. As Tutor, you are expected to attend and participate in these meetings. At the same time, however, your main responsibility is the coaching and mentoring of students' individual research projects, which will take place largely outside of class. Most likely, this will take the form of required office hours, and perhaps some select 'tutorial'-like meetings, all of them stipulated on the syllabus. (The fact that most of your teaching will happen outside of the classroom does not mean that you should be presented to the students as if you were an 'unofficial' or 'second-class' instructor; see Chapter Two for further guidance on this issue.)

The details of how you and the professor interact with each other, and with the students, will depend significantly upon the professor's preferences. Some faculty members will want to reserve relatively more of their Seminar time for discussions of the shared readings (though in no case should these continue past about the eighth week of the course, after which time students must be focused on presenting their research and completing their papers). In this case, much of the instruction in methodology will be left for you to impart outside of class, in library orientations, one-on-one meetings, and/or peer review meetings; you truly will be the research and writing instructor in the room. Other courseheads, however, may want to give up more of their Seminar time to methodological concerns, devoting entire weeks to discussions of source criticism (perhaps using some assigned secondary readings as examples, thus killing two birds with one stone). In this case, your role will be more to support the lessons imparted by the coursehead and to help students bridge the gap between the critiques they have formulated in class and how those same criteria can be applied to their own use of sources,

argumentation, etc. You will be the research and writing coach.

Perhaps the most difficult balancing act between you and the coursehead will be how you manage students' questions and requests for advice and further assistance. Professors will want to encourage students to come to their office hours, and students would be remiss not to take every opportunity they can get to sit at the feet of the professor. One of the major priorities of the Tutorial program is to help our undergraduates attain as much close contact with our faculty as possible, and

Bridge the gap between the critiques they have formulated in class and how those same criteria can be applied to their own use of sources, argumentation, etc.

we sincerely hope that relationships forged in Research Seminars will blossom into thesis advising relationships, or even lifelong mentorships. At the same time, however, there is the practical consideration that you are being paid as a tutor precisely to provide extra help and tailor-made advice on students' projects in your office hours. What if you and

your coursehead have two different takes on the feasibility or desirability of a student's paper proposal? What if a student decides that he/she wants help only from the professor? There is no magic answer here, but the following two principles can go a long way toward resolving any potential confusion:

- Remain in continuous contact with the coursehead. You might ask your coursehead to meet with you on a weekly or biweekly basis to review each student's progress, update each other on who has come to visit each of you, what advice they have been given, where their projects stand, and so on. You may also want to strategize about which one of you will take the lead on a particular student—perhaps in some cases, the student needs the kind of at-

tention only a tutor can provide, while others thrive on the opinions of the professor.

- Find a way to communicate to students which kinds of issues you are most prepared to tackle. Though it may be obvious to you, it will not be so obvious to students that professors and tutors have different interests and priorities. Faculty members will probably be thrilled to meet with students who want help conceptualizing a field of historiography, but less enthused by a student who says, “Can you help me put together my rough draft?” or “How do I use Historical Abstracts?” This is not to say that your contribution to the course is strictly limited to somehow “less intellectual” nuts-and-bolts issues;

Perhaps in some cases, the student needs the kind of attention only a tutor can provide, while others thrive on the opinions of the professor?

as we all know from experience, questions like “How do I find out about ... ?” and “How do I present my argument?” are anything but superficial. Rather, they go right to the core of what it is to be a historian,

and may raise more profound issues of analysis and interpretation than any discussion of secondary works. The point is that you should discover from your coursehead which matters he or she wants to handle personally, and then make clear to your students the specific ways you can complement rather than merely supplement the coursehead’s role.



PLANNING THE COURSE

Syllabus Design and Staged Assignments

Preparing Library Resources for Research Seminars

Creating a Relationship with Harvard Librarians
Strategies for Making Libraries Useful to Students

While all teaching jobs require some preparatory work in the weeks leading up to the first day of class, this is especially true of the Research Seminars, which will succeed or fail in large part according to how well-structured they are. They are meant to be like “research laboratories” for your students, and just like in a scientific laboratory, you must have all the right equipment and reagents in place if your students are to be able to practice their craft to their fullest potential. For a Research Seminar to be truly successful, two matters need attention prior to the start of the semester.

Because the major task of the Seminar is students' completion of an original research paper, courseheads are strongly encouraged to stage assignments leading toward it.

SYLLABUS DESIGN AND STAGED ASSIGNMENTS

You and the coursehead should meet as early as possible in advance of the semester to decide on a format and schedule of course meetings—including individual meetings with the Tutor—so that they can be outlined clearly on the syllabus. Because the major task of the Seminar is students' completion of an original research paper, courseheads are strongly encouraged to stage assignments leading toward it. These might include:

- *early submission of a proposal or alternate proposal ideas;*
- *an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources;*
- *an additional assignment regarding sources and their problems;*
- *an oral presentation; and a full draft 3-4 weeks before the final due date.*

Because each Seminar will hinge upon students' contributions to scholarly discussion, class participation should be a factor in evaluating a student's performance, as well. And because students will be sharpening their research and writing skills over the course of the semester, grade distributions should be geared to measure students' progress, and these preliminary assignments should always account for more than 50% of the final grade of the course. One might, for example, weight assignments as follows:

- *Active participation in all Seminars (20% of grade)*
- *Bibliography (5% of grade)*
- *Exercise in Primary Source Criticism (10% of grade)*
- *Oral Presentation (15% of grade)*
- *Draft of Research Paper (15% of grade)*
- *Final Research Paper (35% of grade)*

Your syllabus must clearly communicate to the students that you are a legitimate instructor, too

Your ability to shape the nature and timing of these assignments may be limited. Some faculty have strong preferences for or antipathies towards certain types of assignments, and in many cases you will be inheriting a syllabus whose form and content were settled many years ago. We nevertheless encourage you, as much as possible, to speak with your coursehead early about the syllabus and to be as candid as possible about the structure of these preliminary assignments. As the tutor, after all, it should fall to you to coach students through these assignments, and in most cases, you will be grading them, too. Though you may be less experienced than the coursehead, most professors will be happy to hear your ideas about the pedagogical value of certain kinds of assignments, whether or not they decide to act upon them.

Even if you do not (or ideally, do not need to) play a very active role in designing the syllabus, one thing that the faculty member must do on the syllabus is make clear who you are, and what your role in the course will be. The precise details of your role—like how often students must meet with you, which assignments you will grade, etc.—may all be open questions at the moment you are hired by the Tutorial Office. But by the time students receive the finished syllabus, you and the coursehead must have decided these questions, and your syllabus must clearly communicate to the students that you are a legitimate instructor, too—even though you may do most of your teaching in your office hours. Noting your name, contact information, and office hours is just the start. The syllabus should also include language like “All students are expected to meet with the tutor this week for a one-on-one review of their annotated bibliographies” or “This assignment is due to the tutor’s mailbox by 5 pm, and will be returned by the tutor at the next Seminar meeting.”

PREPARING LIBRARY RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH SEMINARS

Your second responsibility in planning the

course involves the preparation of library materials. It’s often easy to forget the staggering riches of libraries and library services available to Harvard affiliates. The Research Seminars offer an ideal opportunity for getting to know the system better, both for course leaders and for students. Many course instructors are used to contacting librarians in advance of their lecture courses to set up bibliographical aids, library tours, workshops, and help sessions. Similarly, the Research Seminars demand a certain amount of contact with libraries and librarians before the course begins in order to establish a rapport with the people who will be helping you and your students navigate through the Harvard library system.

Since many courses will involve having to put together a “virtual archive,” you will probably need to set up an appointment with a research librarian in the field closest to your course’s specialization. You will certainly have an idea of the materials you will want students to use; the librarian will help you flesh out these sources and think about ways of introducing students to them. The best way to start this process is by contacting the History Department Library Liaison, Fred Burchsted (burchst@fas). Your coursehead may already have returned a questionnaire to Fred initiating construction of an online research guide to be integrated with the course website. Under the coursehead’s supervision you should work with Fred to refine this tool, while relying on Fred’s familiarity with the specialties and strengths of his colleagues to find those best suited to help you and your students with other aspects of the course. (A rough idea of the respective purviews of Harvard’s librarians and archivists can be gleaned from the Harvard College Libraries site at <http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/contacts/index/html>.)

CREATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HARVARD LIBRARIANS

Once you have determined who the primary library contact for your course will be, you

should schedule an appointment with them a month or two before the course begins. The Seminar’s “virtual archive” may be very easy to assemble for those doing topics in English, but in other cases it may take more time to track down primary sources in translation, anthologies, or even unexpected Harvard repositories. (Never underestimate the holdings of any of the University’s dozens or archives and collections. You might want to brainstorm with the librarian about possible angles you could take to incorporate the wealth of Harvard-held materials into your Seminar.) The library liaison will be able to help courseheads sniff out sources, as well as plan for the specific challenges of introducing students to what might be their first, last, or only research experience in History. This may include coming up with a short list of research guides, bibliographical aids, potential electronic resources, or even local non-Harvard repositories or archives. This list can be forwarded to Fred Burchsted for inclusion in the online research guide attached to the course website.

Students are often reluctant to jump into research because they’re worried about drowning in an ocean of information or expending a lot of energy for not much payoff; this frustration often leads to panic-induced Google-and-Wikipedia research. Your initial meeting with librarians can help you strategize about ways to help your students immerse themselves in their topics responsibly, using appropriate research tools (whether print or virtual) to help them be as efficient and productive as possible.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING LIBRARIES USEFUL TO STUDENTS

You may want to discuss with your liaison some of the ways you can best introduce your students to the research experience. Arranging an orientation tour of Widener, Houghton, Baker, Schlesinger, or the Harvard Archives (among others) can help introduce students immediately to the variety of ways they can start to think about

research. It’s amazing just how many of them have never even entered Widener, or will have used it haphazardly to find a book in the stacks or to study in Loker Reading Room. A tour early in the course can unveil the library’s logic and introduce them to the places and personnel that they’ll be using over the course of the term.

Often, however, students can be unresponsive and easily distracted in the early weeks of the course when they feel no investment in using the available resources, and tours can sometimes prove less than effective. You and your liaison might instead consider shortening or postponing the initial library tour, and arranging a “research roundtable” with a librarian 4-5 weeks into the course. By this point, students have had time to come up with a topic, but might find themselves running into difficulty narrowing their focus or locating primary and secondary sources. This roundtable could act as a fruitful way for students to interact with 2-3 specialists (the tutor, librarian, archivist, etc.) about their particular research questions, and experience first-hand how a librarian can help them streamline their research by asking the kinds of bibliographical questions that lead to the most interesting discoveries.

Since most of the tutor’s work with students will take place outside of the classroom, tutors might want to meet with some of their students inside the library rather than in an office or in the classroom. Tutors—after years of roaming the stacks of university libraries or paging through archival holdings—have to keep in mind that undergraduates sometimes need orientation, or even just to be shown how to do something. Talk to your library liaison about booking a conference room in the library for you and your students to use as a launching pad once or twice during the semester. You can also ask your liaison to suggest ways that s/he might like to contribute to the students’ research experience. Often librarians are thrilled to be part of the research process and will have great ideas for helping students make the best of the university’s materials.

Research Seminars demand a certain amount of contact with libraries and librarians before the course begins in order to establish a rapport with the people who will be helping you and your students navigate through the Harvard library system.



TEACHING RESEARCH

Identifying a Topic

Introducing Students to Bibliography

Using Bibliography

Annotated Bibliographies

Working Through the Primary Sources

Becoming Familiar with Sources, and Source Critique

Secondary Source Research; Its Perils, Too

Research Problems and How to Work Through Them

“The Famine”: Too Little Information

“The Banquet”: Too Much Information

Never-Ending Research

Not Thinking Historically

Mistaking Sources for Evidence

Bringing It All Together: Formulating an Argument

To those of us who have been researching for years, the basic elements of the historian’s craft—using libraries, navigating bibliographies, assessing sources, working with a research question—can be second nature. For many students, however, it will be a new experience and they will need you to guide them through the process. Don’t underestimate the help you can provide by clarifying some fundamental groundwork for your students. (What’s the difference between a library and an archive? Between print and manuscript?) This section of the guide will offer tips and suggestions for introducing

students to research as a concept and as a process, and will help you think of creative ways to work with your students through the entire research experience.

IDENTIFYING A TOPIC

This Research Seminar might be many students’ first time researching a topic they have developed themselves, and they are likely to be excited about the prospect of finally exploring a subject for which they’ve always nurtured an interest. (Senior students using this Seminar as an alternative to a Se-

nior Thesis are likely to be in this category, though they've probably done some research before.) You may, therefore, find several students who come to your Seminar already determined to pursue a particular topic. Others may have no idea, or only a vague concept of what their research topic might be.

For students who have no clear research agenda, urge them to skim through some of the Seminar's assigned readings and/or browse through bibliographies in these books looking for things that stir their interest. Ask them what originally provoked their

Having alternative options or backups, especially at this early phase in the Seminar, is never a bad idea.

interest in the Seminar, and what they had looked forward to learning more about during the course of the term; now's the time for them to be bold and creative in their brainstorming—the next few steps of the research project will help them whittle down their options in any case. Encourage all your

students—even those who claim to be married to one topic—to jot down a handful of possible topics. Having alternative options or backups, especially at this early phase in the Seminar, is never a bad idea.

When your students begin to articulate possible topics, you might want to share some of their ideas with your library liaison. One tutor reports that students were at their most receptive when, on a trip to the Harvard Archives, the archivists—primed with a list of students' proposed topics—began sharing ideas, sources, and potential avenues into their research. This kind of meeting with your liaison can really encourage students to jump into the projects right away and start digging around in potential sources. Alternatively, it can signal the difficulty of a research idea. Some sources in 20th and 21st century history are restricted or remain inaccessible until after a certain date; others will be unavailable at Harvard, in languages unfamiliar to the student, or may require

travel, making the whole project unfeasible. Now is the time to find these things out. Often, your expertise in the field will give you an immediate sense of a project's viability; otherwise, Harvard librarians are a great contact to have.

INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bibliography is an increasingly underappreciated art. Even advanced students often have no idea that some scholars have spent entire careers sifting through reams of primary and secondary sources essentially to chart a path for future generations. Research projects can become suddenly overwhelming as students do their initial HOLLIS searches and find more material than they can easily assimilate. Introduce them to the major bibliographical tools of your field—a student might be able quickly to tailor her project by consulting a bibliographical guide.

A quick way to introduce students to these tools can be a “research roundtable” in which your students meet a librarian or archivist and work through their topic proposals (see Chapter Two). The librarian will have specific suggestions for ways to tackle the topic and will equally be able to make bibliographical suggestions. Coax your students to ask questions of librarians like: “What kinds of tools should I be consulting that aren't online?” “What are the best bibliographical resources for my topic?” or “Are there other ways to approach this topic than the one I've taken?” This early phase of the course is also

Bibliography is an increasingly underappreciated art.

a good opportunity to let students in on the behind-the-scenes workings of bibliography. While our work has been immeasurably facilitated by the

“virtualization” of research apparatus over the past decade, students do not always have the experience with paper research tools to help them contextualize their online findings. As

we become increasingly familiar with the Googlified research world, it's easy to click from page to page without understanding the context of the information being accessed.

Talk with your students about the kinds of bibliographical tools they're using. You might want to explain to them that a majority of the e-resources they will be using are essentially searchable virtual versions of books, catalogues, and periodical indices. Perhaps mention as well that the online research world is still in its infancy, and that responsible research—in almost every case—involves actually going to the library and using books, particularly in the bibliographical phase of research. Some information simply cannot be found online yet, and will take an old-fashioned stacks-snooping mission to uncover. (Biographical dictionaries, poorly represented online, were the sleeper hit in one class.) If they're not in the habit already, prod your students to think of research as something that cannot be done exclusively in their dorm rooms; sometimes fifteen minutes of intelligent research in *Widener*, *Houghton*, or *Baker* can save hours of frustrating online clicking. Moreover, some of the most important bibliographical discoveries occur when words, phrases, or titles catch the eye while thumbing through a printed journal or index in search of a different, previously identified item. There is simply no analog for such serendipitous discoveries in the online world.

USING BIBLIOGRAPHY

As students become more familiar with the specific research milieu of their topic, they should start compiling a bibliography. It might be helpful if they also kept a bibliographical list of their research aids—the guides, surveys, databases, catalogues, and websites that have helped them get to this point. Chances are, they'll need to go back and use them during the rest of the term, so it won't hurt to have them centralized in one place.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Every Seminar will have at least one student who considers an annotated bibliography a drag to put together; “assembling a bibliography is enough work for one week,” he'll say, “why do we have to annotate it?” Aside from an obvious reason for annotation (to give course instructors a passing sense of whether or not students have looked at what they've collected), there are other reasons—compelling ones, at that—for keeping an annotated bibliography. Try taking a catholic view of ‘annotation,’ one that includes references, observations, and citations that will help students' research in the long run. In an ideal world, annotations ought to include a few sentences: in the case of primary sources, sketching its origins, perspective, genre, span, etc.; in the case of secondary sources, outlining the purview, stance, and even argument of the scholarship. This is ideal, though artificial; often students' observations are boilerplate meant merely to fulfill the assignment.

Be open to encouraging students to use annotations as a way of tracking their research. Often the most useful annotation can be a record of where you found a source: in a database, an index, a footnote. (After the bibliographical entry, a simple reference can be helpful, like: “Found in Jones, 1987, p. 40, note 84.”) Keeping track of the “ancestry” of a source can even help students see connections or patterns they might not otherwise see (e.g., “all the articles in my bibliography with a Marxist bent I found from the footnotes of one source...”). Depending on individual research habits and preferences, the bibliography can become an increasingly note-encrusted reference throughout the term, helping students to step back and schematize much of the work they've done.

*Fifteen minutes
of intelligent
research in Widener,
Houghton, or Baker
can save hours of
frustrating online
clicking.*

You never know, it might also rescue that student whose project just doesn't seem to be moving toward a great "original research" argument; his topic might be best suited to a historiographically-driven approach, and this is where an annotated bibliography can be a comfort, inspiration, and motivator.

WORKING THROUGH THE PRIMARY SOURCES

By this point, students have worked with you and with librarians to find a body of primary sources for their research. Once students have sat down for their first few days with the sources, their preconceptions often clash with what the sources actually say. "Where else can I look?" they might ask. Be creative in offering alternatives, but encourage them to keep working—for now—on the sources they've found. Ask them: Why don't they seem satisfying? What are they not saying/showing that you thought they would? And what are they actually saying? Discovering the answer to that last question, clearly, can be more interesting and rewarding than chasing an *idée fixe*. The early encounter with primary sources often reshapes a research project, and students have to be ready to be flexible, to mold their initial idea to the developing project.

BECOMING FAMILIAR WITH SOURCES, AND SOURCE CRITIQUE

Primary sources are complicated things. They often need to be read more than once because they don't say what they mean: they can be ironic, comical, allusive, elusive, or flat out deceptive. But sensitivity to these kinds of undertones takes time to uncover. Encourage your students to "peel the onion" of source interpretation by writing often and early about their sources, even a few sentences summing up what they think about tone, purpose, and reliability.

In this vein, you might even wish to develop an assignment around source criticism, a short appraisal of a primary source that

students think will figure prominently in their paper. Ask them to dwell on these problems of the source's origin, its author/compiler, its relation to other sources, its genre, and how trustworthy a witness it is. Sometimes research can produce a chorus (or cacophony) of voices from the past, and this assignment can help students focus on one

voice and practice on a small scale the kind of interpretive skills they'll need to bring to bear later in their projects. This assignment could be coupled with a discussion in the Seminar about a particular text, or you might find that a few

Students have to be ready to be flexible, to mold their initial idea to the developing project.

students are working on projects whose sources overlap. Bringing them together to share their thoughts could help them along, or you might instead establish some kind of informal course "listserv" in which students can discuss readings and/or research texts as they work through them. Because Research Seminars focus on a specific time and place, questions about the nature of sources will tend to reappear, so the more frequently students discuss them with each other, the better. Getting them to think critically about sources is key in helping them develop meaty, complex, and interesting research papers.

SECONDARY SOURCE RESEARCH; ITS PERILS, TOO

While students tend to be quite conscientious about applying a critical method to primary sources, they sometimes feel unequipped to be critical with secondary material, particularly historiography; either it doesn't occur to them, or they complain of being unqualified: "I'm just an undergraduate, how can I criticize this professional's judgment?" Let them know that you don't expect the field's next groundbreaking article, but you do want them to be just as judicious with secondary as with primary sources. Tell them to think about the criteria

they'll be applying to their research. It's the same criteria course instructors will eventually use to grade their papers: Did the argument hold together? Was it convincing? Why or why not? How was evidence used? Were obvious questions overlooked? If so, why? Is there evidence that should have been discussed but wasn't?

Students concentrating in History may by this point have taken a Reading Seminar, so they will have passing familiarity with the

"I'm just an undergraduate, how can I criticize this professional's judgment?"

problems and issues of historiographical critique. Remind them that they can put this knowledge to use in writing an elegant and well-supported research paper. Can they identify particular "schools of thought"

in the secondary literature? Are there prevailing views that correspond with certain eras or national historiographical traditions? Helping students to map out the historiography in this (admittedly schematic but effective) way can reduce their tentativeness in making some conclusions about the scholarship in their area of research. For those less trained in historiography, introduce them to some of these basic questions, perhaps with a handout outlining the nature of secondary material and ways to approach it, or a discussion in Seminar.

When it comes to secondary research, students generally sit somewhere along a spectrum between two extremes: 1) those who want only to interact with primary sources and are disinterested in secondary material, or 2) those who thrive on reading articles, books, and reviews, giving short shrift (sometimes unwittingly) to primary documents. Both need to be nudged toward the center. Student #1 should be congratulated for her purist approach, but shown how history also involves debate, discussion, and argument: all things she can't glean from the

primary sources alone. Student #2 might tend to show up more frequently, particularly among less experienced undergraduates. Research papers give students the chance to read lots of material on one subject and for the student unfamiliar with the Seminar's topic, the secondary material is going to be his lifeboat. It will orient him, instruct him, and—if we as instructors aren't careful—colonize him to the extent that his paper really doesn't do more than illustrate another historian's arguments with different evidence. It's an insidious problem because the student may not recognize it, nor may you until well into the writing phase. Remind Student #2 that secondary research is secondary. This is his opportunity to dig deeply into the sources that came out of this time and place. If a student seems to be developing ideas that remind you of some familiar historians, or seems more driven by arguments from secondary materials than from a close reading of the primary sources at hand, suggest returning to the sources and giving them another good reading. He should be following his own interests and questions, not those of his published predecessors.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND HOW TO WORK THROUGH THEM

Writing a long research paper is an exhilarating and fulfilling experience for students, but it can also be filled with pitfalls, setbacks, and frustrations. Here are some strategies for dealing with some of the most common problems.

"THE FAMINE": TOO LITTLE INFORMATION

Given the vast array of Research Seminar topics, inevitably some Seminars will have a harder time than others coming up with viable research topics. Hopefully, you will have run across potential source bodies in your own work, or even while preparing the Seminar. If a student is working on a topic that has fewer sources than is ideal, help her out by suggesting collected document

anthologies (often used in survey courses), document appendices in secondary works, or other unfamiliar avenues (interlibrary loan, Boston-area libraries, peer-reviewed or university-sponsored online resources). Even if these alternatives fail to produce much, don't underestimate the potential of a source analysis focused on one or two documents. This could end up being something exegetical, comparative, or perhaps a Geertzian "thick description" paper; in any event, the student shouldn't be discouraged by paucity. Explain how sometimes a great research paper uses an analysis of one source to throw new light on a question, or can rekindle or reorient a debate through a careful analysis. This research paper will involve more thinking and perhaps less "hunting and gathering," but will be no less rewarding.

"THE BANQUET": TOO MUCH INFORMATION

Students working through vast swaths of material may come quickly to feel overwhelmed by the amount of material facing them. Teach them to edit even as they research; maybe their research should be conceived in concentric rings of importance, the center representing documents that treat their immediate research question and all other rings relating to increasingly ancillary concerns. Help them identify and stay focused on a main body of sources, and lay aside (for the time being) materials that appear related to different themes or questions. Maybe the student who consistently complains of "too much to read," or "more sources than I know what to do with" has to work on strengthening and sharpening his research question; vague research agendas can lead to weeks of wasted time, and since Seminars move quickly from conception to research to writing, having this kind of problem can be crippling. Help the student whittle down the

When it comes to secondary research, students generally sit somewhere along a spectrum between two extremes:
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sources at hand, focusing if possible on the richest primary sources. The more acquainted the student becomes with these materials, the more selectively he can access the secondary literature as well.

NEVER-ENDING RESEARCH

A classic temptation—the urge to keep researching in the hopes of finding a magic bullet—is common and understandable. Students should be told, however, that such bullets are largely mythical. They may never find "the book" on their topic, and swirling around in eddies of busywork

*There
are
no
magic
bullets.*

research is not going to get them any closer to it. Help them to conceive of reading and writing as twin activities—each one helps the other along. Often questions only become clear when pen is put to paper (or finger to key). Keeping a richly annotated bibliography can help out (it becomes a petri dish for ideas), as can a "brainstorm" file for quick notes, observations, and outlines. The more they pair writing with research, the less imposing it will seem to write those first few sentences of the draft, and the more prepared they'll be for it. Students should also be prepared to cut their losses and work with what they have. Many will want to "solve" their research question. Let them know that an "incomplete" project is fine—professional historians can spend decades on certain questions and never feel satisfied. Supporting a thesis is one thing, but "finding the answer" is often a chimera. Giving students this information can also keep them from feeling overwhelmed and lend them confidence in putting their project together.

NOT THINKING HISTORICALLY

It's surprising how often tutors need to remind students to think historically. Take it as a symptom of their enthusiasm—when they have a chance to research something that

interests them intensely, they can become caught up in interesting details or tangential byways to the detriment of productive research. Usually this problem of interpretive orientation comes late in the research phase, when students are honing the shape of the paper. You may find you have students whose papers keep veering toward genealogy or pure economics, leaving aside any historical engagement with their material. This point in the research and writing process is often where instructors need to intervene and point out the differences between writing a paper in History versus one in English, Political Science, or Philosophy. These basic principles can be obscured for students when they have been gathering their own material over several months as opposed to having texts assigned to them. Remind them that the objectives are identical to the shorter history papers they write, and that while the sources may be greater in number and diversity than in other assignments, the goal remains the same. It might also be necessary to introduce them to unfamiliar techniques or methodologies (things like prosopography, oral history, quantitative analysis, etc.) to deal with recalcitrant sources historically.

MISTAKING SOURCES FOR EVIDENCE

Not all sources are equally valuable. When students are assigned sources to critique for short response papers, they rarely find it necessary to appraise their quality, usefulness, or value—they take them as a given. Research papers, on the other hand, require students

to develop a more critical sensibility.

Not all sources are equally valuable.

They need to be able to interrogate a source for its value—sources that at first blush seem to fit perfectly with their topic may pale with a second reading. Moreover, not every source

provides evidence to support an argument. Sometimes sources need to be read against the grain, considered with suspicion, or even

discounted. Students might only realize this in the late phases of writing, when their ultimate analysis reveals a source's shortcomings. As students are researching, ask them their opinions of their sources and coax them to keep notes or an informal file of their impressions of sources, always keeping an eye on issues like provenance (Is it a state-sponsored document? A radical manifesto? A legal agreement?) and function (What purpose did it serve at the time? What were its author's motives?). Keep students aware of the nature of their sources and the fact that they have to be discriminating in distilling evidence from what they've collected.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: FORMULATING AN ARGUMENT

Putting together an argument can be daunting for less experienced researchers, but they can get a good head start if you help to defuse the tension early in the process. Don't let students stew for weeks in a tense build-up to the unveiling of a formulated thesis. Try making argument formulation something that you discuss with your students from the very beginning, as they move from choosing a topic, to asking a research question, to their first steps at argumentation. Teach them how to make early tentative arguments part of their research process by running their theories through their sources early on, keeping a jot-pad of rough sentence and paragraph drafts, and creating a dialogue between what they're collecting and what they hope to say in their paper. Most importantly, have them talk to each other about what they plan to argue. As students delve deeper into the research, their work tends to overlap, and they are often each other's best critics and mentors.

For specifics on moving from argument formulation to writing, see Chapter Four.

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Nº 4

TEACHING WRITING

Assigning Writing that Builds Toward the Final Paper

Getting Started

Coaching Your Students through the Writing Process

Arriving at an Argument

Analyzing Evidence

Getting Organized

The Drafting Stage

Tips for Helping Students who get “Stuck”

Responding to Student Writing

After Writing: the Fine Tuning

In teaching a Research Seminar, one of your central duties will be coaching students through the writing process. Steering an undergraduate through that process is

Think of yourself as teaching the elements of historical writing, rather than, simply, teaching “writing.”

seldom easy. As students make their way from half-formed research topics to final, polished papers, how can you help? This section offers tips and strategies for teaching writing. “Writing,” of course, is short-hand for a whole array of tasks, tackled by every historian—hammering out an argument, summarizing historiography, organizing evidence, drafting, revising, and polishing prose, just to name a few. Since you’ll be leading your students

through all of these, think of yourself as teaching the elements of historical writing, rather than, simply, teaching “writing.”

The advice here includes suggestions on helping students tackle their writing projects in manageable “steps”; on how to respond effectively to student writing; and, finally, on how to help students who are struggling.

ASSIGNING WRITING THAT BUILDS TOWARD THE FINAL PAPER

Your students’ ultimate destination is that final, 25-page paper. But they will need a lot of guidance and preparation to get there. So, begin with the syllabus. Research Seminars typically require students to do a lot of “pre-writing.” Shorter assignments allow students

to practice research and writing skills, and they also provide a lot of useful material when it's time to produce a full draft. Most find they have a lot to work with, once they finally sit down at the computer to compose a draft. Possible assignments include:

- *Early proposal or list of 2-3 potential research topics*
- *Annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources*
- *Provisional thesis statement*
- *Close reading or criticism of a primary source (or sources)*
- *Oral presentation*
- *Outline*
- *Full rough draft*

Consider using some more free-form assignments, as well. Some past Seminars have used open-ended writing assignments to get students rolling. In one class, for instance, the first writing assignment asked students simply to fill up three pages with whatever they were most comfortable writing. They could write the first three pages of their paper, the historiography section, a preliminary overview of their argument, an outline in prose, an explanation of why the topic mattered to them—anything. For those who didn't know where to begin, their tutor advised writing about the primary source that interested them most. This exercise worked well in that it allowed students to write without much pressure and proved to most of them that they knew more about their ideas and sources than they had originally thought. However you choose to organize the course, get your students writing early—and often. Writing is often one of the best ways for students to discover what they think. It also helps them wrestle with which ideas work, which don't, and which need further exploration. Early writing assignments also present opportunities to confront looming problems. If you require students to submit writing to you early in the semester, you will have more time to identify potential writing problems and to help students address them before complete drafts are due.

Get your students writing early—and often.

GETTING STARTED

Be sure your students know the basics. Students often stumble because they are unsure of what's required. Before your students put pen to paper, be clear about what is expected. And although it may seem obvious, remind students what a History paper does:

- It makes an argument about some aspect of the past, based on analysis of primary sources.
- It intervenes in the scholarly debate on a particular topic.

Early in the semester, many tutors like to review terms like “thesis statement,” “historiography,” and “primary source.” Yes, most students will know what these are, at this point. But don't assume they do. Teach them.

Emphasize writing. For students to make it a priority, they need to know that writing matters to you. Bring writing into the classroom. Begin with ten minutes of quiet writing that allows students to focus their thoughts on the week's readings. Or ask them to bring thesis statements to class and share them with a partner. Of course, the emphasis need not always be on student writing. Even when the class is discussing secondary sources, make writing a part of the conversation. Expose the “scaffolding” behind an author's prose: What is the argument? How does the writer build and sustain that argument? What kind of evidence is used? The more you discuss writing, the more your students will grasp its importance.

For students to make it a priority, they need to know that writing matters to you.

Inspire them. Talk about the art, as well as the craft, of historical writing. Bring a favorite piece of writing to class, or highlight an elegant section of one of the assigned readings. Point out a gripping introduction. Ask them to discuss a particular author's

style and voice. History, after all, is about storytelling. Spending class time lingering over particularly beautiful and well-crafted passages helps students aspire to write well in their own work.

COACHING YOUR STUDENTS THROUGH THE WRITING PROCESS

For tutors especially, the bulk of the “teaching” you do will happen in individual meetings with your students. In these meetings, be as inquisitive and encouraging as possible. Remember: your job is not so much to tell them what to write as to help them figure it out for themselves. Here are some tips for navigating one-on-one conferences:

Ask a lot of questions. Especially in the early stages of research and writing, press your students to express their ideas aloud. Telling you about the project will help bring their ideas into sharper focus. Prompt them to articulate their opinions, by asking ques-

Hashing out an argument, orally, is great preparation for doing so in writing.

tions like: “What strikes you, in this source? What is interesting and exciting about your research? What are you finding that’s unexpected? What patterns do you see?” It’s your job to guide each student toward a more

pointed topic, hypothesis and, finally, argument. Informal conversations are sometimes the most important step in that process.

Challenge their ideas. Even if a student is committed to a particular position (a good thing!), push him or her to take a stand. Do this gently, but don’t be afraid to say, “I’m not totally convinced. Persuade me.” Or, “Explain that.” Or, “Teach me what I need to know, in order to understand your position. What are you seeing in your sources that leads you to this conclusion?” Hashing out an argument, orally, is great preparation for doing so in writing.

Convey your excitement. Students want to

know that you are enthusiastic about their work. Although you shouldn’t give false praise or encourage shoddy work, make an effort to be positive. Never underestimate the power of a few words of encouragement.

ARRIVING AT AN ARGUMENT

By the time history concentrators are ready to enroll in a Research Seminar, they have had the mantra “thesis statement” pounded into their heads. But knowing that a paper needs an argument doesn’t necessarily make it any easier to find one. To help students along, you can:

Talk about what makes a good thesis statement. The thesis is the central argument of a paper. It is supported by the discussion and evidence presented in the essay’s body. Strong thesis statements are:

- *Debatable.* A historical argument is the author’s scholarly opinion about a debatable issue. Theses are not statements of fact. “Thomas Jefferson was president,” therefore, is not an argument.
- *Specific.* Weak thesis statements are often vague. “Thomas Jefferson was a bad guy,” for instance, is debatable—but it’s too vague to serve as a viable argument.
- *Original.* An ideal argument makes an original contribution to the historical scholarship on a given subject. Don’t let your students be afraid to think creatively about what they want to argue.
- *Supported by a convincing body of evidence.* Remind your students that they must be able to support their argument. If it isn’t buttressed by convincing evidence, even the most complex and challenging thesis won’t work.

Offer some techniques for finding a thesis.

Think about how you have developed historical arguments in your own work. You may find it helpful to brainstorm some exercises

that will lead your students through the same processes. For instance:

- “Write a few paragraphs explaining your project to a layperson (such as your roommate or your mother). Tell the person not only what you’re studying, but why it’s important.”
- “Choose two or three secondary works that come closest to what you’re trying to do. Summarize the argument of each in a sentence. Then say how what you’re doing differs.”
- “Imagine the title and/or section headings of the paper you want to write. Think about what ties them together and how you might move from one heading to the next.”
- “Look for key terms or (short!) phrases that recur in many different sources. Figure out how you could incorporate those words or ideas in a thesis statement.”

ANALYZING EVIDENCE

Even those students with strong, thoughtful arguments may need help using evidence to support them. It’s often striking how student writers struggle to use (and choose) evidence. They select odd quotations, when others would work far better. They employ

long, distracting block quotations, where they could just as easily integrate a few shorter phrases into their own prose. They drop quotations unceremoniously at the end of paragraphs and offer

Students will be tempted to ignore any evidence that seems problematic. Don’t let them.

no comment or interpretation. Making a strong argument means learning to interpret evidence and to deploy it effectively in writing. As with most writing skills, the best way to learn is to practice, so:

Teach critical interpretation. You might begin by asking students to analyze the evidence within a single primary source. Ask them, first, to approach the source critically: When was it created, and by whom? Are there any hints of bias? Does it accord with other evidence, or contradict it? Then, prompt them to draw some preliminary conclusions: What can we learn from this source? (Instead of brainstorming headings, for instance, some historians work backward from individual pieces of evidence: Beginning with one quotation or document, they might think about what questions it answers, then move outward toward broader headings or sections.)

- Assign a one-page primary source criticism, or a “close reading.”
- Or, model this process in class, by discussing one sentence, quotation, or another feature of a primary source.

Teach selectivity. Remind your students that they won’t be able to include every piece of evidence turned up in the course of their research. Encourage them, instead, to choose the pithiest quotes—those that will do the most to support their argument. In a 25-page paper, each piece of evidence needs to carry its weight. Explain that, ultimately, their goal is to convince you—their reader—of their argument’s merit. That means they can’t afford to waste space on poorly-chosen quotes!

Prompt them to confront counter-arguments. Students will be tempted to ignore any evidence that seems problematic. Don’t let them. A successful essay acknowledges potential objections and defends against counter-arguments. Even in the early stages of research and writing, ask (either in person or in written comments): “Are you noticing anything that challenges your interpretation of what’s happening?” “Which historians might disagree with your ideas? How would you respond to their objections?” and “How will you deal with contradictory evidence?”

GETTING ORGANIZED

As they prepare to write a full draft, students are often overwhelmed by the amount of evidence and sources that they have collected. (You can probably relate! At this stage, anyone's notes can seem unwieldy and the thought of organizing them exhausting.) Where to start?

Talk about your own writing process.

How do you organize your notes? What steps do you follow, once you've gathered a mass of evidence? Do you outline? If so, how do you begin? (Instead of brainstorming headings, for instance, some historians work backward from individual pieces of evidence: Beginning with one quotation or document, they might think about what questions it answers, then move outward toward broader headings or sections.)

Make the case for outlining. Many research Seminars require students to make an outline before beginning to write. This is an important step. Although the outline may change later, students benefit from thinking, here, about what evidence they want to include and how they want to order it. As you review a student's outline, imagine the paper that might result from it. Is there an overall logic? Are the transitions easily grasped, or baffling and unclear? Is the evidence weak, or oddly chosen? Does it undermine the main argument? Ideally, the final paper should be clearly structured, with each point flowing easily into the next. Each paragraph should be anchored by a topic sentence that advances the main argument, and each topic sentence should be supported by carefully-selected evidence. Without an outline to guide them, most writers find it difficult to achieve that level of clarity and logic.

THE DRAFTING STAGE

Making the jump from research to writing is often difficult. Luckily, your students have been "pre-writing" for weeks by this stage.

Remind them of how far they've come. Much of the hardest work is done: They've settled on a topic, combed the libraries for evidence, arrived at a preliminary argument, tried their hand at interpreting primary sources, and organized their ideas in outline form. All that remains is to report what they've discovered. And that's the fun part!

*Even
minor errors
telegraph a
writer's
carelessness.*

Offer some general advice. As your students begin to produce drafts, you will no doubt be offering plenty of suggestions about how they might improve their projects. Most of this advice will be specific to each student, each topic, and each draft. You may, however, provide some more general pointers

on how to go about drafting and revising. Remind them that a first draft is only a draft. Encourage them to allow plenty of time to write. And, of course, be available. As they begin to write in earnest, many students will encounter unexpected problems, or find that their ideas have shifted. Be ready for them to reach out for help.

You may wish to distribute a handout of questions students should ask themselves, when re-reading a draft:

- *Is the argument clearly stated?*
- *Does the evidence support it?*
- *Have I used evidence carefully, thoughtfully and selectively?*
- *Does the paper flow logically?*
- *Have I edited for style?*
- *Checked for proofreading errors?*

These may be the same questions, in fact, that you will consult when commenting on their draft. Consider sharing your grading rubric with your students.

Don't let students forget the "details." Footnotes, spelling, diction—all of these are easily shunted to the bottom of a student's priority list, particularly in an early draft. But make clear that these things matter. Even minor errors telegraph a writer's care-

Citing sources properly is critical. Students must learn to incorporate citations responsibly, wherever their papers include evidence or ideas that are not their own.

lessness. When my students submit careless essays, I explain how even small mistakes detract from the persuasiveness of the writing. (How can you trust a paper's argument, if the author has not bothered to correct spelling mistakes?) Make clear that you expect papers to be proofread and edited, before reaching your desk.

Teach students to cite faithfully and correctly.

In the discipline of history, footnotes (or, less commonly, endnotes) are the standard style of citation. Footnotes tell readers how a historian has investigated his or her subject and arrived at particular conclusions. Citing sources properly is critical. Students must learn to incorporate citations responsibly, wherever their papers include evidence or ideas that are not their own. All Harvard students receive *Writing with Sources* and *Writing with Internet Sources*. Both are available online. You may also refer them to other popular guides to citation in academic writing, such as:

- *Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers*, 15th ed. (2003)
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (1996)

TIPS FOR HELPING STUDENTS WHO ARE “STUCK”

Writing a major research paper for the first time can be intimidating. Some of your students will inevitably struggle. If a student seems blocked, try to identify what stage of writing he or she needs help with. Is a vague thesis statement the problem? Is the student struggling to organize notes? Is it plain, old-fashioned writer's block? Here are some trouble-shooting techniques:

- *Assign “free-writing.”* Students who are blocked can often benefit by doing some low-stakes writing—that is, quick composition that does not result in any

grade or judgment. You might assign short bursts of “freewriting”—writing nonstop for five or ten minutes without stopping to edit. For those with writer's block, freewriting can be a big help. For those who aren't sure what the problem is, freewriting is a good way to pause, reassess and find a solution. Provide a prompt, such as “I'm having trouble with this project because...” or “I am trying to argue that...” Ask the student to write freely in response to these statements, and then discuss what they've discovered.

- *Suggest a “reverse” outline.* If a student submits a rambling, directionless draft,

or if you have trouble following the logic or argument in a paper, ask the writer to create a “reverse” outline. That is, suggest that they outline what they have already written. Does the structure still seem to work?

Ask the writer to create a “reverse” outline.

What awkward transitions appear? How might themes be re-ordered? Keep in mind, of course, that a student who struggles profoundly, and repeatedly, with organizational problems may need help from the Writing Center.

- *Think creatively about how to help.* If a student seems to be losing steam, ask them to explain what first excited them about their topic. If another is having trouble with the early stages of writing, suggest they begin by writing about the piece of evidence that most intrigues them. Unexpected problems will arise. But you will be attuned to each student's needs. Be confident, and follow your instincts in finding solutions that suit individual students.
- *Know when to get outside help.* If you find yourself slogging through countless drafts, or spending hours going over the stylistic errors in a student's

writing, know that you don't have all the answers. Ask for help. Harvard has many terrific resources to aid student writers. (See Chapter Six for a list of these.)

RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

Providing feedback on your students' work will be one of your most critical responsibilities. Remember to take a constructive approach. Students give tremendous weight to your feedback. Whether you are offering an informal suggestion or typing comments on a draft, be constructive. Though you will be evaluating their work, your evaluation should also teach. Students will want to come away from each assignment feeling as though they've learned a useful skill or approach—something leading them toward that final paper.

Aim, too, to prompt students toward their own solutions. If you are discussing a student's draft, you might begin by asking the student to evaluate his or her own paper. Particularly in conferences, try to use such questions as:

- *“What do you think works, in this paper? What doesn't?”*
- *“What would you change about this draft?”*
- *“Why did you choose to...?” “Tell me about your decision to...”*
- *“What were you trying to say in this section...?”*

Students will often raise the very issues you find problematic. Sometimes they will even seek advice on problems you hadn't noticed. Either way, the stage is set for you to brainstorm, together, about how to improve the draft.

TWO MODES OF COMMENTING

Written comments generally take two forms: marginalia within the text, and the more composed final comment. Each has its own merits, and its own limitations, and they

should be used together.

MARGINALIA

Students pay surprisingly close attention to what you write in the margins of their papers. An encouraging comment (“Insightful!”) can give a big boost, while a hastily-scribbled “NO” can be tremendously demoralizing. Be thoughtful, and aim to balance criticisms with praise. Strive, also, to be judicious. Not every weakness need be pointed out. Look, instead, for patterns (Does the student consistently misuse quotations?) and mark one or two representative instances. When you write your end comments, you can refer to what you've written in the margins. (“Your topic sentences are sometimes unclear. See the example I marked on p. 3.”)

Perhaps most important: Avoid drowning your students in red ink! If you receive a paper that is riddled with grammatical errors, correct one paragraph and then caution the student to devote more energy to editing. And use your judgment: if a student's writing seems too awkward and problematic to correct in the margins, consider referring them to the Writing Center for help on future drafts.

THE FINAL COMMENT

When composing their final comments on a student's essay, most instructors follow a common format:

- *Greeting*
- *Restatement of the essay's thesis or topic (called “Reflecting”)*
- *Discussion of the paper's strengths*
- *Discussion of the paper's weaknesses*
- *Concluding remarks (perhaps a summary of the paper's main achievements and weaknesses, and some encouragement for the future)*

Studies of student writing have revealed that many students reread their instructors' final comments in preparation to write subsequent

An encouraging comment (“Insightful!”) can give a big boost, while a hastily scribbled “NO” can be tremendously demoralizing.

papers. This is especially likely to be true of Research Seminars, where every piece of assigned writing is clearly intended to prepare students for the next. Therefore, it is important to remember as you compose your final comments that they must be sufficiently (1) intelligible, (2) structured, and (3) actionable—that is, specific and constructive—so as to be useful to a student returning to them potentially several weeks after they were written. Toward that end, try to keep these three points in mind:

- *Limit your advice.* Three or four major points of criticism are about all a student can digest, in one sitting. Any more, and they will likely feel paralyzed. Identify the areas or issues that are most pressing, and limit your discussion to these.
- *Organize your points by order of importance.* A shaky argument is a more serious problem than a few misspelled words. Begin with those criticisms that are the most important, and then move toward more minor issues.
- *Point to specific passages.* Wherever possible, mark places in the student's prose where the argument disappears, the transition is awkward, or the writing becomes unclear. Vague mandates like "Write more clearly" are not particularly helpful.
- *Offer specific examples.* Don't just identify the problem; teach the student one or more ways to fix it. There is no need to worry about 'pampering' the student here—make your suggestions selectively, and offer multiple options. The student will still have to master the techniques you suggest, and choose which solutions work best for him/her.

'AFTER' WRITING: THE FINE TUNING

Students will heave sighs of relief upon fin-

ishing their first rough draft. They may want never to see the paper again. They can take a break from the writing for a little while, but the time between completing the first draft and the final due date is a golden period for research papers. Students need to get excited about this period, since they can change a hastily written, mediocre paper into a tightly argued firecracker. Help them to imagine the finished draft as a new beginning. They've set down their thoughts, worked out their argument, and come to some conclusions. Now that they've done the bulk of the work, what do they think of the results? Are there areas where the argument feels weak, where the evidence seems patchy, where they could bulk up some research, where the paper slides into a tangent? The great advantage of this

Remember as you compose your final comments that they must be sufficiently (1) intelligible, (2) structured, and (3) actionable—that is, specific and constructive—so as to be useful to a student

moment of stocktaking is that they have the opportunity to go back to the drawing board in almost every aspect of the paper. They can reorganize paragraphs, restate the main argument, head back to the library for some mop-up research, edit like mad. Since they may feel too close to the project to be self-critical or objective, it's also a crucial juncture for exchanging work with each other and sharing comments. If the coursehead has not built peer review into one of the scheduled class meetings, have your students circulate drafts by e-mail, or meet in small groups to discuss their work.

The point here is to encourage them not to flag at the last moment; they will be exhausted from a term full of work, but with some constructive help from you and their peers, they can step back to assess and improve their work..

Nº 5

GRADING THE COURSE

Collaboration in Grading

Grading the Final Paper

The major goal of Research Seminars is to teach students to develop, research and write their own research project. Grading, then, should evaluate and reflect students' mastery of the whole range of skills involved in that undertaking: defining a topic, discovering and interpreting primary source materials, and presenting their findings (in writing and, possibly, orally, as well). This chapter offers some guidance on how the grading process—which is meant to be collaborative between the coursehead and the tutor—might work, as well as some thoughts about what to look for when grading the final paper.

COLLABORATION IN GRADING

Grading and evaluating students' work in Research Seminars could be a bit tricky, as courseheads and tutors are asked to collaborate as equals. It is expected that you, the tutor, will grade many of the students' preliminary assignments, making you even more knowledgeable than the coursehead about students' progress and process. At the same time, we ask that the coursehead take the lead in grading the final term paper, and in

assigning the overall course grade, as part of our commitment to offering students direct access to feedback from our faculty.

Given this situation, the grade assigned by the coursehead must take into account your input about the student's process. It is, however, up to you and your coursehead to determine how exactly the two of you collaborate. You and the coursehead might decide to grade the final paper "blindly," and then meet to hash out a compromise grade. Alternately, the faculty member might wish to declare a preferred grade, and then request that you review it. Or, perhaps you should be the one to offer an initial estimate, which the coursehead will review and corroborate. Ultimately the process is left to each individual coursehead's discretion, and we urge you to be flexible in helping to work it out.

However grades are assigned, it is expected that you will prepare for each student a Research Seminar Report, which will be kept on file in the student's folder in the Tutorial Office. This report is extremely important, as it will be used, among other things, to

determine the student's likelihood of success writing a Senior Thesis. We ask, therefore, that you take this responsibility seriously and avoid vague and unhelpful statements like "this student was very pleasant in the classroom." Tell the Tutorial Office honestly about how the student fared at each stage in the process of research and writing, so that an accurate prediction can be made about his/her aptitude for the Senior Thesis. Comments like "this student has a difficult time organizing evidence into an argument, but is a strong prose stylist once he knows what he should write," for example, give a much better sense of the student's skills.

GRADING THE FINAL PAPER

Although grading can be an exhausting process, some quick steps can make it easier—and less subjective. The previous three chapters of this guide will, hopefully, have given you a strong sense of the kinds of skills and level of achievement that one should expect from a Research Seminar paper. Every year, the department gives out awards to the best of these papers, and the winners are typically published in the undergraduate journal *Tempus*. If you (or your students) are looking for "model" papers, this could be a good place to start.

Before sitting down to grade, you may want to devise a rubric—that is, a specific set of criteria you will use to evaluate each student's work. When grading long papers, you will likely use some combination of the "big four":

- *Thesis*. Does the paper have a central argument? Is it clearly-stated and maintained throughout? Is it well-supported? Is it compelling, convincing, and complex
- *Evidence & analysis*. Does the essay offer sufficient evidence to support each point? Is the evidence properly chosen and used effectively? Has the writer overlooked contradictory evidence?

- *Organization*. Is the paper well-structured? Does it flow logically, or is it hard to follow?
- *Style*. Is the writing concise, clear and polished? Are there proofreading problems or spelling mistakes?

You may also ask: Does the work fulfill the assignment? (For shorter assignments, one might even create a quick checklist of things you expect each student to have included or addressed, and check them off as you read.) The department's Teaching Fellow Handbook (http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~history/forms/gr/TF_Handbook.pdf) includes several essays about grading student writing, which may give you further ideas for your rubric.

Many tutors find that it's a good idea to read through the whole stack of papers before grading them singly. You may want to skim all the papers to get a sense of what the final grade range of each might look like, and perhaps make separate piles for those that seem *preliminarily* to fall within the A-range, B-range, C-range, etc. Then, return to each paper and apply your previously established grading rubric, in order to fine-tune (or perhaps revise) your initial assessment. Simply skim all of the submissions and get a sense of what the final grade range might look like. Then, return to each paper and measure it against the criteria you have (previously) decided on.

Last but not least, remember that you are grading the work, not the student. If you find yourself agonizing over a low or mid-range grade, ask why. Be careful to evaluate the paper alone—not the hours devoted to writing it, and not the student's brilliant comments in class.

Nº 6

FINAL THOUGHTS

Tips for Mentoring Undergraduates

Resources for Teacher Training

Resources for Students

As a Research Seminar Tutor, you have much to do—sources to locate, syllabi to design, Seminars to attend, individual projects to coach, preliminary assignments to evaluate etc.—but we also hope you find the experience fulfilling and enjoyable. From a professional development angle, Research Seminars have the potential to offer you your most independent teaching role at Harvard, as you are expected to manage your own schedule of meetings with as many as fifteen students and to oversee their independent research. Though you should be in constant contact and cooperation with your coursehead, ultimately you will have to make many judgment calls about students' projects on your own. What does student A need to hear back about his prospectus? Where can student B go to research her topic further? Is student C missing some key subfield of bibliography directly relevant to his project? As a Research Seminar Tutor, you will learn what it is to be more than a section leader—you will become an adviser and a mentor.

This chapter includes some advice for men-

tors, a selection of resources for you as a teacher-in-training, and information about resources to which you can direct your students should they need more help than you can (or should) provide.

TIPS FOR MENTORING UNDERGRADUATES

Tutors have the unique role in the Research Seminars of establishing continuity between their students' seminar and research experiences. They are positioned to provide invaluable assistance to students trying to assimilate what they're learning in class to their own work. As Tutor you need to do more than just make yourself available to your students; at all stages of the course you should be proactive in helping them formulate, pursue, and complete their projects. Schedule frequent meetings with your students, as most are unlikely to seek you out until they're feeling really stranded. Moreover, those who need the most help are usually the least likely to seek it out. They may feel overwhelmed by the project or embarrassed

that their work isn't moving as quickly as possible. It's best to catch these problems early and address them, perhaps by visiting the library with the struggling student, or reviewing online and/or printed resources together; by helping the student work out an argument and/or draft an outline; or by listening to a short oral presentation of the student's work thus far.

Use your own experience as an example, both good and bad. You yourself are engaged, on a long-term basis, in the same type of project they're pursuing on a smaller scale. You have gone through many of the challenges they'll face during the term. Tell them how you overcame problems in your own work, thought through certain challenges, or developed strategies for research and writing. They'll appreciate the commiseration and will be grateful for your advice.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHER TRAINING

The History Department takes very seriously your professional development as a teacher. As we discussed in Chapter One, Research Seminars are an important part of that undertaking, and are meant to provide a 'double education.' While you and the coursehead instruct your undergraduate students in the techniques and content of their research, you as a graduate student tutor should also be learning from the coursehead discrete skills of your own: how to design a syllabus, how to develop a course bibliography, how to lead discussions, how to teach research techniques, how to mentor students working on independent research, and what to look for in undergraduates at a certain stage in their development.

In addition to the advice and example of your coursehead, you are also encouraged to take advantage of the following two resources for teacher training:

The Departmental Teaching Fellow. The History Department Departmental Teaching Fellow works collaboratively between

the Derek Bok Center and the Undergraduate Office on a range of projects designed to enhance the quality of the Department's undergraduate pedagogy. The most significant portion of the Departmental TF's time is devoted to working with TFs and tutors to assist and support them however possible both inside and outside the classroom. As such, you should consider the Departmental TF an all-purpose, collegial, and risk-free resource to help you refine your teaching style, connect with resources at the Bok Center (and beyond), and solve discrete problems in your course. The Departmental TF also organizes departmental workshops on leading discussions, mentoring students, designing and grading papers and exams, advising and grading theses, assembling teaching portfolios, and teaching with technology. You should know that the Departmental TF always consults on a strictly confidential basis, and as such can also help address delicate issues that may arise with courseheads or students. For information on the Departmental TF for the current academic year visit the Graduate Resources iSite or contact the Undergraduate Office..

The Derek Bok Center. Located on the third floor of the Science Center, the Bok Center offers a variety of programs and resources to help improve teaching and learning in Harvard College. Many of these programs are described on the center's website, at <http://bokcenter.fas.harvard.edu>; they include teaching conferences, practice teaching (or "microteaching"), and videotape consultations, as well as a variety of one-off events and regular discussion groups on student writing, teaching with technology, etc.

Of course, the Undergraduate Office exists in large part to organize and support your work as a teacher, and you should feel free to discuss any larger concerns (about the design of your course or the program as a whole) with either the Departmental TF or the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies (in 2009-2010 the ADUS is Trygve Throntveit, throntv@fas).

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Teachers often hesitate to seek outside help when faced with a student with academic issues. After all, isn't that why you're there? If a student doesn't quite 'get' something, doesn't it reflect on the teacher? Though such reactions are normal, and noble, in fact there are many students who need more help (or more specialized help) than even an excellent tutor can provide. There is nothing remedial about asking students to seek extra assistance with some aspect of their work. With up to fifteen students, it's neither fair nor wise for you to spend all your time with one student.

This is doubly true for students working through personal issues. Students' academic work is often influenced by issues in their personal life, but it is not your job as a tutor to provide psychological counseling or address your students' personal and residential lives. The College employs several layers of professionals trained in these issues, and you are advised to refer your students to this support network whenever you have a strong suspicion that their personal lives are preventing them from performing adequately in your course.

Because Research Seminars move quickly and require a lot of commitment, you need to be particularly sensitive to students who seem listless and unengaged. Talk with them, ask them how things are going and how you can help. Falling behind in the course only compounds their worries, so you should be prepared to do as much as you can to keep your students on track. If there are students who miss meetings or assignments, let the course head know right away, so that one of you can be in touch with the student's Allston Burr Resident Dean as soon as possible.

The Allston Burr Resident Deans, one per upperclass house (for freshman, the role is fulfilled by the Freshman Dean's Office), should be one of your first points of contact. The ABRDs keep careful watch over their

house's students, and will want to know—and help—if a student is at risk of failing a course or coming to personal harm. Because they are effectively the only people at the university with full knowledge of their students' files, they are an important clearinghouse of information about their academic progress. Remember, if a student is failing your course, he/she may be failing others, too; he/she may also be grappling with a deeper issue that needs professional attention. The ABRD should always be able to intervene on your behalf to work out a plan to get the student back on track, and—and this is often misunderstood—alerting the ABRD to a student's unsatisfactory performance poses absolutely no threat to the student, disciplinary or otherwise.

If the student's difficulty seems more strictly academic, and manageable without the ABRD's intervention—for example, he/she just needs some extra tuition in writing, something quite likely to happen in a Research Seminar—turn to the following resources.

The Bureau of Study Counsel. The Bureau of Study Counsel is a resource center for students' academic and personal development. The Bureau encourages the development of the "whole person" in the interrelated realms of intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal life. Students consult the Bureau with a wide variety of academic and personal concerns, and the Bureau staff welcomes any topic for discussion.

Departmental Writing Fellow. The Department now has its own Departmental Writing Fellow, available to counsel individual students on all aspects of their papers. Direct students to the DWF website (<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=historyba&pageid=icb.page192486>), which you can access through the Department's "Graduate Resources" iSite (click "Teaching" and then "Dealing with Student Problems," and look under "Students w/ Academic Issues").

The Writing Center. Located on the lower level of the Barker Center, the Writing Center offers an array of resources for Harvard's student writers. Students may make an appointment for a writing conference (an individual consultation with a trained undergraduate tutor) at any stage of the writing process. (Appointments are scheduled online, at www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/scheduler/login.html.) The Writing Center also publishes a helpful booklet, *Strategies for Essay Writing*, available to all students. This booklet is available online at www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/resources.html. Topics include "How to Do a Close Reading," "Counter-argument," and "Developing a Thesis." (These make useful handouts, too!)

The Harvard Writing Project. Founded in 1995, the Harvard Writing Project seeks to foster pedagogical attention to writing in Harvard College courses. The HWP Bulletin "Responding to Student Writing" (available at the Expository Writing building at 8 Prescott St. and at the Bok Center for Teaching and Learning) offers helpful insights and suggestions on grading and responding to students' essays.

Writing Guides. All Harvard freshmen receive *Writing with Sources*, a booklet written by Gordon Harvey. They also receive *Writing with Internet Sources*. Both are available online through the Department's "Graduate Resources" iSite (click "Teaching" and then "Dealing with Student Problems"). History concentrators purchase and read William K. Storey's *Writing History: A Guide for Students* as part of History 97. Storey also makes a useful reference for those undertaking their first major research project.

House Tutors in Academic Writing. Some of the upperclass houses have appointed House Tutors in Academic Writing. Usually a graduate or professional school student, the House Tutor in Academic Writing holds evening office hours and is available for individual conferences with student writers.

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