

Each of these types of articles typically offers historiography. “Review Essays” are, by nature, historiographical essays. They offer a review of the literature about a certain topic. Even if it is not your topic, take a look at how one of these is written. “Featured Reviews” are longer-than-average book reviews that often feature a brief historiographical discussion of the topic. And finally, if you find an AHR Roundtable (or Exchange or Conversation) on your topic, you are lucky indeed. These features include an introductory essay or section on the historiography of the topic, followed by several articles or sections by experts giving their points of view. If you find one of these on your topic, you have struck historiographical gold. Read carefully, take notes, look for sources, and carefully track how these sources are discussed. For example, is one book or article noted as the “first” or “best” on the topic? Is a book or article noted as a game-changer, a publication that changed the way historians viewed that topic? This is the stuff of historiography.

Each subfield of history has its own leading journals, and you would do well to become acquainted with the key journals in the subfield of your topic. You can find the titles of journals using the browsing options on JSTOR and Project Muse. Titles are generally self-explanatory, so you will find and recognize them easily. For example, take a look at the following titles:

- *Hispanic American Historical Review*
- *Gender and History*
- *Journal of Women’s History*
- *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*
- *International Journal of Middle East Studies*

### ACTIVITY: Group discussion

Collect your books and articles and get together with a group from your class to talk about your findings. How useful are these sources to you? What kinds of sources did other students find? How did they find them?

## 2 Analyzing sources

← START READING HERE

Once you have your sources, you need to annotate them, that is, take notes of the relevant material for your historiographical essay (or the historiographical section of your research paper). This seems like a daunting task at first. You need to break it down into manageable parts. Annotations help you decide whether a book or article is really useful for your purposes.

### ACTIVITY: Scan a monograph

You do not have to read every word of your monograph to acquire a good grasp of its contents. We hope this comes as a pleasant surprise. In this section you will learn to scan intelligently and save yourself a lot of time. Your goal is to gather as much useful

information as possible as quickly as possible. Sit down with one of your monographs. Examine each of the following items in order.

\_\_\_\_\_ Write down the *entire* title. Does the title give you some hint of the book's contents?

Most monograph titles first include a short title, a colon, then a longer description, and sometimes a range of dates:

*Pakistan: History and Politics, 1947–1971*

Others are brief:

*Murder of a Medici Princess*

Do not assume a title will fit your needs unless you've taken a close look at the actual book. Students often miss the specific period covered by a book and discover too late that it will not be useful.

\_\_\_\_\_ What other information can you get from the front cover?

- Is there an illustration? What is it? What kind of message does it convey? (A paperback will usually have an illustration; a hardback without a dust cover will not.)
- If the book has a dust cover, what does the inside front flap tell you?

\_\_\_\_\_ What does the back cover tell you?

- Is there a succinct summary?
- Are there quotes from other scholars? Do their names and credentials give you any idea about the significance of the book you hold in your hand?
- Is there any information about the author? If there is a dust cover, check the inside back flap for information. Who is this person? What are his/her credentials? Again, a paperback will include this information; a hardback without a dust cover will not.

\_\_\_\_\_ Without reading a word from inside the covers, you should now be able to draft a brief sentence about the book. Try it now. If your book is hardback without a dust cover, you cannot do this part of the exercise. Start with the table of contents.

\_\_\_\_\_ Look at the table of contents. How is the book organized? What is its structure? Are there subsections; if so, what kind of issues do they cover? Is the book organized chronologically or thematically? Mention these elements only if they seem relevant.

\_\_\_\_\_ Read the introduction. Students instinctively skip introductions. This is a big mistake. You save time here. In this section of the book the author explains why s/he wrote the book, how s/he grappled with previous scholarship, what theoretical perspectives shaped the research, and how s/he answered her research question. In other words, here is where you find the thesis (the answer to the research question). Read through the introduction and try to locate the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ The historical problem that propelled him or her into writing the book (purpose: why s/he wrote the book).

\_\_\_\_\_ The question that guided his or her research (research question).

\_\_\_\_\_ The categories of analysis s/he uses (race, class, gender, generations).

\_\_\_\_\_ What other historians have written on the topic (historiography or literature review).

\_\_\_\_\_ The key primary sources used to find an answer to the question (evidence).

\_\_\_\_\_ His or her response to the research question (thesis or argument, which often begins with the markers "I argue" or "I contend" or "I claim").

\_\_\_\_\_ Read the conclusion. Here the author summarizes the key findings of the book and explains to you why the findings are important. S/he answers the "so what?" question. (What was at stake? What do we know now that we didn't know before, and why does it matter?)

\_\_\_\_\_ Write a summary of the author's research question and answer, based only on the introduction and conclusion.

\_\_\_\_\_ Skim each chapter.

\_\_\_\_\_ Read the introduction and conclusion of each chapter. Look for each chapter's research question and answer (thesis).

\_\_\_\_\_ Are there subheadings? How do they help structure chapter sections, guide your reading, and facilitate your understanding?

\_\_\_\_\_ Are there quotations? Do they support the author's points?

\_\_\_\_\_ Are there illustrations, charts, tables? Do they support the author's points?

### ACTIVITY: Write a book annotation

An annotation is a brief description of a scholarly book that includes the scope of the book (subject, place, time period) and the primary points made by the author. Some instructors may ask you to submit an annotated bibliography of your sources. If so, your task is to demonstrate that these sources are useful to your topic. Write one now on the book you have just scanned.

#### EXAMPLE OF A STRONG ANNOTATION

**Deutsch, Sarah. *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.**

In this book, Sarah Deutsch, then an associate professor of history at the University of Arizona, argues that between the end of the Civil War and World War II, women drastically changed the city of Boston, from defining acceptable public behavior to the actual physical layout of the city. Tracing the activities not only of upper-class women, but of

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working-class and middle-class women, Deutsch contends that women were powerful agents in creating public spaces for themselves that did not exist at the start of the period. Although women never achieved total freedom or acceptance in public spaces, and not all women enjoyed the same level of freedom or power, Deutsch's findings change the way we understand the creation of the twentieth-century city. This book is useful for my paper on the New Woman in the 1910s because it offers me insight into what urban women were doing at that time in a major city.

### EXAMPLE OF A WEAK ANNOTATION

#### **Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City* (Oxford University Press).**

This book talks about women in Boston who lived in the city and were able to change the way the city was. The period is from 1870 to 1940. Women at this time were unable to be in public because of male spitting and other activities and during this time were able to make progress in terms of politics and also creating spaces in public for women. Since it covers the 1910s, the period I am looking at for New Women, this book will be useful for my paper.

#### **Notice:**

1. *The incomplete and incorrect title (use the Chicago Style for bibliography format);*
2. *The phrase "this book talks about" (books can't talk; also avoid "deals with");*
3. *The weak and grammatically poor summary;*
4. *The lack of identification of a thesis or argument; and*
5. *The incomplete summary and analysis. It is not enough to state that a book will be useful; you need to explain why.*

### **ACTIVITY: Anatomy of a scholarly article**

Scholarly articles, like the ones you found on JSTOR, are actually close to what your history thesis or capstone paper will look like. By taking a scholarly article apart, you can see how it was put together. This exercise will help you read scholarly articles, which can be a bit daunting. It will also help you understand how to put together your own paper, which should have the same elements.

Like monographs, scholarly articles have been read and approved by a number of experts in the field before they were published ("peer reviewed"). All journals in JSTOR and ProjectMuse follow a peer-review process, so you can rely on their level of scholarship. Check with your librarians if you use other databases.

\_\_\_\_\_ Find a scholarly article on your topic (see "Activity: Find Scholarly Article" above if you have not completed that activity).

\_\_\_\_\_ How does the article begin? Does it begin with an anecdote, story, or "hook" of some kind to try to grab your interest? Does it start by posing a historical

problem? Does it wade right into a historiographical debate? Or does it attract your attention in some other way? Your paper will need a similar introduction.

\_\_\_\_\_ Find the author's research question. What is it? Write it down or underline it. Where does it appear?

\_\_\_\_\_ Find the author's argument/thesis, that is, the answer to the research question. What is it? Write it down or underline it. Where does it appear? Both research question and answer/thesis should appear in the first quarter of the paper. Is it fuzzy? Confusing?

\_\_\_\_\_ Does the author position his or her question/thesis in the context of what other historians have said about this topic? In other words, is there a historiographical section? If so, circle it. Where does it appear? Does it help make this research question/thesis seem important?

\_\_\_\_\_ What sources does this author use? Are there quotes? Visual images? Graphs? Tables? If not, should there be? If so, do they seem necessary?

\_\_\_\_\_ How does the article proceed? Chronologically? Thematically?

\_\_\_\_\_ By the end of the article, were you convinced by the author's original point/thesis/argument, and has it been amply demonstrated? If not, why not?

## ACTIVITY: Write an annotation of a scholarly article

Some of the questions above are irrelevant for some articles. Use your judgment to answer appropriate questions for the articles you have selected. Once you have the answers to these questions, you can write an annotation or an article review. Article annotations are similar to book annotations.

### EXAMPLE OF A STRONG ARTICLE ANNOTATION

Wehrle, Edmund F. "Aid Where It Is Needed Most": American Labor's Military-Industrial Complex." *Enterprise & Society* 12 (2011): 96-119.

Although it seems unlikely that labor unions and the military-industrial complex of the Cold War would have much in common, Wehrle argues that, in fact, labor leaders encouraged and used military spending to aid workers, such as urging that defense spending during the Korean War be aimed at areas that were suffering from the greatest unemployment. The AFL-CIO even became an active supporter of fallout shelter construction during the Cold War to enhance opportunities for American workers. One of the important arguments made by Wehrle in this article is that the military-industrial complex was not so powerful that it fit all resources to its own ends, but that even labor unions could harness the military-industrial complex to fit a more social vision of the democratic state. This article will be useful for my research paper on Civil Defense during the American Cold War because it shows that the encouragement to build bomb shelters came from several sources: not just the government or manufacturers of bomb shelters, but even labor unions.

## EXAMPLE OF A WEAK ARTICLE ANNOTATION

Edmund Wehrle, "Aid Where It Is Needed Most," 12 (2011): 96–119.

This article talks about how labor unions during the Cold War were in favor of fallout shelters. It also talks about how defense spending was used to put workers back to work during the Korean War. This article will be useful because it mentions fallout shelters, which my paper is about.

### Notice:

1. *The incomplete and incorrect title (use the Chicago Style for bibliography format);*
2. *The phrase "this article talks about" (articles can't talk; also avoid "deals with");*
3. *The weak summary;*
4. *The lack of identification of a thesis or argument; and*
5. *Incomplete summary and analysis. It is not enough to state that an article will be useful; you need to explain why.*

## 3 Writing a historiographical essay

Now it is time for you to write a historiographical essay on your own topic. You have everything you need.

Examples of historiographical writing are provided at the end of this workbook chapter.

Your instructor will give you the technical specifications of your paper (for example, number of pages, font, margin dimensions) and any special instructions. Here, we give you a general format for a historiographical paper. Those of you who are writing a historiographical section for your final research paper will need to adjust to those instructions.

What will the historiographical essay look like? The content will consist of the following.

- A. YOUR TOPIC:** An introduction to the topic at hand that provides a historical context. What is your research question and why do you think it is important and interesting? What is the scope (event, place, time period)? Do not begin your paper with clichéd phrases such as "since the beginning of time" or "throughout history." You are not dealing with all of history. Introduce *your* topic in its relevant context. Look at the scholarly articles you found to get some ideas. The introduction should not exceed twenty percent of your allotted length. By the end of your introduction, you should have introduced your research question.
- B. HISTORIOGRAPHY:** The body of the paper will concern how historians have treated your topic over time. Most of the time, it is simplest to write chronologically.