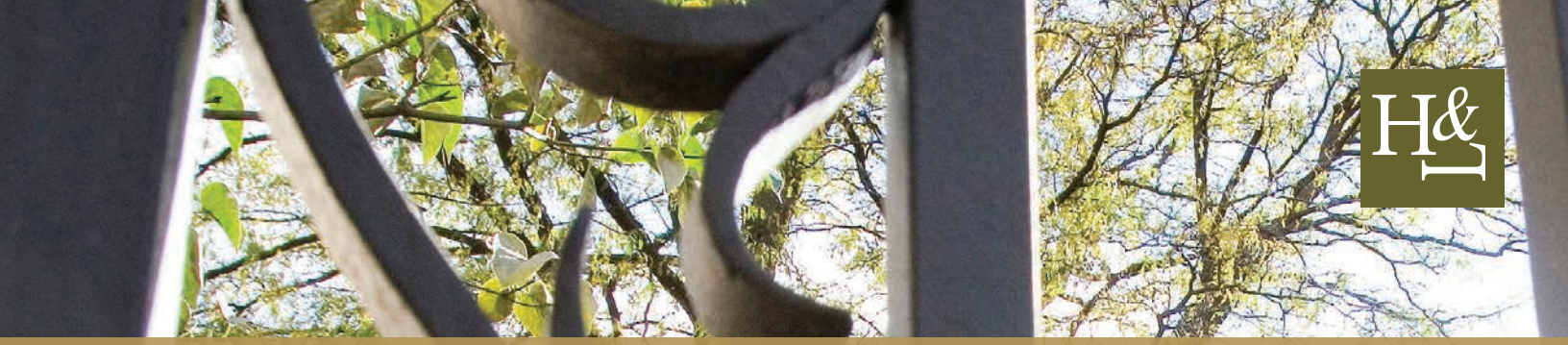

A Guide to Writing in History & Literature

Committee on Degrees
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Faculty of Arts and Sciences
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HARVARD
COLLEGE

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Writing in History & Literature

introduction

History & Literature is an interdisciplinary program in which the "how" of what a text says or shows is as important as the "what." The specific words a text uses or the formal structure of a film, a photograph, a novel, or a poem offer a means for understanding the historical and cultural implications of textual and extratextual "events," and close analysis of language and structure open up the meaning of the text. Close reading provides the specific details needed to develop and support a strong, persuasive argument about how to interpret the text.

Close Reading

Any text can be the object of close reading, which is a method of analysis that provides a detailed interpretation of a passage, a scene from a film, a single photograph, a stanza, etc. The analysis you produce in a close reading could be incorporated into a longer essay as a series of supporting paragraphs. Because each close reading offers an interpretation, writing close readings will help you understand how language and structure create meaning and stimulate the ideas that emerge when you read.

In approaching writing in History & Literature, the best way to begin is to work inductively, beginning with small details found in your text. Rather than starting with a broad premise and looking for details in the text to support that premise, begin with the details in the text and work out from there to make a larger claim. While working from the specific to the general may seem counterintuitive, the advantage of this approach is that it remains grounded in the details of your primary text, giving you the authority to articulate concrete claims and making it far easier to support your claims. By paying close attention to your text, you are much more likely to find a new angle on it. Remember that you are not looking to have the last word on a particular subject; rather, you're looking to contribute a new, interesting perspective on a long-running conversation about that subject.

Below are elements of successful writing in History & Literature. They are listed in the order that might make sense for your writing process, but they do not need to appear in this order in your final draft. Successful writing in History & Literature requires rounds of revision that take into consideration the reader's experience as well as the writer's argument, which will mean reorganizing sections of your essay and editing your prose for clarity and concision.

Establish the Context

Let the reader know briefly where the selection occurs in the text. This does not mean saying, "In this passage taken from page 238…." Rather, it might mean leading into the selection by locating its position in relation to the work as a whole, and locating that larger work in its historical context. In convincing your reader that the passage or scene you have selected is significant, relate it to other passages in the work or to larger issues pertinent to the work as a whole. In setting the extra-textual context, ask

yourself what your reader needs to know as you begin your analysis. Pretend you are teaching the selection to someone who has not engaged with the text lately, or who has not considered it in this way.

Analyze the Passage

To a great extent, the details you draw the reader's attention to will be determined by the larger argument of your paper. But to an equally great extent, the details you emphasize should be determined by the most significant features of language or structure in the passage or scene you have selected. Look for patterns in the passages you've marked when reading. Consider the significance of repetitions, contradictions, similarities, ways the text describes or represents events or settings. You want to teach your reader how to read the selection. In fact, the lesson should be so interesting that your reader sees the value not only of your interpretation of this specific selection of the text, but more, of the way you read.

Concentrate on depth of analysis rather than breadth of coverage. The key to a successful close reading is to focus on something specific. Because the length of close reading is limited, you cannot hope to analyze the entire text. Part of the process will be to select those details that are most important to your specific interpretation of the passage or scene. You are not trying to say everything there is to say about the text; rather, you are concentrating on a single significant moment and exploring what makes it significant. By choosing a significant passage or scene to analyze, you will say something important about the text as a whole.

The key to a successful close reading is to focus on something specific.

Make an Argument

Good academic writing requires clear argumentation. The insights, observations, and ideas you have when you encounter the world around you—whether the stimulus is an event in the natural/social world or a cultural product like a text—must be interpreted and then shaped into a response that organizes and makes sense of your perceptions. Interpretation is an art, and it requires you to use your imagination when reading (and when writing), but it also requires the discipline of grounding your interpretations in solid textual evidence.

The broad purpose of an academic essay is to persuade the reader of your way of interpreting data (text, events, etc.). To make your essay as powerful as possible, it must be motivated by a clear purpose: What needs to be said about this text or event? What can you contribute to our understanding of it? Once you identify the purpose of your essay, you can develop a thesis (argument) and the evidence you will need to support that thesis. You will also want your argument to be analytic and contestable; be careful not to stop at evaluative statements about a text or its politics. Deepen your engagement by asking how and why.

Sometimes, you will be writing about more than one text, and you may be tempted to focus on their similarities or examine pivotal differences. These are good starting points, and you may find it helpful to use these tactics for brainstorming, but you will also want to hone your argument in on the text— you will want the bulk of your claim to be focused on the specific texts you are reading, rather than the larger ideas or attitudes they represent.

Using Primary Sources

History & Literature emphasizes primary source texts such as novels, films, songs, monuments, speeches, poems, archival documents, and other first-hand or original works. Most writing assignments in History & Literature will encourage you to anchor your writing in a primary source base and engage with the context in which it was produced. Initial questions to consider in evaluating a primary source include: Who created it? What can you say about the creator? What is it? Can you describe it in terms of form or genre? When was it created, and what else was happening at the time? Where was it created, and what else was going on there? Who was the audience? How was it preserved so that we could encounter it today? Notice what interests you about the text, and begin your analysis there.

Using Secondary Sources

Secondary sources interpret or analyze primary sources, and in History & Literature they are used to teach engagement with the intergenerational conversation that is scholarship. Most writing assignments in History & Literature will encourage you to engage with secondary sources as a way to make historiographical claims about the way the subject has been written about in the scholarship, as well as historical claims about the context. Initial questions to consider in evaluating a secondary source include: What is the argument, and what's at stake? What evidence is used to make that argument? What intervention is it making in the scholarly conversation? What is taken for granted or left unsaid? Who is the scholar, and what's their disciplinary background? Who is the audience? Notice what interests you about the text, and begin your analysis there.

Most writing assignments in History & Literature will encourage you to anchor your writing in a primary source base and engage with the context in which it was produced.

Academic Integrity

Writing in History & Literature involves building on the ideas of other writers and thinkers, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. In addition to acknowledging how other writers have contributed to your work, doing your work with integrity also consists of developing ideas that are wholly, genuinely, and uniquely yours. Your writing should reflect your thinking, shaped by your own efforts to clarify and articulate your understanding. This development is at the heart of academic writing: articulating and working through early ideas will lead to more complex understandings and analysis as you draft and revise your work. Writing is thinking; there are no shortcuts.

All writing you submit in History & Literature courses must be your own. You may not use generative AI tools unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Submitting work as yours that you did not develop or create on your own is a violation of the Harvard College Honor Code. Remember that so-called artificial intelligence only recognizes rudimentary patterns that reflect and reinforce the status quo. Your writing will be stronger if it is the product of your own original, idiosyncratic ideas that evolve through the writing process.

The Sophomore Essay

The capstone assignment in Sophomore Tutorial is the Sophomore Essay. All other writing you do for the tutorial is designed with the Sophomore Essay in mind. For this final essay, you are expected to (1) perform a close reading of primary source materials, (2) generate out of this analysis a compelling argument, and (3) situate this argument in relation to existing scholarship. The core assignments for the tutorial therefore include a primary source analysis and a secondary source analysis, along with a draft of the Sophomore Essay and the Sophomore Essay itself.

Primary Source Analysis

The first major assignment for the Sophomore Tutorial is a primary source analysis—a four-to-five-page essay where you close read one of the primary source texts assigned in the tutorial. You might be familiar with this sort of assignment from other courses you've taken in the past. One of the things that's unique about History & Literature is the range of materials you have the chance to analyze as part of this assignment: you might close read the opening sentences of a novel, or a scene from a movie, or an entire painting, or an ad for jeans. You'll want to be attentive to the specificity of whatever text you've chosen to write about: a poem doesn't necessarily convey or express meaning in the same way that a photograph does, and a photograph doesn't convey or express meaning in the same way that a speech does. You don't want to simply reproduce analysis that was covered in the tutorial. Instead, you might consider insights that came up during class discussion and think through their implications. Test those insights against other moments or details in the text under examination. Draw attention to features of your primary source that your tutors and classmates might have overlooked. Most of all, focus on details that you find compelling. Follow your intuitions. If something seems strange or interesting, it probably is. Explain to your readers why these particular textual elements are so significant.

Secondary Source Analysis

The second major writing assignment is a secondary source analysis—that is, a four-to-five page essay where you put your own close reading into conversation with a work of scholarship assigned in the tutorial. On one hand, this assignment is meant to help you become more and more comfortable with close reading. On the other hand, this assignment is meant to push you into less familiar terrain. Engaging with secondary sources can be stressful because they are produced by scholars who have spent years thinking about a topic or a source that you might have only encountered recently. The goal of this assignment is not to disagree with a work of scholarship or prove that it is wrong. The goal is for you to use a secondary source to extend and complicate your own analysis and to use your analysis to extend and complicate a secondary source. The most compelling version of a Secondary Source Analysis essay engages with a work of scholarship on its own terms. What is the scholar's main argument? How is this scholarship advancing or intervening in the research that came before it? What evidence does this scholar marshal to support their claims? Don't

fixate on minor details. Look for genuine sites of convergence or divergence between your analysis and theirs.

Draft and Draft Workshop

Drafting is a crucial part of the writing process. It allows you to experiment with sentences, try out different organizational structures, and pursue ideas that may not make it into the final draft of your Sophomore Essay. It's easy to not take the drafting process seriously or to skip it altogether—the end of spring semester is a busy time, and this type of essay may feel familiar. But revision is a key step in the Sophomore Essay process, and the attention you devote to early drafts will help you develop the skills you need to succeed on this assignment and in future tutorials. There are minimum requirements for the draft. It must include: (1) continuous prose, (2) an analysis of a primary source or sources, (3) engagement with a secondary source or sources, (4) an articulation of the project's argument, and (5) a deliberate structure.

Once you submit the draft of your Sophomore Essay, your tutorial will hold a draft workshop. This workshop is a unique chance for you to receive feedback on your writing. It's also an opportunity for you to become a better reader and editor of other people's work. Remember that circulating work—especially in draft form!—can be a very scary thing to do. Be generous with your peers. This doesn't mean you should be blandly positive about everybody's writing. Not engaging seriously with an essay can be as condescending as being overly critical. The workshop is supposed to be a serious conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of an essay draft, a conversation that is geared toward the improvement of that draft. Identify the essay's central argument and determine whether it's convincing. What evidence is cited to support this argument? How is this evidence presented? What is the argument's relationship to existing scholarship? Try to direct your comments during the workshop at the essay rather than the person who wrote it. Say things like, "the introduction to this essay doesn't quite work for me," and explain why, rather than saying, "I don't like the way you wrote the introduction."

Revision is a key step, and the attention you devote to early drafts will help you develop the skills you need to succeed on this assignment and in future tutorials.

Sophomore Essay

The Sophomore Essay is the first significant piece of writing you will undertake as a History & Literature concentrator. The expectations for the Sophomore Essay are pretty much the same as those for the Junior Essay and Senior Thesis. These later assignments ask you to analyze an even greater range of primary materials, develop even more sophisticated arguments, and engage even more deeply with scholarship. But the basic framework you will encounter in each major assignment is the same.

Here are the minimum requirements for the Sophomore Essay. The essay is 3,000–4,000 words long. It needs to analyze at least two primary sources. (These sources may or may not have appeared on the syllabus.) It needs to identify and incorporate two secondary sources not already on the syllabus, though you can certainly still use materials that you encountered in the tutorial. Of course, you can also write about more than two primary sources and two secondary sources, but your essay will also be evaluated on the appropriateness and scope of your research.

You can write about pretty much whatever you want, as long as it bears some relationship to the theme of your tutorial. This freedom can be exhilarating, but it can

also be paralyzing. Don't feel like you need to select the perfect primary sources, and don't feel like you need to concentrate all of your interests into this one assignment. A paper of this length might sound long, but to undertake the deep analysis that close reading demands and to engage seriously with scholarship, especially in the limited amount of time you have at the end of the spring semester, you'll need to be strategic. You won't necessarily be able to read multiple novels or get access to the archival materials you want. Select primary sources that you can get your hands on quickly. Try to limit the number of primary sources you write about: depth for this assignment is preferable to breadth. You don't need to address a whole body of research in this paper either. Select a couple secondary sources that are important, sources that have really shaped the study of the topic you're most interested in. (These sources are usually cited frequently by other scholars.) The Sophomore Essay is a great chance for you to deepen your understanding of this topic, but you will have many opportunities later in your History & Literature career to continue pursuing your interests, like the Junior Essay!

The Junior Essay

The Junior Essay is an extended research paper (6,000–7,000 words) that you will write over the course of the second semester of Junior Tutorial. A primary goal of this assignment is to give you significant experience with sustained independent research, thinking, and writing—all of which you will need to complete your Senior Thesis in History & Literature.

The topic of your Junior Essay is entirely up to you. You might decide to write about a specific aspect of a larger topic that you're considering exploring for your Senior Thesis. Or you might select a topic that's totally different from what you have previously explored and what you will tackle in your thesis. Whatever the case, you'll want to choose a topic and research question that you're excited about—you'll be grappling with it for an entire semester.

The assignments you complete in the second semester of Junior Tutorial will be devoted to developing your Junior Essay. Before the final submission deadline, you'll write a proposal, a review of scholarship, and an extended draft. In these assignments, you'll continue to develop the core analytical skills for this concentration.

Proposal

At the end of the first semester of Junior Tutorial, you will submit a preliminary 2–3 page proposal for your Junior Essay. This assignment is meant to help you kick-start conceptualizing your Junior Essay topic. It's okay if you return from break wanting to write about something different than what you had in mind at the end of the first semester. At the start of the second semester, you will revise the proposal.

In this assignment, you'll briefly introduce your chosen topic and pose a central research question (or series of questions) that you plan to answer in your essay. As you work on your proposal, ask yourself: What am I trying to find out in my Junior Essay? What do I want someone who reads my essay to understand? Why will my research matter? Keep in mind that your topic and research question(s) should be specific enough that you'll be able to address them in a 25-page paper. A strong research question often begins with "how" or "why," and necessitates an analytical, argumentative response.

You'll also identify key primary sources that you plan to engage with in your essay. Delving deeper into a few carefully selected primary sources can often be an effective approach for a paper of this length. Finally, you'll identify a few relevant secondary sources. As you search for secondaries, see if other scholars have already explored your topic and questions. If so, what have they argued? How do you think your work might add to existing analyses and conversations?

Review of Scholarship

This formal 3–4 page essay invites you to think about how the most significant secondary sources for your Junior Essay are in conversation with each other. In this assignment, you'll hone in on 3–4 secondary sources that speak to questions, themes, and subjects that are central to your essay. You'll be asked to analyze each source individually, and to

synthesize and compare them as a group. You'll be able to draw on this review in your Junior Essay.

To tackle this assignment, start by carefully reading through your sources one-by-one. As you read each source, consider: What are this source's main arguments? What kinds of primary sources does the author use? How does the author advance conversations about their subject? How does the author build on or challenge the scholarship that came before them? Is the author taking a literary or cultural studies approach, or a historical approach? How might this approach inform their analysis, conclusions, and the larger stakes of their work?

After reading and analyzing each source separately, start thinking across them. What do these sources share in terms of their arguments, sources, and approaches? In what ways do they differ?

Finally, reflect on the broader takeaways for your work. How does this particular selection of sources shed light on a topic or theme, and what does reading them side-by-side reveal about how scholars have framed different types of research questions about this topic or theme? What questions do you think still need to be answered, and where are there areas for further analysis? How might your essay join this conversation and make its own critical interventions? Consider bringing in additional sources or contexts, or adopting a different method or framework to guide your analysis of the same sources.

Delving deeper into a few carefully selected primary sources can often be an effective approach for a paper of this length.

Draft and Draft Workshop

For this assignment, you will write a full or partial draft of your Junior Essay. The more effort you put into this draft, the more productive feedback you will receive from your Junior Tutorial instructor and peer editors. There is no one way to approach this draft—you might begin with the introduction, or you might dive into closely analyzing a primary source that you're excited to write about and which will be central to your paper. Drafting is a great way to define how you're going to organize and structure your Junior Essay overall, and to start conceptualizing your thesis statement and supporting points. The process can also lead to important discoveries. For example, you might find that you have more or less to say about a source than you anticipated, and will need to adjust your plans accordingly.

After you submit your draft, you'll participate in a draft workshop with another Junior Tutorial. This is a fantastic opportunity to practice giving and receiving feedback from your peers. It's a good idea to approach this workshop with a spirit that is generous as well as serious. Your tutor has worked with you on your project all semester, but your peers will come to it with fresh eyes. They can share helpful feedback about what they see as your draft's strengths, and whether they find any parts confusing. They might tell you if they think the argument is unclear, or if the paper would benefit from further evidence, analysis, or context that would help get your points across. This feedback will be essential as you improve and polish your work. Remember that revising and rewriting are just as important as writing!

Junior Essay

Your Junior Essay will be between 6,000 and 7,000 words (not including footnotes or the bibliography). While there is no single formula for how to structure your essay, your paper must demonstrate interdisciplinary analysis and offer: 1) a sophisticated

central argument; 2) close analyses of primary sources; 3) substantial engagement with secondary sources; 4) clear contextualization. Your essay will be formally evaluated by your Junior Tutorial instructor as well as an outside reader (another member of the Tutorial Board on History and Literature), who will both assign it a grade of High Honors, Honors, Low Honors, or Recommended for Review. It will also be letter-graded as part of your second-semester grade in Junior Tutorial.

As you work on your essay independently throughout the spring, it's important that you devise and stick with a consistent weekly research and writing schedule. You might ask your Junior Tutorial instructor to help you make this schedule and create checkpoints that will help you stay accountable. This process is time consuming and the deadline (just a few weeks after spring break) can creep up on you! Leaving everything to the last minute will make it impossible to write a successful Junior Essay. Revision is a key part of the Junior Essay process, which is designed to give you a chance to practice the skills and habits of research and writing you will need to write a successful Senior Thesis.

The Senior Thesis

The Senior Thesis is the capstone of your History & Literature career. While it's a significantly longer project than anything you've written before, many of the same principles you relied upon for the Sophomore and Junior Essays still apply. That said, your thesis—and thesis writing process—has more flexibility within it, which is a good thing. You might already know exactly what you want to write about, or you might still be making decisions. You might write about just one novel, while a friend might be writing about three different films. You might be writing on a topic that spans fifty years or one that is tightly focused on one event. The Senior Thesis is your opportunity to take up the questions that were perhaps too large for your Junior Essay or to explore an entirely different archive. There is no one perfect formula for a Senior Thesis. History & Literature students have written amazingly creative projects over the years, and each reflects the individual ideas, interests, and views of its author. An ideal thesis is a project that you will be proud to call your own.

Because the thesis is such an individual project with so few official deadlines, the following chapters are organized into four stages: project development, writing the thesis proposal, researching and writing your draft chapter, and revising and submission. You might find it helpful to read through the entire guide at the beginning of senior year to get a sense of what lies ahead, and then return to individual chapters when you are at a particular stage of the process.

Your Relationship with Your Adviser

There is one key element of the senior thesis year for which no handbook will ever be a substitute, and that is your thesis adviser, who will be a member of the tutorial board. While the senior thesis is ultimately an independent project, your tutor will be there to help you along the way! At the end of your junior year, you'll submit a form with some rough interests for a thesis as well as qualities you would like in a thesis adviser. Knowledge of a field is useful but is of course not the only quality to keep in mind. No matter who is advising your thesis, you can count on your tutor being well-qualified to help you through the research and writing process.

But your tutor can best help you if you help them know what you need. The best thing you can do is be honest. Because your tutor isn't giving you a letter grade for the semester or grading the thesis, there's no reason not to be candid about when you're facing writer's block, are unsure of what you're doing, or just need more time to talk it out. Your tutor's first and only duty is to be your mentor and advocate.

Each step of the way, you should work in close contact with your adviser. Your tutor will often be your best sounding board for testing out your ideas. In your first meeting, you should talk to them about what you want out of the thesis process. Think about what a satisfying senior year looks like to you. If the thesis isn't your top priority this year (that's fine!), you can let your tutor know. If you want your tutor to really push you to write the strongest thesis you can, talk about what kind of feedback you find most motivating. You can also talk about your work habits: are you the kind of student who needs firm deadlines for mini-assignments or do you prefer having

more flexibility to just get words down on paper? Talk about the texts and ideas that you think you might want to study further. Talk about the questions you have.

How should I relate to my tutor?

There are many kinds of relationships that History & Literature students have with their tutors. All should be professional. It's okay (and usually most beneficial) to develop a comfortable, informal rapport with your tutor. But remember, too, that your senior tutorial is a class with an established weekly meeting time that should be treated with the same amount of respect as any other.

What can I and can't I expect from my tutor?

As your thesis adviser, your tutor will help you to build your project from the ground up. They can help you find resources and point you toward the correct people at the library and in the rest of the university at large. Your tutor will read drafts and provide feedback on them. And although your tutor might not know much about your texts or topic at the onset, you can also count on them to read some of the pertinent texts along with you in order to help you think about how to tackle them.

Your tutor will not, however, do your work for you. That is, your tutor will help you find the right direction, but don't expect them to give you all the answers. Definitely don't expect your tutor to dictate to you your research question or provide you with the structure for your research and writing. Your tutor's job is to help you to write the best thesis that you are able to write.

History & Literature tutors will be very generous with their time, but they also have other teaching responsibilities. In your very first meeting with your tutor, be sure to have a frank conversation about your respective schedules. Talk about the communication method and the hours of the day that are best. Talk about what you and your tutor expect for response times to emails. Some people respond quickly; others might take a day or two to reply. Either is okay. It's simply important that you and your tutor agree on what to expect from one another. You should also talk about when you will need to submit drafts in order to expect timely feedback. Remember, you won't be able to get feedback on a draft that you submit an hour before your meeting.

Remember most of all that your tutor will be most helpful if you are open about what's on your mind or candid about when you're struggling.

How can I help my tutor to help me?

Communicating what you want and need most to your tutor is actually sometimes more difficult than it sounds, but it's crucial for a successful relationship. One way to begin this process is to think carefully about your experiences in the past and especially about the comments that you've received on your papers during your time at Harvard. Look for patterns. Do you have trouble organizing your arguments? Tell your tutor. Do you have trouble organizing your time? Swallow your pride and tell your tutor. Are you a strong close reader, but maybe you have trouble connecting those readings to larger issues? Tell your tutor. Or maybe you tend to think big and your tutors and professors have always told you that you need to do a better job of grounding your arguments in more evidence? Talk to your tutor.

Remember most of all that your tutor will be most helpful if you are open about what's on your mind or candid about when you're struggling. The worst thing that you can do, therefore, is to not seek help from your tutor when you need it. Tutors have all written dissertations and know how difficult tackling a project like a thesis can be! Whatever you do, make sure that you are keeping meetings, responding to emails, and not disappearing until you have more progress to share. Talking to your tutor is how you can get back on track!

I have multiple advisers, how will this work?

If you are a joint concentrator or if you have asked a faculty member from another department to co-advise your thesis, you will still have a member of the History & Literature tutorial board to advise you. There's not necessarily a benefit to having more than one adviser—in fact, having too many cooks in the kitchen might make things more stressful—but you'll find it most helpful if you can get both of your advisers in one meeting early in the process to discuss the logistics of co-advising. But it's generally best to have that meeting when you have a firm topic in mind. Different faculty members may have different expectations within their home departments about how often they meet with advisees or how often they read drafts. That's fine! You can trust that your History & Literature adviser will be available to meet with you and provide weekly feedback.

Frequently Asked Questions

When should I start working on the thesis? Is summer research necessary?

There's no need or expectation that you settle on your topic and begin working on your thesis any time before the beginning of your senior year. Some students do seek funding to do research over the summer, but many others work full time or travel. Both camps have written successful theses. If you're eager to get started early, members of the administrative team are around during the summer and happy to serve as a sounding board for you.

How long should my thesis be?

A Senior Thesis for History & Literature must be between 10,000 and 20,000 words, not counting notes and bibliography. In consultation with their tutor, students may petition to write a thesis that exceeds 20,000 words. Typical theses run somewhere in the range of 15,000–20,000 words.

How should a thesis be structured?

The thesis is typically organized into two or three chapters, bookended by an introduction and a conclusion or epilogue. On rare occasions, some students have opted to structure their thesis differently, such as writing four or five mini-chapters. This is entirely up to you, and is a decision guided by the nature of your research question, topic, and primary source base. You may also begin the project planning for three chapters and decide later on that the thesis makes more sense as two chapters.

How will my thesis be graded?

There are two separate grading procedures for the Senior Tutorial and Senior Thesis. The tutorial is graded SAT/UNSAT. For the first semester, you'll need to submit your draft chapter by the deadline, and for the second semester, you'll need to submit your thesis. The thesis will be graded on the Latin honors scale (summa, magna, cum) and will not be graded by your adviser. Instead, it will be read and evaluated by members of the tutorial board: one reader will be a historian and one a literary or cultural scholar. If you're a joint concentrator and in a few other special cases, you will also have a third reader. In addition to the Latin honors awarded by each reader, you will also receive written comments from each reader evaluating the merits of your thesis.

What can I write about?

There is no perfect topic! Your thesis topic should be something that is interesting and exciting to you since you'll be spending six months with it. There is no set standard for interdisciplinarity. But you should be attentive to both form and context regardless

of your source base, because your thesis will be read by both a historian and a cultural scholar. You may continue to work on the topic you chose to write your Junior Essay about, and may even use some of the same writing from it for your chapters, although you'll want to expand upon the ideas. You may also have written an essay for another class you are particularly interested in expanding. This is fine, but you must receive written permission from both your instructor and the History & Literature Director of Studies for any dual submission.

For students who are History & Literature concentrators or joint concentrators where History & Literature is the primary concentration, you must write a scholarly thesis rather than creative work. That's not to say there's no room for creativity within the thesis, but you may not write a work of fiction or personal memoir about your topic. If you want to incorporate more personal reflections, an introduction or conclusion is a great place to do this work.

Is there research funding available?

Harvard has many sources of funding available, but most are to do research over the summer. If you know that you are interested in conducting a research trip, you might plan to submit a proposal during the spring of your junior year even if you don't have a topic fully developed. There are some smaller funds available for term-time research through the Harvard College Research Program (HCRP), but the deadline for the fall and spring semesters is very early in each semester.

Can I use AI tools for any part of my thesis?

No; any violations will be considered academic misconduct. Your thesis should be entirely the product of your own original thought and hard work. Although other classes or departments at Harvard may have different standards for assignments or theses, your work for History & Literature tutorials should be your original brainstorming, research, writing, and revising. Your thesis will also be stronger for it. And remember that you have many other, better resources at your disposal. Talk to your tutor about your ideas and questions. Talk to History & Literature's research librarian about finding sources. Your tutor will also provide you with feedback about structure, revision, and line edits. Both you and the people you know are far smarter than a computer can ever be!

Your work for tutorials should be your original brainstorming, research, writing, and revising. Your thesis will also be stronger for it.

What if I miss the deadline?

All candidates for an honors degree in History & Literature must write a Senior Thesis. If you do not submit your thesis by the deadline, your thesis will not be sent out to readers for consideration for concentration honors. That's it! You can still receive a SAT for Senior Tutorial and graduate with a degree from History & Literature. Similarly, if you choose to not write a Senior Thesis, this is also fine. Speak to one of the Directors of Studies about your options.

chapter one

Chapter One: Developing the Project

You have approximately six months to write the thesis. While that may seem like a lot of time now, you'll want to make sure you can pace yourself: the thesis is a marathon, not a sprint! A well-paced project should give you enough time to explore, research, write, and revise your thesis *and* still focus on your other classes, sleep, and enjoy your senior year.

By now, you've had plenty of experience performing primary source analysis, rigorous secondary source research, and strong argumentation for assignments and research papers in your Sophomore and Junior Tutorial. The thesis is asking you to draw upon the same skills, but at a larger scale. On the one hand, this is incredibly exciting: you have lots more space and time to think about your interests. On the other hand, managing a large project can be intimidating, especially when you're still trying to figure out what the project even is.

You will want to give yourself some time to explore, but you will also want to make sure you are using that time efficiently. When selecting a topic, it's important to take your time and to keep an open mind about what you might find.

Organizing Your Time

The first step in any large project is to set a clear work schedule for yourself. Start by mapping out all of the senior thesis deadlines so that you have a firm idea of how much time you have for each step of the process: there are only three official deadlines. After you've learned more about each stage of the project, use your calendar to set more individualized deadlines with your tutor. As you progress through the first semester of your senior year, you will eventually want to work out a plan for each month and even each week of the project.

On a week to week basis, plan to spend as much time on your thesis work as you would for a normal class—it is one! Attend your weekly meeting with your tutor even if you didn't get as much done as you planned so that you can make a new plan for the following meeting. You should also make a plan with your adviser about when you should be submitting work so that you can receive and read feedback in time to discuss it at your meeting. Although Senior Tutorial is graded SAT/UNSAT, don't let the thesis fall to the bottom of your priority list every week. However, it's also important to remember that your thesis is only one aspect of your life, not your entire life. Don't forget about checking the deadlines for your other courses. If you know you have an important midterm in another class that will take up more time and brain space, make sure you're realistic about what work you'll be able to do for your thesis. The same goes for your extracurriculars. If you know you have major events that will take up more of your time during certain weeks, you might plan to write more some weeks in the event you wind up writing less in others. You can write a good thesis without it consuming all of your time.

You will also want to allow for some flexibility in your schedule for the thesis process itself. Some weeks you might have writer's block or you might decide you want to change directions for a chapter (or even the thesis). All of this is normal and fine. Don't panic if your timeline needs to change or if you are at a different stage than your peers. So long as you meet the major deadlines, you are not behind!

From Topics to Research

Once you've thought about organizing your time, it's time to start thinking about the thesis itself. As you consider what you want to write on, you can think of the project in terms of three basic components:

1. topics of interest,
2. the primary sources that you might use to study those interests,
3. the questions that you have about your primary sources (and how they speak to your interests).

It's natural to begin a project by describing its "topic." Maybe you're thinking of writing about protest songs in the '60s, or golden age Bollywood cinema, or women's health in Latin America in the 19th century? These are all great general topics. It's important to know, however, that a "topic" is far too broad to define your research project. Why? Because a "topic" alone doesn't in and of itself lead to a compelling scholarly argument. For that, you need to move from thinking about a "topic" toward thinking about the primary sources that you will use and the questions (ideally one single question) that you will be asking.

Interests, primary sources, questions. Eventually, you will narrow your project down by picking the "best" in each of these categories (more about that in Chapter Two). But for now, in the project development stage, you want to generate as many interests, primary sources, and questions as you can. These are the basic building blocks of any research project, and the only blocks with which you should be playing at this stage of the game. Even though you may be anxious to jump directly into a topic, investing some time in the brainstorming process will help ensure you have a strong foundation for the next part of the thesis.

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Brainstorming

The following brainstorming exercises are designed to help you move from thinking about broad, general topic ideas, to thinking about primary sources, and then finally toward more focused questions. Each exercise requires you to commit yourself to a twenty or thirty-minute session (no more, no less!). It's probably best to do them on separate days, but it's up to you. The only real rule is that you have to find a quiet and calm place with no distractions. If you're distracted, these exercises are not as useful.

You'll rarely if ever hear anyone say it, but brainstorming actually takes practice. You get better at it the more you do it, so you may want to commit yourself to several sessions. And even if you already have a topic in mind, you should also give them a try. In addition to your timed sessions, you might even want to have them "on the back burner" as you go about your daily business. You never know when inspiration will strike!

Sit down with your computer or pen and paper and just write whatever comes to mind. Remember that these brainstorming exercises are not tests. At the end you should have many different possibilities to explore further, not one perfectly formed topic.

Here again, in question form, are the fundamental issues that you must ponder:

- What within my field am I interested in studying further?
- What primary source or sources could I realistically use to study those interests further?
- What, exactly, are the questions that I have about those sources and interests?

Brainstorming Exercises

Exercise A (20–30 minutes): Brainstorm topics of interest. In the first brainstorm, your job is to write down all of the possible "topics" that you might be interested in researching further with your thesis. Here is where you list all of the themes, people, places, texts, events, movements, images, etc., that you might possibly want to study in detail. Nothing is off limits here. This is your chance to think big, so you can, if you like, indulge your grandest aspirations. The only criterion is that whatever you write down must capture your imagination and make you want to know more. What have you come across in the past years that has fascinated you? What has surprised you? What authors and genres and events and people keep you "coming back for more"? Just write down whatever comes to your head. You will have plenty of time to revise later. Want to study labor unions? Write it down. Afrofuturism? Fine. Put it on there. Do you like 19th-century photography? Write that down, too. Interested in gay rodeos? Action films and masculinity? Frontier dentistry? Just write anything down that comes to mind that you might consider to be a topic of possible research interest to you. As you can probably guess, the purpose of this list is simply to help you locate the general areas where you might conduct further research. Think of these as the rough locations where you might start digging for your specific research question later.

Exercise B (20–30 minutes): Brainstorm primary sources. In the second brainstorm, your job is to take that first list of general topics of interest and then, *for each item,* write down all of the possible primary sources that you have come across in the past that you might use to study those general topics. There are a few items to think about with this second exercise. First, you will notice that in this brainstorm you will generate a very different type of list than in the first. You will generate, that is, a list of specific titles—*Alien* could be on this list, but "science fiction" could not; "the WPA slave narrative records" would work quite well, but "slavery" or "oral histories" would not. (It's perfectly okay, by the way, if you can't remember a name or title completely. As long as you are referring to a specific source, just jot it down to the best of your memory.) Second, remember that primary sources don't necessarily need to be written records. They can be photos, songs, paintings, buildings, maps—virtually anything that you can analyze. Third, note that you may not be able to come up with any primary sources for some, perhaps several of the more general "topics" from the first brainstorming exercise. That tells you something important about where you might conduct some supplemental, preliminary research later on. For now, just make a brief note of these topics and move on to the next exercise when you're ready.

Exercise C (20-30 minutes): Brainstorm questions. For the last brainstorming exercise, your job is to take stock of both lists that you generated earlier and then to start asking some questions about the items on those lists. Don't be critical at this point. As with the first list, here, the sky is the limit. Just write the questions that come to mind—any questions, all questions. How did decolonization influence Algerian literature in the 1970s? Why was P. T. Barnum so successful with 19th-century

audiences? Don't worry yet about whether they are "good" questions (there will be plenty of time for that later). Just be sure to ask as many questions as you possibly can. Ask questions not just of your topics of interest, but of the primary sources that you listed as well. You will be tempted to ask whether there are other primary sources that you don't know. That's an important question, so write it down. But try also to ask questions of the primary sources that you do know. Questions, questions, and more questions. You can never ask too many questions during project development. And the more you ask, the more you will know that you are on the right track toward developing a strong thesis.

Pre-Research

With each of these brainstorming exercises, you may feel the need to research your ideas further, especially when developing your list of primary sources. That is, you may wind up brainstorming a particularly intriguing topic and questions about that topic, but not know what your primary source base would include to answer those questions. If it's something you vaguely remember from previous reading or classes, review old syllabi, papers, and notes to see if anything jogs your memory. But you may also need to do some sleuthing for new sources. Fortunately, you don't have to do this alone! Beyond your adviser, you can also talk to other members of the History & Literature Tutorial Board for ideas. Reach out to faculty to see if you could stop by their office hours for a quick chat. You can also contact History & Literature's research librarian to set up an appointment to help you search databases and library archives.

Sometimes, you'll find a great topic and question but not the sources that can help you answer it. It might be that the existing sources aren't easily accessible, such as a physical archive if you've already missed the funding deadlines. And while it's most common to find too many sources, the opposite can also happen, where there isn't enough information available to help you robustly explore your ideas. This doesn't mean you have to entirely scrap your idea. Instead, think about how you can reframe your topic. Are there other ways you could go about answering your question? Are there other sources that could work well in conversation with that one great text you found?

You can never ask too many questions during project development.

Make sure that pre-research is the last step in your brainstorming process. If you conduct pre-research first, you can't be sure that your ideas—especially your ideas about what interests you—are your own and not from others. It's also easy to reject what could be a great topic if you feel like someone has already written about it. Don't be discouraged if you find out there's a book or article that is taking up the same topic. This doesn't mean there's nothing new to say, it just means that you will want to think about how you can develop a research question that will help differentiate your approach to the topic.

chapter two

Chapter Two: Writing the Proposal

After you've spent some time gathering together the basic building blocks of a research project in the form of articulated interests, primary sources, and a whole slew of questions, your job is to start sifting through those raw materials and evaluating them. With a ruthless critical eye, you must systematically discern which materials you will actually use for your senior thesis project, and which materials you will set aside for another day.

Think of this next stage as the moment when you begin to settle into your project. The key is to establish a comfortable pace that will ensure you stay on track to a smooth finish. Start by setting your sights on your goal and building a firm picture in your head of the major benchmarks along the way to help you gauge your progress. Next, it's time for you to zero in on the precise research question that will drive your project to its final completion and draw up a plan for answering it. The project proposal, your first required writing for the Senior Tutorial, will help you do this efficiently.

The Thesis Proposal

The end of the project development stage begins when you write up your thesis proposal for review. The assignment calls for all thesis writers to submit a one-page single-spaced proposal as well as one single-spaced page of relevant bibliography divided between primary and secondary sources. The guidelines are strict because the Tutorial Board meets to discuss each and every student's proposal. For this discussion to work, proposals need to be short, concise, and to the point. But it also pushes you to boil down your many ideas into a focused and coherent statement, which will help you better understand your project as well.

You might initially be wary about the prospect of tutors meeting in a closed session to discuss your projects. In fact, it's one of the greatest perks of being a History & Literature concentrator. The sole purpose of this tutor meeting is to help you. The tutors are instructed to answer one question and one question only: do they think that this project, as proposed, is viable? Can a student reasonably complete the proposed project in the amount of time available, and with the resources that are available? That's it. They do not meet to "judge" your proposal. They certainly don't meet to judge you. Think of it instead as a group of expert scholars all taking an interest in what you are doing and lending a helping hand.

Finding Your Research Question

The central element of a strong thesis proposal is a focused and well-designed research question. The most difficult aspect of finding a research question is the fact that the process requires you to be realistic (sometimes painfully so) about what is possible. Finding a good research question requires you to come to some hard and practical

realizations about what you can actually accomplish in the time that you have, in the space that you have, and with the resources that are available to you.

The good news is there are only three fundamental criteria for a strong research question and you have 100% control over them all. The challenge is that your question must meet *all three* criteria for it to work. In the last chapter, you started by writing down every interesting question that came to mind. You were urged not to be critical yet, and simply to write them down as they came to you. Well, now is the time to start being critical. If a potential research question meets only one or two of the three criteria—even if you *love* it—it won't work and you should eliminate it from contention.

Finding your research question can take hard work, perseverance, and some difficult choices, so prepare yourself for that now. Your tutor can help you, and often they'll be the most objective judge. It will be important to be as open as you possibly can to their ideas and advice as you make these judgements.

Here are the three criteria against which you will test every potential research question you have:

1. **Your question must genuinely intrigue you.** If you look at the question and yawn, it's not a good research question.
2. **Your question must be analytical in nature.** If your question is a "fact-finding" question, it's probably not a good research question. On the other hand, if your question articulates a genuine puzzle, has no obvious answer, and instead requires you to interpret several elements of a given topic and then formulate an opinion about it, chances are good that it's a good research question. Here's a trick: "fact-finding" questions tend to start with the interrogative words "what," "who," and "where." Analytical questions tend to start with the interrogative words "how" or "why." Another great trick is to recognize that an analytical question creates a good discussion, while a fact-finding question does not. Once you've discovered the answer to a fact-finding question, the discussion is over. Analytical questions have many possible "right" answers that foster debate when people favor one answer (and the sources of support for that answer) over another.
3. **Your question must be answerable.** Once a question has satisfied criteria #1 and #2, you also have to think honestly about how you would go about answering your question: Is there a body of source material available to you upon which you can realistically draw? Do you have to go somewhere else to get it? Will it be available to you when you go? Does it cost money? You also have to think about the actual contents of your source material: Will the source material actually be able to answer your question? Does the source material contain enough data/ evidence to make an argument? Finally, you must also think realistically about the time that you have to conduct your research: Can you possibly read and digest your source material in the time that you have to complete this project? Is it possible to conduct all of the research needed to answer the question in the time that you have? If it's a potentially enormous source base, can you logically narrow it down to a more manageable size? Could the question be posed in a way that limits the scope or scale of the source base?

Settling on a Topic

As you test your favorite questions against these three criteria, you will of necessity have to let go of some of your BIG senior thesis dreams. The most frequent pitfall that students run into in their senior thesis projects, hands down, is starting their project with a monograph-sized idea and/or an unanswerable research question (i.e., a question that is too big, that has no sources, that is not analytical etc.). Trust that if you throw out the unanswerable, unworkable questions now, even if you love them, your future self will thank you for doing so. It can mean all the difference between a successful and unsuccessful project.

Remember also that if a question initially seems to be unworkable in light of the three criteria, it may not be totally lost. You may be able to turn an unworkable question into a workable one simply by doing more preliminary research and refining the question's language. You might not, for example, be able to answer your burning questions about the 1937 Paris Exhibition and fascism or about the global reach of anime with one body of sources. But your tutor, or a librarian, or one of your professors might be able to help you find another body of sources that would work.

In this stage, you may have to eliminate almost all of your favorite questions. You might even cross off every single one of them, in which case you will need to return to brainstorming and repeat the process. Don't get discouraged if this happens! And remember that you're doing yourself a huge favor when you throw out the unworkable questions. You're only setting yourself up for hardship otherwise. If you do the senior thesis project in the right way—i.e., in the way that is the most efficient and the most enjoyable—it's this stage that takes the most work.

Throw out the unanswerable, unworkable questions. It can mean all the difference between a successful and unsuccessful project.

Once again, this is a great occasion to enlist the help of your tutor. Show your tutor the ideas and questions you've come up with and tell them why you think a question is a good one. Conversely, if you love a question, but suspect that it might not meet all of the criteria, talk to your tutor about that too. Your tutor might have some good ideas about how to turn it into a question that *does* work. You'll never know until you talk it out. These types of conversations will take up the first few weeks of Senior Tutorial. But the more you talk it out now, the higher your success rate will be later.

Writing the Proposal

Context and Question. Once you have pinned down your research question, your job is to help frame it for an audience in your one-page proposal. A proposal should begin with a general introduction of the context informing your question. *Briefly* introduce the time period (when?) and geographical location (where?) of your project. Then identify the main issues that your thesis will address culminating in your research question. The idea is to explain to your readers, who you should presume know very little about your thesis subject, the basics of what they need to know in order to understand and follow your research question.

Sources. After introducing your question and providing context, you should identify the types of sources you will use to answer your question. Start by identifying the main primary source or sources you intend to examine. You'll also want to address the secondary scholarship you expect to engage with in your thesis. This will require some library time, but not as much as you might think. Discuss how scholars have previously approached your question and the answers they have provided. You do not need to have read all of these sources in their entirety. Much of this information

can be compiled from reading the introduction to a monograph or skimming an article that you can later return to for a more in-depth reading. Include, if you can, some information about why you feel the answers that other scholars have provided are insufficient, or how your project will contribute to the debate by bringing new sources into the conversation or analyzing sources in new ways. If no scholar has ever asked the question that you are asking (this is more unlikely), the burden is on you to explain the ways in which your research question can contribute to a body or bodies of scholarship related to your topic.

Working Title and Bibliography. Finally, include a working thesis title at the top of the page in addition to your name, your tutor's name, and your field. This title will tell your readers a lot about the key terms of your project and how your question is being framed. In addition to your proposal, you will also include a one-page bibliography listing the primary and secondary sources that are most relevant to your research proposal. If your working bibliography is already much longer than one page, select the sources you think are most representative of the work you plan to do.

As you draft your proposal, feel free to make use of the sample thesis proposals on Canvas. These will demonstrate the different ways students have approached this assignment. While there is a general formula you can follow, no two thesis proposals are exactly the same.

Argumentation

As you write the proposal, you may already have some possible answers to your question, and you might even have some ideas about a provisional argument. Before you include an argument in your proposal—even a provisional argument—stop for a minute to consider this. Remember that you haven't done much research yet. Is it reasonable for you to know enough to answer your question before you've researched it fully? If you try to formulate an argument before you've conducted your research, you face the impossible task of getting your sources to "prove" an argument they cannot support. You are not allowing your sources to speak for themselves. This may work out if your argument is supportable. But if it's not, you're in trouble. Start instead with your well-designed, strong research question and then allow your sources to help you focus on the best answer. In short, let your sources talk to you by returning to your fundamental History & Literature skills in close reading.

Let your sources talk to you by returning to your fundamental History & Literature skills in close reading.

What if you are not entirely sure of what you are doing when you submit your proposal? What if you change your mind? You are definitely not the first senior to face this issue. Don't worry, the brainstorming, project planning, and refinement of your research question can certainly continue after the proposal deadline. Might your research question change over time? Yes. It's possible, even probable, that your research question will evolve as you move further down the path. You will make adjustments to it based on what you find as part of your research. Most often, the research question and scope of the thesis will narrow further the more research you do. This is perfectly normal. But ideally, your research question will remain fairly constant throughout the course of your project. If you put in the time now, before and while you write the proposal, you are more likely to find the research question that sticks for the duration of the project.

It does happen, however, that students will have their proposals accepted by the tutorial board and still find it necessary, later in the game, to change their project in

a dramatic way. If at any time in the project you think this might be necessary, you should talk to your tutor immediately! 99 times out of 100, your tutor will be able to help you to right the ship and continue along your way. But if you and your tutor agree that a change is in order, you simply need to talk to the Director of Studies and come up with a new plan.

Next Steps

Once the Tutorial Board has discussed your proposal, they will decide whether you should move on from the development stage of your senior thesis work to the research and writing stage. Your adviser will report back to you about the group's feedback. Often, tutors will have very specific advice for ways in which to make your project better: ways to narrow your question productively, primary sources you might not know, and scholarship that will be helpful for you to consult and to think about as you continue your work.

Sometimes the Tutorial Board will ask students to rewrite and resubmit their proposals. If this happens to you, don't be embarrassed. It simply means, once again, that they thought that you would have difficulty completing your project as proposed. Your tutor will give you specific information about what you will need to change, and you may be invited to have a discussion with the Director of Studies for additional support in making these helpful revisions. Every year, students are asked to rewrite their proposals, and go on to complete their projects and write great theses. This is not punishment. It is simply to help you to develop your project further and to find that workable research question.

Chapter Three: The Rough Draft

chapter three

Now that you've framed your research question in your thesis proposal, it's time to sketch out how your thesis will be organized into chapters—each guided by its own research question. Any project will have many possible organizational structures, so the idea is to find a strategy that works best for you. In close conversation with your tutor, think about the best ways to organize your research work into logical, workable pieces. These pieces will become the provisional "chapters" of your rough draft. Usually, your source base will dictate how you can best structure your rough draft. Think first about natural divisions that exist in your sources: Can you divide your source base by texts? By genre? By themes? Locations? Authors? Chronology? A provisional organization scheme might place a primary text or set of texts at the center of each draft "chapter." It might focus on particular chronological moments, or individual locations relevant to your research.

Once you have a chapter breakdown, quickly identify which chapter you will write first so you can begin working toward your next task: the chapter draft. This does not necessarily have to be the first chapter of the thesis. Instead, you might start with what you envision as the second or third chapter, if this is the one you are most prepared to take on (primary sources reviewed, relevant secondary scholarship identified, etc.). This may seem premature if you've only settled on a research question a few weeks ago. Remember the rough draft is just a tool that you are creating for later use. It's not your final draft. But it does take good time management, organization, and planning.

Drafting the First Chapter

Ideally, research and writing should be complementary, integrated activities. After the thesis is turned in, seniors frequently express how they should have started writing earlier than they actually did. The idea to keep in mind is that the goal of this stage is not to write the final draft. The goal is to create a rough draft, which is utterly and completely different. In writing the rough draft, you are creating for yourself a tool for discovering your ideas and gathering them together in a coherent form. Do not agonize over it or expect meticulously polished prose or the ideal wording. That comes later. At this stage, it is most important that you simply begin to write, and through this writing allow your ideas, evidence, and argument to come together.

Getting Organized

Be sure to set aside specific times each week for working on your thesis beyond your one hour meeting with your adviser. You will also want to establish a system for organizing your notes and research, which will become quite expansive as you go along. Talk to your tutor and other students about their systems. There is no right or wrong way to do this, so find the system that works best for you. Most importantly, be diligent in recording where your ideas come from, including specific page numbers for direct quotes *and* paraphrased ideas. This will ensure you are able to turn in a draft

chapter with complete citations and keep up on citations in your subsequent chapter drafts (and save yourself future headaches during the revision process).

In order to have your chapter drafted by the deadline, you will need to be strategic in your reading and integration of reading and writing. When prioritizing what secondary sources to read, it is important to be realistic and judicious. If there is a relevant monograph, identify the most important chapter or chapters to read carefully along with the introduction. The rest can be skimmed or skipped. Perhaps there is a shorter article version encapsulating the main points of the book you can read instead? You do not have time to read every important book cover to cover. Once you start reading, you will also want to set aside time to write a short source summary in complete sentences after you finish reading each primary or secondary source (that you expect to use in your thesis). This will help you formulate your ideas coherently and completely. If you spend some time writing after you read sources, you'll be amazed at how quickly you'll amass page after page of written work. Some of this writing will help you develop ideas, and some might be directly transferred to your rough draft.

Writing Exercises

Here's a series of exercises for your writing sessions at the end of a day's research:

- **Briefly summarize.** Summary isn't always the most useful tool to the researcher because it does not require analytical thinking. So be careful not to overdo it. However, writing out a brief summary (three or four sentences usually does the trick) of a text or a passage in your own words can sometimes help you to see elements that you may miss the first time through. It can also be useful later as you compile your rough draft when you need to give a short synopsis for your reader. Again, it's important to write out these summaries in your own words. It will force you to see things through your own eyes and not through the eyes of others.
- **Sketch out possible arguments.** For every piece of primary or secondary source evidence, write out in paragraph form what that source tells you in light of your research question. This is not the same as a summary. Instead, you're putting the content of your source material to analytical use and articulating how it might help you to answer your research question. You will find sometimes that the source material on which you worked that day helps you to answer your research question very little, or even not at all. If this is the case, try to write about why it does not help you, and then also try to write about the kinds of questions that your source could help you answer. Remember that if a source does not answer your research question, it's not necessarily useless. It might (by not answering your question) actually help you to sharpen your research question by showing you what is not relevant.
- **Put the source in dialogue with the rest of your source material.** Last, try to write some sentences that reflect on how the material relates to other source material (primary or secondary) that you have consulted. Is it contradictory? Do the sources support each other? Does this suggest a pattern? Or does it seem inconsistent with what you've already learned? If it is a secondary source that makes an argument, do you agree or disagree? Why?

Keep in mind that in these short writing exercises, the only "wrong" way to do them is neglecting to write in complete sentences. Otherwise, the sky's the limit. You

might even find yourself doing additional freewriting to help sort out your thoughts. What you write is all your own—it's simply a means for you to put your thoughts on paper in usable form. Realize also that these exercises do not have to take a great deal of time. Do yourself a favor and keep it simple. Answer the simple questions and rattle off a paragraph or two in 15 or 30 minutes. If you're inspired to write more, terrific; but if not, you're done for the day!

Assembling the Draft Chapter

To receive a SAT for the first semester of HL99, your draft chapter submission must contain the following elements

- 4,000–5,000 words
- A provisional chapter argument (not the argument for the full thesis)
- A provisional title
- Close reading and analysis of primary source materials
- Engagement with secondary sources
- Complete citations

You should begin compiling your actual rough draft document as soon as you possibly can. You want to give yourself some time to gather and reflect on the evidence that you find, of course. Remember that there's nothing really at stake in the rough draft. It's just a narrative of your notes—a gathering place for your ideas, loosely structured in essay form at an early stage in the process. Once you've finished the rough laying out of your ideas and evidence for each chapter, then (and only then) you will use the rough draft as the basis for completing your thesis during the revision process.

The rough draft is just a narrative of your notes—a gathering place for your ideas, loosely structured in essay form at an early stage in the process.

Regular communication with your tutor will be vitally important as you compile your rough draft. In your weekly sessions with your tutor, discuss what you are finding, or not finding, in your research. Brainstorm together about how you might use your evidence to formulate an answer to your research question. Bounce your ideas off of your tutor. Tell them what your hypotheses are and about the evidence that leads you to those hunches. Your tutor will help you evaluate whether your evidence actually supports what you are saying and will help you develop those ideas and hypotheses into strong arguments.

And then take the writing that you've been compiling at the end of each research session and start to arrange these complete sentences in loose essay form, filling in the gaps along the way whenever you feel you are able. Ultimately, you will use this evidence to answer the chapter's research question. This answer is the chapter's tentative argument. That is enough for now! You are not expected to know the overarching thesis argument yet.

The presentation of your evidence and analysis will be the largest part of your rough draft, where you demonstrate how the evidence you are gathering in your research leads you to your argument. This part of your rough draft will feel clunky. Parts of it might feel bloated. Other parts will feel incomplete. Pieces will be disconnected, disjointed, and disordered. Some sections might even feel a bit wrong. That's all okay. The goal here is to lay out your evidence for yourself and yourself alone, to describe what it says, and show how it supports your argument.

Feedback from your adviser during this rough draft stage will focus on argumentation, larger conceptual issues, use of evidence, and structure. Remember that you can't expect

your tutor to do your research or to answer your question for you. You should not expect to receive more granular feedback on your writing such as copyediting or line edits until the revision and proofreading stage in February.

Submitting the Draft Chapter for Concentration Review

History & Literature requires all seniors to submit a 4,000 to 5,000 word draft chapter for formal review. The chapter will also be circulated to a small group of students and tutors for the draft chapter workshop. The purpose of this assignment is not to induce panic. It's simply to help you keep moving at a decent pace through the middle stages of your project and receive feedback at an early stage in the writing.

The Tutorial Board will evaluate your submission and determine whether you have progressed far enough in your thesis work. If your draft chapter is late or incomplete, you may be asked to have a conversation with a member of the History & Literature administrative team. Should this happen to you, just as in the proposal review process, you should not be embarrassed. The purpose of submitting your work in progress for review is simply to make sure that you are on track.

Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism

In citing sources, History & Literature allows students to use either University of Chicago or MLA (Modern Language Association) citation style. Most use Chicago. But you must choose one and stick to it.

As you write your rough draft, write out citations that are as complete as possible.

One last concern to consider carefully as you research and write your draft chapters is plagiarism. While some plagiarism is intentional, some plagiarism actually happens by accident. Note well: both kinds of plagiarism, intentional and unintentional, result in the same penalty—they are, that is, equal crimes in the eyes of the Harvard Honor Council.

You must guard against accidental plagiarism. You must cite every word and every idea in your rough draft that is not your own. The way to do this is to be vigilant and methodical about exactly writing down where your information is coming from as you take notes. If you quote verbatim, do so self-consciously and explicitly; use clear quotation marks and write down the author, title, and page number of the source. If you are using a source you found in a secondary source, and you don't access the source directly, then you must cite it as "quoted in" the secondary source. If you are working in translation, you must cite the name of the translator. And then, as you write your rough draft, you should try to write out citations that are as complete as possible. This is sometimes frustrating because citing sources takes time. But any time that you devote to citation now is time that you won't have to spend later. And it will help you eliminate any chances for accidental plagiarism.

Keep in mind that watching out for plagiarism is also a very good way to gauge how analytical your writing is. If you find yourself simply retelling what other people have written, it's likely that you're not being analytical enough in your thinking. This is a good time to seek help from your tutor about how to approach your topic from a stronger critical angle.

Remember, in History & Literature you are also not allowed to use AI tools at any step of the thesis process. Violations will be considered academic misconduct. Your thesis should be entirely the product of your own original thought and hard work, and it will be so much better for it!

Moving Forward

Draft Chapter Workshop

At the end of the semester, all seniors participate in a draft chapter peer review workshop with other History & Literature seniors and one or two tutors. These workshops offer the opportunity to learn about other seniors' projects and to get valuable feedback on your own. Workshops are scheduled around the beginning of reading period. You will be asked to circulate a draft to your workshop group ahead of time and come prepared to discuss the drafts submitted by your peers. Afterwards, you'll receive an email from one of the tutors leading the workshop with a summary of the feedback you received.

Debriefing after the workshop

Try to meet with your tutor shortly after the draft chapter workshop to debrief on the feedback and establish future goals for the revision stage. Occasionally students realize as they draft the first chapter or participate in the draft chapter workshop that they need more or different evidence to make their claims. These types of realizations can be difficult, but it's important to remain calm if it happens to you. Usually, the need for additional research means that you will spend a few more weeks reading source material, taking notes, and writing the suggested complete-sentence exercises. But sometimes it takes going back through the process of hunting for primary source evidence, talking further with professors and experts in your field, culling secondary material in search of primary source evidence, and enlisting further help from the research librarian.

If, in conversation with your tutor, you decide that you need more evidence for your argument, you will need to ask yourself the hard question of whether it's really a case of needing more evidence, or whether the evidence is not saying what you thought it did—or hoped it would! If the answer is the latter, then you will need to change your argument. If you decide that you need more evidence, however, you must determine whether this evidence actually exists or is available to you right now. If the evidence does exist and is accessible to you, spend a few more weeks going out and finding it.

But if it doesn't, you may again need to change your argument, or even change your research question altogether to address more closely the primary source material that you do have. On rare occasions, it might even become clear that the entire thesis topic needs revision. This requires quick, decisive action and sometimes even a conversation with the administrative team. Obviously, it is far easier to correct this problem if you can catch it early in the game, so it is absolutely crucial that you discuss with your tutor each and every week whether your sources are speaking directly to your research question. You must be brutally honest in these conversations. You are doing yourself no favors if you hide the fact that you are finding little useful data in your research.

Making a Plan: Break and Beyond

After the draft chapter workshop, identify with your tutor the most relevant feedback, and then put the first chapter on ice. Take a breath. But don't lose momentum. Before you leave for break, make a clear work plan with your tutor. Identify goals to accomplish over break, deadlines for completing the next chapter or chapters, and plans for accountability. It is important here to be realistic with your goals, while also committing yourself to working on your thesis over the break. You should begin identifying sources for the next chapter you will write, and plan to be in touch with your tutor at least three times over break, whether it's Zoom, phone, or email. Try to have (at least) the next thesis chapter drafted by the end of break. If you would like to receive more feedback as you go, you may also want to participate in the optional second draft chapter workshop at the beginning of the semester.

Chapter Four: From Revision to Submission

chapter four

After break, you will hopefully be well rested and ready to finish the thesis! When you meet with your adviser at the beginning of the new semester, you'll want to make a plan for the final weeks leading up to your submission. By now, you will have your draft chapter completed and hopefully have made good progress on other chapters over break. Now, it's time to take inventory of what's left.

- **Consider how much new work you will need to produce.** Do you have all of your research assembled? Do you have rough drafts or outlines of each chapter, or will you be writing a new chapter from scratch?
- **Assess what is feasible.** If you're feeling overwhelmed or if the thesis's argument has taken you in a different direction than you originally proposed, you might consider if the scope of your thesis should change. If you originally planned to write a three-chapter thesis and this no longer feels like it makes sense for your argument or timeline, it's okay to change course. A two-chapter thesis can be just as effective!
- **Plan a realistic timeline with your adviser.** Don't plan on having the thesis consume all of your time for the next few weeks. You will still have other classes to take, activities to engage in, and friends to see, so think about how much time you will be able to devote to your thesis each week.
- **Work backward from the final submission date with your adviser**. If you still have a significant amount of writing to do, plan what benchmarks you will need to meet to receive timely feedback on drafts. If you have drafts of everything, think about how many rounds of revision your chapters might need.
- **Make sure you build in time for citations.** You should be keeping track of these throughout the process, but if you haven't, do not assume you will be able to do your footnotes and bibliography in an hour or two!

There's no one set way to finish writing your thesis, but you may find it helpful to think of the last stage as a revolving door of edits. Writing your introduction will help clarify your chapter arguments, while editing your chapters will also help clarify what needs to go into the introduction and what you might want to write about in your conclusion. Ideally, you will have enough time to work through multiple drafts to do any major edits, line editing, and final polishing before submission.

Writing your Introduction

Once you have chapters drafted or outlined, you will want to think about how they fit together. Writing the introduction after you have your chapters in draft form can allow you to have a clearer picture of the thesis's larger argument, even if you plan to do significant editing of each chapter. Now that you've done so much reading and writing, you are now ready to state the *answer* to your research questions. These questions may have significantly evolved from your original proposal.

There is no one right way to write an introduction or set length requirement. Your introduction depends upon what material you have covered elsewhere in the thesis, but you might also find that some of the material from your chapters should now move into the thesis's introduction. Think of the introduction as a document that helps orient a reader. While you have spent months becoming an expert on your topic, a reader will not necessarily be as familiar with the subject, so consider what they need to know up front. You and your adviser have spent a lot of time talking about your topic, but how would you explain the subject to someone encountering it for the first time? If you are writing about a novel or film, even something like a brief plot summary will be helpful information.

You will also want to situate yourself in an existing critical conversation. While you'll want to introduce readers to your archive of primary sources, don't forget about the secondary sources! Your reader will want to know that you know what else has been written about the subject. Are you making an intervention in the existing criticism? Are you writing about a topic or text other scholars have generally overlooked? Are you contextualizing a source differently? Even if you don't feel like your argument is groundbreaking, your thesis is still making a scholarly contribution, so tell your reader what that is.

Now is the time to make your argument! Because the thesis is a longer project than you have previously written, you'll want to think about the scale of your claim. The argument of the thesis will be bolstered by the more specific claims of each chapter, but you'll still want your larger argument to be contestable and supportable with the evidence you have assembled. Even if your thesis takes on a more narrative approach, it should nevertheless present a clear, compelling argument. While you don't necessarily need to include a statement that begins with "I argue" into the final thesis, it can often be a helpful exercise to write one to make sure you can articulate what you want the larger thesis to accomplish. You'll also want to convey to your reader what is at stake in your argument. Why does your argument matter? What can it help a broader audience understand about a topic or text?

The introduction is a document that helps orient a reader.

Not all thesis introductions require the same information, but there are a few things that may be helpful to consider. Depending on the scope of your thesis, you might say more about the source base and methodologies you've employed, especially if it goes beyond analyzing a set of more readily available sources. If you're drawing upon oral histories or deep archival work, this can be worth highlighting for a reader. If you are making claims that rely on data analysis or if you are focusing on a few sources to act as representative for a much larger base, make sure your reader knows why.

You may also find it helpful to include a chapter breakdown or roadmap for the thesis. This can be especially helpful if your chapters do not follow a clear historical narrative or if you are turning your attention to a different text. If you choose to include chapter breakdowns, these can be brief. Don't feel as though you need to fully replicate the argument of each chapter; you don't want to overly preview what your reader will learn from reading them!

Revising Your Chapters

Once you know your thesis's primary argument, you'll want to make sure that your chapters are supporting that argument as clearly as possible. Depending on where you are in the revision process, you might find it most helpful to work through each chapter

in sequence or begin with the chapter that you feel needs the most editing. Sometimes, the order of your chapters might even change. Revision may require several rounds, so as you read through your chapters, identify the issues you want to prioritize.

With the introduction drafted, you might find that the arguments of your individual chapters need to be adjusted. How does the chapter's argument support your larger argument? Is it clear to a reader how your chapters are in dialogue with the larger argument and each other? While you may have found it helpful to draft each chapter as though it were a separate paper, you'll now want to think about how they are all part of the same thesis. Think about what the connecting thread is between your chapters, and make sure that you can maintain sight of it. You might find that structural revisions would be helpful. You might produce a reverse outline of your draft, taking note of the claims you have made throughout. Is there a better way you can organize the information or signpost the argument to your reader? Is there any important information your chapters are still missing? You'll want to make sure that you have sufficiently analyzed your evidence and that you have appropriate support for your claims.

Once you have a draft where the argument is foregrounded and the structure is in place, you and your tutor will want to read with an eye toward clarity. Are there parts of the thesis that feel extraneous or redundant? In the drafting process, it can be psychologically difficult to delete things you spent a lot of time reading and writing about, but the line-editing stage is when you should be ruthless. (Footnotes don't count toward the final word count, so if there's pertinent information to share that might feel like a slight digression from your central point, you can strategically use discursive footnotes to include some of it.) Think about how you can present the most effective version of your argument. You will also want to keep an eye toward the word count. While your tutor can request permission for you to go over the 20,000 word limit, make sure your writing is as streamlined as possible. Do you really need that adjective or adverb? Read your thesis out loud and listen for clunky sentences and wordy phrasing.

Think about what the connecting thread is between your chapters, and make sure that you can maintain sight of it.

Conclusion

Writing a conclusion to the thesis can feel daunting, but there is no one right way to write a conclusion or a minimum page length it needs to be. It will likely feel most natural—and most satisfying—to write it as not just a conclusion to your thesis as a body of text, but also as a conclusion to the many months of work you've put into it. How you conclude is ultimately up to you, but here are some questions you might consider as you brainstorm possibilities. Are there other things that didn't make it into the body of your thesis that you see as avenues for future work? Do you see your thesis connecting to more contemporary events or conversations? What do you want your reader to take away from reading the thesis? What did you take away from the experience? Do not feel like you need to recap the thesis introduction or stretch your conclusion to a particular length. Write something that feels satisfying.

Proofreading

After you've spent so much time writing and revising your thesis, you'll want to make sure that you are able to submit a polished product that reflects your best work. You'll want to make sure that all of your citations have been filled in and that you haven't forgotten to remove any random notes you've left for yourself in the document.

Proofreading helps you present your work in a good light and ensures that your thesis will make a good first impression on your readers. The goal of proofreading is to ensure that your readers can concentrate fully on your ideas. You do not want them to be distracted by anything else. Even the most brilliant ideas can become obscured by typos, incorrect citation styles, and bad grammar.

If you can, try to enlist a friend to proofread your work for you. You should proofread your work, too, but you are probably too close to your words to see them with 100% clarity. Ideally, another pair of eyes will help you to seek out and get rid of any errors.

Formatting

- **Title Page:** All theses must include a title page that accords with Harvard's required format (see the website for formatting template).
- **Word Count Page:** Immediately following the title page, you must insert a separate page indicating the word count for your thesis (see the website for formatting template). This figure refers only to the text; it does not include footnotes, documents, bibliography, or appendices.
- **Table of Contents:** Every thesis requires a Table of Contents to guide the reader.
- **Body Format:** Margins should be 1″, and pages should be numbered, beginning with the first page of the introduction. Left justify only; do not full justify. Chapter titles may be centered. The body text must be double-spaced and font size should be 12 pt. Footnotes must be 10, 11, or 12 pt. in the same font as the body text. Times New Roman font is strongly recommended.
- **Appendices and Images:** You may place images in the body of the text or at the end in an appendix. An appendix can also be used if you feel there are additional sources, not readily available, that your reader would benefit from seeing.
- **Acknowledgments:** Please do not include acknowledgments. Readers prefer not to know who directed your thesis, lest they be somehow swayed by that knowledge. If you wish, you may add acknowledgments after your thesis has been read.

Submission and Celebration

You must submit your thesis on Canvas by 4 p.m. on Thesis Day in order for it to be sent out to readers. Theses received after the deadline will not be considered for concentration honors.

The last, but most certainly not least, part of the senior thesis project is to celebrate its end. On Thesis Day, History & Literature throws a champagne party to toast all the thesis writers and their advisors and to celebrate your accomplishments.

After you have the chance to celebrate, rest, and relax, you'll spend the rest of the semester preparing for oral exams with your tutor. During the exam, you'll spend ten minutes talking about your thesis, so you'll eventually want to return to it, but it's good to spend some time away from it rather than look for typos you might have missed or things you wish you could have edited. You also don't want to get caught up in thinking about a grade. Congratulations, you have successfully completed a senior thesis, and you have every reason to be proud of your hard work!

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