

## HISTORY 2129 / ENVS 2449: Guidelines For Writing A Research Paper Prospectus in History

Below is a guide for writing a prospectus for a research paper. Although you may not be able to answer all these questions in your prospectus, you should try to have some solid preliminary answers.

### 1. Thesis statement or hypothesis

- a. the topic or subject of your examination
- b. the question you are going to ask about the subject, based on a series of premises about the subject (in other words, the perspective from which you will examine the subject)
- c. the argument you are going to make about it (this will undoubtedly shift as you research and write, but you need to begin to formulate a hypothesis to help direct your inquiry)

### 2. Annotated bibliography

- a. primary sources  
explain why you've chosen these sources
- b. secondary sources  
explain what they offer your study: the information they provide; the author's argument and perspective

NOTE: How to find sources:

Hawthorne-Longfellow Library:

1. on-line CBB catalog (be inventive, but specific enough)
2. reference bibliographies (e.g., autobiographies, diaries; compilations of primary and secondary sources about particular topics; economic data)
3. government documents (legislative acts and documents; annual town reports)
4. newspaper microfilm (with published indices)
5. online databases (searches for articles; databases for historical newspapers and journals)
6. Barbara Levergood, the Reference Librarian for History and Government

In addition to the research guide for the course, you should also explore the H-L Library Maine History Research Guide (<http://libguides.bowdoin.edu/maine-history>)

NOTE: For primary source materials, you can also check the footnotes and bibliography in a good secondary source on the *topic*. Look for primary sources that have not been selectively quoted by a historian. When you use secondary sources, try not to take the historian's interpretation at face value.

### 3. Methodology

- how you plan to use the sources
- the extent to which the sources are valid/reliable for the questions you want to ask

### 4. Projected outline of the essay

NOTE: Think of your prospectus as a work-in-progress. As you work with the secondary literature on your subject, either broadly or narrowly conceived, you should think about how your study fits into the historiographical literature.

As you begin to analyze your primary sources, you may discover that you need additional sources, which you should add to the annotated bibliography. And, as you analyze the evidence in both your primary and secondary sources, you may discover that your thesis premises have changed, and that you need to revise, or rethink altogether, your thesis question.

*Note:* if you completed your research and began to write your research paper, your work-in-progress prospectus would become the foundation for the introduction to your essay.

NOTE: Historians use footnote or endnote format for citations and provide a bibliography of the sources that we consult, rather than parenthetical citations and a works cited page:  
Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide from the Chicago Manual of Style at  
[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)  
Bowdoin Library Chicago Quick Guide – “Notes and Bibliography” style at  
<https://library.bowdoin.edu/research/chicago-note-bibliography.pdf>