

Guidelines for the Research Paper

History 422

I. GENERAL GUIDELINES

These guidelines are relevant if you have chosen the (B) track for HIS 422; otherwise see the guidelines for article reviews. If you have selected track (B), then you have *chosen* – note the italicized word – for this course. I offer these guidelines in order to give you a better idea of what I have in mind for this exercise. These guidelines constitute a sacred and hallowed contract and covenant. I assume that in turning in your papers you have read these guidelines and have agreed to abide by them. Those who violate the guidelines will be mercilessly punished.

The purpose of the assignment, aside from enhancing your knowledge of Russian history, is to promote your skills in research, critical thought, synthesis, and writing. I have left the choice of topic open to you, so that you may focus on those questions and issues that you find most interesting and relevant. I am open to any topic, as long as I am confident that there are sufficient sources in English. I ask that you approve and discuss your topic with me so that I can get you started with suggested materials and help you along the way. In general, consultation with me throughout the process is a good idea, since my purpose in being here is actually to enhance, as well as to evaluate, your performance. With this in mind, I have developed the following timetable:

- 19 February:** Choose between (A) and (B) tracks.
- 3 March:** Topics for your paper are due. These should consist of a paragraph or so explaining the topic, the question(s) you wish to answer, and the ways you plan to go about doing so. Before turning in your topic, you should have touched base with me at least provisionally about the topic.
- 31 March:** Preliminary bibliographies due. Here you must provide a provisional list of books, articles, and other sources that you plan to use in your research. *You must have met with me in my office to discuss the topic and sources prior to submitting the bibliography.* Failure to do so will result in penalties.
- 21 April:** At this point, you will turn in a first draft of your paper, which will be worth 30% of the final grade on the paper. The idea here is for you to do the best job you can in putting together the paper with the recognition that you will have the opportunity to do subsequent work. I will make every effort to return the first drafts to you as soon as possible, though this will depend on how many students have selected the (B) track.
- 10 May:** Now the final draft of the paper is due, worth 70% of the total grade on the paper. Before turning in your final draft, *you must meet with me to discuss in greater detail the first draft.* It is up to you to set up such a meeting with me. Failure to do so will detract from your final grade.

The nature of the paper will to some extent depend on the topic. But in almost all cases you should strive in your paper to adopt *an analytical approach*, rather than a strictly narrative one. The best way to approach the topic is to articulate a question or series of questions that you think your sources will allow you to answer. As you read, you can then gather notes on that question and formulate an argument that you will make in the paper. As a general rule, the paper that attempts to make an argument and support it with concrete evidence will be more effective than the paper that attempts merely to "tell" about an issue

without any particular commitments. State your argument (or thesis) early on in the paper, and then use the remainder of the text to develop support for that argument. Making a distinct argument is always a big challenge, because it requires taking a firm stand. This does not mean, however, that your argument has to be crude and simplistic. State your argument forcefully and then use the body of the text to introduce the complexities that will add nuance to your assertions. In all cases, *make sure that you support your statements with some kind of concrete evidence.*

My basic expectations concerning the paper are summarized here.

- 1) The paper should be approximately 12-14 pages in length. Longer papers (15 pages in the absolute maximum) are acceptable, but no paper should be under the 12-page minimum. These page guidelines assume that margins will be 1 inch on all four sides and that the font is 10- or 12-point. Please *number the pages.*
- 2) Standards with respect to grammar and clarity are straightforward: poorly written papers receive poor grades.
- 3) I expect that your paper will be diligently proofread. If I find repeated basic grammatical and syntactical mistakes, I will be forced to conclude that you did not bother to proofread, and this will deeply offend, aggravate, and antagonize me.
- 4) A bibliography of cited works should be provided at the end of the paper (the bibliography is NOT part of the page minimum). In putting together your bibliographies, I strongly urge to use the style in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago). Otherwise, you can consult a scholarly book and follow the style used there, or see point no. 5 below. You may also consult the website guidelines for further guidance.
- 5) References within the paper should take the form of either footnotes, using a format like this for books,¹ and like this for journal articles,² or internal bracketed references (Goldman, 217-220). I prefer the first variant, but if you must use the second, please refer to *only the author (last name) and page number* within the parentheses. Use an abbreviated title only if you are using more than one work by the same author (Goldman, *Women*, 217-220). Full references should of course appear in the bibliography. The point is that I do not want lengthy citations within the text.
- 6) Do not quote excessively and avoid bloc quotes altogether. I am interested in *your* thought processes. The use of quotations is an important part of writing, but *under no circumstances* should you have such quotations do the work for you. If you find yourself quoting a lot, ask yourself: is this really necessary, or am I just padding the paper? If you answer truthfully that you are padding the paper, then I will probably think so, too.

¹ Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 217-220.

² Orlando Figes, "The Russian Revolution and Its Language in the Village," *Russian Review*, 56.3 (1997): 323-345.

II. THE PAPER PROPOSAL

I have asked you to submit a short paragraph describing your paper topic for the research paper. Along these lines, I here provide a brief model for what a proposal like this might look like. Certainly there are many ways you can do this, but the example below seems to me to be a reasonably good one.

While it is clear that some educated Russians eventually joined the revolutionary movement in the nineteenth century, there were evidently others who, while retaining an oppositional stance towards the government, nonetheless rejected the idea of revolutionary change. My paper will explore this non-revolutionary intelligentsia and will seek to answer two principal questions: 1) What arguments did these non-revolutionaries make against the revolutionaries? and 2) What alternative forms of opposition did they engage in? My paper is motivated by the hypothesis that revolutionaries, though very visible because of their radical actions, were nonetheless a minority even among educated Russians. My paper will test this hypothesis by looking at several secondary works and, if available in English, some primary texts.

Note the strengths of the proposal: 1) It makes clear the topic of the paper, which is sufficiently narrow to be feasible, but sufficiently broad to be interesting. Moreover, there are probably a number of sources available on this question (you can learn whether or not this is the case by consulting with me). 2) It articulates very clearly the questions that it will seek to answer and also forwards a broader hypothesis. In most cases it would be sufficient to articulate even just one question, but that should be the minimum. 3) The proposal makes at least some reference to sources. You can easily make up a line like this even if you don't have the slightest idea whether there are such sources. But if you consult with me, you can make claims with integrity. 4) Finally, note how the paper is very intriguing. The reader is indeed immediately interested in learning more about this non-revolutionary intelligentsia, because it will tell us more about Russian society and about the place of the revolutionary movement within it. There is even an element of challenge in it, which always makes a proposal interesting. Think about how this proposal stacks up against a proposal that merely states the paper will be "about Stalin" or "on peasants."

III. THE FIRST DRAFT

The draft of the research paper counts for 30% of your grade on the whole exercise. This gives you an incentive to do well the first time around, but also the opportunity to improve your grade substantially with the final submission. I will make every effort to return the draft to you as quickly as possible with substantial commentary, but note that there is not *that* much time between the first draft and the final, so I encourage you to do as much as you can to make the first draft as strong as possible so that you can really utilize my comments most effectively to *improve* the paper (as opposed merely to finishing it). My expectation is that the final version will indeed represent a *substantial* improvement over the first draft.

This being said, I recognize that the first draft is indeed a draft, and I will evaluate it as such. This means that the prose can be a little rough if need be, and you may even indicate in brackets or parentheses questions or lines of inquiry that you plan to develop further. (Obviously it is unacceptable if the entire draft consists of such brackets.) The point is that I am looking for a good, serious start – evidence that you have done a fair amount of research, thought hard about the issues involved with your topic, and worked diligently to determine the best way to present the information. On the mechanical side, you should try to bring everything into the best order possible, though here, too, I will make some allowance for the fact that this is a draft.

In terms of the text itself, it is difficult for me to make general recommendations, but here goes. Do your best in the introductory paragraph to present the issue and the questions that you are addressing in the

paper. This first paragraph should be difficult to write and should probably go through several drafts, even at this early stage. In general, I cannot emphasize enough that good writing requires time and a great deal of attention. Particularly if you have reason to believe that you do not write very well, be certain to give yourself plenty of time to work on this paper. The rest of the paper should be devoted towards answering the question that you have raised in the introduction. This will involve situating the issue to some degree – i.e., with reference to "historical background" – and making sure that the information that you present relates to the larger question in some way and that the corresponding connections are clearly articulated. Do not *assume* that I can read your mind, that I "know what you're saying," or that your use of incorrect terms is somehow "ok." This means that you need to be *explicit* (i.e., clear) about what it is you are trying to do and why you are presenting the information that you are. Your paper should also attempt to be nuanced. It is perfectly appropriate that you forward some kind of argument, perhaps even a forceful one. But you want to show that you have taken stock of all the evidence and perhaps that you acknowledge alternative interpretations and see their merits.

Above all, if you have questions or concerns, you should contact me.

IV. THE FINAL DRAFT

The final draft should represent a considerable improvement on the first draft and should, most importantly, address in one way or another the criticisms that you received in response to that first version. If you have in no way addressed by criticisms and suggestions, I will assume that you have not taken the revisions seriously and will grade the final version accordingly (i.e., *harshly*). Note that I spend a lot of time on drafts, and nothing is more disheartening and vexing than to see that my advice is simply being ignored.

For the final draft, you are required to submit and sign the checklist below. You can bring it to the exam if you submit your paper electronically. Here are the standards by which your paper will be assessed:

<p>A = excellent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper is well organized with clear structure and organization. • The prose is lucid and precise, with clear topic sentences. • The paper offers a clear argument or set of propositions and supports them with appropriate evidence. • The paper deploys at least five or six different sources (the exact number will depend on the topic in question) • All the technical requirements of the paper have been met, including standards of citation. • The final draft of the paper clearly represents an improvement over the first draft and has, in particular, taken into account the instructor's earlier comments.
<p>B = good</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization and structure are strong in general, but deficiencies remain. • The prose is intelligible (with good topic sentences) but at points imprecise or not clear. • The paper offers certain propositions, but these are somewhat vague, contradictory, or only partially supported by evidence. • Some evidence that would either support or refute the paper has been ignored. • The final draft addresses most, but not all, problems identified in the first draft. • The paper relies too much on too few sources (though the importance of this issue will depend on the topic in question). • Technical requirements have been largely, but not entirely, met.

<p>C = marginally adequate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More serious deficiencies in organization, structure, and prose that begin to compromise the intelligibility of the essay. • A clear absence of proofreading. • Paper offers few propositions and gives poor indication about what it is trying to say. • Significant comments on the first draft have been ignored, and comparatively few improvements have been made between the two drafts. • Little evidence is offered to support the claims being made. • The paper relies too much on one or two sources.
<p>D = seriously deficient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very poor organization and prose. • No effort to offer any propositions, assertions, or arguments. • Bad or no topic sentences. • Almost no use of any evidence. • No signs of proofreading. • Comments on the first draft have been completely ignored, and there has been no improvement between the two drafts.
<p>F = horrible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any paper not actually turned in or turned in too late. • Any paper exhibiting any clear signs of plagiarism. • The writing is senseless, incomprehensible, and/or bizarre. • Absolutely no signs of proofreading. • The paper is substantially shorter than the minimum. • The recycling bin is the <i>only</i> place where this paper belongs.

What's the Point? There are numerous points to this exercise. The first is to allow students to explore an issue in greater detail than they would be able to do in the case of article reviews, on track (A). The second is to develop student skills in identifying and framing a historical problem worthy of greater exploration. Framing a problem for investigation is more difficult, and fewer people capable of doing this, than most people realize. Third, the exercise requires students to identify appropriate sources for addressing the problem and to modify the definition of that problem in light of the sources available. Finally, the exercise develops skills in good writing, analysis, and critical assessment – all skills that become more important by the day. In a word, the exercise develops skills of analysis, research, and communication.

Checklist

All items on this list must be checked off as having been done and you must sign the statement below to show your willing and conscious compliance. This sheet should be the cover sheet on your submission of the final paper.

- _____ The pages of my paper are numbered consecutively.
- _____ My paper is typed or computer-printed.
- _____ I have included a bibliography of the sources consulted.
- _____ I have double-checked to make sure that I cited my sources properly.
- _____ In all instances where I have quoted, I have supplied page numbers.
- _____ I have run a spell-check on my paper or checked the spelling very diligently.
- _____ In general I have proofread the paper very carefully.
- _____ I have carefully followed Dr. Werth's guidelines for grammar and style.
- _____ All my margins are about one inch (left, right, top, and bottom).
- _____ My draft is at least nine FULL pages in length, with no bogus fluff & padding.
- _____ My paper has a title that relates to the content of the paper.
- _____ I have carefully articulated the topic of my inquiry in the introductory paragraph.

With my signature below in ink, I indicate that I have complied with all the requirements listed and checked off above to the best of my ability. I recognize that Dr. Werth will wish to visit savage vengeance on me if the items I have checked off as being true are not actually borne out in the paper itself. I also recognize that this sheet with my signature MUST accompany the paper at the time of its submission.

Signature

Date