

Historical Research Paper

Patrick Rael, *Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students*, (Brunswick: Bowdoin College, 2004).

How to Read a Secondary Source

Read the title. Define every word in the title; look up any unknown words. Think about what the title promises for the book. Look at the table of contents. This is your "menu" for the book. What can you tell about its contents and structure from the TOC?

Read a book from the outside in. Read the foreword and introduction (if an article, read the first paragraph or two). Read the conclusion or epilogue if there is one (if an article, read the last one or two paragraphs). After all this, ask yourself what the author's thesis might be. How has the argument been structured?

Read chapters from the outside in. Quickly read the first and last paragraph of each chapter. After doing this and taking the step outlined above, you should have a good idea of the book's major themes and arguments.

Read through the chapters actively, taking cues as to which paragraphs are most important from their topic sentences. (Good topic sentences tell you what the paragraph is about.) Not every sentence and paragraph is as important as every other. It is up to you to judge, based on what you know so far about the book's themes and arguments. If you can, highlight passages that seem to be especially relevant.

Take notes: Many students attempt to take comprehensive notes on the content of a book or article. I suggest that you record your *thoughts about the reading rather than simply the details and contents of the reader. What surprised you? What seemed particularly insightful? What seems suspect? What reinforces or counters points made in other readings?* This kind of note taking will keep your reading active, and actually will help you remember the contents of the piece better than otherwise.

How to Read a Primary Source

Purpose

Who is the author and what is her or his place in society (explain why you are justified in thinking so)?

Why did the author prepare the document? What was the occasion for its creation? Ex. official histories

What is at stake for the author in this text? Why do you think she or he wrote it? What evidence in the text tells you this?

Does the author have a thesis? What — in one sentence — is that thesis?

Argument

- What is the text trying to do? How does the text make its case? What is its strategy for accomplishing its goal? How does it carry out this strategy?
- Who is the intended audience of the text? How might this influence its rhetorical strategy? Cite specific examples. Ex. Vietnam's Declaration of Independence
- What arguments or concerns does the author respond to that are *not clearly stated*? Ex. Dulles Brothers
- Do you think the author is credible and reliable? Use at least one specific example to explain why. *How do you know???*
 - Tone, compared to other sources, person's background, axe to grind, personal correspondence or intended for the public

Assumptions

How do the ideas and values in the source differ from the ideas and values of our age?

What presumptions and preconceptions do we as readers bring to bear on this text? For instance, what portions of the text might we find objectionable, but which contemporaries might have found acceptable.

How might the difference between our values and the values of the author influence the way we understand the text? Explain how such a difference in values might lead us to misinterpret the text, or understand it in a way contemporaries would not have.

Relate: Now choose another of the readings, and compare the two, answering these questions:

What patterns or ideas are repeated throughout the readings?

What major differences appear in them?

Which do you find more reliable and credible?

How to Ask Good Questions

Good questions require thought and research. “Should the U.S. have dropped the bomb on Japan”?

Given that the Japanese military establishment had vowed to fight to the bitter end, should the United States have dropped the bomb on Japan?

Given that the United States’ government was becoming increasingly concerned with post-war struggles with the Soviet Union, should the United States have dropped the bomb on Japan?

Given that many in the United States expressed what may be called racist views of the Japanese, and in fact interned Japanese Americans in concentration camps during the war, should the United States have dropped the bomb on Japan?

Explore premises and make them explicit.

What impact did racism have on the decision to drop the bomb?

What impact did the brewing Cold War with the Soviet Union have on the decision to drop the bomb?

What impact did military strategy have on the decision to drop the bomb?

Keep Going.

Did racism lead the U.S. to drop the bomb on Japan when it may not have done so on Germany? How exactly did American views of the Japanese and Germans differ? How could such popular cultural views have influenced a foreign and military policy thought to be rational?

What in our dealings with Stalin might have prompted the U.S. to drop the bomb on Japan? Why might U.S. strategists have thought dropping the bomb would have been useful at all?

What, rationally, could U.S. strategists have considered necessary to win the war against Japan? What is actually the case that dropping the bomb saved U.S. lives? If so, what about the moral costs of bombing civilian non-combatants?

Difference Between a Simple Question and a Critical Question

Simple Question: Can be answered with a yes/no response; contains the answers within themselves; can only be answered with a fact or series of facts

Ex. Did southerners attempt to limit African-American rights by prohibiting them from voting?

Critical Questions: Leads to further questions and discussion; derives from a careful and critical reading of the text

Ex. After Reconstruction, many former slaves received rights that did not exist prior to the Civil War. These rights included voting, citizenship, and due process. In what ways do these rights represent freedom and in what ways were these rights limited? How do these rights represent freedom as understood by white Americans during this period? In what ways do these rights represent Congress's priorities regarding the former slaves, considering the limitations of these rights?

Affidavit of a Georgia freedwoman, 1866. My husband and I lived in Florida about four months. During that time he beat and abused me. I reported it to the officer in charge of the Freedman's Bureau. He had him arrested, and he got out of the guard house and left the place, remaining away until a new officer took charge. He then came back and beat me again. I had him arrested. He knocked the officer down and ran away and came here to Savannah. Since that time he has abused me and refuses to pay for the rent of my room and has not furnished me with any money, food, or clothing. I told him that I would go to the Freedmen's Bureau. He replied, "Damn the Freedmen's Bureau--I'll cuss you before them." On Saturday night, he came to my room and took all his things. He told me he would rather keep a woman than be married because she could not carry him to law and I could. I then told him that if he wanted to leave me to get a divorce and he could go. He said, "If I can get a divorce without paying for it, I'll get it for you. If I can't I won't give it to you, you can go without it." I said, "If you want to leave me, leave me like a man!" He has no just complaint against me.

Thought: This seems like an instance of gender oppression. But we've been thinking about things in terms of race. Plus, this is strange: we've just seen enslaved African Americans become free; now we see evidence of gender conflict. (Why is this "strange"?) I guess it's strange because I expected the expansion of freedom for all blacks to have been shared equally among black men and women. Perhaps this was not so.

Hypothesis: Are these two things — emancipation and gender conflict — related? If so, how? Did emancipation cause gender conflict? If so, how? Did freedom intensify conflicts that existed before? Why would freedom have intensified conflict — what about it would do that? (Note that this process is about mulling over possibilities. When I ask, "if so, how?" I then respond with several options. This process of considering alternative possible answers is crucial!)

Questions to ask when asking questions:

What words, phrases, or concepts in my questions have yet to be explored?

- Gender oppression-who was oppressed? What type of oppression are we talking about?

What assumptions have I made (or are implicit) in the questions I've asked?

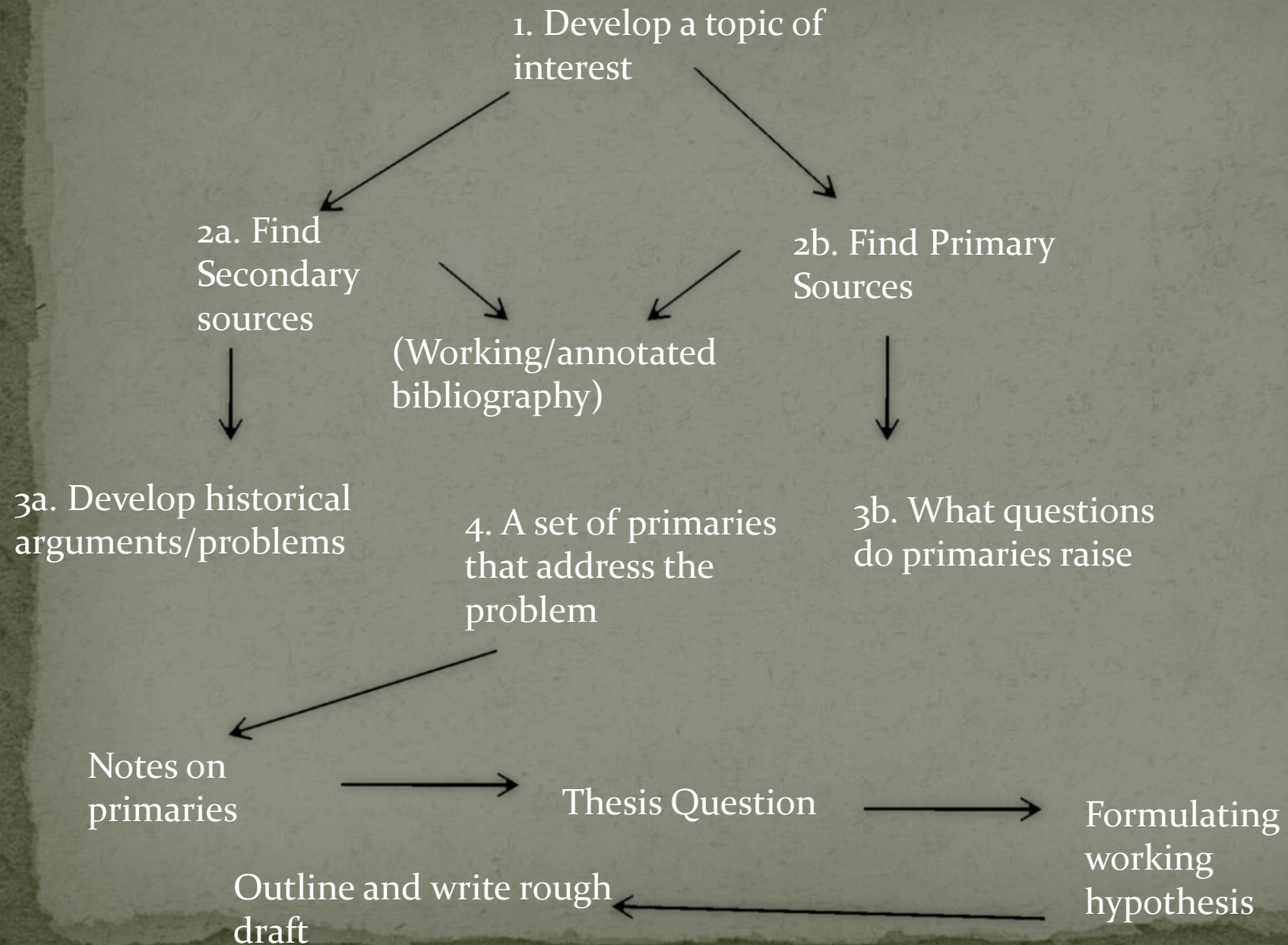
- I'm possibly assuming that oppression only means physical but were there other types?

- I'm also assuming that emancipation caused this abuse, but am I right?

How would I go about testing my hypotheses?

- Look for other accounts of abuse after emancipation and possibly before.

What would a possible answer or solution look like?



The Thesis

A history paper takes a stand on a historical issue or problem, and attempts to develop a coherent and persuasive line of thought intended to convince the reader of the validity of that stand. Your thesis is the concise statement of your argument.

Developing a good thesis is usually the most difficult part of writing a paper; do not expect it to come easily.

Constructing a thesis:

- Start with a topic: Ex. Discrimination against Japanese Americans during WWII. This is too vague and too broad and does not pose a question.
- Develop a question around your topic: why did the U.S. government allow discrimination against Japanese Americans?
- Develop a unique perspective on your question which answers it: Ex. Government officials allowed discrimination against Japanese Americans not because it was in the nation's interest, but because it provided a concrete enemy for people to focus on. This is a thesis statement!!

Constructing a tentative thesis: Here is a somewhat formulaic approach to constructing a tentative thesis. It is just one possibility among many.

- A concessive clause ("although such and such").
- The main clause. The subject of the main clause should be the subject of the paper.
- A "because" clause. This will force you to summarize support for your thesis as concisely as possible.

Example: Although the Scopes Trial was a legal farce, it reflected deep ambivalence in American thinking, because so many conflicting attitudes met headlong in Dayton, Tennessee.

(1) Dear Reader: I want to convince you that. . . . [This is a hypothesis]

(2) The main reasons why you should believe me are that. . . . [This is a summary of your evidence and logic.]

(3) You should care about my thesis because. . . . [This provides the seeds of your conclusion, and checks the significance of your thesis.]

Refining the Thesis: A good thesis does not spring to life from nothing. A good thesis is the product of a discussion you have about your source material and its meaning.

(2) Create a hypothesis, that is, a tentative answer to the question. I suggest using the formula above.

(3) Then, considering the contents of your primary sources, ask these questions: Is my hypothesis really true? What evidence at my disposal makes it false? How can I *modify* my hypothesis to make it true?

For instance, you may have some source information that suggests black women were beaten by their husbands when free, but you might also have some that suggests their husbands protected them from whites and kept them from working long hard hours in the fields. Perhaps it was only in the realm of *relative equality within the family* that women lost out in freedom.

(4) Develop a new, more complex hypothesis by modifying the old one. There usually is no need to start from scratch; simply alter what you started with.

Other tips on writing a good thesis:

- Look for vague words or phrases that you need to clarify. Underline these and unpack them in your introduction. These will be words or phrases that you will need to define or the reader will be unaware of your meaning. You can also change the wording of the phrase to be more specific.

Begin to think about your thesis as you read your secondary sources but you will not be able to write a clear thesis until you have investigated the primary sources. If you do not know what the primary sources say, you cannot make an argument.

As you write, start out with a tentative thesis but be prepared to change it if the evidence leads you in a different direction. Once you write the first draft, go back and look at your thesis. Does your paper support the claim you are making? Does your evidence and analysis support your thesis? Remember, the thesis is not the starting point of your exploration, but the result of it. If all your evidence and analysis supports your thesis then you have proved your case; if not, you need to reevaluate your claim.

Formatting Your Paper

Introduction:

- Provide the who, what, where, and when of your paper. This provides the reader with context. Be specific! Provide a hook. Avoid phrases like “since the beginning of time,” or “throughout history.”
- Explain the problem you will address. This will be the questions you have developed during your research.
- Define any key terms that you will be writing about. For instance, if you are writing about upper-class women during a specific period and you simply address them as women throughout your paper, explain this. “Women” is a broad category so explain how you will use the word.
- Provide a roadmap for your paper, meaning the structure.
- In one to two sentences state your argument. This could be the last sentence of your second paragraph.

Since the beginning of time humans have owned one another in slavery. This brutal institution was carried to its fullest extent in the United States in the years between the American Revolution and the Civil War. Slaveholders treated their slaves as chattel, brutalizing them with the whip and the lash. The law never recognized the humanity of the slave, and similarly regarded him as property. Consequently, there was a big disparity between private and public rights of slaves.

To many supporters of slavery, the nature of slave rights had a dual character. On the one hand, in order to maintain the total dominance of the white master class, the law denied any rights to slaves. Publicly, the slave was merely property, and not human at all. Yet the personal records of many planters suggest that slaves often proved able to demand customary “rights” from their masters. In the privacy of the master-slave relationship, the black man did indeed have rights which the white man was bound to respect, on pain of losing his labor or subjecting himself to violence. This conflict between slaves’ lack of “public” rights and masters’ “private” acknowledgment of slaves’ rights undermined planters’ hegemony and permitted slaves to exert a degree of autonomy and freedom within an oppressive institution.

The Body: constitutes the bulk of your paper

- Structure: Your thesis should provide some structure. Example from above reveals the writer will have at least two sections: private rights and public rights.
- Logic and flow: begin with general statements and move to specifics. Ex. The Founding Fathers not addressing slavery in the Constitution and then move to more specific state laws.
- Paragraphs: MEAL, roughly 5 sentences
- Topic Sentence: A mini argument explaining to the reader what the paragraph is going to discuss.
- Support: quotes/paraphrases and YOUR analysis of these pieces of evidence
- Transitions: last sentence that links the ideas you just wrote about while transitioning to the next paragraph-Ex. Public rights for slaves were very minimal, but their private rights existed in a limited form.

The Conclusion: last paragraph of your paper

- Restates your thesis but not word for word
- Possibly connecting your issue to something contemporary
- Why this is an important topic to discuss
- Further research that should be done
- Asking even bigger questions

Quoting and Paraphrasing

Quoting:

Integrating another author's words in your paper

Use a quote if it really will make an impact

Do not allow a quote to stand on its own

Introduce the reader to the author of the quote

Place the exact phrase within double quotation marks

Commas and periods go inside the quotation marks

Do not start a sentence with a quote

Directly quote from your primary sources and paraphrase
from your secondary sources

ANALYZE THE QUOTE!!!!!!

Three examples of how to use a quote within your paper:

Ex 1: Sarah Henshaw, a nurse who worked for the commission, explained that the first sanitary fair “was pre-eminently a woman-enterprise, and received no assistance from the other sex.”

Ex 2: “Later I learned that Dulles had lied to us,” wrote CIA operative Philip Roettinger, “Communism was not the threat we were fighting at all; land reform was.”

Ex 3: “The Russians perceived in the transition from Roosevelt to Truman an abrupt shift from an attitude of cooperation to one of confrontation,” argues historian John Gaddis.

Using brackets: Brackets represent a word that YOU put inside the quote. This should not change the meaning of the quote.

Original: devoted women might waste their zeal and produce as much harm as good from their excitement

The quote: “devoted women might [have] waste[d] their zeal and produce[d] as much harm as good from their excitement”

Original: You are married women; and, by the laws of Illinois, your names are good for nothing, unless your husbands write their names after yours on the contract.

“[They were] married women; and, by the laws of Illinois, [their] names [were] good for nothing, unless [their] husbands [wrote] their names after [theirs] on the contract.”

Using an ellipsis and [sic]-“thus was it written”

Ellipsis: ...-represents an omission from a quote; three periods with no spaces in between; Use four periods (....) for two sentences; DO NOT START OR END SENTENCE WITH AN ELLIPSIS

Original: For, while money has been freely provided for its treasury by the rich men of the country, from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast, the articles of clothing, and the delicacies, in the way of food, provided by the women

“For, while money has been freely provided...by the rich men of the country...the articles of clothing, and the delicacies...provided by the women”

“This power is ours. The power of principle, of virtue, of love, of religion.... To increase this moral power is every woman’s duty.” (2 spaces at end of sentence)

[sic]: Use when the author wrote the quote in archaic English with misspelled words or mechanically unsound; use at end of sentence if whole sentence was written poorly or just after a specific word

Ex: “that US has no intention interfering or intervening internal affairs Guat and...has every desire...assist furtherance liberal democracy based individual freedoms [sic].”

Block quotes: use when you are quoting three or more sentences (DO NOT DO THIS OFTEN, POSSIBLY ONLY ONCE); indent and single space the entire quote

- The author notes **that** “**at** this time it was thought impossible to run the factories.”
- The author notes, “[A]t this time it was thought impossible to run the factories.”

Paraphrasing: changing a direct passage by using your own words; CITATIONS ARE REQUIRED but not quotation marks; paraphrase your secondary sources

Original: Several possible courses lay open to the deposed statesman.

Paraphrased: The deposed statesman had several options to choose from.

Common Grammatical Mistakes

-Mixed verb tenses ("tense"):

"Bernal Diaz presented a positive view of the Spanish because he wants to protect himself from recrimination."

(Put "wants" in the same tense: ("wanted.")

-Passive voice ("passive"):

"The Aztecs were destroyed in droves, and finally defeated."

(Identify the proper subject of this sentence and re-work, as in "The Spanish destroyed the Aztecs in droves, and finally defeated them.")

-Run-on sentence ("run-on"):

"Coffee contains caffeine furthermore, chocolate, tea, and cola also contain significant amounts of caffeine."

(Add a semi-colon after "caffeine" to properly conjoin two independent clauses.)

Common Grammatical Mistakes

-Comma splice ("splice"):

"Many industrialists thought workers lazy, as a result they paid their employees poorly."

(Replace comma after "lazy" with a semi-colon to properly conjoin two independent clauses.)

-Sentence fragment ("frag"):

"The little town of Dayton, Tennessee, in the tumultuous 1920s, caught in the international limelight."

(The sentence needs a verb for its subject, Dayton.)

-Faulty pronoun reference ("ref"):

"The Spaniard hated the Aztec because of their religious beliefs."

(The referent for "their" ("Aztec") is singular; change "their" to "his.")

Common Grammatical Mistakes

-Subject-verb agreement ("s-v"):

"The army required each one of the soldiers to carry their own entrenching tool."

("Their" is plural, yet refers to the singular "one," not "soldiers."
"The army required each soldier to carry his own entrenching tool.")

-Misplaced modifier ("mod"):

"The slaves burned the farmhouse, furious at their masters."

(The participial phrase "furious at their masters" cannot modify "farmhouse"; it must be placed immediately after "slaves.")

-Dangling modifier ("mod"):

"Arriving by boat in the New World, the weather was brutal."

(The weather cannot arrive by boat in the New World; identify the proper subject for the first clause, as in "Arriving by boat in the New World, the Puritans found the weather brutal.")

Common Grammatical Mistakes

-Word choice ("w.c."):

"One slave tells of how he was able to get a job after the war and earn enough money to travel to North Carolina to find his long separated mother."
(His mother had probably remained in once piece; substitute "lost" for "separated.")

Passive Voice

“Mistakes were made in Iraq.”

Subject, Action (verb), Direct Object (thing being acted upon)

“Mistakes were made in Iraq.”

“The White House made mistakes in Iraq.”

Passive Voice

I *was told* to do it that way.

- Becky told me to do it that way.

The operation *was performed* by a famous surgeon.

- Ellis, a famous surgeon, performed the operation.

Passive Voice

“to be” verbs: is, was, were

Especially avoid: there is, it is

-Possessives:

Singular noun: President Chamberlain's bowtie.

Singular noun ending in "s": President Sills's bowtie.

Plural noun: The women's salaries.

Plural noun ending in "s": The deans' luncheon.

Special case of singular noun ending in "s": Moses' laws; Jesus' parables. [religious figures only]

Note that only in the last two cases does the apostrophe appear without a concluding "s."

Recognize the difference:

- effect (noun) and affect (verb)
- the North vs. northern and the West vs. western
- e.g. and i.e. – shouldn't use these anyway
- its and it's and whose vs. who's – possessive vs. it is and who is
 - "The corporation gave its assent to proceed."

that vs. which

- that is a defining, restrictive clause (usually not set off by a comma)
- which is a non-defining, elaborative clause

- There are several secondary sources specific to the subject of manhood **which** my author cites.
- In contrast to the meager War on Poverty funding, which had never exceeded a little more than a million dollars a year, Model Cities promised Hunters Point \$3.4 million for each of the first four years.

that vs. who:

that = things; who = people

Wrong: “Abraham Lincoln was the president that led the North.”

Right: “Abraham Lincoln was the president who led the North.”

Split Infinitive

- avoid split infinitives: to quickly run
to run quickly
- It is wrong to **ever** split an infinitive.

Descriptive Compounds

- Nineteenth-century voters frequently thought they were electing “the best man.” There are no such illusions in the twentieth century.
- Lower-class interests are as deserving as hyphenation as upper-class ones, although this would likely upset the upper class (unless it were affected by middle-class morality).

Endnotes and Bibliography

Book (endnote, bibliography):

¹John Hope Franklin, *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 54.

Franklin, John Hope. *George Washington Williams: A Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Article in a scholarly journal (footnote, bibliography):

¹Richard Jackson, “Running Down the Up-Escalator: Regional Inequality in Papua New Guinea,” *Australian Geographer* 14, May 1979, 180.

Jackson, Richard. “Running Down the Up-Escalator: Regional Inequality in Papua New Guinea.” *Australian Geographer* 14 (May 1979).

Article in a newspaper (footnote, bibliography):

¹William Lloyd Garrison, “Guilt of New England,”
The Liberator (Boston), January 7, 1832.

Garrison, William Lloyd. “Guilt of New England.” *The Liberator* (Boston), January 7, 1832.