

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Department of History  
Fall 2023

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Office hours: Monday 9:30-11:30

### **History 800: MA Writing Seminar**

The central purpose of this class is for students to complete a **20-page draft** of their MA seminar paper or to turn a major research paper into an article. We'll work together to help you craft a research question, think about how your work fits in the historiography, identify sources available in Madison, and begin the writing process. The seminar provides you with a structure and a forum while you are writing and revising your MA. The work load is relatively light to free up as much time as possible for research and writing.

The MA seminar paper should demonstrate that you are capable of making an original argument of your own based on a close reading of primary sources (or, in certain fields, a combination of primary and secondary sources). It's not meant to be the final word on the question. The rule of thumb, which is generally applicable to graduate school, is you do the best that you can in the time that you have.

We'll also be doing some work on writing. The core objective of the seminar is for students to transform their research into compelling pieces of writing. Our readings will be short and will focus on writing strategies, methods, and techniques. We will discuss how to write powerful introductions, and pen conclusions that go beyond mere summaries. We'll think about how to write with confidence, make strong arguments, and discuss strategies to communicate effectively with scholars outside our fields of specialization. We will address how to use evidence convincingly – how much is enough and how should it be framed? And we'll pay close attention to how to conceptualize a lengthy piece of research. The goal is to provide structure, encouragement, and feedback to help students advance their writing projects.

NB: The seminar structure is flexible and can be adjusted to meet the needs of participants.

**Credit hours and Workload:** the credit standard for this 3-credit class is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week). This includes regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meeting times of 115 minutes per week), dedicated time reading, individual meetings with the instructor, and writing your MA seminar paper. You will spend most of these 135 hours working on your MA paper.

Unless otherwise noted the readings will be posted on the class Canvas page (look under "files").

**Week 1. Sept 6. Introduction and Course Requirements**

**Week 2. Sept 13. Writing and Research.**

Lynn Hunt, "How Writing Leads to Thinking," *Perspective on History* (February 2010); Steven Pinker, "Why Academics Stink at Writing," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 26, 2014; Jan Mieszkowski, "Here Comes the Prose Police: Why Academic Writing gets a Bad Rap," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 11, 2019; Laura Edwards, "Writing between the Past and the Present," *Perspectives on History*, January 1, 2011.

**Week 3. Sept 20. Crafting and Refining a Research Topic**

**Due Monday Sept 18 by 2 pm:** 2-page research proposal: What's the question I am trying to answer? How am I going to answer it? What is my hypothesis? How does my work fit into the historiography? (2 pages).

Read: Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 8th edition (Chicago, 2013), chapter 1 & 2.

We'll discuss Turabian and workshop your proposals.

**Week 4. Sept 27. Crafting and Refining a Research Topic (part II)**

Workshopping proposals part II:

**Presentation:** what are the key questions I am trying to answer? How do they connect to the historiography? Why will this research matter to those outside my field of expertise? What difficulties do I anticipate?

**Week 5. Oct 4. Discussion of a Sample MA**

Read: Conrad Allen, "No Cavalryman's War? Horsemen, Manhood, and Modernity in the British Army 1900-1939." MA Thesis, UW Madison, 2018

Look at the following MA that was later transformed into a journal article. Skim through both of them to think about how the journal article differs from the MA.

Terrence Peterson, "Safeguard the Empire: Vichy, Italy, and the Jews of Tunisia, 1940-1942," MA Thesis, UW Madison, 2011.

Terrence Peterson, "The 'Jewish Question' and the 'Italian Peril': Vichy, Italy, and the Jews of Tunisia, 1940-42," *Journal of Contemporary History* 50 (2015): 234-258.

#### Week 6. Oct 11. **Your Sources**

Sources: what sources do I plan to use for my paper? Do I expect any problems accessing them? Can I get them through the UW Libraries, Interlibrary loan, or online?

Assignment: submit a 1 to 2 page outline of your paper. Bring a copy of a key source to the class and be prepared to discuss it.

Week 7. Oct 18. **No class.** Work on your paper. Individual meetings with instructor

#### Week 8. Oct 25. **Writing introductions, Crafting an Outline, Claiming Significance (so what?)**

Assignment: **Hand in 3-4 pages of your MA**

Read: Wendy Laura Belcher, *Writing your Journal Article in 12 Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* (Los Angeles, 2019), 191-99; 280-97.

Read: Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *The Ideas that Made America* (Oxford, 2019), 1-6, 75-77; 133-134, and Mary Louise Roberts, *Sheer Misery: Soldiers in Battle in WWII* (Chicago, 2021), 65-67, 95-96, 123-27.

#### Week 9. Nov 1. **Style**

A faculty Associate from the Writing Center will be joining us.

Read, Belcher, *Writing your Journal Article*, 308-23

Week 10. Nov 8. **Situating your Work: Historiography and Methodology**

Read: Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (Norton, 2010), 1-43, 57-70, 82-94, 96-104.

Assignment: Come to class prepared to present an article/book chapter that discusses a methodological or historiographical approach that you adopt or challenge in your research paper.

Week 11. Nov 15. **No Class**. Write your MA. Individual meetings with instructor.

Week 12. Nov 22. Thanksgiving (no class on Wed). Individual meetings with instructor.

**Nov 23: 12-14 pages of draft due.**

Week 13. Nov 29. Peer Review and Presentations

Peer review of 10-page drafts. Read the suggestions about reviewing in Belcher, *Writing your Journal Article*, 202-08.

Second hour: Peer review group #3

Week 14. Dec 6. Presentations (15 minutes followed by Q&A)

Week 15. Dec 13 Presentations (15 minutes followed by Q&A)

December 18. **Final paper due: 20 pages of your MA**. Must include an introduction and preliminary conclusion.

**From the UW-History Graduate Handbook**

The History Master's Degree

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**Research Seminar Requirements**

Research seminars are designed to give students a large block of time to work on their research. The seminars introduce students to the life of a professional historian, provide them with the space and structure to undertake a research project, and give them the opportunity to present their findings in a conference-type setting. They may be field-specific or thematic.

All students must enroll in History 800 or a research seminar in their primary field of study no later than their third semester and complete the research paper by the end of their fourth semester.

1. Research paper: The minimum requirement for completing the research seminar is to submit a 20-page draft essay. Research papers in their final form for the Second-Year Review should be approximately 9,000 and no more than 10,000 words, excluding notes and bibliography.
2. The objective of the research paper is to demonstrate the student's ability to make an original, well-written argument based on a substantial use of primary sources or, in certain fields, a combination of primary and secondary sources.
3. Most students complete a two-semester sequence that consists of:
  - Three credits in a research seminar and an optional fourth credit of History 990 with their faculty advisor, who will advise them on the specific content of their research.
  - An additional one to three credits of History 990, with the approval of their advisor in a subsequent semester.
  - Occasionally students complete the full 9,000-word paper during the research seminar, in which case they will satisfy the research requirement without undertaking further work.
4. Research seminars are graded on an A-F scale. The grade is determined as follows:
  - If the student takes a research seminar and completes their research project in this seminar, the grade is determined by the seminar instructor.
  - If the student takes a research seminar, takes the optional fourth credit of History 990, and completes their research project within the semester, then the grade is determined jointly by the 990 instructor and the seminar instructor.

- If the student takes two semesters to complete the research project, the instructor of the research seminar determines the grade for semester one and the 990 advisor determines the grade for semester two. If the student has taken the optional fourth credit during the first semester, the grade for the one-credit 990 is determined by the 990 instructor with whom the student has registered for the second semester.