

10 Qualities of Good Historical Writing

Adapted from *A Short Guide to Writing About History*, Richard Marius and Melvin E. Page

1. Good historical writing has a sharply focused, limited topic.
2. Historical writing should have a clearly stated argument.
3. Historical writing should include original thoughts of the author.
4. Good historical writing conveys the same spirit as a good story.
5. Historical writing is built, step by step, on evidence.
6. Good historical writing always documents its sources.
7. Historical writing is written dispassionately.
8. The first and last paragraphs of good historical writing mirror each other.
9. Historical writing observes the common conventions of written English.
10. Historical writing speaks to its intended audience.

A Writer's Checklist: Revising your Historical Writing

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1. What is my primary motivation for writing this text/script?
2. What would draw a reader/viewer to this text/script?
3. Do I quote, summarize, and paraphrase sources that demonstrate my point of view? Do I have evidence for my argument?
4. Do I provide enough context to allow readers/viewers less informed than I am to follow my text/script easily?
5. Have I determined which of my sources are primary and secondary?
6. Where do I infer conclusions from the evidence?
7. Do I take contrary evidence into account? Have I been fair in the presentation of the evidence?
8. Are my transitions effective?
9. Is my opening interesting enough to draw readers/viewers into it even though they are not specialists in the subject?
10. Does my conclusion mirror my opening in some way?
11. Are my sentences clear enough to be understood at first reading/viewing?
12. Can I eliminate words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs? Can I make my writing more direct?
13. Can I make some sentences more vivid by using the active rather than the passive voice?
14. Do I repeat some words or phrases too often? Can I find other words or phrases to give variety to my prose?