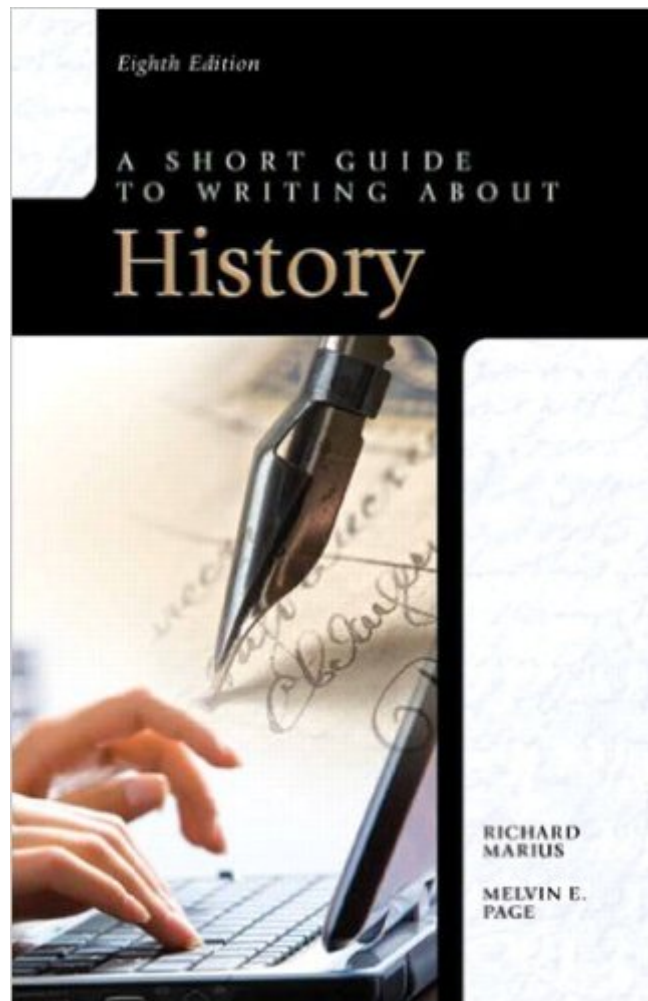


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# A Short Guide To Writing About History (8th Edition) (Short Guides)



## Synopsis

A Short Guide to Writing about History is an ideal complement for any history course intended to teach students to think and write like historians. This engaging and practical text will teach students how to go beyond reporting the basic dates and facts of their history books and show them how to infuse their writing with their own ideas and unique perspective. Covering brief essays and the documented resource paper, the text explores the writing and researching processes, different modes of historical writing (including argument), and offers guidelines for improving style as well as documenting sources.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Marius has written an extremely readable and informative book on the writing of history. He proceeds from showing readers what questions to ask in doing historical research into types of historical writing can be done, from descriptive to argumentative. However, the most useful part of the book is the chapter on sources and writing. He skillfully shows readers how to choose a topic and narrow their focus into a manageable paper. He also discusses the use of CD-Rom and Internet sources, a necessity for any good book on the writing of history in the early 21st century, particularly due to the increase in the reliance on Internet research by college undergraduates and HS students that are comfortable with this technology. The book also makes actually doing research seem like not such a daunting scary task, which at first thought it seems like for many undergraduates. The

one problem with this section is that Marius advocates the use of paper notes. As has been seen with many professional academic historians lately, the use of paper notes can end up costing the writer dearly, particularly with the use of a large amount of sources. Marius should have included a section on how to use a data base or other computerized note taking system. Marius also uses many examples to back up his points throughout the book, even publishing one complete paper and then commenting on its strengths and weaknesses in order to give the reader a better understanding. The remainder of the book is an extremely useful three chapters on writing mechanics as well as quoting and citing a variety of sources. I found the section on footnotes quite good and useful. This section will be especially useful for the undergraduate who arrives on campus without ever having to use footnotes while in high school. Overall, this is an outstanding book. The only real drawback is that since its publication (3rd edition) the sections on the Internet are in many ways obsolete. But with the ever changing technology and things available on the Internet, both good and bad, no book can keep up.

This book is very useful not only for the preparation of historical papers but for any research paper. Especially useful are the sections devoted to conventions about mechanics and grammar and suggestions about style. Also included are outlines for the proper construction of arguments and details addressing the modes of expression used in writing. I bought this book for a history seminar in as an undergrad and have found it helpful to me ever since as a technical guide to the proper way of writing. Highly recommended.

Richard Marius gives us in this short book an enthusiasm for the pursuit of the past that is simply infectious. Although the work is not an in-depth study of Historiography, it is a great introduction to the would be Historian on the very basic rules of researching and composing a paper on any historical subject.

*A Short Guide to Writing About History* is a book that has withstood the test of the time over the past two decades. Originally written in 1989 by the late Richard Marius, professor from Harvard University, the book has seen seven updated and revised editions. Marius passed away in 1999 and Melvin E. Page, professor at East Tennessee University, has continued the laborious task of keeping the book relevant as sources of information continue to evolve and appear. Page achieves the goal of keeping the guide short and, most of importantly, useful. History students need not put themselves through the monumental of task of sifting through the near-1,000 pages found in the

15th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style to determine how to write their research papers, because this short guide sums up most of what these students will need when researching. The book serves two purposes. First, for those not familiar with the basics of researching and writing papers, it provides breakdowns on how to gather information, best practices on recording notes, how to write, and finally, documented sources. Second, the book acts as an easy quick-reference for those already familiar with these concepts. Students unfamiliar on the basic question of where to start will get a good introduction on researching methods. For example, how to approach history with a "who, what, when, where, and why" mentality. In addition, how to narrow down topics and focus in on subjects that the student can tackle with their limited time and resources. The authors state, "The most common flaw in student essays is the topics are so broad that the essays have no focus" (pg 61). For example, the causes of World War II will definitely be too big for an essay. This is an issue I have experienced when doing my own research. The author provides some good approaches on narrowing topics such as changing the angle of vision. Instead of answer how World War II started, change the focus down to groups or even individuals and then re-ask the questions with the new, limited angle. A Short Guide to Writing About History may indeed be short, but it has longevity in its usefulness because it is perfect for refreshing one's self before approaching a new research assignment. The most helpful portions that I will refer to the most are the examples found throughout the book. Not only are there sample papers, but the book provides a concise "Writer's Checklist of Source Citations" which gives examples on how to cite some of the most commonly referenced materials such as books, articles, and journals. While this section is helpful providing some tricky situations such as how to document an author along with a translator, there is not an example dealing with volumes. While using this checklist over the past month in my own research, this has been the only area where it fell short. Volumes are common in historical research and Chicago Manual of Style has a quirky method for documenting them using "Vol." with a capital "V" in bibliography references and "vol." with a lowercase "v" in notes. Other than that, the checklist is nearly complete offering examples even in obscure sources like DVDs, thesis papers, and photographs. The full-blown paper examples in the back are also helpful. There is one research paper, a book review, and a short essay. In my experience, I have seen many teachers provide sample research paper examples, but few provide examples on book reviews or short essays. This, unfortunately, leaves students continually questioning themselves on the best way to approach these assignments. For reviews, the book provides guidelines on what to focus on as well as tips like "don't feel compelled to say negative things about the book" (pg 192). While pointing out inaccuracies or disagreements with the author is perfectly acceptable, "passionate attacks" are not

necessary (pg 192). In the realm of short essays--probably the most common assignment I have seen in my undergrad years--the book goes into detail on how to approach essays of 500 words or less. Though shorter than a regular essay, students should still answer the "who, what, when, where, and why" questions along with providing a clear thesis statement at the beginning. Even though the book is just barely over 200 pages, it still provides some in-depth analysis crucial to any student of history. "Historical fallacies" gets a whole section going into detail on the pitfalls that even published and accomplished historians use. For example, putting too much emphasis on a single cause to explain why an event occurred. The book provides a good fallacy example in that the South lost the American Civil War only because General Robert E. Lee lost at Gettysburg. While a student or historian may feel the need to express the importance of their particular topic of research, the book points out that "events were caused by complex influences, and you should take care to acknowledge those complexities" (pg 41). Another great fallacy tackled by the book is the notion of avoiding mistakes by learning about the past. Many students point to this concept as a reason to learn about history, but "new inventions, new ways of thinking, or new combinations of ideas can upset all predictions" (pg 42). Finally, the most common fallacy I have encountered in historical works, be they by students or professional historians, is the straw man, or the fake opinion. A straw man argument provides a writer with a "cause" to rally against, but since there is no one holding the opinion he is attacking, it is a waste of his and the reader's time. *A Short Guide to Writing About History* is a solid book. The examples are, for the most part, exactly what students will need. The checklist for citations will be the most used portion of the book and the paper, book review, and short-essay examples will give them solid comparisons when writing. The fallacies will help any researcher--regardless of their level--avoid the common pitfalls that plague even professional historians today. The biggest criticism I can provide on this book is the price. The \$38.00 price tag is hefty for such a short book. Some students may find earlier, used editions at a cheaper price to be just as helpful. Either way, the book is a useful tool for any history student and I will definitely keep it on my shelf.

History prof recommended this for help in writing research papers in history department. Compact and inspirational, the author makes his points by way of examples and citations from historians. Passionate about his subject area, he communicates this well and infuses it into his observations and recommendations for writing about historical topics. While the jury is still out on my first paper to utilize this resource, I already know I am a better writer of history for having utilized this fine resource. Just the idea of grabbing your reader and making him want to read the rest was useful.

Had to buy this to learn the specific way my teacher wanted our quotes. The book didn't give a specific way to quote, and it had quotes cited at page bottom in several formats. The book does give the general format for a history report, and is helpful for a beginner like myself.

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