

**Doing history: Research and writing in the digital age.** By Michael J. Galgano, J. Chris Arndt and Raymond M. Hyser. Boston, Mass.: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008, pp.184. ISBN: 9780534619534

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*Doing history: Research and writing in the digital age*, with its extensive coverage of the fundamentals of research, is capable of transforming a budding historian and a novice reader not only to a great one but also to a great reader, as well as a critical thinker and citizen. In their systematic approach to the writing of history, James Madison University Professors of History, Galgano, Arndt, and Hyser endeavour to explain to a beginner in the field of research the process of choosing a topic, locating sources, analyzing and interpreting such sources, and “then presenting the findings in an organized and clear manner” (p.ix).

The book consists of six chapters preceded by a preface and an introduction and followed by two appendixes and an index. Chapter one begins by responding to the question: “What is history?” However, the chapter in the words of the authors “goes beyond simply describing the discipline and the tools necessary to practice it by offering an overview of the rich variety of approaches historians use to study the past” (p.ix). For example, they raise the issue of the misuse of history, a practice that takes place when history is twisted to serve certain political ulterior ends. According to the authors, the difficulty of maintaining objectivity, of looking at the past with an eye devoid of personal prejudice and points of view, is yet another problem of historical inquiry. Through the discussion of the ideas of certain figures such as the German scholar Leopold von Ranke, and Karl Marx, along with the Positivist and Progressive schools, the authors provide an overview of the history of historical writing, emphasizing the nineteenth century as the century that gave birth to the modern “way of thinking about the past and writing history” (p.7).

In the second chapter, the authors present, as mentioned in their own words in the conclusion “a systematic framework to conduct historical research” (p.123). The chapter begins with some factors that assist the beginners in choosing a topic. These factors are curiosity, historical interest, imagination, and narrowing the topic. As the researcher thinks about his/her topic, and brainstorms, he/she becomes ready to produce, what the authors call, a prospectus. “The prospectus is a conversation in which the researcher proposes a topic and writes focused questions, terms, and ideas to initiate the search of bibliographies and other resources that shape this stage of the research process” (p.19).

Next, the authors deal with the research trail, or literature search. Instrumental in familiarizing the researcher with the major reference works available, the research trail is a “systematic identification and collection of all relevant materials available in print and online necessary to conduct scholarly research on a particular topic”(p.20). Thus, all the research trail enables the researcher to locate all secondary and primary sources necessary for the conduct of the study, a step before the interpretation and analysis of such sources begin.

In Chapter three, the authors, as stated in the conclusion, explore “the steps involved in understanding historical context, historiographical interpretations, and methodological approaches” (p.123). Since the volume of secondary sources can be overwhelming, the authors suggest that the beginner historian should ask a number of questions in his/her attempt to determine the usefulness of a secondary source. Such a battery of questions includes the knowledge of the author, the audience to whom the work is written, the date of the source, the publisher of the secondary source, and whether the source includes footnotes and a bibliography.

As for reading the secondary source, the authors propose that the beginner historian should read critically. As modern academic writings contain a thesis, where the central idea of the work is introduced, the authors also point out the importance of understanding the thesis, as knowing it is “requisite to understanding the reading” (p.40). The authors also state that the conclusion is no less important as it summarises “the contents of a monograph or scholarly article”

(p.40). Reading the introductory and concluding sections along with an understanding of the thesis are crucial steps in honing one's critical reading skills, necessary for the reading of secondary sources.

Chapter four is devoted to a discussion on primary sources. In assessing the usefulness of a primary source, whether written, oral, or visual, that could be used to advance the research project, the authors propose the following evaluation criteria for analysis: author, point of view, audience, purpose, tone and language, and finally significance. All primary source materials, regardless of their differing formats, must be scrutinized in light of such criteria. The researcher or historian in particular needs to constantly ask questions about these six evaluation criteria as he/she advances to construct a coherent and scholarly historical argument. Chapter four emphasizes writing as an ongoing process that "starts when research begins" (p.81). Hence, drafting, editing, and revising, and again drafting, editing, and revising, and again...go for several rounds before a satisfactory feeling *begins* to emerge.

The fifth and sixth chapters consecutively explore "the writing processes, finishing the paper and appropriate attribution of evidence" (p.124). In the final chapter the authors describe "how and why historians cite evidence", and offer "numerous examples of how to acknowledge sources for notes and bibliographic purposes" (p.124). Therefore, chapter six elaborates on the importance of footnotes, and bibliography in giving the research credibility, depth, and academic weight. In doing so, the authors, answer the questions *why* the researchers footnote, *when* they footnote, and *how* they footnote.

In their highly commendable effort to 'present a coherent, "nuts and bolts" introduction to historical methodology' (p.vi), and explain, in a lucid, well-documented, and well-presented manner, what the writing process entails, Professors Galgano, Arndt, and Hyser, have sculpted a marvellous monograph. The book certainly can be described as a milestone in the field of research and writing. Where relevant, the authors use examples of students' writings to illustrate a point discussed, a feature that adds to the inestimable value of the book by making it a practical guide to research and writing. *Doing History: Research and Writing in the Digital Age*, is a class of its own. The book can yield great benefits, not only to the

beginner historians or students of history but also to any researcher, in any field.