

The Five Is of History: Keys to Exploring and Explaining the Past
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1. Inquire
2. Investigate
3. Integrate
4. Incorporate
5. Interpret

1. Inquire about a significant question, issue, or problem to solve. In most cases, your instructor will give you guidance. As you grow intellectually, prepare yourself to generate more of the fundamental questions that you will explore. Ask “how can I make a contribution?” New sources, comparative perspective, application of theory?
2. Investigate the issues relevant to the topic and focus you have selected. Use specialized finding aids to locate primary and scholarly secondary sources. Google and other generic search engines are useless for serious historical research. Good analysis of any issue must be built on a bedrock of empirical evidence. In history, this means a rich mix of quality firsthand accounts (primary sources).
3. Integrate your information into logical, tightly focused topics, devoting a paragraph to each. Integrate a wide range of sources in support of each topic and show where your analysis supports or challenges existing historiography.
4. Incorporate the voices of historical actors by quoting directly from the primary sources. You legitimize your present-day interpretation of past events by linking your ideas directly to eyewitness accounts of the past. Your essay should reflect a conversation between the voices of the past, other scholars, and you.
5. Interpret the meaning of the materials that you have assembled. The “facts” don’t speak for themselves. It is your job as the historian to explain and analyze what the assembled evidence means. This is where you compare and contrast your analysis of the primary sources with the views presented by other scholars in the secondary literature.