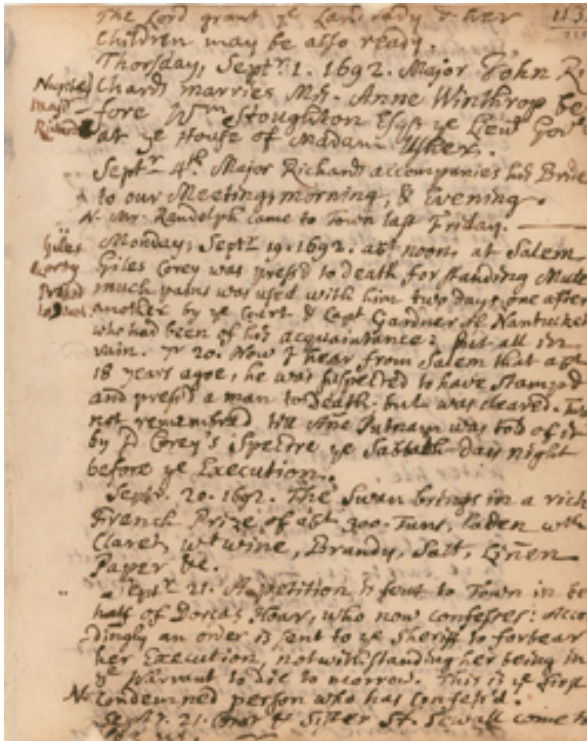


HI 190 - Tips for Historical Research

The hardest thing about starting research is distinguishing between what's important and what's irrelevant. You have to know what the book, or letter, or diary is about before judging which parts are important, and you have to read it before you know what it's about.

What if you take notes on the irrelevant bits and miss the important ones?

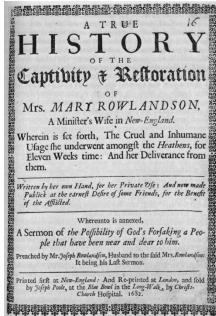


The answer is that you will take a lot more notes than what you will use in your term paper. You're feeling your way forward when you read a historical source, trusting your instincts on what is of potential relevance, erring on the side of taking too many rather than too few notes, and giving yourself the time to reread earlier passages when you grasp their relevance later.

The best notes are a combination of summary and word-for-word transcriptions of sentences, paragraphs, and whole pages, typed, written or photographed directly from the source you are using. If you have a laptop, take it with you into the Historical Society's reading room, since most can type faster than they can write. If you are taking notes from a published work, at the top of the page, record the author, title, and place, publisher, and date of publication. If you are taking notes on a manuscript, include the relevant information (Letter from Kanye West to Kim Kardashian, or, Samuel Sewall's Diary), the date, the name of the manuscript collection, the Box and Folder #s.

If you have a smartphone or digital camera, bring that with you. Digital photos are very useful when you need to refer back to a document or when you have limited time during

business hours and want to collect material for future study. Be careful though: many a young scholar has returned from an afternoon of mad photo shooting in the archive convinced that she/he has done serious research when the work has yet to be started! Make sure to take a picture of the label on each box when you start using it, and on each folder in the box. Be careful also when you upload your pictures from the camera to a computer (or other device) to load pictures in the order you took them so that you will be able to tell from which folder in which box they came.



As you read, keep a running summary of the work's content, taking care to designate the page numbers corresponding to where you find the material. Here are some examples:

1 - Whitfield describes landing on Martin's Vineyard, meeting Mr. Mahu (Mayhew), pastor of the church there, and, with Mahu as interpreter, speaking as well to the Indian Hiacoomes, who preaches twice each Lord's day.

3 - A letter written by Mayhew follows: Hiacoomes lived near the English settlement, was interested in the settlers, spoke frequently to Mayhew, was challenged by other Indians (and by Pake Ponesso in particular) and was struck in the face for speaking with Mayhew.

5 - A sickness came to many Indians, but Hiacoomes and his family did not fall ill. Their chief Myoxeo came to Hiacoomes to ask him about his single God.

Anytime you come across what seems to be an especially vivid or notable passage, record it word for word. These include passages that convey complexity or specificity that a simple summary might miss.

Your notes should also include passages that you think you might quote in your paper. Always put quotation marks around these verbatim passages. Here is an example:

7 - Mayhew meets an Indian named Towanquatick, a member of the Sagamores. Another Indian tried to kill him with an arrow at night, but according to Mayhew God made the arrow only split his nose, as opposed to piercing the heart, which was clearly the intention, and while there was much blood, he was spared:

[8] "The next morning I went to see the Sagamore, and I found him praising God for his great deliverance, both himself and all the Indians, wondering that he was yet alive. The cause of his being shot, as the Indians said, was for his walking with the English; and it is also conceived, both by them and us, that his forwardnesse for the meeting was one thing, which with the experience I have had of him since) gives me matter of strong perswasion that he beares in his

brow the markes of the Lord Jesus.”

Note the spelling: *forwardnesse* instead of forwardness; *perswasion* instead of persuasion; *beares* instead of bears, etc. When you transcribe, record everything as you see it, including the punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Superior historical research is the fruit of two qualities of mind. The first is a willingness to work patiently and steadily: to reconstruct the mental universe of a writer who died centuries ago or to stare at a difficult script until words emerge from the tangle of lines. The second is a readiness to follow your hunches and intuitions: to trace out the complex web of influence that links a particular book, letter, painting, or sword to the vanished world that produced it. These assignments are designed to help you cultivate both qualities.