



Elise Chenier

August 10 near Vancouver · Edited

Historian Hivemind: when writing scholarly articles, how do you know when to stop? I am seriously hoping to answer this question for a web site on the research and writing process that I am currently finishing off. The designer thought I should answer this question, and I figure we all must have our own 'tells'. What is/are yours? The information is intended to benefit graduate students who are writing and submitting their first article, and is not just about the writing process, but also about making an argument. When do you know you have been to enough archives, have enough evidence, read enough of the secondary source literature. I will guess the number 1 reason is a deadline, so just skip to #2!

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Colette Colligan page/word limit. Keep the constraints of the forum in mind

August 10 at 4:12pm · Unlike · 1



Colette Colligan balance of argument to detail. If it is just about adding more evidence or detail, time to stop.

August 10 at 4:13pm · Unlike · 2



Joy Dixon To be completely honest, I probably only stop when I hit the deadline. . .(if it weren't for deadlines I would revise every piece into infinity.) [If that answer is cheating, I will add that I plan things out in a very detailed outline that starts by calculating major points in relation to the page or word limit. In most academic writing I average 250 words per paragraph, so a 10,000 word article allows for something like 4 sections of roughly 10 paragraphs each. . .and so I am always "done" when I hit the end of my outline.]

August 10 at 5:11pm · Edited · Unlike · 2



Elise Chenier I added this after Joy and Colette replied: The information is intended to benefit graduate students who are writing and submitting their first article, and is not just about the writing process, but also about making an argument. When do you know you have been to enough archives, have enough evidence, read enough of the secondary source literature.

August 10 at 5:59pm · Edited · Like



Joy Dixon Two further thoughts (though I will also admit that it is way more fun to talk about writing than to actually write -- thinking now of the unfinished review essay on my desk): 1. There is no "done." There is only "done for now." (That came out more Yoda-like than I intended.) 2. I usually decide that I have reached "enough" when I am no longer routinely surprised by what I read - when I am familiar enough with the archive and the literature to guess (more or less) what is coming next.

August 10 at 6:35pm · Unlike · 4



Matthew Hayday I guess that "when I am fed up with reading it and want it off my desk" isn't all that helpful for graduate students. But in terms of the "enough archival material", that's a rather tricky one. I've tended to approach it from the perspective of whether the article, as it stands, makes what I think to be an interesting and new contribution to the literature, and whether there is sufficient archival evidence to support my argument. I don't expect an article to be comprehensive in its coverage of a subject (and I feel the same way about book manuscripts), but it should be an important/significant contribution to the literature on the topic and advance the scholarly conversation. And I never expect it to be absolutely perfect, because peer reviewers will /always/ ask for some sort of changes, whether minor or major.

August 10 at 6:49pm · Unlike · 2



Ian Carter I tell my grad students that their essays should be structured around a critical move they want to make in relation to existing literature, and that the evidence they offer should always be in service to that move. So you have to do enough research to have an idea of what conversation it can contribute to, and then you stop with the archives. Also, "done" means "ready to send off for the constructive advice of peer reviewers."

August 11 at 5:29pm · Unlike · 1



Ian Carter When reading the secondary source literature I look for the point at which I can anticipate a significant number of the citations to core claims about the field. That seems to suggest that I've taken the field's temperature fairly well.

August 12 at 12:40am · Like



Elise Chenier Ian Carter, Matthew Hayday and Joy Dixon, May I use your answers for the site, with you credited? The site is interracialintimacies.org and your answers would appear near the end of the site (scroll right, go to the writing part) One of my objectives i... [See More](#)

September 1 at 2:09pm · Like



Ian Carter No problem, Elise. Glad to be of help.

September 1 at 9:37pm · Unlike · 1



Matthew Hayday Sure!

Yesterday at 4:00am · Unlike · 1