

HIS420: RUSSIA'S PATRIOTIC WARS

FALL 2011

RESEARCH PROPOSAL/PAPER ASSIGNMENT AND GUIDELINES

Write a 15-18 page research paper on some aspect of Russia's experience of the Napoleonic and/or Second World Wars.

In their book *The Craft of Research*, three prominent humanities and social science scholars (Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams) describe the task of doing research in the following way:

- You must settle on a *topic* specific enough to let you master a reasonable amount of information: not "the history of scientific writing," but "essays in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society* (1800-1900) as a precursor to the modern scientific article."
- Out of that topic, you must develop *questions* that will guide your research and point you toward a *problem* that you intend to solve.
- You must gather *data* relevant to answering your question.
[Booth, et al., *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29]

Further, they note that this process means being able to finish the following statements.

1. *Topic*: I am studying _____,
2. *Question*: because I want to find out who/how/why _____,
3. *Rationale*: in order to understand how/why/what _____. (48)

And finally, it means thinking about research not only in terms of "finding out" and "understanding," but of "showing" and "explaining" the results to readers in a way that is compelling. (63)

So, first think about a general topic in which you're interested: a specific battle or campaign? The homefront? The experience of rank and file soldiers? The experience of officers? The response of artists? The view of allies? Or something completely different?

Next, think of the kind of questions that might be interesting to try to answer.

Then, think of the kind of sources that will give you insight into answering those questions.

You will first hand in a **research proposal and bibliography**, due (via email) October 21, by 4:00 pm.

By this point, you should have done several things. You should have focused in on a research problem: that is, not just a big question, but a specific question that **your** research will answer. You should have identified a primary source base for your research, and looked into it enough to be sure that it will allow

you to answer your research problem and to have a sense of how it will help you. And you should have a sense of any secondary literature that will help you place your problem in a larger context.

Thus, the proposal (which should be 2-3 pages long) should reflect this by doing the following:

- explain the problem you are investigating
- explain your source base, and how it will help you solve your problem
- give a basic hypothesis of what your final thesis might be (i.e., guess at your answer/solution based on the examination you've already done)
- explain how your specific focus is part of a larger set of questions (i.e., place your plan in the context of the existing secondary literature)

It should also be written formally.

Your bibliography should be presented in an accepted bibliographic style, preferably Chicago/Turabian.

Your final paper should build on these initial approaches to your topic, taking into account my comments on the proposal. You should rely most heavily on primary sources of some kind in developing your paper and argument.

The final paper is due December 6, during the final class of the term.