

Written contribution: the structure

The most common form of presenting the results of an historical project is a written one. An outline is the first requirement in turning mountains of chaotic material into an orderly written contribution.

Of course, an initial outline is created during the research process, when you consider which questions you wish to pose on the theme. But the structure of the written contribution takes things a step further – it includes, generally speaking, an introduction, main section, conclusion and appendix.

1. Introduction

In the **introduction**, you prepare your reader for what he or she should expect to encounter in your work. Here, you name your theme, your questions and goals and the focal point of the work; you provide information about the sources you have consulted and your methods of research; you justify the structure of the work and disclose any problems you encountered. An introduction is especially effective if it also manages to make the reader curious about the work – for example, by beginning with a quotation that introduces and ties in with the theme.

Introduction

2. Main section

The **main section** of the work contains the content-related presentation, which is based on the original outline from the research phase. It is not uncommon to change the original outline again at this point. One makes a general distinction between chronological (time-based) and systematic (thematic) outlines. With a **chronological outline**, it is not sufficient simply to use dates as chapter heads (My school in 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956). Rather, the events must be stressed (for example, 1955 – the denunciation of a teacher). In a **systematic outline**, you would orient your structure toward content-related aspects, which can also cut through the chronology (for example, Sport – a boys' subject?). While a chronological outline emphasizes developments over time, a systematic structure emphasizes certain thematic focal points, whose chronology can be of secondary importance.

Main section



3. Conclusion

The **conclusion** serves to summarize the most important results and to emphasize special experiences. Here, it makes sense to answer the questions raised in the introduction. The conclusion can also present your reflections on which problems remain open and what further research could be done to answer these or other questions. In addition, the conclusion can present your ideas on how this local example might illuminate the broader regional context, what the importance of this historical example might be for the present and, finally, what was particularly surprising about the contents of your project.

Conclusion

4. Appendix

In the **appendix** you show where you got the information presented in your work. So the following belongs in your appendix:

- a complete list of all literature, including all books you have used;
- a source index;
- a list of all your interviews;
- a list of Internet sites you have consulted.

If you couldn't find room for them in your text, you may also include important documents in your appendix: charts, diagrams, pictures, interview transcripts, copies of particularly important papers. If you choose to include them here, you must refer to each document that appears in the appendix within the body of your text.

Appendix