

The Planning and Writing of a Biography

Getting Organized to Write a Biography

Before you write a biography based upon your research, you need to organize your information and thoughts into categories. Typically, a biography is written in a topical and chronological order. The ten sources for this project have provided you with insight into the following aspects of his life:

- Early life and family
- Personal interests, personality, and non-political career
- Political career
- Later life

The next step is to complete a pre-write exercise that helps you organize the information under the appropriate categories or topics. However, before you panic and envision having to write an extensive biography, you can select ONE (1) of the above topics and complete a pre-write on it. Exactly what form your pre-write takes is up to you. Whatever works best for you is what you need to do. Outlines, webs, and lists are some of the more common types of pre-writing forms. Be sure to think in terms of paragraphs because they are the basic units in writing.

Writing the Biography Itself

The next step is to write the biography. As you do so, two things must be kept in mind as you write. **First, put some feeling into your writing.** Do not just chronicle the facts of his life, but allow your viewpoint - your sympathies and impressions about Gadsden and his actions - to color your narrative.

Second, you need to document the information in your biography. What does this mean? It means that you must tell the reader as (s)he reads your biography where you found **specific information** and **quotes**. So how do you do this? There are three ways to document or cite your sources – footnotes, endnotes, and parentheticals or internal notes. They are named for their location in relation to the written text:

Footnotes/Endnotes

Gadsden was a staunch patriot whom fellow congressman Silas Deane said “leaves all N England Sons of Liberty, farr behind.”¹

The numeral one tells you where to look to see where this quote can be found. If you look at the foot or bottom of the page, it is called a footnote, and if you look at the end of the paper, it is called an endnote.

Parentheticals (also known as internal notes)

Gadsden was a staunch patriot whom fellow congressman Silas Deane said “leaves all N England Sons of Liberty, farr behind” (Smith 35).

The information tells us that if we looked on p. 35 of the book edited by Smith and listed in our bibliography (called a “Works Cited” page) then we could find this quote.

So what happens if you get information from two different sources and incorporate it in a single sentence. There are several options, but for this biography, choose one of the following and consistently follow it:

Option 1

Gadsden was best known as a merchant, but he was also a planter who owned a 90-slave rice plantation in Georgetown (Edgar 260) and at his death owned slaves valued at around \$14,000 (Inventory 366-67).

Option 2

Gadsden was best known as a merchant, but he was also a planter who owned a 90-slave rice plantation in Georgetown and at his death owned slaves valued at around \$14,000 (Edgar 260; Inventory 366-67).

What if you get all of your information in a particular paragraph from one source.? You can cite the source at the end of the paragraph. For a quote, you need to cite the source immediately following the quote.

The best comprehensive source on this style of documenting papers is the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* . I would recommend that you procure a copy of this book for your future academic career, but you will not need it for this project because I will provide the information you will need for this biography assignment.

The list on the following page shows how to write the sources correctly in the bibliography (called “Works Cited” when using parentheticals) and the shortened MLA citation.

Bibliographic Format

(known as "Works Cited")

Charleston Courier, August 31, 1805.

Edgar, Walter B., ed. *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives: The Commons House of Assembly 1692-1775*. Vol. 2. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1977.

Gadsden, Christopher. "To General Washington." 10 August 1781. *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden 1746-1805*. Ed. Richard Walsh. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1966. 169-171.

Gibbes, R.W. *Documentary History of the American Revolution: Consisting of Letters & Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, From Originals in the Possession of the Editor, and Other Sources, 1764-1776*. Vol. 1. 1855. Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, 1972.

Inventories D 1800-1810. Charleston County, SC: 366-367.

Porcher, F. A. *A Memoir of Gen. Christopher Gadsden, Read Before the South Carolina Historical Society*. Charleston, SC, 1878.

Smith, Paul H., ed. *Letters of Delegates to Congress: August 1774 – August 1775*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1976.

South Carolina Gazette, June 2-9, 1766.

Weir, Robert M. "Two Letters by Christopher Gadsden, February 1766." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 75 (July 1974): 169-176.

Wills of Charleston County, SC 1671-1868. Vol. 30 (1800-1807): 869-873.

Parenthetical Format

(a ___ means a page # is needed)

(*Charleston Courier*)

(Edgar ___)

(Gadsden ___)

(Gibbes ___)

(Inventory ___)

(Porcher ___)

(Smith ___)

(*SC Gazette*)

(Weir ___)

(Will ___)

How Your Biography Will Be Evaluated

Your biography will be evaluated using the following rubric:

Six Trait Grading Rubric

I. Viewpoint with Ideas and Content to Support It

- 5 – The paper stays focused and addresses the topic fully incorporating accurate details. The writing has life in it with a definite point of view present. It shows more than tells.
- 3 – The writing has little emotion and/or conviction of opinion and does not address the topic fully. There are not enough details or inaccurate ones used to support the limited viewpoint present. It tells but doesn't really show.
- 1 – The writing is general and lacking details. Details may be inaccurate. You are just beginning to figure out what to say.

II. Organization

- 5 – The paper has a beginning, middle, and end. There is logic in its discussion of opinions, ideas, and content and the paragraph is the basic unit.
- 3 – The paper could be organized better, and the thoughts and/or details could be in a more logical order.
- 1 – The paper is jumbled and confusing. There doesn't seem to be a logical order.

III. Voice

- 5 – The writing shows that the author cares about the topic and is willing to take a risk. The result is writing with personality and style.
- 3 – The writing is pleasant to read but is safe with very little of the author's personality.
- 1 – The writing seems distant, uninvolved from the topic and is bland or boring.

IV. Word Choice

- 5 – The words used make the paper clear, visual, and accurate.
- 3 – The word choice doesn't really capture anyone's imagination or attention.
- 1 – The words and phrases are misused or confuse the reader.

V. Sentence Fluency

- 5 – The sentences are varied in length, have different beginnings, and flow together when read.
- 3 – The sentences are clear, but sound choppy or awkward when read. They may be wordy or sound too similar.
- 1 – The sentences are poorly written leaving out words, and some sentences are so repetitive that the paper is boring to read.

VI. Conventions

- 5 – There are few grammatical, capitalization, spelling, and documentation errors. Paragraphing is done well.
- 3 – This paper has a number of grammatical, capitalization, spelling, and documentation errors. Paragraphing is attempted but could use work.
- 1 – This paper has not been proofread well and its many errors make reading tedious and frustrating. Paragraphing is not even tried.

1 = Not Yet (F or 60%)	Ideas	___ X 40% =
2 = Emerging/Beginning (D or 70%)	Organization	___ X 20% =
3 = Developing/Growing (C or 80%)	Voice	___ X 10% =
4 = Maturing/Growing Well (B or 90%)	Word Choice	___ X 10% =
5 = Strong/Excellent (A or 100%)	Sentence Fluency	___ X 10% =
	Conventions	___ X 10% =

Final Grade =