HIST Tutorial: Tips and advice for starting historical research

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What makes a worthwhile history project is really not that different than what makes a good chemistry project.

1. Is it a new topic that hasn’t been previously covered in the literature?

2. Is it a topic that would be of interest to either historians or the greater chemical community?

3. If it has been previously covered, can you offer something new? New insight? More detail? Correction of previous errors? etc.

4. Can you find/collect enough critical resources? Can you handle resources in other languages?

The approach to history research is often not the same as scientific research (i.e. you cannot carry out experiments to collect data).

As such, a history project might often start with the discovery of a new source of information (i.e. data) which can be used to re-evaluate a known theory or question.
Typical topics for projects include:

- Biography of a particular scientist (i.e. *the life of Dave Lewis*).
- The history of a particular discovery/theory (i.e. *the macromolecular theory of polymers*).
- The history of a field within chemistry (i.e. *physical organic chemistry*).
- The history of a class of chemical species (i.e. *organic dyes*).
- The history of an institution (i.e. *Nobel Foundation*).

Of course, many projects are not limited to a single such topic and might span several different subtopics.

Thus, in addition to considering available sources, one has to consider the scope of the topic.

- Is this a short-term or long-term project?
- What is the envisioned output product? (i.e. talk? journal article? book chapter? book?)
- Can the project be broken down into smaller, more manageable pieces?

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- Gallica (at the Bibliothèque National de France) - https://gallica.bnf.fr

Databases of dissertation information:

- Online university library catalogs

- ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Abstracts from 1743 to present; full text for works added since 1997; selected full text for works prior to 1997).
Where to Publish?

**History of chemistry journals**

- *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry*
- *Ambix*
- *Substantia*

**History of science journals**

- *Isis*
- *British Journal for the History of Science*
- *History of Science*

**Chemistry journals that publish history papers**

- *Angewandte Chemie International Edition* (Essays - Invited or contributed)
- *Journal of Organic Chemistry* (Perspectives - Invited only)

**History of chemistry book series**

- *SpringerBriefs in the History of Chemistry* (Springer)
- *Synthesis* (University of Chicago Press)

**Publishers of history of chemistry books**

- Oxford University Press
- University of Chicago Press
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- Opportunities to submit papers and participate in discussions
- Opportunities to associate with chemists and historians around the world interested in the history of chemistry and related topics
- Opportunities to be a member of the HIST leadership team, participate in various HIST committees, (for example, be a member of an awards selection committee)

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- The HIST Award for Outstanding Achievement in History of Chemistry (presented at the Fall ACS meeting)
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