

On paper, writing a thesis is a fairly straightforward affair. The first textbook I had for historical writing could hardly be called a book; it was small enough for one to easily lose in a pile of Las Vegas travel brochures. Despite its diminutive size, it was comprehensive to a point of exhaustion. The salient points were writing a thesis at the outset, then a historiography, and finally to approach the body in sections. My professor (and the book) assured me that so long as I kept my thoughts organized and got a head start, writing a thesis would be a piece of cake. Still, I could not help but feeling afraid. Just two years out of high school, I had to perform a task in the model of the work of college professors. Despite, or perhaps because of my fears, I jumped headlong into the maw of the unknown. Armed with no experience whatsoever in constructing an argument longer than five pages or so, I decided to make this project my life. I thought that copious amounts of honest effort would surely overcome whatever personal deficits I might be saddled with.

It turns out that I was right. Not only did I complete the assignment, something that I could not even conceptualize in the early going, it was the most rewarding experience of my academic life. I can identify my own industry as the cause for this success but in order to truly apply myself, I had to have the ability to do it. What enabled this was the library. One of the great misgivings I had was the way I would go about uncovering evidence for my position. To my surprise, there was a welter of useful resources all easily accessible provided I point myself in the right direction. This did not mean simply entering a term in a search engine and then scouring the results. By looking at document links, newspaper texts, and bibliographies, I was able to fan out my project's scope in unexpected ways. A newspaper might refer to a key figure, event, or place that would not come up in queries with the obvious key terms and would open up a whole new avenue of inquiry with a more tightly defined net. The greatest finds of my project include the uncovering of an original German text by a critical scientist on the Apollo program, congressional records chronicling the heated moments of pitched partisan debates, original committee inquiries made by bureaucrats at NASA, and even popular movies made to sell the NASA cause to the public. I expected this assignment to be arduous and formulaic like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle but in the library, it became wildly organic, never failing to keep pace with my flourishing imagination. A complete argument requires the support of a thorough and widely diverse body of literature. Through this project I learned how to compile this. Though some of the quality of my paper can attributed to the fact that I toiled over it for thousands of hours over the period of nearly a year, that I was capable and learned how to quickly identify possible ways to proceed is what I specifically owe the depth of this paper to.

Though part of the reason why I feel so much pride in presenting this experience is that I managed to overcome a daunting task, there is far more to the story. On a personal level, what I managed to do instilled me with self confidence. I was a terrible high school student and did not have any direction let alone ambition. That I managed to slay this beast redoubled my commitment to History and makes me confident that I can successfully cultivate an immersive lifelong affair in the subject. I know now that research is by no means an impossibility. With a deep reservoir of sources and the courage to take the first step, all my pessimistic preconceptions were dispelled in short order. One of the facts about academics is that a serious engagement in almost any field requires research proficiency. Since completing this thesis, I have applied my new skills in a variety of different classes and settings, each subsequent attempt bringing about even more refinement to my method and am planning for a future in this discipline that I would not even dare imagine even a year prior.