



**RevolutionNJ**

ENGAGE THE PAST. SHAPE THE FUTURE.

**“A Bundle of Silences: Reimagining Interpretive Approaches to the Past”  
FAQ and Additional Resources**

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**Interpretive Theme: Historical Process**

**Webinar Title: Historical Process**

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**FAQ:**

1. What are best practices when undertaking historical research on the internet?

The best practices for conducting online historical research mirror the approach to traditional research conducted in archives and libraries. Research begins with listing the who, what, when, where, and how of your topic. Addressing those questions provides a list of keywords (e.g., New Jersey, Revolutionary War, damage claim). These terms are combined with known resources, such as those listed in the accompanying syllabus. Online sources of historical data such as university libraries, local history archives, and so forth are explored first. If these fail to provide enough useful information, other online sources may be consulted.

2. What are useful steps for evaluating online historical resources?

Many online sources are not subjected to the same scholarly rigor as books and journal articles (e.g., peer review, editing). As such, we can apply some simple tests like those outlined by in James Loewen’s *Lies Across America* book. This begins with trying to verify the accuracy of information. Non-academic sources can still reference other works, and the use of hyperlinks to support assertions is an important guide for determining the accuracy of online information. This can be mitigated if the author is an authority. For instance, a history professor’s personal blog about their research process is likely to contain verifiable information. The objectivity of the author is also important. Is the writing attempting to sway your opinion, does it resort to emotional language rather than historical reality? Other aspects to consider are the date of the source and its length. Older and/or short information should always be verified.

3. Ok, but what are the real steps to evaluating online historical resources?

In an era of fake news, the answer to this question has received renewed attention. As such, we have several practical steps to follow. First, pay attention to the website’s address. Does the website seem credible, does it attempt to copy another site, perhaps by adding an extra domain to the end (e.g., com.co)? Read the About Us or some similar section. Determining the intention of the author(s) is often vital to ascertaining credibility. If no such section exists, question the material. As mentioned in Question 2, look for references (hyperlinks or otherwise) in the text. If no reference to additional information is

presented, the quality is likely to be low and information provided inaccurate. Also, even if quotes or references are provided, apply the same rigor to those sources. A small group of individuals can quickly create a “citation circle” making their views appear valid, but if they are only referencing one another, this should be questioned as well. Finally, other researchers may have left clues if comments are allowed, refer to them and see how others are reacting.

#### 4. What about Google, DuckDuckGo, or Wikipedia?

These and similar sites have become important resources for online historical research. Search engines like DuckDuckGo and Google provide an important method for finding historical resources. Consider refining your search by using [scholar.google.com](https://scholar.google.com) or [books.google.com](https://books.google.com).

Today, Wikipedia is a useful resource as well. Remember that Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, it is not original research. Use Wikipedia as a finding aid. Well-researched Wikipedia articles provide important links to additional resources, including both primary and secondary sources.

#### 5. Are there unique aspects to working with oral histories that researchers should be aware of?

Absolutely! Remember, oral histories are both primary documents and personal recollections. As with all historical sources, if your goal is to determine objective historical facts, verify information in an oral history. However, just because a date or other historical fact is inaccurate in an oral history does not mean the interview is useless. After all, understanding how individuals remember and process historical events is key to writing modern narratives that craft archival-based stories which also explain why people do the things they do.

### **Additional Resources:**

#### 1. Historical Organizations and Societies

American Historical Association - <https://www.historians.org/>

Oral History Association - <https://www.oralhistory.org/>

Society for Historical Archaeology - <https://sha.org/>

New Jersey Historical Commission - <https://nj.gov/state/historical/>

#### 2. Sources of Historical Data

NJ Historical Commission Resources - <https://nj.gov/state/historical/his-resources.shtml>

Rutgers University NJ Historical Maps - <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/portals/njmaps/>

Historical Maps of New Jersey - <https://mapmaker.rutgers.edu/MAPS.html>

Bird's-Eye Views - <https://www.loc.gov/maps/?fa=subject:new+jersey%7Csubject:aerial+views>  
NJ Oral Histories - <https://libguides.rutgers.edu/c.php?g=933713&p=6731979>  
NJ Sanborn Maps - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?fa=location%3Anew+jersey>  
NJ GIS Data - <https://njgin.nj.gov/>  
New Jersey State Archives - <https://www.nj.gov/state/archives/index.html>  
FamilySearch (Free Census Records) - <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>

### 3. How-To Guides

NCSU Guide to Research - <https://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/HI598/histresguide.htm>  
Best Practices for Oral History - <https://www.oralhistory.org/best-practices/>  
Citing Maps - <https://guides.library.upenn.edu/c.php?g=476326&p=3256218>  
QGIS for Archaeology (and history) – <https://www.youtube.com/AnthroYeti>

### 4. Further Reading

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Richter, Amy G. 2015. *At Home in Nineteenth-Century America: A Documentary History*. New York: NYU Press.

Ritchie, Donald A. 2014. *Doing Oral History*. London: Oxford University Press.

Rodríguez, Gloria García. 2011. *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Documentary History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

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Wolf, Eric R. 1982. *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.