

Unit 1: Video 2 Transcript

Q9: What is the most important thing a first year student can take away from history courses?

A: I think if I were speaking to a first-year student in history, I would encourage that student to think outside the box. Push yourself to think about new angles and new ways of understanding sources. We have a tendency to sort of fall into a sort of pattern that we've seen other people follow. And so we feel safe and secure there. And if other people have done these—looked at these particular sources and looked at them in a particular way, then that will work for me. And that's fine. You're getting your feet wet. You're trying to learn the discipline, and that's good. But don't be afraid to be just a little bit adventurous. Think of ways that you can bring something new to the way that we think about history. Because ultimately that's what really good history is about. It's not about just repeating the same old thing over and over again. It's finding those new little bits and pieces and fitting them together in new and exciting ways. So I think that's one thing I would say.

And the other thing I would say is, don't be afraid of dipping into a little bit of theory. And that's scary. I mean, that's scary for graduate students. It's scary for professors. I mean, sometimes you pick up a book and you can't even read it. You have no idea what the person is trying to say. You just know that it's very, very intellectual and probably very wise. But start in small steps and build in terms of theory. Talk to your professors. Talk to grad students, and really get yourself in the game. And then you'll be in a position, I think, by the end of your degree, to be making those kinds of significant insights that will make people talk about your work.