**HIST 1130: Introduction to U.S. History**

**Final Project Topics**

Use this guide to help you develop a manageable topic for your final project course packet. Let’s take a theoretical example in which you want to make a packet about **the history of pandemics in the United States**. Here are ways you can refine that topic:

**Go smaller.**

*“I’m going to make a packet about pandemics in the United States during the 1900s, how they spread, and their lasting impact on American history.”*

This is too broad. You only have 8-10 sources with which to tell your interpretation, and you’re going to have to familiarize your reader with several different pandemics which is going to probably stretch you too thin. You are welcome to choose a topic that spans multiple decades or even the whole century/centuries, but if you go this route you’ll need to make the topic itself much narrower, perhaps by focusing on a single location (ex. Boston) and/or a very particular aspect of the topic (ex. vaccines).

**Get more specific.**

*"I’m going to make a packet about the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919 and how it changed American society.”*

This is better in that it narrows down to a manageable-sized topic (a single pandemic), but “how it changed American society” is still too vague. What parts of American society? Family life? Small businesses? Hospital procedures? Focusing on one or two elements is going to allow you to make a much more coherent project.

**Make an interpretation.**

*"I’m going to make a packet about the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919 that documents the policies that government leaders took to combat the pandemic.”*

This is a strong topic. You could find speeches by the President or governors of states, public health announcements, editorials, etc. However, it can be improved by making a clearer interpretation or message rather than just describing what happened. What, specifically, are you going to say about the response? That it was effective? Ineffective? Something else?

**Not enough evidence or available primary sources.**

*"I’m going to make a packet about the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919 that shows how immigrant communities were more negatively impacted by the pandemic than native-born ones because of racist government policies.”*

This is a strong topic in that it is focused and offers a clear interpretation. But after doing some research on this topic, maybe you find that you just can’t find enough evidence to make the case, or can’t find enough primary sources online that will allow you to compellingly tell this story to your reader. Back to the drawing board!

**Just right.**

*"I’m going to make a packet about the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919 that compares how two cities responded to the pandemic. My interpretation is that San Diego’s strict and swift policies were effective whereas Philadelphia’s response was ineffective and resulted in much more devastation.”*

This is a quite specific topic - a single pandemic in two cities - with a clear message about the importance of public health policies in combatting the disease. You’re not going to be able to magically arrive at this interpretation just by thinking about it. Getting to this level of specificity will require you to do background research on the topic ([such as finding this article, which you would then cite in your bibliography](https://www.pnas.org/content/104/18/7588)), coming up with a few different options, and choosing the one that you think you can find the best sources for. In this case, there a variety of different primary sources you can find online to support your interpretation, from newspaper articles about deaths in the two cities to photographs of hospitals or quarantine signs.