

## A Few Resources for Writers Who Research • For the Field's End Roundtable



Compiled by Wendy Call • March 2011

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### WEBSITES

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[The British National Archives](#) website has a deep, wide range of resources for writers with stories set in the old country.

[The California Historical Society](#) has a particularly rich collection of material.

Prose writer [Philip Gerard](#) has developed an entire university course around the subject of research for creative writers. He has very generously made much of the course material available free, online. From his home page, click on the link at the bottom of the page. A good basic intro to the subject (and the practice).

[History Link](#) is a Seattle treasure. Editor [Priscilla Long](#) sometimes offers workshops on researching and writing local history.

Though the wonderful online literary magazine [Identity Theory](#) is no longer updated, its author interviews are exemplars of the form.

The [Internet Public Library](#). A portable library.

The [U.S. National Archives](#) has a useful and user-friendly website.

[The Poynter Foundation](#) offers (online or at one of their workshops, offered in Florida and sometimes nationwide) everything you ever wanted or needed to know about journalism, reporting, and the sort of research that journalists do.

Erika Dreifus has some excellent resources on researching historical fiction at her website, [the Practicing Writer](#). As a bonus, she has researched everything from MFA programs to grant sources. Her monthly e-newsletter of professional opportunities for writers is excellent.

[Victoria Research Web](#) is a good online guide for writers looking for information about the Victorian era.

### ARTICLES AND MAGAZINES: GOOD ADVICE AND GOOD EXAMPLES

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“[The Art of Creative Research](#),” by Philip Gerard (*The Writer's Chronicle*, October/November 2006) This article, from the journal of the [Associated Writers and Writing Programs](#), is a good introduction to how a creative writer does research.

[Arts and Letters Daily](#) Online only. A staggering amount of reading material crammed into this *daily* online magazine.

[Common-Place](#) is a lovely, free online-only journal about life in America before 1900.

[Columbia Journalism Review](#) is a bimonthly print magazine for those interested in journalism and how it works – or doesn't. This magazine published by the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University often has information on research.

[Poets & Writers](#) is the bimonthly of the literary writers' scene occasionally has short craft articles on how to do research.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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**Guides to the Craft of Research**

Gerard, Philip. *Writing a Book that Makes a Difference*, (Story Press, 2000)

An excellent guide to writing your first book – also includes a bit on completing book-related research.

Long, Priscilla. *The Writer's Portable Mentor* (Wallingford Press, 2010)

One of the best prose craft books I've ever read. And the author is a master of writerly research.

Kramer, Mark and Wendy Call, editors. *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide* (Plume, 2007)

Designed primarily for journalists who want to improve their storytelling techniques, just about anyone writing nonfiction can find useful advice here. A few essays relate to research.

Malcolm, Janet. *The Journalist and the Murderer* (Vintage, 1990)

A cautionary tale about why it's important to get it right.

Metzler, Ken. *Creative Interviewing: The Writer's Guide to Gathering Information by Asking Questions* (Prentice Hall, 1996)

Designed for journalists-in-training, this book is a good, basic introduction to conducting interviews.

Prose, Francine. *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and Those Who Want to Write Them* (Harper Perennial, 2006)

A different kind of research – but one that will greatly improve your writing.

Rowland, Robin. *The Creative Guide to Research: How to Find What You Need...Online or Offline* (Career Press, 2000)

Though very dated when it comes to online research, this book is a helpful introduction to the topic.

**Literary Examples to Follow**

Hochschild, Adam. *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

Excellent example of effective research, scene-setting, and telling a complicated story extremely accurately and well.

Martínez, Rubén. *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (Henry Holt, 2001)

Good example of both paper and personal research put to the service of a good story.

Urrea, Luis Alberto. *Devil's Highway: A True Story* (Back Bay Books, 2005)

Stunning example of the dramatic possibilities of a deeply researched subject.

Root, Jr., Robert L. and Michael Steinberg. *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* (Allyn & Bacon, 199 first edition, now in multiple editions)

Pick up a used edition (this book is expensive) to see how a number of writers incorporate research into their writing.

Sims, Patsy, editor. *Literary Nonfiction: Learning by Example* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

The editor has heavily annotated stories by top nonfiction writers. She occasionally refers to how they have put their reporting and research to work.

**LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES: GOING PLACES**[American Antiquarian Society](#)

This is the country's largest archive of printed materials from pre-1900 America. Anyone can visit their archive in Worcester, Massachusetts. Five artists and writers each year receive paid fellowships for a month's immersion in the archive. Some of their collection is available through their website.

[Library of Congress](#)

If you can finagle a trip to the Other Washington, I highly recommend time (it's free!) in the nation's most beautiful library, with the nation's best reference librarians. Otherwise, much is available online or by mail. Reference librarians are available online and the digital collections are excellent.