

## Reflective Essay

As a history major with a passion for world travel, I studied abroad in Ireland during my sophomore year of college. While I was there, I fell in love with the country's rich history. After I returned stateside, I found a class at University of Maryland on the English Civil War (1642-1651). As soon as I saw this course, I knew I had to take it because this war had such a large impact on Ireland. In this class I was assigned a research paper, so when I started searching for a subject to write about I thought back to my trip and remembered how intrigued I was about a castle I visited in County Kilkenny. The castle had breathtaking halls and parlors that made me feel like I was taking a trip back to the seventeenth century; therefore, I sought to find out who lived in the castle when the war took place. I learned that a man named James Butler, an English earl, resided in the castle, and as it turned out he had a major role in the war itself. Consequently, I focused my research paper on his life and his impact on the war.

When I began investigating Butler, I used techniques that I had learned in a Maryland library seminar, which I had attended earlier that year. I started off by exploring the University of Maryland's library catalogue looking for any and everything to do with Butler's life. When I found a pertinent piece of information on the library's website, I would record the location information and then use the links below the book or article in the "subject" area of the webpage to take me to other relevant information about the topic. These subject links on the website were crucial for finding relevant sources on my topic because without them it meant that I would have had to explore every single page of the search records to find what I was looking for.

After I found everything on the website, I went to McKeldin Library to pick up my sources. When I used a source, I would examine its historical authenticity based upon a couple of factors, such as if a college publisher printed the book and if the author's bibliographical information was based off of other historical authorities. I was taught that most books printed by college publishers are reliable for research. Also, if the author referenced other historical books on the subject matter, it most likely meant that this would be a dependable source.

Most of the other information that I could not obtain in "hard" format I found on the research port link on the Maryland library website. I used databases such as JStor and EBSCO to locate numerous journal articles on my subject matter. I knew that the articles posted on these databases were primarily scholarly works, so verifying the legitimacy of the text was rarely needed. The only thing I checked were the articles' bibliographies to see if they were sound sources to use. These online databases were a crucial aid in my effort to complete my research.

There were two people that helped assist me throughout the research process. They were Professor Baron, my teacher for the class, and Dr. Casway, an Irish history specialist. Both of these professors helped me locate sources and guided my writing process. I would go to them if I had questions or if I hit a slump. Through their vast knowledge of the subject area, they helped me locate sources I would never have thought of, which helped transformed my average paper to an outstanding piece of work.

This research project has taught me a tremendous amount of information that will be beneficial for my future. Next year I will be working on my Masters Degree here at Maryland. The skills I learned while working on this paper, such as locating sources, talking to experts in the subject field, and navigating online databases will be crucial for completing my degree. I will also be able to use these skills further down the line when I become a high school history teacher. Not only will I be able to find applicable information for teaching my class, but I will also be able to teach my future students the same skills for their own research projects. My

hopes are that these skills will come full circle one day when my students go off to college and complete research on their own.