

HIST Tutorial: Tips and advice for starting historical research

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Where to Start?: Picking a Project

- What makes a worthwhile history project is really not that different than what makes a good chemistry project.
 1. Is it a new topic that hasn't been previously covered in the literature?
 2. Is it a topic that would be of interest to either historians or the greater chemical community?
 3. If it has been previously covered, can you offer something new? New insight? More detail? Correction of previous errors? etc.
 4. Can you find/collect enough critical resources? Can you handle resources in other languages?
- The approach to history research is often not the same as scientific research (i.e. *you cannot carry out experiments to collect data*).

Theory/Question → **Collect data** → **Analyze** → **Conclusions**

As such, a history project might often start with the discovery of a new source of information (i.e. data) which can be used to re-evaluate known theory or question.

Typical topics for projects include:

- Biography of a particular scientist (i.e. *the life of Dave Lewis*).
- The history of a particular discovery/theory (i.e. *the macromolecular theory of polymers*).
- The history of a field within chemistry (i.e. *physical organic chemistry*).
- The history of a class of chemical species (i.e. *organic dyes*).
- The history of an institution (i.e. *Nobel Foundation*).

Of course, many projects are not limited to a single such topic and might span several different subtopics.

Thus, in addition to considering available sources, one has to consider the scope of the topic.

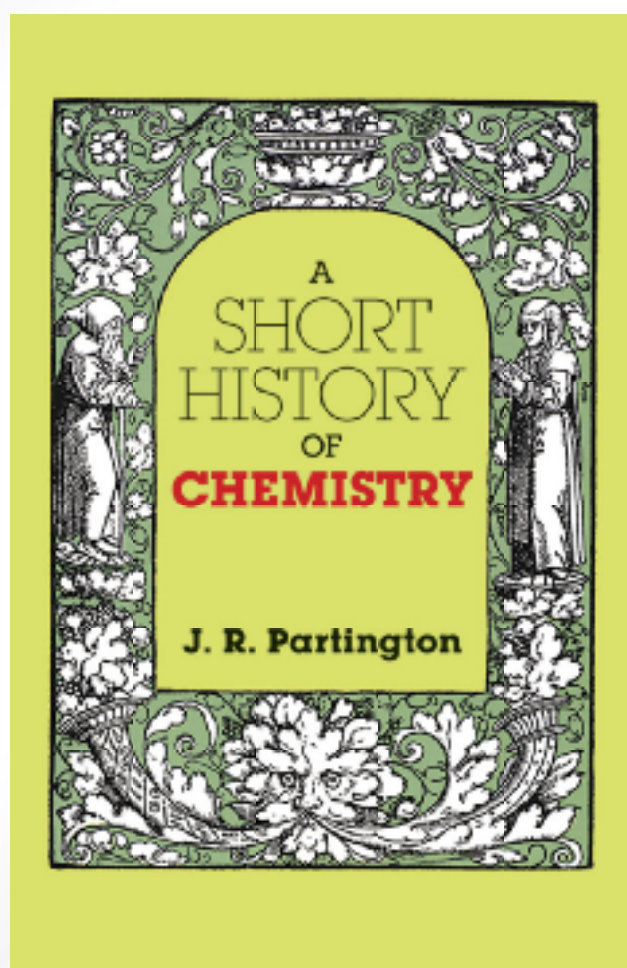
- Is this a short-term or long-term project?
- What is the envisioned output product? (i.e. talk? journal article? book chapter? book?)
- Can the project be broken down into smaller, more manageable pieces?

Sources - General Reference Books

J. R. Partington. *A History of Chemistry*, Volumes 1-4. Macmillan: London, 1961-1970.
(Reprint published by Martino Publishing in 1998).

Used copies of the original go for \$100-300 per volume (*if you can find them*).

Used copies of the reprint go for ~\$500 complete

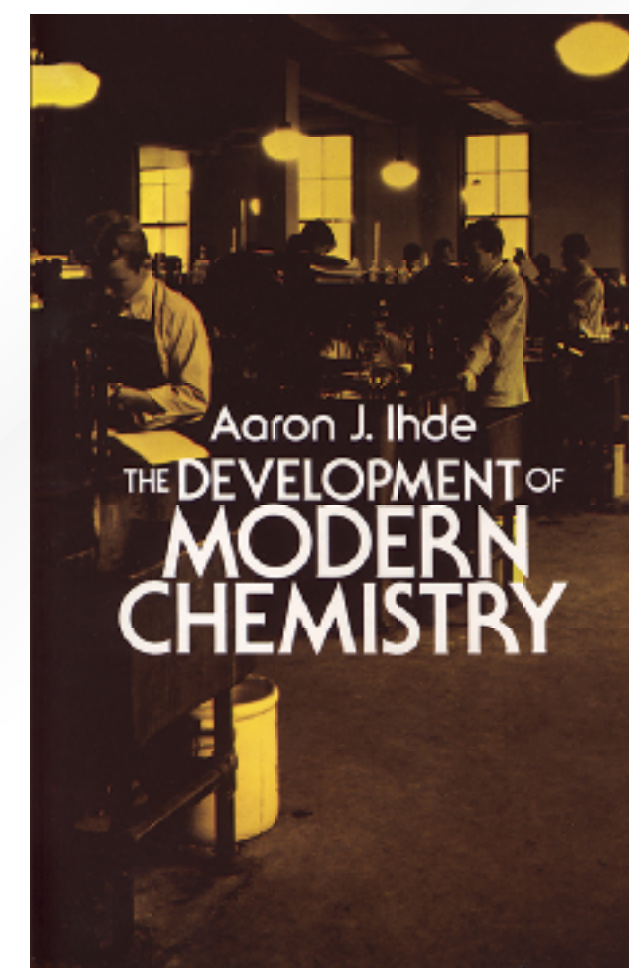


J. R. Partington. *A Short History of Chemistry*, 3rd Ed. Macmillan: London, 1957.

Paperback reprint available from Dover Publications (\$24.95)



William H. Brock, *The Chemical Tree: A History of Chemistry*. W. W. Norton & Co.: New York, 2000 (\$24.55)



Aaron J. Ihde. *The Development of Modern Chemistry*. Harper & Row: New York, 1964.

Paperback reprint available from Dover Publications (\$28.95)

Databases of electronic copies of old books and journals:

- Google Books - <https://books.google.com> (some books/journals can only be read online and not downloaded)
- Hathi Trust Digital Libaray - <https://www.hathitrust.org> (some titles and/or years cannot be read, but can still be searched. Full books cannot be downloaded without a membership, but individual pages can be).
- Internet Archive - <https://archive.org/index.php>
- Gallica (at the Bibliothèque National de France) - <https://gallica.bfn.fr>

Databases of dissertation information:

- Online university library catalogs
- ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (*Abstracts from 1743 to present; full text for works added since 1997; selected full text for works prior to 1997*).

History of chemistry journals

- *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry*
- *Ambix*
- *Substantia*

History of science journals

- *Isis*
- *British Journal for the History of Science*
- *History of Science*

Chemistry journals that publish history papers

- *Angewandte Chemie International Edition* (Essays - Invited or contributed)
- *Journal of Organic Chemistry* (Perspectives - Invited only)

History of chemistry book series

- *SpringerBriefs in the History of Chemistry* (Springer)
- *Synthesis* (University of Chicago Press)

Publishers of history of chemistry books

- Oxford University Press
- University of Chicago Press

Most Importantly - Join HIST!

As a member of the Division of the History of Chemistry
of the American Chemical Society



HIST provides

- Activities at national meetings (symposia, open technical discussions, award luncheons and dinners) that allow you to meet colleagues, exchange ideas, initiate collaborations, meet the Editor of the Bulletin for the History of Chemistry
- Opportunities to submit papers and participate in discussions
- Opportunities to associate with chemists and historians around the world interested in the history of chemistry and related topics
- Opportunities to be a member of the HIST leadership team, participate in various HIST committees, (for example, be a member of an award's selection committee)

Awards - Recognize Individuals and Achievements of Historical Significance

- The HIST Award for Outstanding Achievement in History of Chemistry (presented at the Fall ACS meeting)
- Citations for Chemical Breakthroughs (awarded annually for seminal publications, patents and books)
- Outstanding Paper Award (awarded annually for papers published in the *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry*)

As a member you will:

1 Receive Publications

- The *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry* (contains full articles, announcements, notes, editorial commentary)
- HIST Abstracts of ACS national meetings
- *Divisional Newsletter*

2 Take advantage of Discounts

- 40% discount on any ACS publication produced by HIST
- 40% discount on ACS-Chemical Heritage Foundation *History of Modern Chemical Sciences Series*
- Discount on ACS national meeting abstracts

3 Be part of the HIST subdivision of Archaeological Chemistry

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