

Primary Source Checklist

What are primary sources?

Primary sources are original records or objects that provide first hand testimony or direct evidence about an historical event or topic.

How do you analyze primary sources?

Good 'reading' of sources involves asking questions and using your 'historical imagination'.

Use this checklist to help get started

Purpose

- Who is the author? What's their place in society?
- Why did they prepare this document? What's at stake for them?
- Do they have a thesis? What is it?

Argument

- What is the text trying to do? How does it try to achieve this?
- Who is the intended audience? How does this impact the author's strategy?
- Is the author credible and reliable?

Presuppositions/Values

- How do the ideas and values in the source differ from our own age?
- What preconceptions do we as readers bring to the text?
- Do the differences in values impact the way we understand the text?

Evaluating Truth Content

- How does this source support arguments from secondary sources?
- What unintended information does the document reveal?
- Which parts are the author's interpretations? Which are facts?

Relate

- Compared to other sources, what ideas are repeated in them?
- What are the major differences?
- Which is more credible and reliable?