

By this point in the semester you are gaining familiarity with how to explore a focused question and what to do when you encounter historical documents and other primary sources. Now you'll do the same thing on a slightly larger scale for this project, which is a 5-page essay based on *three* primary documents that have something in common.

Select **THREE** primary source documents from our textbook. Develop a question for historical investigation. **It should be the kind of question you need all three documents to answer.** The answer to the question will be in the form of a thesis statement. Your question shouldn't be just a question of fact ("what happened?") but rather of interpretation ("How? Why? What did it mean?") demonstrating strong critical and historical thinking. In your paper, you will correctly and completely cite (using correct Chicago-Style footnotes) the documents you use, just as we do in the SkillBuilders.

Schedule

Week of October 14 – Choose your documents, begin to formulate your question. Use the "Historical Thinking" module on Blackboard to help you analyze the documents as evidence and formulate a thesis.

October 26 – A PRINTED draft of your paper is due in class for peer review (in-class workshop)

November 2 – Final essay is due in class in hard copy (or emailed BEFORE class)

The paper is worth 20 points of your final grade.

Structure and Guidelines

If you need help with paper structure, here's a suggested format you can use (optional). Begin your paper by **ASKING** the historical question you investigated or **INTRODUCING** the historical problem you are interested in. This does not have to be in the actual form of a question. The opening paragraph should contain a clear and debatable **THESIS STATEMENT** (i.e. the answer to your question). (approx 1/2 page)

Then **DESCRIBE** your historical sources, placing them each in its historical context, demonstrating that as you explored the documents, you have addressed some of the List "A" and "B" questions provided below. To be clear: you do not have to answer these questions **IN** your actual paper, unless they make sense for your argument – they are just to guide your close reading of the documents. (approx 2 pages)

Then **ANSWER** the question you designed, **USING EVIDENCE** from the documents – in the form of quotations, summary, description, or comparison. Remember to "frame" your quotations (no orphans!) to make it clear which document they come from, and provide footnotes to all quotations. (approx 2 pages)

Provide a **CONCLUSION** that summarizes your **THESIS** and the relevance of these documents to it. (approx 1/2 page)

Total length = 5 pages. Use footnotes (as we do in the Skill Builders), without an additional Works Cited list. Please do not attach a cover page, but do make sure your paper has a useful & interesting title (i.e. not "Primary Source Project").

Step 1 in Writing This Paper: Read the “Writing in History” Module on Blackboard

Step 2 – Apply Critical Thinking / Historical Analysis Tools to your documents

Questions to Ask Primary Sources

Primary sources do not speak for themselves—they have to be interpreted. You do not just simply read about the past, you must investigate the past by asking questions. You must be the detective, and interrogate the document. These questions may help *guide your interpretation* as you read and think about your chosen documents – you **do not** need to address all of these in your paper.

LIST A – Start with these kinds of basic questions each time you encounter a new primary source. Analysis requires you to OBSERVE what is really there (without judgment or personal opinion) + REFLECT + QUESTION

Who created this primary source? What do you know about the creator?

When was it created? Why? For what audience originally?

How did we get this document? Was it intended as a public/published or private document?

What is the main idea? Is the document making an argument and if so, what does it argue?

Is it prescriptive (i.e. telling you what people thought SHOULD happen) or descriptive (i.e. telling you what people thought DID happen)?

Whose perspective is it written from? Does it tell you about the beliefs and actions of the elite, or of “ordinary” people?

Why are you looking at it now? What historical questions can you answer using this source?

Summarize this source’s CONTEXT: the historical situation in which it was produced

Summarize this source’s CONTENT: its major point or meaning

Summarize this source’s CONSEQUENCES: its effects, significance or importance in history

LIST B - Here are some other useful questions a historian might ask of a primary source.

What was going on in the world, the country, the region or locality when this was created?

Can you tell what its original physical form was?

How much time has elapsed between the document’s creation and the event it portrays?

What do you see that you didn’t expect, or that goes against your initial assumptions?

What powerful or important words or metaphors are expressed? What does the creator do to get her or his point across?

What assumptions does the author make?

Is the message explicit, and are there implied messages as well? I.e. is there a subtext as well as a text?

What do you know or can find out about the author? Race, sex, class, occupation, religion, age, region/country of origin, political beliefs? Does any of this matter? How?

What are the benefits of using this kind of source? What are its limitations? What does it NOT reveal?

What other questions do you have about this source?

How might you verify the information in this document?

Draft due Oct 26

Final paper due Nov 2

Does your paper do this?

- ✓ **Ask** a clear question, state a clear problem, or present a clear thesis statement right in the introductory paragraph
- ✓ **Describe** all three sources, using appropriate historical context
- ✓ **Answer** the question or **support** the thesis **using evidence** from the sources
- ✓ **Conclude** by summarizing your argument and how the chosen documents support your thesis

Does your paper have these?

- ✓ Title
- ✓ At least 5 pages in length
- ✓ Page numbers
- ✓ Correct Chicago-Style footnotes
- ✓ 3 related/connected primary source documents
- ✓ A thesis that meets the checklist criteria provided in class

Did you do this before printing?

- ✓ Read the paper out loud
- ✓ Insert page numbers
- ✓ Run spell-check

Reminder: the assignment asked you to do the following as you researched an answer to a self-designed historical question, using 3 primary source documents from the Hewitt/Lawson textbook: ASK a clear question or ADVANCE a clear thesis argument, DESCRIBE your sources, ANSWER your question using evidence from the sources, and provide a CONCLUSION that summarizes your argument and how these documents help support your thesis.

	<i>4-5 Points Good to Excellent</i>	<i>2-3 Acceptable</i>	<i>1 Weak</i>
Thesis	Proposes an answer to a clear, well-developed question; thesis statement meets all the stated criteria	States a thesis, but may be vague, unsupported with the given evidence, or expresses a personal belief or moral judgment	Thesis simply states historical facts, or paper does not actually develop from a clear question 0 = thesis is absent
Evidence	Sources are well described, set in historical context accurately, and with enough information from them to develop a comprehensive analysis	Sources are partially described but historical context may be partial. Information is taken from sources with some evaluation and analysis, but not enough to be thorough	Information is taken from sources without any interpretation or evaluation, rather treated simply as fact 0 = does not use 3 sources as evidence
Organization	Paper has a clear organizational structure throughout its 5 pages (has intro and conclusion + the middle flows well, with clear transitions between ideas and sections)	Paper has a partially constructed organizational structure; some parts may be confusing or disordered	No organizational pattern is observable; paper does not flow logically from section to section, or is missing an introduction or conclusion. Reader has to work to understand what the paper is saying. 0 = paper is not 5 pages
Writing	Uses sophisticated, elegant writing style appropriate for strong academic writing, and is free of major grammatical errors. Footnotes correctly cite sources using Chicago Style.	Uses formal style appropriate for academic writing and does not contain errors that seriously detract from the quality of the writing. Footnotes are present but might contain minor formatting errors.	Writing uses informal or conversational style inappropriate for academic writing and/or contains numerous grammatical or stylistic errors. Footnotes are missing necessary information. 0 = lacks footnotes