

## How to analyze a primary document

Speeches listened to orally or read are important parts of history. A historian can learn a lot about a situation from what is said and what is also not said by a famous man or woman of history.

By looking at a speech or letter in an analytical way many new truths can be found. History is skewed by those who write it. A true realization of events can be made by any educated person.

Here are a few simple steps on how to analyze a primary document

1. Who is the author? The presenter or writer of a letter or speech tells a lot on what the document will be addressing. Every person famous or not sees their situation as the righteous or correct path. You must look at the bias of the writer and the bias of the listener.
  - a. What is the profession of the author?
  - b. What is the bias the author brings?
  - c. Why did the author create the speech/document?
2. When was it given? Sometimes when history is studied, people tend to place the entire story in front of them and forget that certain events have not happened, or the event has not been fully realized. Making a time line of the events that have happened, and then a timeline of events that occurred after the document helps the reader understand the importance of the speech or letter.
  - a. When was it written or created?
  - b. What are the circumstances surrounding the document?
3. What is the letter about? Exactly what is the body of the work? What is the core of the letter? The document or speech was given for a specific purpose.
  - a. What is the content of the letter
  - b. Summarize the document: What are the key points of the document? Explain why you believe these are the key points.
4. To whom is it written for? The audience of a speech or document can tell a lot why the document was created in the first place.
  - a. Who is the document/speech specifically intended for?
  - b. Why was it directed to this person or group?
  - c. What reactions if any did the author intend to incite?
  - d. What is the bias of the receiver of the document/speech?

5. Finalization. Many things can be said and not said in a primary document. We all know that sometimes things are communicated without having to say a word. That is the power of the document, essentially why we study the document.
  - a. What are the overall messages or intent of the document? Give examples.
  - b. What was the historical reaction or events that occurred after the document?
  - c. Did the document have any influence to the history that followed it?
  
6. Reflection. This is your opinion. Just like watching a movie, listening to music, observing art, or anything that incites emotion; you have an opinion.
  - a. What is your opinion of the document? This is open ended; please cite examples to your opinion.