

Study Aids – Source Analysis Papers

This study aid should help introductory students write papers analyzing primary sources in Prof. Berkhofer's courses. If you have never written a source analysis paper for a university History class before, it would be a good idea to first examine the [Reading Primary Sources](#) study aid in order to figure out how to read the sources you will use in your source analysis paper.

This page only offers suggestions for focused short writing assignments of about two pages. Students who are constructing longer source analysis essays or research papers (especially in upper-division History courses), should also look at the [Paper Writing](#) study aid, which contains more complete advice for such assignments.

Even so, this page offers some useful suggestions for students looking to start their source analysis papers.

Writing a Source Analysis Paper: The Ten-Step Process

There are many things that go into writing a good source analysis paper. One might compare it to building a house. Think about it: if you do not take the time to plan for construction, the house will fall. Writing a good thought paper is similar. Here is a ten-step process to help you write a better source analysis paper. These guidelines will help you in writing any short essay.

- 1) Before reading the documents, write down the assigned question that you are going to address in your paper. Read this question several times to yourself. The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking about what your answer will be, before you begin reading.
- 2) Read the documents. Meanwhile, jot down any evidence from the documents that you might want to use in the paper.
- 3) Write a thesis statement that answers the assigned question.
- 4) Write down several sub-themes that you would like to address in the paper. Initially, write as many as you think of. Then pick the two most interesting subthemes that you would like to discuss.
- 5) Write an outline, like one listed below. After completing this outline, you'll find that the paper is virtually written. All you have to do now is write the first draft.

Suggested Source Analysis Paper Format:

A. Introductory paragraph

1. Write a lead sentence that gains the reader's attention. Example: When speaking of families, it is important not to neglect the issue of sexual behavior.
2. Introduce your thesis or primary argument. Example: The American Revolutionary War was less of a social revolution than it was a fight for economic autonomy.
3. Introduce sub-arguments or sub-themes that you are going to use to support your thesis.

B. Body of the paper

1. Discuss the sub-themes that you identified in the introductory paragraph, in separate paragraphs.
2. Write down page numbers of the book (document reader or textbook) that you're going to use to support these sub-themes.

C. Conclusion

1. Restate your thesis and sub-themes.
 2. Write any closing comments.
- 6) Write the first draft of the paper.
- 7) After you've completed writing the first draft, the hard part begins. Yes, it's time to proofread.
- 8) When proofreading, you want to correct several things, which I've listed below:

Spelling—Most word processors have a spell-checking feature, but do not rely heavily on them.

Use a dictionary, to correct any words that you are not sure about.

Usage—Be sure that you are using the word that you intend to use correctly.

Examples: there/their/they're, no/know, it's/its, lead/led, or any other homonym

Punctuation—Use periods, commas, semi-colons, colons, em-dashes (two hyphens), when necessary.

Verb tense—to improve the flow of your writing, choose a tense (i.e., past, present, future) and stick with it. Most historical writing speaks of figures from the past in the past tense ("John Hancock said...").

Paragraph construction—Think of each paragraph that you write as presenting a complete idea. Thus, you want to form a topic sentence that each subsequent sentence relates to. Then you want to make sure that the last sentence of each paragraph, flows into the first sentence of the following paragraph.

Words of hesitation—Try to eliminate words that connote a sense of hesitation (e.g., maybe, might, perhaps, possibly) unless you absolutely have to use them as qualifying language.

For more thorough editing, see the [Style Sheet](#) guidelines and the [Paper Writing](#) study aid.

9) After proofreading for these things, go back, and read your paper aloud. This process will allow you to hear any inconsistency that you did not pick up earlier when reading silently.

Meanwhile, ask yourself the following questions:

- a. Do my thesis, sub-themes, and conclusion make sense?
- b. Do I support all of the statements that I've made with evidence from the readings?

10) This last step is probably the most important. Have someone else read your paper. Often a fresh eye will catch things that you did not. I will be happy to read drafts of your paper during my office hours.

Congratulations! You're ready to turn in your paper.

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