

History 7B Primary Source Paper Instructions

Overview:

Primary sources are documents created in the historical time period, by participants or observers living in that time period. Typical primary sources are letters, diaries, speeches, government documents, photos, artwork, etc. For each Primary Source Paper, you are asked to identify 1-3 primary sources on a topic in U.S. history that interests you and write a brief, 1000-1500 word essay (roughly 3-4 pages, but check "Word Count"), in which you use the primary source/s as evidence for your own original argument/observation/claim about the topic.

Deadlines:

Primary Source Paper #1:

2/27: Primary Source Paper Worksheet due in class

3/13: Primary Source Paper #1 due on Canvas by 11:59pm

Primary Source Paper #2:

(No worksheet required this time, but you are welcome to submit one for feedback at least one week ahead).

5/8: Primary Source Paper #2 due on Canvas by 11:59pm

Steps to Completing the Assignment:

- 1) **Identify a topic and primary source/s that interest you.** You are welcome to choose a topic and primary source/s assigned for class. There are also many primary sources available online. A good place to search for primary sources on a range of U.S. history topics is the [Library of Congress' Digital Archives](#). If you would like help identifying primary sources for a particular topic/question that interests you, let me know, and I can help you identify online sources. If you identify primary sources on your own, be sure to run them by me first.
- 2) **Learn about the historical context.** Though your essay will focus on primary source evidence, you need to understand the historical background/context for your topic and for your primary sources in particular. The secondary sources assigned for class and lecture material may be sufficient. Does your topic relate to any larger historical questions or themes discussed in class? You are also welcome to do more background research, but extra research is not required for the assignment and *should not take up too much time or space in your essay* (no more than 1-2 paragraphs). Make sure that you use reliable sources, and that you cite all sources that you use (see handout on citing sources).
- 3) **Read and analyze your source/s carefully.** The goal is to put yourself into the historical context and perspective of the author of the source/s, while also reading critically for point of view, bias, etc. To guide you in this task, I have provided a Primary Source Paper Worksheet (see attached). Two weeks before Primary Source Paper #1 is due (see deadline above), I will ask that you fill this out and bring it to class (one analysis chart per source you plan to use; print out extra copies from Canvas if

you need them). I do not require that students complete a worksheet before Primary Source Paper #2, but I strongly recommend that you do so.

- 4) **Identify your main point/argument.** Every college-level essay needs to be organized around a main argument/observation/claim. To determine your argument, you might consider what important historical question/s your primary source/s might help us answer about your topic. This question should be fairly specific, while still being historically significant and open to interpretation. It will usually start with a “How” or “Why.” The argument of your paper will be your own, original answer to your question. The reverse side of the Primary Source Paper Worksheet is intended to help you with this task.

Ex.: Q: “How did Anne Hutchinson and Thomas Hutchinson go about challenging authority in colonial society?”

A: “Anne Hutchinson and Thomas Hutchinson goals were very different, but both challenged colonial authority by celebrating the common man.”

- 5) **Identify specific examples in the primary source/s that support your argument.** Read back over your primary source/s and select specific examples that support your argument, or that would seem to refute your argument (so you can respond to counter-arguments). In your essay, you will want to cite and paraphrase (describe in your own words) most of these examples. In such a short essay, you will only use direct quotations if they are short --1-2 lines--and perfectly capture an idea.
- 6) **Outline.** Decide how you can most effectively organize your essay to make your main point (and respond to any counter-arguments). In general, students will find it most effective to follow a 5-paragraph format: Intro paragraph (with thesis statement), 3-4 body paragraphs (one supporting point/idea per paragraph), conclusion.
- 7) **Rough Draft.** During this stage, try not to obsess over every word, or to get stuck trying to make your writing sound “smart”. Your focus should be on communicating your ideas clearly, rather than sounding a certain way. Imagine you are talking to a fellow classmate and trying to explain your argument to them. Turn off that critical “editing voice” in your head while you get your ideas down on paper. You can always revise once you have a draft.
- 8) **Revise.** Make sure you leave time for this important step. Take a break from your paper and come back to it to revise. Now that you have written your paper, do you need to revise or rewrite your thesis statement? Do you have transition sentences that clarify the connections between your points and your main argument? Try reading your paper out loud to see if the sentences are clear and direct. Keep in mind that simple, direct sentences are preferable to complex but confusing ones. Place subjects before verbs. Use the simple past tense where possible. Use the “word count” feature on your word processing program to make sure you have at least 1,000 words.
- 9) **Cite your sources.** Use footnotes or endnotes to cite any sources you use in your essay. Provide a Bibliography at the end of your paper, in which you provide bibliographic information for each of the sources you consulted, formatted using MLA Style (see handout on citing sources).

- 10) **Check for plagiarism.** Go back and make sure that there are no phrases, sentences, or paragraphs in your essay that are not your own. Instead, paraphrase (put into your own words), and cite (indicate where you got the information/idea). See the Citing Sources Handout for more information. Remember, the purpose of the paper is to engage in the process of historical inquiry, not to produce a perfect, publishable masterpiece! Using someone else's words or ideas in your paper as if they were your own--WHETHER YOU INTENDED TO OR NOT--will result in a zero. I will be able to tell! So go back and check!
- 11) **Submit your essay on Canvas.** Click on "Assignments" and then on "Primary Source Paper." Follow instructions there for uploading a file to Canvas. If you have problems, please let me know, but be sure to log in ahead of time so you are not doing it at the last minute. Trouble using Canvas will not be accepted as an excuse for late papers (unless the site itself is having technical difficulties).

Primary Source Paper Grading Rubric

Criteria	Description	Possible Points (out of 100)
Contextualization	Without going into too much detail about the historical background (no more than a paragraph), does the paper demonstrate a solid understanding of the period and the larger historical issues involved, as acquired through the readings and lectures? Are there no major errors of historical understanding?	0-20
Argument/Thesis	Is the argument clearly stated somewhere toward the end of the first paragraph? Is the argument specific (supported using these sources alone), while also being debatable and historically significant?	0-20
Use of Evidence	Does the essay include specific examples from each primary source as evidence for the argument? Are direct quotations used sparingly (only when the quote perfectly captures an idea and is no more than 1-2 lines)? Is adequate explanation/analysis provided for each quote or example?	0-20
Analysis/Close Reading	Does the paper demonstrate a close and thoughtful reading of the primary source documents, with attention to things like point of view, intended audience, bias, and tone (when relevant to the argument of the paper)? Still more impressive: does the paper inspire the reader to look at the document/s in a new way?	0-20
Grammar/Proofreading /Organization	Does the essay demonstrate strong writing skills? Is it clear and easy to read? Are there few major grammar or spelling errors? Is it clearly organized? Are sources cited appropriately (See handout on citing sources). Were the basic assignment directions followed? Is it at least 1,000 words?	0-20