

Resource Sheet #22

Investigating Primary Sources

First, determine what type of primary source it is from the left-hand column, and then answer the corresponding questions in the right.

Types of Primary Sources	Questions
Ad or Broadside	What is it promoting? What is the main idea? Who is the audience? What images are used? What current ad is similar?
Newspaper Articles	What phrases and words catch your attention? What was the author's purpose in writing the article? What important historical information does this source provide?
Pictures and Photographs	What clues can you find about the location and date? What are the main messages? What is the most important historical information this source provides?

PROP: Evaluating Viewpoints

P	Is it a primary (eyewitness) or secondary (not an eyewitness) source? Primary sources are invariably more desirable. To reach valid conclusions, you need to realize the importance of primary sources and gather as many as possible to use as evidence in an argument. You should depend on secondary sources, like encyclopedias or history tests, only when primary sources are unavailable.
R	If the source is a person, does he or she have any reason to distort the evidence? Would those giving the statement, writing the document, recording the audio (or video), or identifying the object benefit if the truth were distorted, covered up, falsified, sensationalized, or manipulated? Witnesses with no reason to distort the evidence are more desirable than those who might benefit from a particular presentation of the evidence.
O	Are there other witnesses, statements, recordings, or evidence which report the same data, information, or knowledge? Having other evidence verify the initial evidence strengthens the argument.
P	Is it a public or private statement? If the person making the statement of evidence knew or intended that other people should hear it, then it is a public statement. A private statement may be judged more accurate because it was probably said in confidence and is, therefore more likely to reflect the speaker's true feelings or observations.

Courtesy of Critical Thinking Press

O'Reilly, Kevin. *Evaluating Viewpoints: Critical Thinking in United States History Series - Book Four: Spanish American War-Vietnam War*. Midwest Publications: Critical Thinking Press and Software, 1991. Pg. 3.