

Extended Analysis of Documents

HAPPY Handout

Four ways to extend the analysis of primary sources include correctly analyzing:

Historical Context
Audience
Purpose
Point of View (POV)

HAP-P (say 'happy') represents a useful acronym you can employ to help yourself remember the four methods of extended document analysis specifically listed in the DBQ rubric.

Historical Context

Analysis of 'Historical Context' involves connecting a document to specific historical events, to specific circumstances of time and place, and/or to broader regional, national, or global processes. In identifying the historical context you place the document within broader trends contemporary to the source. A relevant context is a significant influence on the contents of the document.

To place a document within an historical context, identify the particular historical trend or process in which the document fits. Write a sentence which describes the context. Explain how the document participates in that historical trend or process. Analysis and explanation of the historical context might include the phrases: "the historical context of this document is _____"; "the influence of this context is shown in this document by _____"; and, "the reason this context is significant is that it _____".

Audience

Authors aim what they write to particular groups of people. Observing the 'intended audience' of a source involves identifying a person or group the author expects to inform or influence in creating the source. It is very important in constructing your argument about the intended audience that you go beyond what is noted in the source line of the document. Credit for explaining the significance of the audience of a document will not be granted for mere repetition of an audience identified in the source line.

If you know the 'intended audience' of the author, from knowledge not explicitly stated in the source line or document itself, write sentences which describe the audience. In describing author's intended audience include phrases such as: "the author's intended audience was _____"; "the intended audience is shown by _____"; and, "the reason this intended audience is significant is that it _____".

Purpose

Author's Purpose can be thought of as the goal sought by the author. It involves identifying the author's endgame, what they hope to accomplish, and why they are writing the document. Common purposes include attempts to inform, to entertain, to persuade, to influence, to teach, to record, requirements of the author's job or profession, to describe, self-aggrandizement, and/or to regulate (as in laws or rules).

If you pick up on a 'purpose' of the author in producing the document write sentences which describe the purpose conveyed. In describing author's purpose in creating a source include phrases which make your deductions explicit such as: "the author's purpose in writing was to _____"; "is shown by _____"; and, "the reason this purpose is significant is that it _____".

Point of View (POV)

The best way to earn recognition in your essay for analyzing Point of View (POV) is to go beyond the basic identity of the source author and the source itself, as described in the document source line. In order to write a successful POV statement, you should try to establish a better understanding of the identity of the author; you can do this by asking yourself questions about the author and the source. What is the author's profession? What is the author's gender or social class? What religion does the author follow? Does the author have an identifiable ethnicity, nationality, or other allegiance to a particular group? Once you've asked these questions, go further and explain how one of these factors may have influenced the content of the source. Your complete POV statement should both identify an influence that may have shaped the author or source and explain how that particular influence specifically affected the content of the document.

Put simply, to do POV identify an important aspect of WHO the author is, and explain HOW the author's personhood might have impacted what they wrote. As with other approaches to document analysis you should explain explicitly and directly both the who and the how, and then explain the reason the POV is significant.

whY is it important:

Does the document reflect continuity, or change over time? What details tell you this? How does it impact/reflect contemporary and/or current opinions on the topic? What are the limitations (is it credible?) of the document?

Analysis of primary sources differs from description in that when one describes a source, one provides only a summary of its content; when one analyzes a source, one thinks critically about not only the content of a source but also who the author and presumed audience of the source were, why a source was produced, and what factors influenced the production of that source. All of these factors contribute to the usefulness of the source for a historian in answering particular historical questions.

- *The College Board*