

Analyzing Advertisements

Context: What are the contemporary circumstances of the advertisement's creation?	
<p>-Who produced the advertisement?</p> <p>-Where was the advertisement produced?</p> <p>-When was the advertisement produced?</p> <p>-Who is the intended audience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose cultural values are articulated or reflected? • Who is excluded from this audience? Why? <p>-How does the advertisement reflect, reinforce, or challenge contemporary ideas?</p>	
Function: What is the advertisement trying to do?	
<p>-What good, service, idea, or institution is promoted in the advertisement?</p> <p>-What is the overt message of the advertisement?</p> <p>-What is the covert message of the advertisement?</p> <p>-What medium (television, print, radio, web) is the advertisement in?</p> <p>-How might the readership/listenership be described (total numbers, demographics)?</p>	
Strategy: How is the message communicated?	
<p>-How is the good, service, idea, or institution promoted in the advertisement?</p> <p>-What objects, scenes, and people are featured in the advertisement?</p>	

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Does the advertisement use famous people, places, or events?-How are the elements of the advertisement arranged?-How does the organization of the advertisement lead the audience through its argument?-How does the style of the advertisement align with contemporary cultural trends?-How are images used to work with rhetorical appeals (appeals to reason, emotion)?-What tone does the advertisement's text use to reach the audience (technical, informal, authoritative)? | |
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Adapted from Daniel Pope, "Making Sense of Advertisements," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/ads/intro.html>, June 2003.

Analyzing Film

Documentary	
<p>What additional sources can be used to determine the accuracy of these reconstructions?</p> <p>Is the documentary a primary source, or is a secondary source?</p>	
Feature Film	
<p><i>Note: In films “based on” or “inspired” by real stories, events might be reordered to fit a dramatic narrative.</i></p> <p>How might this reshape understanding of the historical event?</p> <p>What kind of research was conducted?</p> <p>What is the message of the film? Does it tell us something about the time it was made or the time it was set? Both?</p> <p>How does the purpose of the film affect its utility as a primary source?</p>	
News	
<p>Where is the news information coming from?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is (are) the source(s) of information? <p>What point of view is presented?</p> <p>What local values and concerns are reflected from the news footage?</p> <p>Which are absent?</p>	
Personal Footage	
<p>How representative are home movies of everyday lives?</p>	

Whose stories are being told? Whose aren't? Why might this be the case?	
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How might footage of personal, family, community events be useful as historical sources?	
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adapted from Tom Gunning, "Making Sense of Films," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/film/>, February 2002.

Analyzing Letters and Diaries

<i>Considering Materiality (If you have access to the original letters or diaries):</i> Thinking about the tangible components of letters and diaries	
<p>-Who is the primary creator of this letter or diary?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose cultural perspective do they represent? • What biases might they have? <p><i>-For letters:</i> To whom is the letter written? What is the relationship between the letter writer and the recipient?</p> <p>-What were their intentions?</p> <p>-Who saved the diary or collected the letters? Why?</p> <p>-Is this the only volume of the diary or the only set of letters?</p> <p>-Might there be other volumes or sets located elsewhere?</p> <p>-What is the time period covered by the diary(ies) or letter(s)?</p> <p>-How is time distinguished in each letter or diary entry?</p>	
<i>Considering Portrayals:</i> Thinking about the ways in which letter writers and diarists write about events, relationships, and themselves	
<p>-Which events are written about?</p> <p>-Which events are ignored?</p> <p>-How does the letter writer or diarist use formal language/informal language in their descriptions of people, places, events, or feelings?</p> <p><i>-For letters:</i> How might the letter writer's relationship with the recipient affect what is written?</p>	

Considering Corroboration: Thinking about questions of time and position

-How does the letter writer or diarist understand that the events they are describing are part of larger historical developments?

-Do they understand their own time as an era or turning point?

- If so how?
- If not, what might this suggest about the letter writer or diarist's sense of their position in history?

Does the letter or diary speculate about the future?

What sources can you use to confirm events mentioned in the letters or diary entries?

adapted from Steven Stowe, "Making Sense of Letters and Diaries," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/letters/>, July 2002.

Analyzing Maps

D-Date	<p>When was the map created?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answering this question allows you place the map within its appropriate historical and chronological context 	
O-Orientation	<p>What are the principal directions on the map? How are they displayed?</p>	
G-Grid	<p>What kind of grid system is used?</p>	
S-Scale	<p>Is there a scale present? If so, what is it?</p>	
T-Title	<p>What is the name of the map?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This may seem to be a very easy question to answer; however, by focusing on the title of the map, you are considering what is being communicated by the map. <p>Where was the map created? Who is the intended audience of the map? When was the map created?</p>	
A-Author	<p>Who created the map—an individual? An organizational entity?</p>	
I-Index	<p>Are both an alphabetical listing of places and a grid present on the map?</p>	
L-Legend	<p>Is there a legend present that explains the symbols present on the map?</p>	
S-Sources	<p>What sources are used to create the map?</p> <p>Identifying the sources allow you to examine and assess the validity of the map as a source.</p>	

adapted from David Stephens, "Making Sense of Maps," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/maps/>, February 2002.

Analyzing Monuments

Monument history	
<p>When was the idea of the monument first conceived?</p> <p>What does the monument commemorate?</p> <p>Who sponsored or advocated for the creation of the monument? Why?</p> <p>What do we know about this person/these people/this organization?</p> <p>How was the monument funded?</p> <p>When was the monument dedicated?</p>	
Monument design and materials	
<p>How was the design of the monument selected?</p> <p>Was the final monument design adapted? How and why?</p> <p>What historical narrative is communicated by the monument's design?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is included in this narrative? • Who is excluded from this narrative? <p>What is the function of the narrative?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who might be helped by this narrative? • Who might be hurt by this narrative? <p>What is the monument made of?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any special significance in the selection of materials for the monument? 	
Monument site	

<p>Where is the monument located? (absolute location)</p> <p>How does the monument fit in with surrounding spaces? (relative location)</p> <p>Has the monument site changed—has the monument been moved?</p>	
Monument inscriptions	
<p>What words or symbols are inscribed on the monument?</p> <p>What message or narrative is told or supported by these inscriptions?</p>	
Monument connections	
<p>At the time of its dedication, how did the monument relate to:</p> <p>-The immediate, local community?</p> <p>-Other monuments?</p> <p>-Society at large?</p>	
Monument afterlife	
<p>How has the monument been used since its dedication?</p> <p>Has the monument been continually used in the same fashion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If not, how has the community's use of the monument been adapted? <p>Is the monument viewed as a local landmark?</p>	

adapted from Gerald A. Danzer, *Public Places: Exploring Their History. Nearby History.* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 5-14.0

Analyzing Music

Analyzing Music as a Document	
<p>-Who created the music?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lyricist(s)? Composer(s)? ● Publisher? <p>-Who are the musicians involved?</p> <p>-When was the music created?</p> <p>-What is the music's structure?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lyrically? ● Musically? ● Relation of words and music (e.g., repeating tune with new words, the "hook")? <p>-What instruments were used?</p>	
Analyzing the Primary Contexts of Music: those that would have been most important to people at the time of the music's creation, and might have shaped it	
<p>-When and where was the music originally published or performed?</p> <p>-In what style(s) or genre(s) can the music be placed?</p> <p>-Who published or performed it?</p> <p>-Why was the music created?</p> <p>-Why was it published or performed?</p> <p>-If published or recorded, what technology(ies) were used? (i.e, cylinders or records; CD or mp3; cassettes or sheet music)</p>	

Analyzing the Secondary Contexts of Music:

those emerging after the song's creation that might help in understanding its significance

-Did the music take on a life of its own?

- Are there other notable performances or recordings of this music?
- Did the music's meaning change over time?
- Does the music come to represent or define place or identity? Does this change over time?

-What have people said and written about the song?

-How was the song described by its creators and early performers?

-How have audiences responded to or interpreted the song?

adapted from Ronald Walters and John Spitzer, "Making Sense of American Popular Song," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Songs/>, June 2003.

Analyzing Numbers

How reliable are the numbers?

Determining the reliability of numbers is essential. It's common to assume that numbers are objective, but as with any other source, they were collected within and are a reflection of a specific context. It is essential to ask questions about the operating assumptions and biases grounding the collection and dissemination of these numbers, and to account for them throughout your work.

-When was this data collected?

-How was this data collected?

- What alternate methods for data collection might have been used?

-Who collected this data?

- What was their process of collection?
- What forms of data were not collected? Why?

-What was the purpose of this data collection?

- What other sources might be available to assist in fully understanding this data? and/or the process by which this data was collected?

What questions can we ask of these numbers?

Once you have determined the reliability of the numbers, you can review them to consider the kinds of historical questions they can (and cannot) help you answer.

Note-the following questions are examples:

How many people have lived here over time?

How have the number of homes shifted across a geographic area?

How do we account for transient workers in the local area who might be missing from a census record?

<p>What might be the relationship between the local population and the local climate?</p> <p>What might be the relationship between the membership of a place of worship and the community surrounding it?</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Which are the best ways to organize and read the numbers to answer our questions?</i></p> <p>As you identify patterns and visualize the numbers, remember the operating assumptions and biases that informed the initial collection and dissemination of these numbers.</p>	
<p>How might the purpose and process of collecting these numbers impact the patterns you are identifying?</p> <p>How will you note this impact?</p>	

adapted from Gary Kornblith, "Making Sense of Numbers," History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/numbers/>, July 2002.

Analyzing Oral Histories

Who Is Talking?	
<p>Who is the narrator?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the narrator’s relationship to the events under discussion?• What stake might the narrator have in presenting their particular version of events?• What effect might the narrator’s social identity and position have on the interview?• Does the narrator have a prior relationship with the interviewer?• How does the narrator present themselves in the interview?• What influences—personal, cultural, social—might shape the way the narrator expresses himself or herself? <p>What sort of character does the narrator become in the interview?</p>	
<p>Who is the interviewer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What background and interests does the interviewer bring to the topic of the interview?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How might this affect the interview?• How do the interviewer’s questions shape the story told? Has the interviewer prepared for the interview?	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How adept is the interviewer in getting the narrator to tell their story in their own way? ● Does the interviewer have a prior relationship with the narrator? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How might this affect the interview? ● What effect might the interviewer's social identity and position have on the interviewee, and hence the interview? <p>How might the dynamic between narrator and interviewer effect what is said in the interview?</p>	
<p>What Are They Talking About?</p>	
<p>In which languages is the interview conducted?</p> <p>In which languages is the interview presented?</p> <p>How has the narrator structured the interview?</p> <p>What's the plot of the story?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What does this tell us about the way the narrator thinks about his or her experience? <p>What does the narrator avoid or sidestep? What topics does the narrator especially warm to, or speak about with interest, enthusiasm, or conviction?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What might this tell us? <p>Are there times when the narrator doesn't seem to answer the question posed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What might be the reason for this? <p>Are there significant factual errors in the narrative?</p> <p>Is it internally consistent?</p>	

How might you account for errors and inconsistencies?	
Why Are They Talking?	
<p>For what purpose has this interview been conducted?</p> <p>How might the purpose have shaped the content, perspective, and tone of the interview?</p>	
<p>What Are the Circumstances of the Interview?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What technologies are used to record the interview? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What shortcomings might those technologies have? ● Has the interview been edited or altered? ● What effect might the location of the interview have had on what was said in the interview? ● If anyone other than the interviewer and interviewee were present, what effect might the presence of this other person have had on the interview? ● Do you know the mental and physical health of the narrator and interviewer? <p>What effect might these have had on the interview?</p>	

adapted from Linda Shopes, "Making Sense of Oral History," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/>, February 2002.

Analyzing Photographs

The “of”: What is shown in the photograph	
<p>What type of photograph is it? (portrait, landscape, architecture, etc.)</p> <p>Who created the photograph?</p> <p>What do you see?</p> <p>How are people/objects displayed?</p> <p>What is missing?</p>	
The “about”: The subject matter and circumstances	
<p>When was the photograph taken?</p> <p>In what historical context can you place the photograph?</p>	
Abstract Elements: Visual expression techniques	
<p>Why was the photograph taken?</p> <p>How was the photograph taken?</p> <p>From what perspective (or angle) is the subject photographed?</p> <p>What is included and excluded by this perspective (or angle)?</p> <p>Who is the intended audience?</p> <p>How might the identity of the intended audience impact the way the photo was received?</p>	

adapted from Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin, “‘Mind and Sight’: Visual Literacy and the Archivist,” in *American Archival Studies*, ed. Randall C. Jimerson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000), 73-97; and James Curtis, “Making Sense of Documentary Photography,” *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Photos/>, June 2003.