

Assignment # 2: Using a primary and a secondary source

Purpose: First, to practice finding, citing, and interpreting a primary source, with help from a secondary source. Second, to continue practicing how to properly cite sources in Chicago style. While the form and style are still important, the emphasis this time is more on the content: your evaluation of the primary source in light of information from an appropriate secondary source.

What you do:

- Locate a primary source concerning any subject that interests you, from the origins of writing up to 1500 CE. Flipping through the Bentley and Ziegler textbook might inspire you to look for something from a certain period or region. You can also browse the links on the class web page. Hints about finding primary sources are given below. The primary source could be anything from an inscription on an Assyrian monument to an extract from Marco Polo's *Travels*, as long as it meets the criteria below. Then pick a second choice as a backup.
- By the posted deadline, email the author, title, and a link (if it is online) or one-sentence description (if it is not) of your first and second choices for a primary source to me. I will check to see that the source is appropriate and reply to you, either approving it or explaining why it is not suitable and asking you to try again. I will approve sources in the order that I receive them. Every student must use a different source. If your choices are OK but your first choice is already taken, I will approve your second choice; if both are being used, I will let you know that you need to look for another two options and email me again. People who respond early will generally get their first choices. People who wait until the last minute may have to work harder to find additional choices if their first two are taken.
- Once you have an approved primary source, find at least one secondary source that provides some background on the primary source that will help you to evaluate the reliability and biases of the primary source. The secondary source must meet the criteria below. The secondary source might be about the author, and/or the specific primary source you are using, or perhaps about the kind of position that the author occupied. It should give you insight into the possible interests, knowledge, and point of view of the author.
- Write a two to three page paper that describes the source and its content, evaluates its reliability and possible biases based on information in your secondary source(s) and your own thinking about the piece, and draws some conclusions about the events or society that the primary source comes from or deals with.

Hints for finding a primary source: Your primary source may be from one of the online collections of primary sources listed on the class web page under “Links”, from some other reputable website, from one of the SSU library’s online databases, from a printed collection of primary sources, or anywhere else that meets the criteria given below. It may also be an extract from a longer source, such as a book-length translation of a primary source like a classical Greek, Roman, Chinese, Arabic, Medieval, or other book.

Criteria for the primary source: Your primary source must

- have been written before 1500 C.E.
- be between 400 and 3000 words long (use a word processor’s word counting feature if possible). This is about 2/3 of a single-spaced page like this one to about 4 pages like this one.
- be a text (words), not an image, artifact, etc.

- be available in English translation. That is, no texts in undeciphered writing systems!
- deal with the real world. That is, hymns, creation stories, myths about gods, discussions of philosophy, and so on are not appropriate, because they will not allow you to discuss the reliability or biases of the author. Stories that involve magic, monsters, miracles, etc. may still be acceptable if they have otherwise mostly realistic content. You can evaluate how reliable those aspects of the source are for understanding the society of the time.
- *not* be assigned as readings for this course, included in those readings, or printed in our textbook (Bentley and Ziegler). It also must not be the one you used for Assignment 1. Please verify that your source is not among the readings or in the textbook before emailing me.

Hints for finding a secondary source: Primary sources in books, collections, and websites often have introductions or other sections with background information. Use this information, as well as the author and title of the source, to search for a separate secondary source with information on who the author was, why the piece was written, what historians have said about the author, and so on. Google is a good place to start, but make sure that the source you end up with meets the criteria below. Also try searching for the author or the title of the source in SSU's "History QuickSearch", and other history databases if necessary. From the SSU library home page, click "Databases", then "History", then "History QuickSearch" in the upper right part of the page. Encyclopedias often have articles on authors of historical documents, or on the documents themselves. Or ask a librarian for help, through online chat 24/7 from the library's home page, or in person in the library.

Criteria for the secondary source: Your secondary source must

- be a reputable, academic source with a named author. Wikipedia is not a citable academic source. Wikipedia or a similar site can be a good starting point, and may have information that helps you find a good source, but it is not a reliable source itself. Websites connected to universities are usually OK, but use your judgment.
- *not* be an assigned reading, our textbook (Bentley and Ziegler), or my lecture notes or slides.

Do it yourself: Once again, the point of this exercise is for *you* to practice working with a primary source. So do this exercise yourself, not in collaboration with colleagues currently or previously in this class. I have the computer files of every history paper ever submitted to me.

What you turn in: A single computer file that contains:

1. a two to three page paper, double-spaced, in Chicago style
2. an additional page with endnotes and a bibliography in Chicago style
3. and an appendix containing the full text of the primary source or the portion that you used for this paper. This may be typed, scanned, copied and pasted from an online source, etc., in such a way that I can read it and refer to it while reading your paper. The format of this appendix does not matter, as long as I can read it easily.

Content:

1. Explain the nature of the primary source. This could include who wrote it, the author's position, job, or role in society, the date it was written, its intended audience, why it was written, and so on. Explaining this will involve citing your secondary source(s) for some background. Be sure to properly cite the source(s) of your information, using endnotes. Make sure that your secondary source actually contains the information you use. If you found information on Wikipedia (for example), you can only use that information if you

find it in a legitimate source, and then cite that source. If you can't find a fact in a citable source, do not mention it at all; it could well be wrong.

2. Summarize what the source says. If you are using an extract of a larger work, be sure you summarize just that extract. Read and summarize it yourself; don't depend on a description in some other source.
3. Evaluate the primary source's reliability and its author's possible biases. The secondary source should help you with this. Your own thinking will also help. If the author is a general explaining his military successes, might his story be biased? If he is a wealthy landholder, should we take his claims about the views of peasants at face value? If he is a Roman historian writing about events that happened 500 years earlier, how confident should we be in his claims? And so on.
4. Finally, draw some conclusions or inferences about the society in which it was written, events or people it describes, and so on, beyond what the source explicitly states. This will involve noticing some assumptions in it, references to things that are not central to the source's theme (like the bridges in the story of the murder of Guilhem Déjean), or other hints. You might draw conclusions about the status and roles of men versus women; the organization of power in the society; religious ideas; technology they used; and so on.

No thesis needed: This paper need not have a thesis or make an argument. It is just for practice in using a primary source.

Guidance: You will find practical suggestions and examples of how to approach these tasks in the two readings for Sept. 15, and a bit in the first chapter of Arnold, assigned for Sept. 3.

Quotations: No quotations longer than two lines. Maximum of one quotation per page.

Format: Same as Assignment #1: Chicago style, with endnotes. See the posted Chicago Style Guide for History 201. Be sure to properly cite all your facts and quotations.

Turning it in: Same as Assignment #1: Email the paper to bruce.owen@sonoma.edu as an attachment. No paper copy is involved. A good way is to click "Email me!" on the class website.

File format: Same as Assignment #1: Save the paper in Word 95 (.doc), Word 2000 (.doc), or Rich Text (.rtf) format. These are nearly universal formats that any word processor should be able to make and open. The command to save in these formats is often under "Save As".

File name: Like Assignment #1: Name the file in this format:

h201-09f-Assignment2-LastnameFirstname

Replace "LastnameFirstname" with your name, last name first, capitalizing the first letter of each name. Your word processor will usually add a 3-letter file extension like ".doc" or ".rtf".

Drafts: Same as Assignment #1: I will gladly discuss your assignment or comment on a draft before the assignment is due. Allow at least a few days before the deadline so I can reply and you can revise. My comments may help you write a better essay and get a better grade. If you email a draft, please name the file as above, but add "-draft", like

h201-09f-Assignment2-SmithJohn-draft.doc

Grading: This assignment is worth 150 points, out of 1000 for the course. The grading rubric is attached.

Assignment #2: Using a primary and a secondary source

Points	Possible	Item
	10	First and second choices for primary source submitted correctly by deadline
	10	Primary source approved
	10	Primary source is appropriate: it is primary, before 1500 C.E., 400-3000 words, deals with real world, not assigned or in textbook. Problems here may affect other aspects of grading, too.
	10	Secondary source is appropriate: it is secondary, academically reputable, relevant, not assigned or in textbook. Problems here may affect other aspects of grading, too.
	10	Explanation of the nature of the primary source, citing the secondary source(s)
	10	Summary of the content of the primary source
	30	Evaluation of the reliability and possible biases of the primary source.
	30	Conclusions or inferences about society or events, based on the primary source.
	20	Citations, endnotes, and bibliography in correct Chicago style Full text of primary source included as appendix (no style requirements)
	10	All in a single file, in correct file format (.doc or .rtf), correctly named
		Late (-10%), Rewrite (-20%), Excessive quotations or plagiarism (up to -100%)
	150	Total