

WHAT IS HISTORY?

1. History is the study of the **human** past.

Historians study people and the achievements of people in the same way that geologists study the earth and paleontologists study plants and animals.

2. History is the study of **primary sources** (i.e., written documents and artifacts).

Historians study written documents known as primary sources in the same way that art historians study paintings and sculptures, archeologists study artifacts, and paleontologists study fossils.

3. History is the **narration** of past events.

Historians create a narrative of past events (a.k.a. secondary sources and textbooks) that non-historians read to learn about the past.

TWO JOBS OF A HISTORIAN

1. A historian is a detective!

A historian, like a detective, uses evidence to solve a mystery. The evidence is the primary sources. The mystery is the society that produced those sources. In other words, a historian uses primary sources (evidence) in order to understand the context in which they were written (mystery).

Like a detective, the historian uses critical thinking. To think **CRITICALLY** means to make a choice or judgment. Like a detective, a historian evaluates the evidence, and then make judgments about its meaning and importance.

2. A historian is a storyteller!

After completing the detective work, a historian must share the results. Like a detective the historian must explain how the evidence solves the mystery and persuade the audience. The historian creates a story (narration) intended to convince non-historians of the conclusion.

The historian is the creator of **SECONDARY SOURCES**.

WHAT IS HISTORICAL ANALYSIS?

As a historian, you are a detective. You use evidence to solve a mystery. In other words, you use primary sources to understand the society that produced those texts. This process involves carefully choosing evidence (quotes) from primary sources and deciding how that evidence answers the historical question (critical thinking/analysis).

Crime Investigation	Historical Method
Step #1: Establish crime scene	Step #1: Establish research question and sources
Step #2: Examine crime scene	Step #2: Examine sources
Step #3: Choose relevant evidence	Step #3: Choose relevant evidence
Step #4: Examine and interpret the evidence.	Step #4: Examine and interpret the evidence.
Step #5: Analyze the evidence by determining its connection to the crime.	Step #5: Analyze the evidence by determining how it answers the research question.
Step #6: Share your results.	Step #6: Share your results.

Step #2: Examine sources

1. What kind of document is this? (law code, letter, chronicle, papal bull, etc.)
2. When and where was the document written?
3. Who wrote the document? What do you know about the author? Is there anything about the author's background that might explain his/her perspective?
4. Who/what is the source about? What is the connection between the author and the subject matter?
5. Why was the document written? Is there a clear purpose, or are multiple interpretations possible?
6. Who was, or who might have been, its intended audience?

Step #4: Interpret evidence

Before you can analyze the evidence, you must determine the meaning of your chosen evidence: What does your chosen evidence mean?

Step #5: Analyze the evidence

Analysis involves critical (choice) thinking. You must make a choice/judgment about how you think your chosen evidence solves the mystery: How does your chosen evidence answer the historical question?

Step #4 Share your results

Sharing your results is making an **argument** about the connection between the primary source (evidence) and the time period (mystery) that your audience will understand and believe.

- To make your audience understand, you must present your results step-by step.
- To make your audience believe, you must make sure that you have not left out any information necessary to explain the connection between the evidence and the mystery.