

Evaluating Sources

Archival Sources

Source

- Laurel Bowen 2000,
- Georgia State Univeristy
- <http://www.library.gsu.edu/spcoll/pages/pages.asp?ldID=105&guideID=549&ID=3643>

What are Archival Sources?

- "Archival material" can be:
 - a person's or organization's correspondence,
 - unpublished reports,
 - committee minutes,
 - diaries,
 - oral history interviews,
 - photographs and videos,
 - sound recordings,
 - artifacts or objects.

Questions to Ask: Creator

- What is the basis of authority of the creator
- What is their credibility

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Who is the writer or interviewee? What was his or her role in the events or organization? Was the person in a position of authority, or was s/he challenging the status quo? Is this an eye-witness account or hearsay? How aware is the person or organization of the context of an event, of the issues under debate, of the actions and views of other people? What is the person's or organization's point of view, and what evidence is cited to support it? Is the person aware of his potential biases and of other points of view?

Questions to Ask: Historical Context

- Is it verifiable or reliable?

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To what extent is the information or account reliable and valid? How well and in what manner does it meet internal and external tests of corroboration, consistence, and explication of contradictions? What is the relation of this information or account to existing documentation (such as other first-hand accounts) and to secondary sources (interpretations, descriptions, and historical studies of events in books and journal articles).

Questions to Ask: Point of View or Bias

- How neutral is the information?

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Information is rarely neutral. Who is the writer? What are his or her relationships to other people or organizations? Is the writer an observer or a participant in an event? What is the motivation for speaking or behaving in a certain way? What does the person or organization hope to accomplish (the goal)? Is there a political or philosophical agenda? Is the person/organization aware of information that s/he or they do not present? What do other people say about the same information, the same issue, or the organization itself?

Questions to Ask: Currency

- How close to the events is the item? Is it an actual artifact or a recollection?

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Was the information or account written or conveyed during the regular course of life or business? Or is it a recollection or recreation of past events? If it is a recollection of past events, how long ago did the events occur?

Questions to Ask: Significance

- How important is this item?

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To what extent does the material add fresh information, fill gaps in the existing record, and/or provide fresh insights and perspectives? How representative is the information? Is the information facts, perceptions, interpretations, judgments, or attitudes? How does it contribute to understanding? Does it matter that we know this?

Example: Operation Totalize

- <http://www.2ndbn5thmar.com/history/TOTALIZE.pdf>