



Take a Bath with History: The SOAPS Method of Document Analysis

Historians work with **primary documents** in trying to understand the past. However, the documents are hard to decipher unless one knows about the creator of the document, the background of the document, and why it was created. In a SOAPS analysis, historians look at a document this way:

S: Speaker - identify the speaker/creator of the document. This is more than simply providing a name. Sometimes the speaker is someone everyone knows. Other times, it is someone no one knows. In any case, WHO is the person? What does this document say about the speaker? Base your description on the contents of the document. Identify at least three characteristics of the speaker based on your understanding of the document.

O: Occasion - when was the document created? This is more than simply a date. What was happening in the year or years preceding the document that help us understand the document? What was going on in history that might help explain why this document was created when it was? What was the specific event/issue of the time that prompted the document's creation?

A: Audience - for whom was the document created? Who does the speaker plan on delivering this message to? What does the author think about his/her audience? Why is the audience paying attention to this document? Describe the audience as completely as possible. What do you think the audience's reaction(s) was/were?

P: Purpose - for what reason was this document created? What does the speaker hope to accomplish? This paragraph is a perfect place for a quote from the document to illustrate meaning (with an explanation of its relevance).

S: Significance - why is this document important? What does it say about the era in which it was created? What, if anything, did it lead to? What was the response to the document? Did the speaker accomplish his/her purpose? Explain. Is there a connection to later historical events or the modern world? If so, explain.

Writing and Formatting your SOAPS Papers

Writing

When writing a SOAPS paper, use the questions on the reverse as a guide, not a checklist. Do not attempt to answer every question. Some questions apply to some documents but not others. Use your best judgment.

During the year, you are required to submit a **TOTAL of TEN** SOAPS papers on historical documents, **TWO in EACH UNIT**. Documents will be assigned for reading in the course syllabus. Write-ups are due at the beginning of class on the day the documents are being discussed. **NO EXCEPTIONS**. If you are absent for any reason on a day a document is being discussed, you must turn in a paper on a different document on a different day when you are in attendance.

Formatting

All SOAPS papers must be typed in an easily-readable font sized 12, be double-spaced, and have margins of 1 inch on all sides. Papers (unless otherwise noted) are limited to **350 words**. Use the tools in your word processor to count the words.

Each paper should include a heading with your name & date, and include the title & author of the document as the paper's title. Words in the heading and title do not count towards your 350-word limit.

Each SOAPS paper should be made up of 5 short paragraphs, one for each letter of the SOAPS acronym. Our basic writing rules apply to your SOAPS papers.

Grading

Each SOAPS paper is worth **50 points**, 10 points for each letter of the acronym. Points will be subtracted from your overall grade for failure to format your paper according to the above requirements. To get an "A," your paper must meet the following requirements:

- communicate that you understand the meaning of the document
- **describe/analyze** the speaker & audience rather than simply stating them
- relate the document to what is going on in history at the time of its creation
- include your analysis of the document's purpose - this means that it simply does not summarize or restate the main points of the document, but includes your insight
- meet all formatting requirements listed above.

