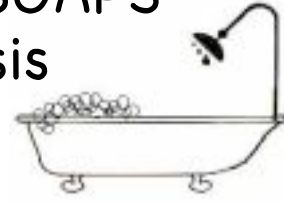


Take a Bath with History: The SOAPS Method of Document Analysis



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. Describe the speaker. **Do not write a biography.** What does this document say about the speaker? Base your description on the words and ideas the speaker espouses in the document.

O: Occasion - when was the document created? What was the specific event/issue of the time that prompted the document's creation? Describe the era to provide the backdrop and context for the document? What was going on in history that might help explain why this document was created when it was?

A: Audience - Who is the document's intended audience? Did the document have the intended effect on the audience? Describe the audience as completely as possible. How was the document perceived by different groups?

P: Purpose - for what reason was this document created? What does the speaker hope to accomplish? Are there multiple purposes? 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 & Formatting your SOAPS Papers

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During the semester, you are required to submit **FIVE** SOAPS papers on historical documents. 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.

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.

SAMPLE HEADING

Heading	Lastname 1
Using MLA	
Format	
<i>Farewell Address</i> by George Washington	

SOAPS paper should be 5 short paragraphs - one for each letter of the acronym.

While substance is the most important part of your grade for these assignments, pay attention to rules of grammar and style. Most importantly, make sure to

- **avoid empty words:** Instead of stating "The speaker of the document is George Washington," say "George Washington shares his vision of a future America in his "Farewell Address." It is clear in the second example that Washington is the speaker, and the second statement actually says something about the document. The first statement is empty - that is it has no information that helps the reader understand the document.
- use only 3rd person (no I, me, we, you, your, us, our)
- avoid use of contractions
- use quotation marks when quoting the document (no more than 2 quotes)
- use active voice whenever possible
- write in the past tense (present tense acceptable in the final paragraph)
- write only in complete sentences with correct capitalization & end punctuation
- use the spell check feature of your word processor

SOAPS PAPER RUBRIC

An "A" SOAPS paper has **ALL** of the following characteristics:

- demonstrates a complete understanding of the document
- writes an analytical, versus a simplistic, descriptive paper
- describes the speaker(s) based on words & ideas found in the document
- is descriptive, not biographical
- understands the historical era and its connection to the document
- demonstrates knowledge of correct chronological order
- describes the appropriate audience of the document; demonstrates awareness of different interpretations by different groups (if applicable)
- appropriately states the purpose of the document, whether it is implicit or explicit
- analyzes the historical significance of the document; understands where the document fits within the larger context of US History (ie, knows the outcome of the document)
- demonstrates a careful reading and understanding of the written instructions
- is free of surface errors and empty words; uses specific words and examples rather than vague language

A "B" SOAPS paper has all of the following characteristics:

- demonstrates a general understanding of the document

AND DEMONSTRATES MOST OF THE FOLLOWING

- demonstrates a complete understanding of the document
- writes an analytical, versus a simplistic, descriptive paper
- describes the speaker(s) based on words & ideas found in the document
- is descriptive, not biographical
- understands the historical era and its connection to the document
- demonstrates knowledge of correct chronological order
- describes the appropriate audience of the document; demonstrates awareness of different interpretations by different groups (if applicable)
- appropriately states the purpose of the document, whether it is implicit or explicit
- analyzes the historical significance of the document; understands where the document fits within the larger context of US History (ie, knows the outcome of the document)
- demonstrates a careful reading and understanding of the written instructions
- is free of surface errors and empty words; uses specific words and examples rather than vague language

A "C" SOAPS paper has all of the following characteristics:

- demonstrates a simplistic OR somewhat confused understanding of the doc.

AND DEMONSTRATES SOME OF THE FOLLOWING

- demonstrates a complete understanding of the document
- writes an analytical, versus a simplistic, descriptive paper
- describes the speaker(s) based on words & ideas found in the document
- is descriptive, not biographical
- understands the historical era and its connection to the document
- demonstrates knowledge of correct chronological order
- describes the appropriate audience of the document; demonstrates awareness of different interpretations by different groups (if applicable)
- appropriately states the purpose of the document, whether it is implicit or explicit
- analyzes the historical significance of the document; understands where the document fits within the larger context of US History (ie, knows the outcome of the document)
- demonstrates a careful reading and understanding of the written instructions
- is free of surface errors and empty words; uses specific words and examples rather than vague language

A "D" SOAPS paper has all of the following characteristics:

- demonstrates significant confusion of the document

AND DEMONSTRATES LITTLE OF THE FOLLOWING

- demonstrates a complete understanding of the document
- writes an analytical, versus a simplistic, descriptive paper
- describes the speaker(s) based on words & ideas found in the document
- is descriptive, not biographical
- understands the historical era and its connection to the document
- demonstrates knowledge of correct chronological order
- describes the appropriate audience of the document; demonstrates awareness of different interpretations by different groups (if applicable)
- appropriately states the purpose of the document, whether it is implicit or explicit
- analyzes the historical significance of the document; understands where the document fits within the larger context of US History (ie, knows the outcome of the document)
- demonstrates a careful reading and understanding of the written instructions
- is free of surface errors and empty words; uses specific words and examples rather than vague language

AN "F" SOAPS paper has all of the following characteristics:

- demonstrates tremendous misunderstanding of the document
- has none of the characteristics of an A, B, or C paper
- fails to demonstrate evidence of following directions
- contains significant surface errors
- contains many empty words and statements