

Analytical Toolkit for History Readers*

ARGUMENT, ORGANIZATION, PERIODIZATION

- What is author's argument or thesis?
- What is the central point he/she is trying to prove?
- What, if any, supporting arguments are proposed?
- Does the author make unsubstantiated claims?
- Does the author convince you of their positions, why or why not?

- At a summary level, how is the article organized?
- What is accomplished in the introduction or first section of the article?
- In the body of the article, how does the author go about presenting the argument?
- Does the author use methodical topic sentences for each paragraph or some other organization?

- How does the author periodize his or her topic? That is, what are the temporal and/or geographic boundaries that frame the topic? Is this a common periodization, why or why not, and is this important?

SOURCES

- What types of evidence are used?
- Does the author use primary sources (actual letters, administrative records, or any documentation from the period studied) or secondary sources (other scholarly works about the topic)?
- How does the author use this evidence?
- Is the evidence relevant, applicable, or misused?

THE AUTHOR'S PERSONAL VIEWS

- Where can we find the author and his/her personal views in this text?
- Do the author's opinions interfere with their argument or detract from the argument?

HISTORIOGRAPHY ("the history of history") AND OTHER SCHOLARS

- What type of history is this article? Intellectual history ("history of ideas"), cultural history ("beliefs and practices"), economic history ("quantifications"), biographical history, religious history, political history, etc.
- What is the historiographical tradition that this article fits into?
- Does the work make novel contributions to the field?
- How have other scholars received the author's work and whom does he/she agree with or disagree with?

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*These questions developed from my coursework with Dr. Allison Frazier, Department of History, University of Texas at Austin.