

Critical Thinking Project

For the last part of the semester we'll work through a set of short assignments that understanding and analyzing evidence

For this project, you'll pick a document from history and talk about what you think it really tells us, giving examples of your reasoning from the text you chose and other sources related to that time and place.

Here are the steps involved:

	Due by
A. Choosing your document	Monday, November 13
B. Summary Write-Up	Monday, November 20
C. Annotated Bibliography	Monday, December 4
D. Analysis Write-Up	Monday, December 11

Late assignments: As stated in the syllabus, late assignments will be accepted, but will be marked down for being late.

Plagiarism reminder: For your written assignments, you must use your own words and your own thinking. Do not copy or retype anything from web pages about your document, or from anywhere else. Using the words of others without citations as your own is plagiarism, and it's not tolerated at Lehman College.

For these assignments, quoting from your document is fine—as long as it's in quotation marks and it's clear it's coming from your document. Otherwise, the content of your write-ups must be your words and your thinking.

As stated in this course's syllabus, any write-ups containing plagiarism—pasting in or rearranging the words of others without citations indicating its source—will result in an automatic zero for the assignment. Multiple instances of plagiarism will result in failing the course.

A. Choosing your document

This is your Week 11 response and will be posted online. For this, you'll need to do two things.

- Choose one of the list of short documents from history that interests you.
 - Skim through the reading at a glance and see what jumps out at you as you look through it.
 - This will be your document for the rest of this project, so pick one that you want to explore or find out more about.
- For your Week 11 online response, write a post that includes all of the following:
 - Which reading did you pick?
 - Why did it interest you?
 - What passage or detail jumped out at you as you glanced through it?
 - What, specifically, would you like to find out more about?

Due date: Monday, November 13

B. Summary Write-Up

Read through your document and summarize the story it tells in your own words.

- Answer the Summary Questions below.
- Read through the document and describe what is happening in each scene. Use your own words.
 - Your only source for this write-up should be the text of your document. You don't need to do any other research.
 - You don't need to try to analyze or interpret the author's intent, motives, or meanings—that comes later. For now, just summarize.
- Formatting: Your Summary Write-Up should
 - Be double-spaced
 - Have standard 1-inch margins and a standard font and font size
 - Have your name, the date, and a title (for example, "Summarizing XXXX", where XXXX is your document) at the top, or on a separate cover page
- Length: Your Summary Write-Up should be at least one full page of writing, double-spaced. This is about 350-400 words.

Due date: Monday, November 20

Document Summary Questions

Primary sources are the most direct and most powerful way to connect with people and events of the past. But primary sources must be interpreted, because every source originates from a certain point of view and is intended for a certain audience, and therefore tells only part of the story. Our job is to figure out what part is being told, how it relates to what else we know, and what's being left out. You should ask yourself these questions each time you encounter a primary source.

1. **Who wrote this document, when, and where?** In some documents, as in a course reader or handout, you might be provided this information in the headnote to the source; or it may be in the introduction to the edition you're working from. The who, when, and where provides the context you need to get beyond the document's face value. Some documents have no known author, but you can still say something about them, like "A person from ancient Egypt."
2. **What type of document is this?** Primary sources come in all types, and which type tells us something about what was going through the author's mind when he or she wrote it. For example, a newspaper article would normally be written to be a concise and informative communications to many readers, while a private diary entry is probably more candid and informal, intended to be seen by few or none, or perhaps intended to be read by the writer's family or descendants. (Although this discussion is framed largely in terms of written documents, all primary sources—artifacts, recordings, graffiti, and so on—can be treated with these same steps.)
3. **Who is the intended audience of the document?** Most documents are intended to communicate ideas and viewpoints to a person or a group. Authors tailor their arguments to their target audience, sometimes without realizing it, using their knowledge of the target to elicit the best response. Also, there may be more than one audience: a general writing a military dispatch, for example, might be thinking both of his superiors at headquarters and the general public.
4. **What are the main points of the document?** Boil it all down. What is the author ultimately trying to get the audience to understand?

Writing a Summary: Process

- Divide the text into sections
- For each section,
 - Determine the main point of that section
 - Write a one- or two-sentence summary of the section, focusing on that point
- Write a one- or two-sentence summary of the entire piece
 - Check your high-level summary against the original text
- Combine your summary of the entire piece with your section summaries into a paragraph
- Check what you have written against the original text

Writing a Summary: Tips

- A summary condenses a text, so it is always shorter
- Summaries identify the main point of a text and provide information about the supporting points
- Be sure to refer to the author as you write your summary
- In general, don't quote in summaries

C. Annotated Bibliography

Use the Lehman library website to find three books or journal articles about your document or its context, and write a paragraph for each about why they would be useful.

- Go to the Lehman library website and find three books or journal articles that would be relevant and potentially useful if you were writing a research essay on your document or the time, place, and culture it comes from.
- For each book or article,
 - Look through the table of contents, the index, and the publisher's summary to get a sense of what this work talks about that's relevant to your document.
 - Use the citation feature on the library web page for that work to copy and paste a bibliography entry into your document.
 - Under the bibliography entry, write a paragraph about what this book talks about and why it might be helpful for someone researching your document or the time, place, and culture it comes from.
- Formatting: Same as for the Summary Write-Up (see above).

Due date: Monday, December 4

D. Analysis Write-Up

Make an argument about what you think the author wants his or her audience to believe, using three examples from the text.

- Content:
 - Start with an introduction paragraph that states what you’re arguing in this essay—that is, what you think the author is really trying to say. What questions does the reading raise about the author’s intent? What clues in the text hint at their motive?
 - Then, give three examples. For each example, describe what it says in the text, and then talk about what you think the example tells us and how it lines up with what you’re arguing in this essay.
 - In your discussion, try to include the answers to the analysis questions below.
- Sources:
 - You don’t have to, but you may briefly use information from the books you found for your Annotated Bibliography as support for your analysis. Most of the paper should be what you think—your analysis and interpretation of your document.
 - If you do use information from your Annotated Bibliography sources, that information *must be cited* by adding the author’s name and year from your Annotated Bibliography plus a page number after any information from your sources: e.g., (Smith, 2021, 54). Not providing cites for any information from your sources will result in a grade reduction for the assignment.
 - **Important warning:** You must not use web pages, blogs, Wikipedia, or any other nonscholarly source. Use of material from websites or sources other than your document and the scholarly sources in your annotated bibliography will result in a zero for the assignment.
- Formatting: Same as for the Summary Write-Up (see above).
- Length: Your Analysis Write-Up should be at least 1½ to 2 full pages of writing, double-spaced. This is about 500-750 words.

Due date: Monday, December 11

Document Analysis Questions

Once you have a sense of what the document says, you can try to explore what you think it means, based on your reasoning, experience, and the information you have available.

1. **Why was this document written?** What do we know about the impetus for this document? What prompted the author to write it?
2. **What does it reveal about the society and time period in which it was created?** Bring together what you know from all of the above and try to get at the real meat of what this document tells us—not just about the author, but also about the author’s society and his or her relationship to it (was she a part of the mainstream, or a rebel?). One way of looking at this would be to ask yourself whether the same document could have been written 10 years before, or 10 years after. Why not—what changed?
3. **What’s missing?** What point of view is left out? Was it intentional? How would that change the picture presented by the author?
4. **What passage stands out the most?** Which sentence or passage did you react most strongly to—out of admiration, revulsion, or strong agreement or disagreement? Think about what caused that reaction: Was it the content alone, or were you affected by the differences between the author’s cultural values and your own?