

Analyzing a document (external analysis)

The *introduction* of the document : The purpose of this section is to introduce your document and its subject (briefly) as well as to clarify the following issues:

- a. The author: Who is the author? What do we know about the author? What motive (purpose) might the author have had in writing this document? What biases or assumptions might color the views of the author? What is the degree of familiarity of the author with the subject discussed in the document? Was the author a direct observer of the event/issue [if this is pertinent] or was the information obtained second-hand? Had the author any personal involvement in the events/issues described [if relevant]? Do we have any reason to think that the author does not describe what he/she believes to be true?
- b. The time frame: When was this document produced? Is it contemporary to the events/issues it describes? In what context was it produced? How has it come down to us? Could it have been tampered with?
- c. Place: Where was this document produced? Does the geographical location influence the content? Was this document meant to be public or private?
- d. Category of document: What is the category in which this document falls (memoirs, poem, novel, speech, law, study, sermon, Church document, song, letter, etc.)? How would the type of writing affect the content and believability of the document? Is the document in the original language in which it was produced? Is the translation authoritative?
- e. Audience: What is the intended audience of this document? Was the author representing a specific group? Or addressing the document to a specific group (or speaking to a specific group)?

Analyzing the document (internal analysis)

Main body of the document :

- a. Content of the document: What does the author argue (main theme; secondary themes: summarize them briefly but thoroughly. You might need to regroup ideas under some themes)? What specific information of importance is provided? What light does it shed on the society/events/issues described? Do not simply summarize but analyze the document as well: What does the author really mean? Does the source tell a consistent story? Are there contradictions? Evident errors [why would this be]? Does the source provide us unwittingly with information (what can be read between the lines)? Are there allusions made by the author that need to be explained?
- b. Believability of the document: Given the external analysis and the content of the document, how credible is the information? Is it corroborated by other sources? Are important facts ignored? Why would such facts be omitted? Using other credible evidence, can you confirm or contradict the thesis of the document? Is the testimony sincere, exact? What makes you think so? Are there assertions made that are incorrect?

Evaluating the evidence (*conclusion*) :

Reaffirm the core thesis of the document/author; present your personal evaluation of it.
Comment on the influence/impact the document might have had and the reason(s) for it.
Distinguish between the short and the long term. If possible, situate this document in a wider context. If it is a document produced by a specific group, or written from a clearly identifiable point of view, discuss to what extent it is typical of that point of view. It is in the conclusion that you really show that you have mastered the art of document analysis