

## Assignment: primary source analysis

This assignment is your opportunity to practice analyzing a primary source—a key historical skill. You can find basic information about assignments in the syllabus, but this handout will serve to give more details on how to complete the assignment, and what I expect to see from it.

*The basics:* You will write a primary source analysis of a letter written by Emma Crosby, the wife of Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby, who moved to Fort Simpson in 1874. Crosby's letters are held by UBC Rare Books and Special Collections and are available as digitized copies online here: <http://digitalcollections.library.ubc.ca/cdm/landingpage/collection/ecrosby>. Your task is to select one of Crosby's letters, and then—in two to three pages, double-spaced—identify the source, offer a brief explanation of its historical context, and develop a short analysis of it.

*Submitting the assignment:* This will be due at the beginning of class on 31 October 2013. Submit your analysis on paper (not by email) to me in class, or to my mailbox in the History Department office Buchanan Tower 1297, before the start of class time on the due date. Remember that, as per the syllabus, no extensions will be granted and no late assignments will be accepted except in the case of documented reasons that qualify for academic concession (such as medical emergencies or others listed here: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,48,0,0>). Back up your work, and ensure that you submit the correct version (in hard copy, not by email) by the start of class time, as these are not valid reasons for late submission.

*Okay, so what do you actually do?*

1. Find the letters.
  - a. Emma Crosby's letters are available in UBC Special Collections, in the Emma Crosby fonds. If you would like to look at the letters in person, you are welcome to do so.
  - b. Emma Crosby's letters are also digitized online, in the UBC Special Collections digital collections. You can find these here via the link, above.
2. Choose one letter to analyze. You can select any letter you want, so feel free to do this either randomly or with intention, as you wish. If you are using the digitized version, you can search for a specific word or phrase, if there is a specific topic that interests you.
3. Read your chosen letter. (Read it again. Read it again.)
  - a. Remember to read the whole thing, so if it is more than one page long, scroll down the pages (on the website, on the right-hand side) or keep turning pages (if you are in Special Collections) until you get to the end.
  - b. Don't panic. Crosby wrote in cursive, but if you struggle with her writing, the digital versions also have transcripts available (under "transcript" at the bottom of each page, or via the "text" tab just above the image of the letter).
4. Take notes on key points, themes, or issues, and begin to develop your analysis.
5. Analyze and write, write and analyze. (See below.)
6. Edit!
7. Submit.

*Yeah, but what should your writing and analysis actually entail?*

Remember the basics of primary source analysis, as we have been discussing in class. It should look something like this, in the end:

1. First, you should identify the source and consider the “basic” questions such as the following: what is it? Who produced it? For whom, and for what purpose? When and where? Remember that you may not be able to answer all of these questions, but you should be able to offer a basic identification of the source. In this section, you might also want to consider key topics of discussion, the tone of writing, or other general observations.
2. Second, you should give a brief explanation of the source’s broader historical context. You do *not* need to do outside research for this assignment, so don’t feel like you need to make your life harder! In-class materials will help you here (ie. the lecture on Thursday 24 October).
3. Third, you should develop a short analysis of the source, which might consider its content, style, tone, purpose, message, and/or the broader significance of the source within its historical context; what it might reveal or suggest about big themes, concepts, or issues; and/or about its uses and limitations for historians looking to learn more about that broader context. There are some very useful sample questions here, which might help to guide your analysis (though remember you can’t use them all!): <http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/history/study/primary/>

*What should the final product include? What will I look for when I am marking?*

1. The basics: two to three pages, double spaced, in full sentences and developed paragraphs, typed with normal margins and font, with your name on it, stapled, submitted on time.
2. At the top of the first page, an indication of the source you used—for example, “Letter from Emma Crosby to Eliza Douse, 12 May 1874.” This could be your title.
3. An “identification” paragraph.
4. A paragraph discussing the historical context of the source.
5. A paragraph or more developing your analysis of the source.
6. Quality of writing and expression.
7. Depth of analysis, effective use of evidence, and a close relationship between these.
8. Written in your own words or in quotation marks when not in your own words. If you quote or use information from a source other than the letter in question (remember, you are not required to do so), use a footnote. There are examples of acceptable styles here: <http://www.history.ubc.ca/content/writing-centre>

All of these are critical parts of the assignment, and form part of the final grade. However, the strongest work will be distinguished by its depth of analysis (especially in the “analysis” paragraph/s), use of evidence, and quality of written expression; these will be marked based on the rubric that follows. (Not all features have to be present for a mark earned in that range, but this should give you a general idea of what I expect at each level.)

	Evidence	Analysis	Writing and mechanics
Excellent A to A+	Makes excellent use of chosen source and relevant background material from class; interprets and uses evidence with sensitivity to the nature of the text(s) and of historical contexts. Interpretation clearly and closely linked to source.	A clear, original, persuasive, and sophisticated analysis with a provocative perspective which takes on a clearly defined set of debates, concepts, or themes relating to the topic.	Well-written, elegant and clear with appropriate documentation and other scholarly apparatus when appropriate.
Very Good B+ to A-	Very good use of chosen source and relevant background material from class, with clear understanding of the nature of the evidence and its historical context. Interpretation clearly and closely linked to source.	Well-organized, with a clear and coherent analysis, demonstrating real understanding of the historical issues at stake; may need to be encouraged to ask more difficult questions. Interpretation clearly linked to chosen source.	Well-written on the whole, though there may be some passages that are unclear or require further explication; good use of citations, etc., when appropriate.
Good B- to B	Good use of source, clear understanding of the basic elements of the text under discussion and its uses; clear use of background material from class; no major problems of interpretation, clearly linked to source.	A clear analysis, though not necessarily a particularly original or creative one; some attempt to synthesize or draw conclusions, although not always clearly linked to chosen source.	Some problems of spelling, grammar, word choice or style, though not sufficient to entirely obscure the points being made; basic scholarly apparatus intact.
Fair C- to C+	Some use of source; some problems of understanding either source or background material from class, possibly with some leaps of interpretation from source.	Some effort to develop a basic analysis, though it may be unevenly or inadequately developed; banal approach (or one that simply restates discussions we have had in class).	Confusing or vague, requiring a real effort on the part of the reader to guess at the arguments being made or their implications; problems with spelling, grammar, word choice and style.
Poor D or Fail	Fails to use evidence from chosen source adequately or competently; inappropriate or misunderstood examples; significant problems of understanding or interpretation, either of source or of background material from class.	No clear analysis, purely descriptive, and/or a-historical and polemical with no real attention to questions posed in the assignment.	Poorly written, significant problems with grammar and word choice, difficult to understand or follow basic claims; failure to properly identify or cite passages quoted.