

## Tips for analyzing primary source documents

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Begin by reading the document from beginning to end without taking notes.

1. What can you tell about the author or the nature of the document?
  2. What themes/subjects are immediately available while reading the document?
  3. Who is the intended audience for the document? (If unknown, who are the possible audiences for the document?)
  4. What was the author's purpose in writing the document?
  5. How might the intended audience and purpose have influenced what the author wrote? (Are there some things that might be exaggerated? Ignored? Misconstrued?)
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### Broaden and deepen your analysis

6. Beyond the obvious facts in the document, what characteristics of society at this time does the document shed light upon? (Extend your reading of the document to a concept or a theme. What's the "big picture?"). This is really the focus of your study. *What does it tell us about Jews in medieval Europe? Here you can choose to focus on a specific topic within the document such as relations between Christians and Jews, Jewish conversion, etc.*

7. What are the strengths of this document as a historical source? (What makes it especially reliable?) What are the limitations of this document as a historical source? (Are there reasons to question its validity? To what extent does the document support generalizations beyond the single individual who created it? Is there a specific bias? )

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### Make sure

- To give your analysis a title that reflects your discussion.
- To discuss the content of the source.
- To discuss the context of the source.
- To focus your essay on how we can use the source for the study of Jews in the past

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### Technical details

The document study should be written in essay format, with a clear introduction and conclusion, and appropriate footnotes. Although you should be answering the questions listed above, make sure you incorporate them into an essay. Since this a very short essay, you may assume your reader knows the content of the document. Perhaps consider focusing the analysis on one theme rather than covering all the different issues covered by the document. The more focused your analysis, the deeper you will be able to get into it.

In general terms, the footnote and bibliography style used in this course is the **Chicago Manual of Style**. You can find some basic instructions online at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html> .

For the purpose of this essay, you can format your footnotes in the following way:

<sup>1</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach and Thomas of Cantimpre, "The conversion of Catherine of Louvain," in *HIS208 Handout*, 28-31.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions about this assignment.