

Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

How to Read a Primary Source

An acronym that may help guide your evaluation of primary source texts: P-A-P-E-R.

- **P**urpose of the author in preparing the document
- **A**rgument and strategy author uses to achieve those goals
- **P**resuppositions, values, assumptions (in the text, and our own)
- **E**pistemology (evaluating truth content)
- **R**elate to other texts (compare and contrast)

Purpose

- Who is the author and what is her or his place in relation to film/industry (explain why you are justified in thinking so)? What could or might it be, based on the text & context, and why?
- Why was the document prepared? What was the occasion for its creation?
- Does the creator have a thesis or argument? What—in a few words—is it?

Argument

- What is the text trying to do? How does the text make its case? What is its strategy for accomplishing its goal? How does it carry out this strategy?
- What is the intended audience of the text? How might this influence its content or rhetorical strategy? Cite specific examples.
- What arguments or concerns does the author respond to that are *not* clearly stated? Provide at least one example of a point at which the author seems to be refuting a position never clearly stated. Explain what you think this position may be in detail, and why you think it.

Presuppositions

- How do the ideas and values in the source differ from the ideas and values of our age? These might include cultural values (gender, race, class), but also how advertising functions best or what a film review is for, etc. Cite specific examples.
- What preconceptions do we as researcher bring to bear on this text? For instance, what portions of the text might we find objectionable or mistaken, but which contemporaries might have found acceptable or 'correct.' State the values we hold on that subject, and the values expressed in the text.
- How might the difference between our values and the values of the author influence the way we understand the text? Explain how such a difference in values might lead us to misinterpret the text, or understand it in a way contemporaries would not have.

Epistemology

- How might this text support one of the arguments found in secondary sources we've read? Choose a paragraph from a secondary source we've read, where this text might be an appropriate footnote (cite page and paragraph of reading), and explain why.
- What kinds of information does this text reveal that it does not seem concerned with revealing? (In other words, what does it tell us without *knowing* it's telling us?)

Relate: Now choose another of your (or your peers') primary sources, and compare the two, answering these questions:

- What patterns or ideas are repeated throughout the readings?
- What major differences appear in them?
- Which do you find more reliable and/or credible?

Source: adapted from Patrick Rael, "*Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students*" last modified July 2004. <http://www.bowdoin.edu/writing-guides.htm>