Guide to Primary Source Analysis - Extended



An archive consists of primary sources—materials in a variety of formats that serve as evidence documenting a time period, an event, a work, people, or ideas—such as letters, books, pamphlets, personal diaries, etc. The following worksheet asks you to consider the importance of a specific item and its relationship to the archive. Choose an artifact in front of you that you are curious to learn more about and begin a more indepth analysis on your specific object.

1.	Identify the type of artifact (letter, photograph, newspaper clipping)
2.	Provide identifying information (Transaction #, Collection/Box/Folder Name, etc.)
3.	Describe exactly what you see. Act as if you are explaining the item to somebody who has never viewed it before. What type of document is it?
4.	List three things that you immediately find striking or noteworthy: •
5.	• Who was the intended audience, if any?
6.	Who produced this document? When? How reliable is this author?
7.	What is the historical context of the object?

8.	What questions do you have about the artifact?
9.	What information would help you understand and interpret the item in front of you?
10.	How does this object challenge or reinforce your understanding of the course material?
11.	Why do you think this item is in the archive?
12.	Should archives collect these types of documents? Why or why not?
13.	What is missing or absent from this selection of sources? Why do you think these absences exist?
14.	If you were trying to fill the gaps in this selection of artifacts, what additional items would you look for and why?
15.	Describe your experience analyzing this document. Do you have any further questions about the Harry Ransom Center?