

HOW TO READ A DOCUMENT

When faced with reading historical documents you should break the document down into different levels of understanding. Most documents can be interpreted on three differing levels. The following guide is intended as a blueprint for you to use as you investigate the value of each document.

LEVEL I

These questions should allow you to obtain concrete answers. While level one questions are seemingly straight forward they are the key to understanding the entire document. You should either underline or make notes in the margins to answer these questions.

- 1. Who wrote this document?**
- 2. Who is the intended audience of the document?**
- 3. What is the story line?**

LEVEL II

Level two allows you to look behind the essential facts. Your goal should be to learn what the document is really about. You now want to see the document as a "neutral observer" and be less accepting of the facts contained with the text. On level one the document told you the answers. On level two you begin to question the document.

- 1. Why was this document written?**
- 2. What type of document is this?**
- 3. What are the basic assumptions made by this document?**

LEVEL III

Both levels one and two have real answers, for which there is little debate. Level three allows and requires you to exercise your critical imagination. Your answers may vary

from someone else, but the critical point is that your answer be connected to historical fact and not just wild ramblings on your part. This level may require you to do additional research to understand and arrive at an answer.

- 1. Can I believe this document?**
- 2. What can I learn about the society that produced this document?**
- 3. What does this document mean to me?**