Time and Place Rule

The closer in time and place a source and its creator were to an event in the past, the better the source will be.

Start with the most reliable:

- Direct traces of the event
- Accounts of the event, created at the time it occurred by firsthand participants or observers
- Accounts of the event, created after it occurred, by firsthand observers
- Accounts of the event, created after it occurred, by people who did not participate or witness the event

Bias Rule

Every piece of evidence and every source must be read or viewed skeptically and critically. Historians know that every source is biased in some way.

No source should be taken at face value. The creator’s point of view must be considered. The source may document what the creator thinks may have happened, or may have omitted information because they want you to influence your understanding.
Each piece of evidence and source must be cross-checked and compared with related sources and pieces of evidence.

### Questions

Who created the source and why? Was it created through a spur-of-the-moment act, a routine transaction, or a thoughtful, deliberate process?

Did the recorder have firsthand knowledge of the event? Or, did the record report what others saw and heard?

Was the recorder a neutral party, or did the creator have opinions or interests that might have influenced what was recorded?

Did the recorder produce the source for personal use, for one or more individuals, or for a large audience?

Was the source meant to be public or private?

Did the recorder wish to inform or persuade others? (Check the words in the source. The words may tell you whether the recorder was trying to be objective or persuasive.) Did the recorder have reasons to be honest or dishonest?
Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some lapse of time? How large a lapse of time?
