

SOAPS-TONE: Analysis of Documents

Historians recommend that students analyze documents through the use of acronyms. An acronym of analysis is *SOAPPS*. This stands for Subject (S), Occasion (O), Audience (A), Purpose (P), Point of View (P), Speaker (S), and TONE. Typically historical primary sources will identify the author, the date, and the occasion for the comments. These introductory facts are followed by the document itself. After reading any document, you should be able to summarize the questions asked below in one line.

1. SUBJECT/SUMMARY

When reading a document, determine the subject. Answer these questions – what is it about and why is the document important or significant? Summarize actions.

2. OCCASION

The occasion of the document involves its time frame (not a specific date) and the historical context behind the document. Answer such questions – when in time the document was created, what was the specific event, what is happening in history, and where did it geographically originated.

3. AUDIENCE

All documents have an intended audience, which you must identify. Speakers say or write different things to different audiences. Analysis of audience partially answers the question of *point of view* and *perspective*. For whom was the document written in that time? Sometimes, there can be multiple audiences or hidden audiences.

4. PURPOSE

Critical to the analysis of a document is understanding the purpose behind the document. Purpose or motivation answers the question as to why the speaker said or wrote what (s)he did. What goal did the speaker want to achieve?

5. POINT OF VIEW or PERSPECTIVE

The second “P” is point of view or bias that colors or influences a person’s outlook. All documents and primary source materials contain point of views. In order to interpret documents, students must learn to recognize the speaker’s perspective.

6. SPEAKER

When students analyze a document, the process begins with an attribution, or who wrote or spoke the words. Analyze the speaker’s gender, social background, economic status, political persuasion, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and race. Who the speaker is affects his or her reliability.

7. TONE

Students need to be able to identify the manner of expression or mood created by the language of the written document. What is the tone of the speaker?

After analyzing the document, what inference or generalization about the civilization and culture can you make (if you have not read about the culture, this could be a prediction)? Additionally, what conclusion can you reach about the importance or significance of this document to history? Justify your answers. The question you must determine after analyzing any document is “how reliable is the document”? Do you believe it? Why or why not? That is the job of a good historian and this is the major process by which history is written.



Document A: The Iron Curtain Speech (Modified)

It is my duty, however, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe.

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow.

In a great number of countries, far from the Russian frontiers and throughout the world, Communist fifth columns are established and work in complete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the Communist center.

I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines.

But what we have to consider here today while time remains, is the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries.

Source: *Excerpt from the "Iron Curtain Speech" delivered by Winston Churchill, March 1946 in Fulton, Missouri.*

Document B: The Truman Doctrine (Modified)

The United States has received from the Greek Government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance... Greece is in desperate need of financial and economic assistance to enable it to resume purchases of food, clothing, fuel, and seeds.

The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority. . . . Greece must have assistance if it is to become a self-supporting and self-respecting democracy. The United States must supply this assistance. . . . No other nation is willing and able to provide the necessary support for a democratic Greek government.

One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will be able to work out a way of life free from coercion.

It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the survival and integrity of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East. . . . Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East.

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world. And we shall surely endanger the welfare of this nation.

Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.

Source: Excerpt from the "Truman Doctrine Speech," delivered by President Truman to Congress on March 12, 1947.

Document C: Soviet Ambassador Telegram (Modified)

The foreign policy of the United States, which reflects the imperialist tendencies of American monopolistic capital, is characterized in the postwar period by a striving for world supremacy. This is the real meaning of the many statements by President Truman and other representatives of American ruling circles; that the United States has the right to lead the world. All the forces of American diplomacy -- the army, the air force, the navy, industry, and science -- are enlisted in the service of this foreign policy. For this purpose broad plans for expansion have been developed and are being implemented through diplomacy and the establishment of a system of naval and air bases stretching far beyond the boundaries of the United States, through the arms race, and through the creation of ever newer types of weapons. . . .

During the Second World War . . . [American leaders] calculated that the United States of America, if it could avoid direct participation in the war, would enter it only at the last minute, when it could easily affect the outcome of the war, completely ensuring its interests.

In this regard, it was thought that the main competitors of the United States would be crushed or greatly weakened in the war, and the United States by virtue of this circumstance would assume the role of the most powerful factor in resolving the fundamental questions of the postwar world.

Source: *Excerpt from a telegram sent by Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Novikov to Soviet Leadership in September 1946.*

Document D: Henry Wallace (Modified)

I have been increasingly disturbed about the trend of international affairs since the end of the war.

How do American actions appear to other nations? I mean actions [like] the Bikini tests of the atomic bomb and continued production of bombs, the plan to arm Latin America with our weapons, and the effort to secure air bases spread over half the globe from which the other half of the globe can be bombed. I cannot but feel that these actions must make it look to the rest of the world as if we were only paying lip service to peace at the conference table.

These facts rather make it appear either (1) that we are preparing ourselves to win the war which we regard as inevitable or (2) that we are trying to build up a predominance [largest amount] of force to intimidate the rest of mankind.

Our interest in establishing democracy in Eastern Europe, where democracy by and large has never existed, seems to [the Soviets] an attempt to reestablish the encirclement of unfriendly neighbors which might serve as a springboard of still another effort to destroy [them].

Source: *Secretary of Commerce and former Vice President Henry A. Wallace letter to President Harry S. Truman, July 23, 1946. Truman asked Wallace to resign shortly after this letter.*