

Historical Methods

This table provides examples of qualitative and quantitative observations that might be used for different types of primary resources.

Sources of Historical Data	Evidence supported by...	Documents	Artifacts	Images	Architecture	Landscapes	Archaeological Sites	Oral History
<p>Qualitative descriptive data</p> <p>Q: Informal observations using the sense of touch, smell, sight, hearing, and/or taste that result in a category or basic description</p>	Data describing the attributes, qualities, categories, or properties that something possesses	Format of document, shape and color, condition of the document, subject, style of writing, word choice, voice, sentence structure, organization, author, date of authorship, purpose, audience, emotional reaction	Condition, color, texture, flexibility, shape, appeal, reflectivity, attraction to a magnet, creator, intended user, date of creation, efficiency in design, function	Condition, format, subject, creator, date of creation, mood, setting, use of space, form, colors, light, artistic techniques, perspective, purpose	Condition, construction materials, designer, builder, construction date, style, atmosphere created, use of space, efficiency in design, symmetry, design, purpose	Condition, setting, function, type of habitat, types of resources present, condition, value, spatial organization, land patterns, topography	Condition, setting, site function, organization, types of features and artifacts present, creator, dates for features found, reason for creation and abandonment, technologies and materials present	Information about the storyteller, subject, word choice, tone, pronunciation, organization, purpose, appeal, language style, perspective, amount of detail, use of dramatic elements, references to people, time, things, and places
<p>Quantitative numerical data</p> <p>Q: Observations that result in numerical expressions or in terms of a standardized scale</p>	Data describing something based on the quantity, amount, range, or some standardized unit of measure	Document size, page count, paragraph count, word count, occurrences of words, text convention occurrences, number of characters, time frame covered	Percentage of material components, size, weight, displacement, number of parts, hardness using a hardness scale, color described using a color chart	Size, percentage given to different parts of the composition, numbers of items (men & women, tools), chemical properties of materials, colors described using a color chart	Size, percentage of open space, percentage of space given to specific functions, percentage of material components, strength of materials	Size, percentage given to certain functions, human and nonhuman population densities, distributions of human and nonhuman resources	Size, percentage of open space, percentage of space given to specific functions, number of features, quantity of artifacts, date range occupied, distance to resources	Length, number of settings, number of characters, time frame covered, frequency of words or phrases, frequency of inclusive and exclusive language

The following tables provide questions posed for some of the most common forms of historical analyses.

Analyses	Evidence supported by...	Documents	Artifacts	Images	Architecture	Landscapes	Archaeological Data	Oral History
<p>External Analysis determining authenticity of an historical resource</p> <p>Q: General questions of who, when, where, what, how about an historical resource</p>	<p>Comparison to similar things that are well documented by scholars and/or uses scientific processes or tools to form conclusions</p>	<p>Q: Was this letter written by Thomas Jefferson? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Was this object made from deer hide? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Was this painting made at the battlefield site? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Was this building constructed during the colonial era? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Does this landscape contain evidence of the colonial period gardens? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Was this archaeological site created by Native Americans of the Archaic Period? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Was this person present at all of the events mentioned in the story? How do we know?</p>
<p>Internal Analysis determining credibility of an historical resource</p> <p>Q: Questions used to determine the historical value and consistency of an historical resource</p>	<p>Comparison to other historical resources to determine credibility of statements or content within a resource</p>	<p>Q: Is the number of American casualties correct in Jefferson's letter? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Does the moccasin's method of construction represent traditional Western Abenaki practices? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Is the number of men depicted in the painting consistent with the officers' accounts of the battle? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Has the building's facade been altered dramatically over the past 300 years? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Can we identify the impact that later gardens had on the original colonial garden? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Has agricultural plowing of the site over the past 100 years destroyed most of the archaeological features? How do we know?</p>	<p>Q: Are there important facts concerning the events in the story that were omitted in this telling? How do we know?</p>

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<p>Content Analysis Research that focuses on the data intrinsic to an historic resource</p> <p>Q: Questions of who, when, where, what, and how, which focus on the obvious and indistinct data that are provided by a single historical resource</p>	<p>A detailed qualitative and quantitative study of an historical resource and comparison to like resources</p>	<p>Q: What is the evidence of inconsistencies (or not) in the message conveyed in the American Constitution?</p>	<p>Q: What is the evidence that the trade ax reflects Euro-American confusion or a genuine understanding of Native American desires?</p>	<p>Q: What is the evidence of an emerging belief in manifest destiny?</p>	<p>Q: How does the architecture of the colonial meetinghouse address the issues of power and resistance?</p>	<p>Q: Where is there evidence in Vermont's landscape of the ethnic origins of its earliest settlers?</p>	<p>Q: Who created the mound sites located in the Southeastern United States?</p>	<p>Q: What evidence in Native American creation stories reflects events occurring in PaleoIndian times?</p>
<p>Quantitative Analysis Research that reduces historical facts to numbers</p> <p>Q: Questions of who, when, where, what, and how, which focus on the comparison of historical quantitative data</p>	<p>The application of quantitative, statistical, or computer tools to understand historical data sets</p>	<p>Q: Analyze who (e.g., British crown or merchants, American merchants, plantation owners) benefited the most economically from slavery in colonial America.</p>	<p>Q: What were the differences in value in the 1770s of ceramics purchased in Philadelphia and Boston markets, which were made in Europe, Asia, and the American colonies?</p>	<p>Q: Where in colonial America did the popularity of neoclassical paintings reach their peak?</p>	<p>Q: How does the use of space compare among the different American colonial architectural styles?</p>	<p>Q: What percentage of the landscape in colonial Massachusetts was devoted to agricultural land, residential neighborhoods, public space, and industry?</p>	<p>Q: How frequently did a Mohawk community relocate their village sites before the Contact Period compared to the 17th and 18th centuries?</p>	<p>Q: What is the most common lesson or moral that appears in Cherokee traditional oral history?</p>

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<p>Intuitive Analysis Research focusing on pattern recognition in historical data sets</p> <p>Q: Questions of who, when, where, what, and how, which seek to reveal and understand patterns in historical data</p>	<p>Extensive observation and practical knowledge of the subject helps you intuit a conclusion but lacks some of the necessary data to make a conclusive argument</p>	<p>Q: Based on Jefferson's writings, how did his attitude toward emancipation evolve over time?</p>	<p>Q: How did Native American, Euro-American, and African ceramic technologies influence the ceramics made by South Carolina's colonial enslaved people?</p>	<p>Q: Analyze where colonial painters obtain the majority of their artistic influences.</p>	<p>Q: How did the construction of the colonial capitals influence the architectural styles chosen by the colonial elites?</p>	<p>Q: What is the relationship between the architectural styles of colonial buildings and that of the colonists' headstones?</p>	<p>Q: Are there similarities between how Native Americans of matrilineal communities organized their divisions of labor before and after contact with Europeans?</p>	<p>Q: Do the voices of previous storyteller's come through in the retelling of Iroquois oral traditions?</p>
<p>Critical Analysis Research focusing on the potential of historical data to answer a question</p> <p>Q: Is there enough evidence to establish a clear and convincing argument? If not, then what evidence is lacking?</p>	<p>A detailed qualitative and quantitative study of an historical resource, comparison to like resources, and appropriate analyses of the data</p>	<p>Q: Is there enough evidence to justify the statement that many land transactions between Native Americans and Euro-Americans were the result of coercion on the part of Euro-Americans? If not, then what evidence is lacking?</p>	<p>Q: Is there enough evidence to justify the statement that the object is a fake and created to deceive the buyer? If not then, what evidence is lacking?</p>	<p>Q: Is there enough evidence to justify the statement that the cameos of George and Martha Washington, made by the thousands in the 1870s, are the reasons for American's exaggerated perception of the importance of Washington's presidency? If not, then what evidence is lacking?</p>	<p>Q: Is there enough evidence to justify the statement that the log cabin was a minor architectural style in colonial America because the European ideals held by most settlers did not see it as an acceptable style of architecture? If not, then what evidence is lacking?</p>	<p>Q: Is there enough evidence to justify the statement that urban planning in eighteenth-century New England was based on the struggles of political, economic, and religious powers? If not, then what evidence is lacking?</p>	<p>Q: Is there enough evidence to justify the statement that the economy of the Bahamas during the nineteenth century was based on the principals of the pirate economies of the previous three centuries? If not, then what evidence is lacking?</p>	<p>Q: Is there enough evidence to justify the statement that it is the oral histories of former enslaved people passed down through the generations that had a tremendous influence on the black activist movements of the 1950s? If not, then what evidence is lacking?</p>

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<p>Contextual Analysis Research into the historical and cultural setting in which something was produced, used and/or discarded or destroyed</p> <p>Q: Questions that investigate the place and time in which an historical resource existed and the positionality (race, gender, class, etc.) of the maker/intended audience.</p>	<p>A detailed account of the historical and cultural setting of an historical resource</p>	<p>Under what historical circumstances was the Seneca Falls Declaration of Rights and Sentiments written?</p>	<p>In New England, what was the relationship between wampum and European currency during the early seventeenth century?</p>	<p>How do miniature portraits in late seventeenth-century Virginia reflect gender roles of that race and social class?</p>	<p>During the eighteenth century, where did North Carolina's enslaved people acquire the materials to build their homes?</p>	<p>What forms of planning were involved in the development of rural settlements in Delaware during the early seventeenth century?</p>	<p>What do the early colonial period Wampanoag villages suggest about the impact of European diseases on the daily lives of the villagers?</p>	<p>During what occasions did storytelling play unique roles in Creek communities?</p>
<p>Comparative Analysis Research that involves the comparison of historical resources</p> <p>Q: Questions that isolate for comparison select characteristics or qualities of historical resources</p>	<p>A systematic comparison of resources using comparable qualitative and/or quantitative data</p>	<p>Compare the style of writing that appears in the Declaration of Independence to the Seneca Falls Declaration of Rights and Sentiments.</p>	<p>Does the application and meaning of symbols on colonial headstones relate to those seen on contemporary furniture?</p>	<p>What do depictions of women in eighteenth-century American art tell us about gender, ethnic, and social class stereotypes of the time?</p>	<p>Did colonial settlers in seventeenth-century Pennsylvania build their homes using standard principles in architectural design?</p>	<p>How many ways did American colonial cities deal with the spatial needs of their residents and businesses?</p>	<p>Which was the most efficient system of waste disposal developed by the urban centers in colonial America?</p>	<p>What would be an example of a classification or typology of Native American origin stories?</p>

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<p>Comparative Contextual Analysis Research that involves the comparison of similar historical resources considering their unique historical and cultural settings</p> <p>Q: Questions that seek to find patterns in historical resources across time and space</p>	<p>A systematic comparison of historical resources as well as their historical and cultural settings</p>	<p>What role does the historical context play in the changes apparent in the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868 between the United States government and the Indians of the Upper Plains?</p>	<p>In America, how did the meaning and shape of the beaver hat change from the colonial era to the nineteenth century?</p>	<p>What distinguished public art from private art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?</p>	<p>Where did the various American architectural styles originate from?</p>	<p>How did rivers impact the development of colonial America?</p>	<p>What is the distinction between a summer and winter campsite for the Iroquoian tribes during the Woodland Period?</p>	<p>What are the prominent themes of oral stories that have origins in and/or content about colonial America?</p>
<p>Cause and Effect Analysis Research that attempts to link historical events with later outcomes</p> <p>Q: Questions that seek to understand the connections among people, places, and events in a complex web of contingencies</p>	<p>An explanation of how an historical resource reflects change or continuity in a specific place and time OR how the historical resource or content referred to in the historical resource was an agent for change or stability</p>	<p>How much influence did Thomas Paine's <i>Common Sense</i> have on the style of other literature written during the Revolutionary Era?</p>	<p>Is there a link between the birth of capitalism in America and the desire for Chinese porcelain and other luxury goods in the late eighteenth century?</p>	<p>What role did the Civil War have on the technological development of photography?</p>	<p>Did the desire for monumental architecture by elites in the Hudson Valley influence the development of the mining marble and granite in the Champlain Valley?</p>	<p>Did the increasing number of enslaved people on plantations or increased black migration to the north after the Civil War lead to a greater segregation of whites and blacks on the landscape?</p>	<p>Did the introduction of European trade goods to Native Americans lead to the almost immediate abandonment of traditional technologies?</p>	<p>To what degree did the African-American mourning songs of the early nineteenth century influence the funeral music of white Americans during the late nineteenth century?</p>

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<p>Cultural Analysis Investigation of a culture's identity and how a culture adapts and changes over time in response to internal and external stimuli</p> <p>Q: Questions that seek patterns in qualitative and quantitative data concerning a group of people that represent a single culture</p>	<p>Consistent patterns in attitudes, goals, practices, and material things and often a demonstration of how they change over time</p>	<p>How does the case of <i>Bradwell vs Illinois</i> represent the struggles of women for equality in the nineteenth century?</p>	<p>What do the styles, forms, and decoration of ceramics inform us about the English colonists during the colonial era?</p>	<p>In what ways do colonial maps of the eighteenth century foster the idea of manifest destiny for Euro-Americans?</p>	<p>What did the use of space in early textile factories tell us about ethnic and gender roles in the nineteenth century?</p>	<p>How do the landscapes created by African enslaved people in the Carolinas reflect their cultural practices in Africa as well as adaptations to their new environment?</p>	<p>What were the internal and external stimuli for change in the gender roles for eastern Native American men and women during the seventeenth century?</p>	<p>How does the role of song change for African-Americans before and after emancipation?</p>
<p>Cross-Cultural Analysis Research into the common traits and practices held by different cultures</p> <p>Q: Questions that seek patterns in qualitative and quantitative data concerning multiple groups of people that represent distinct cultures</p>	<p>Consistent patterns in attitudes, goals, practices, and material things that occur among several different cultural groups</p>	<p>How are the American Revolution and the Constitution of 1788 similar to the Haytian Revolution and Constitution of 1801?</p>	<p>How did the Euro-American use of decoration or ornamentation of the body differ from that of Algonquin tribes and African enslaved people during the seventeenth century?</p>	<p>During the nineteenth century, in what ways did the creation and use of paintings and drawings differ between Indians of the Upper Plains and Euro-Americans settlers in the region?</p>	<p>In what ways does the use of architectural structures appear similar in Native Americans and African enslaved people in the Southeast?</p>	<p>Were there common European/Indian concepts of how the land should be treated in the "New World," and how did they compare / contrast?</p>	<p>What does the archaeological record reveal about the roles of children in Native American societies throughout the Southwest?</p>	<p>Do the oral histories of whites, blacks, and Indians present today in rural Kentucky reflect the diverse opinions and attitudes of their colonial ancestors?</p>

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<p>Functional Analysis determining the use of and/or meaning to people of a historical resource</p> <p>Q: Questions of who, when, where, what, and how related to the function or meaning of something</p>	<p>A detailed qualitative and quantitative study of an historical resource and comparison to like resources</p>	<p>What was the meaning of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments (1848) for its writers/and various readers?</p>	<p>What was the impact of the cotton gin on the daily lives of enslaved people?</p>	<p>How did this image impact the ideas of those who are/are not from the group depicted (ethnic, gender, social class, etc.) during the late nineteenth century?</p>	<p>What were the functions of the formal and informal spaces in Georgian architecture?</p>	<p>Where in the colonial landscape do we find people negotiating for or fighting for equality or power amongst themselves?</p>	<p>What roles did the site serve and how did the function of the site change over the past 300 years?</p>	<p>Who in the story is intended to be the voice of reason, and what is s/he asking the listener to do?</p>
<p>Product Analysis research related to the changes and continuities in specific categories of historical resources over time</p> <p>Q: Questions of who, when, where, what, and how related to the impact of producers and consumers on a category of historical resources</p>	<p>A detailed qualitative and quantitative study of an historical resource and comparison to like resources</p>	<p>How did treaties between Euro-Americans and Native Americans change in their language and importance during the colonial era?</p>	<p>How did the method of preparing deer hides change over time for Indian women during the pre-contact and colonial eras?</p>	<p>What role did the families of Civil War soldiers play in promoting changes to the subject matter and photographic process during the Civil War?</p>	<p>When did the buying power of the middle class impact the styles of architecture in America?</p>	<p>How did new immigrants change the appearance of urban America during the seventeenth and eighteenth century?</p>	<p>Who was responsible for the changes in ceramic styles seen in the archaeological record of the pre-Columbian Chesapeake Bay?</p>	<p>How have the roles of creation and migration stories changed in Indian societies from the pre-contact era to present?</p>