

Primary Source Fundamentals

Special Collections and Archives

1. Primary sources can be used to support or refute multiple hypotheses and answer many different kinds of research questions. For example, this patient's record could be used to answer questions about early 20th century medical techniques, the history of Jews in the American West, etc. What other kinds of research questions could this item be used to answer?
2. What types of items are found in this patient file? Describe them in a few sentences, including any information in the file that you could use to narrow down or flesh out any of the potential research questions from question #1.
3. What person or organization produced these items or contributed to their production? If more than one person or organization was involved in producing the item, include more than one. What can you tell about the person or organization from examining the items?
4. When was this item/items produced? Describe some physical details that would give you clues as to when it was produced.
5. What do the items in this file reveal about the period in which they were produced, and what can you tell about the historical situation that gave rise to the creation of these items from examining it?
6. Is the item a credible source of information? If so, why – and if not, why not? (it can certainly be more credible than not, but it doesn't have to be all one or the other!)
7. Who is the audience for this item? What can you tell about the audience for this item from examining it? What values of the audience does the creator of the item seem to be appealing to?

