# HOW TO ANALYZE INFORMATION

To analyze information means to break it apart into bits and pieces, such as facts and opinions, causes and effects, before and after time-relationships. Like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, however, the pieces that result from analysis must be put back together in ways that reveal the relationships of the pieces, each to the other and each to the whole.

1. Read the material carefully.  Before beginning any analysis of material, you must first understand what you are reading.  The best way to do this is to look for main ideas in the material and for details that support the main ideas.  After a careful reading of the whole you are then ready to start your analysis.

2. Ask yourself questions.  Ask who or what is involved.  Ask who did what to whom.  Ask when and where the action is taking place.  Ask how if it's appropriate, and always ask why.

3. Separate fact from opinion.  Facts are provable and observable. They usually can be checked in more than one source.  Opinions are beliefs that may or may not be observable or proved true.  Separating opinion from facts helps you recognize the historian's analysis.  Certain words or phrases often proceed opinions in most historical writings.  Some examples of these phrases include it is believed, I would appear, The evidence seems to warrant.

4. Search for bias.  Facts can be selectively used to present a one-sided view.  Be alert to words, phrases, or facts that support a single viewpoint when it seems evident that more than one viewpoint is possible.

5. Check for cause-effect relationships.  Look for the clue words that indicate that part of a sentence states an effect.  Also remember that cause can be stated separately from its effect and that effect in itself may be a cause.

6. Come to a conclusion.  After assembling the bits and pieces, do something with them.  Draw a conclusion, from a generalization, consider a hypothesis for future reading.