



SKILLBUILDER

Using Primary Sources

►► Defining the Skill

Primary sources are materials written by people who lived during historical events. They include letters, diaries, articles, videotapes, speeches, eyewitness accounts, and photographs. Secondary sources, such as social studies books, are materials designed to discuss or teach about an event. When you research a topic, look for useful primary sources. Include these in your writing if you want to illustrate or prove an important point.

►► Applying the Skill

The passage to the right is an example of an essay about Captain James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific. Use the strategies listed below to help you determine when and how to use a primary source in your own writing.

How to Use Primary Sources

Strategy 1 Choose a primary source that gives key information about your subject. Be sure that the material is from a primary source and not a secondary source.

Strategy 2 Analyze the primary source and consider what the document was supposed to achieve and who would read it. Ask yourself how the primary source can help prove your point.

Strategy 3 Quote the primary source exactly as it is written. Some primary sources, such as this letter, will have different language, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation than modern sources.

Make a Chart

Making a chart will help you determine when and how to use a primary source. The chart to the right explains the use of the primary source in the passage (above, right).

►► Practicing the Skill

Turn to page 534 in Chapter 18, Section 2. Read the quotation from a primary source found there. Make a chart like the one above to determine how and why the primary source was used.

Captain James Cook made three trips from England to the South Pacific. The seeming purpose of his first trip in 1768 was to observe the movements of the planet Venus. **1** As this letter from the king clearly shows, however, Britain's true purpose was to find and claim the southern continent:

3 Whereas the making Discoverys of Countries hitherto unknown, and the Attaining a Knowledge of distant Parts ... will redound greatly to the Honour of this Nation as a Maritime Power, as well as to the Dignity of the Crown of Great Britain, and may tend greatly to the advancement of the Trade and Navigation thereof; ... You are therefore in Pursuance of His Majesty's Pleasure hereby requir'd and directed to put to Sea with the Bark you Command so soon as the Observation of the Transit of the Planet Venus shall be finished

| Subject | Primary Source | Reason for Quoting the Primary Source |
|--|---|--|
| Captain Cook's first voyage to the South Pacific in 1768 | The secret instructions given to Captain Cook | To prove that the true purpose of the voyage was different from the stated purpose |