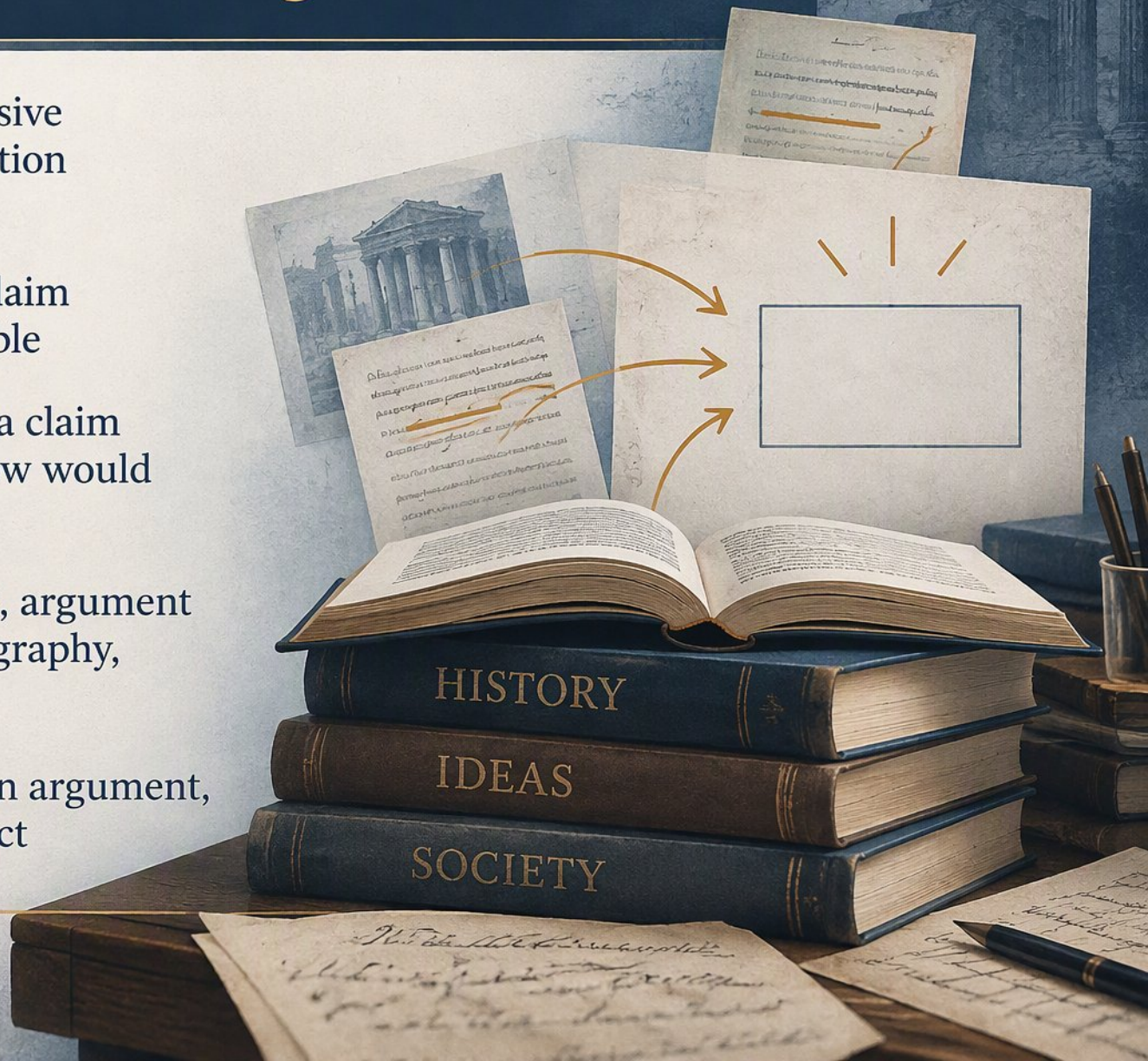
Reading Secondary Sources:
How Historians Build Arguments

PEOPLE
PLACES
IDEAS
IN CONTEXT

- Course goal: move from passive reading to active reconstruction of arguments
- Judge whether a historical claim is defensible, not just plausible
- Core question: what makes a claim stand up to scrutiny, and how would you know?
- Roadmap: source categories, argument anatomy, evidence, historiography, reading protocol, critique
- Every secondary source is an argument, not a neutral container of fact

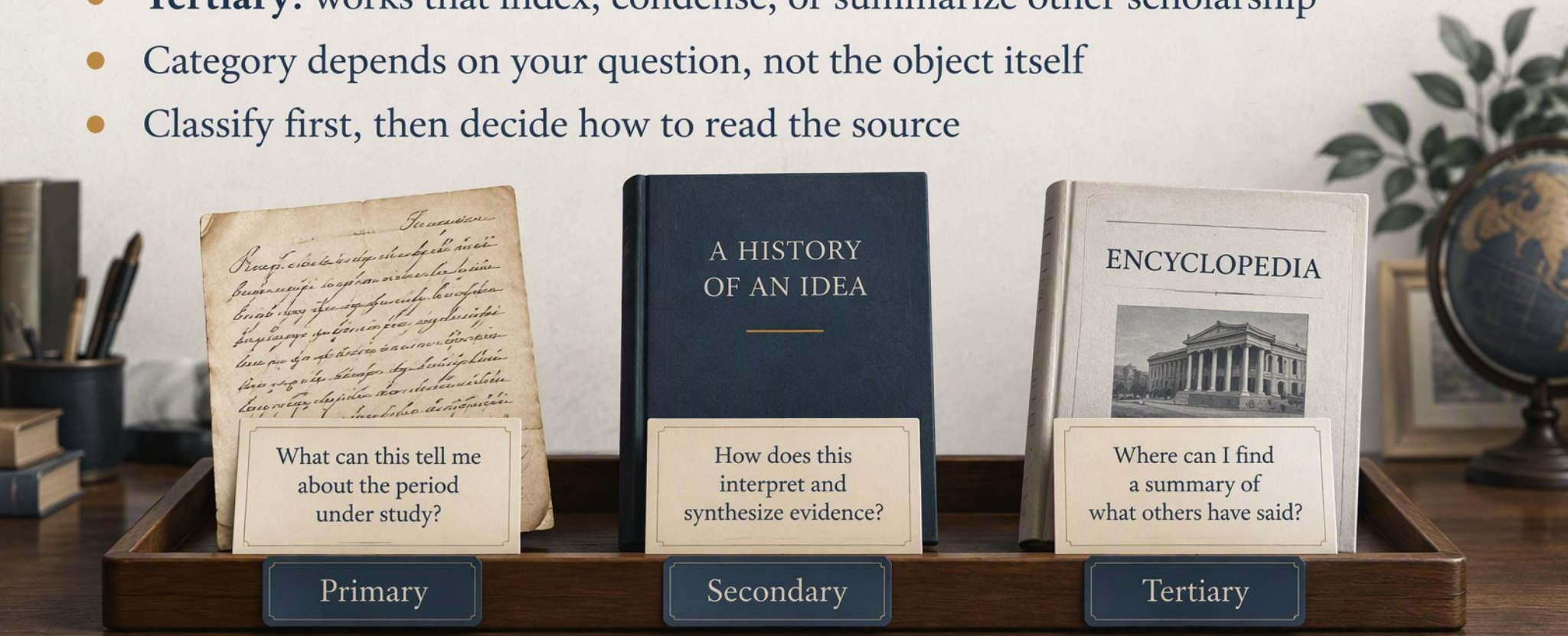


A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE PAST

Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary: Why the Category Matters

SOURCES
QUESTIONS
BETTER
UNDERSTANDING

- **Primary:** traces produced in the period under study
- **Secondary:** later accounts that interpret and synthesize evidence
- **Tertiary:** works that index, condense, or summarize other scholarship
- Category depends on your question, not the object itself
- Classify first, then decide how to read the source

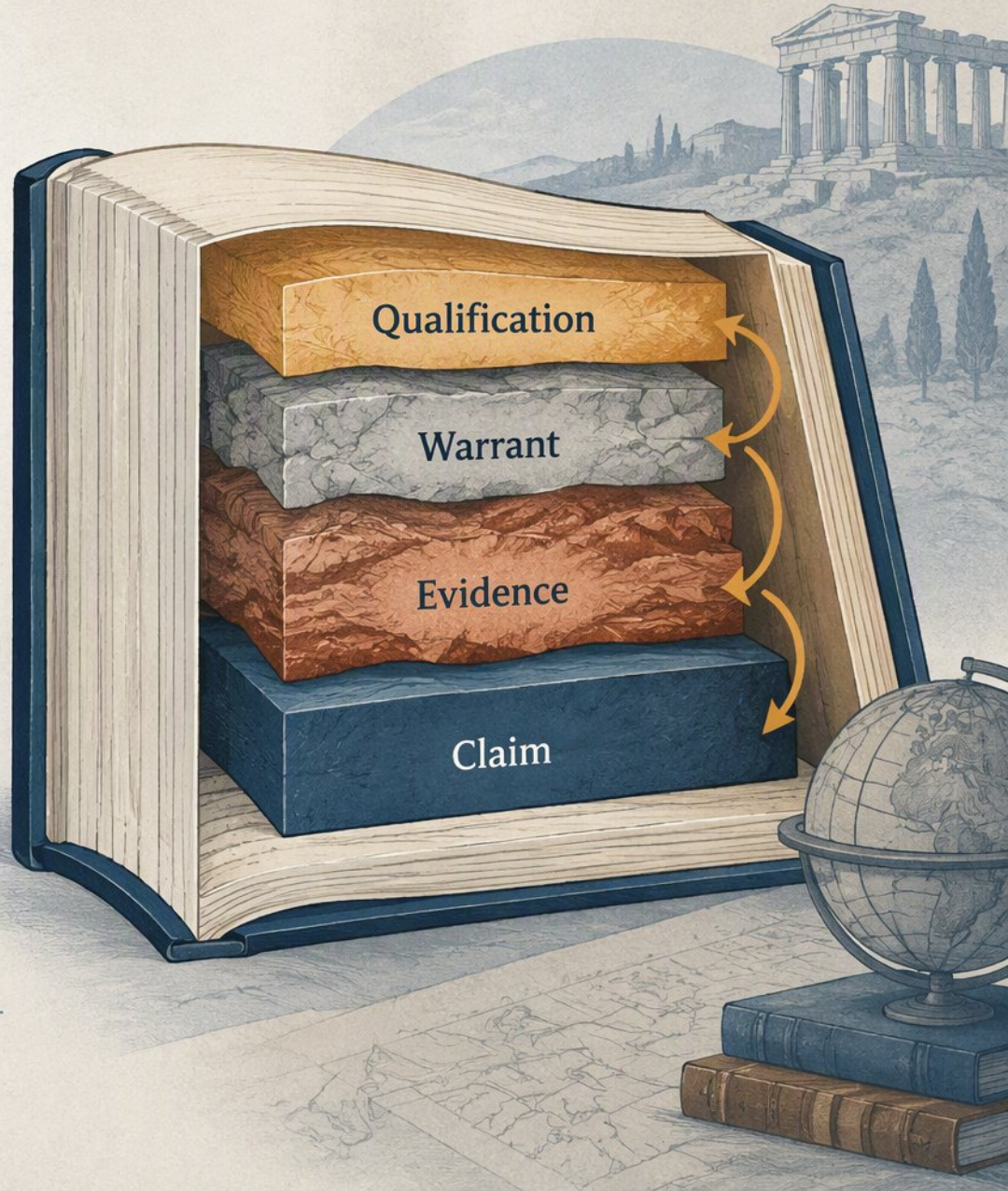


SAME SOURCES. DIFFERENT QUESTIONS. DEEPER INSIGHTS.

Anatomy of a Historical Argument

READ
ANALYZE
THINK
HISTORY

- Claim, evidence, warrant, qualification: the four working parts
- Theme is what the book is about; *thesis* is what it proves
- Find the thesis in the introduction, chapter conclusions, *or* footnotes
- Note the author's question, scope, and periodization choices
- Separate argument from background; chapters build toward the thesis



BETTER QUESTIONS
DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Evidence, Inference, and the Historian's Craft

READ CRITICALLY · THINK CONTEXTUALLY · BUILD REASONED ARGUMENTS

- Sources become evidence only after interrogation
- Source criticism: who, when, where, for whom, and why?
- Historical claims rest on inference and probability, not proof
- Footnotes and bibliographies map the author's evidence base
- Silence in the record is itself an interpretive problem



SAME SOURCES. DEEPER QUESTIONS.

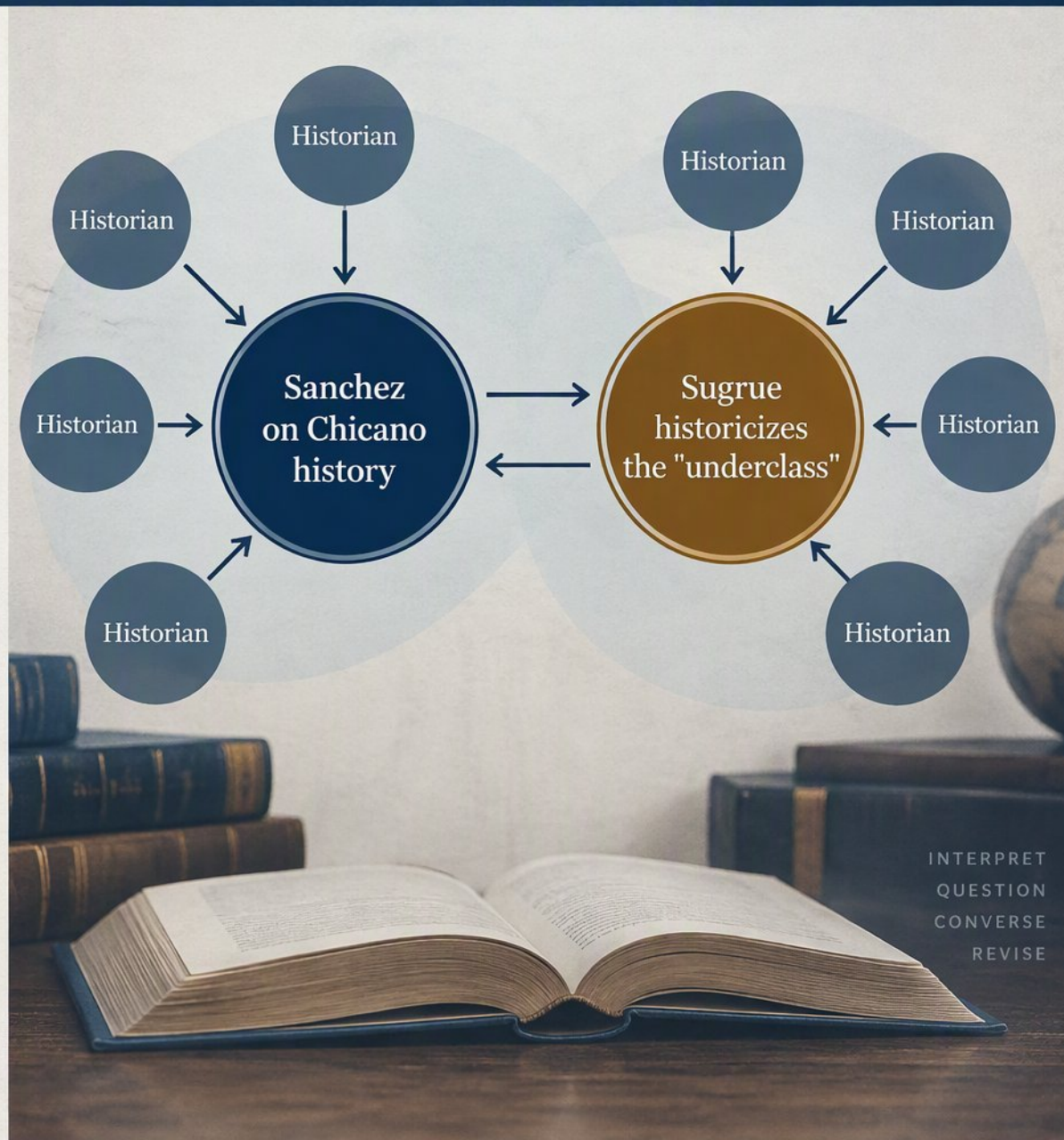
Historiography: Reading a Book in Its Conversation

IDEAS · EVIDENCE · DEBATE · A RICHER HISTORY

DIFFERENT READINGS
A DEEPER PAST

- History is what happened; historiography is what historians argue about it
- Find the conversation in literature reviews, footnotes, and acknowledgments
- Interpretations shift with new evidence and changing present-day assumptions
- Sanchez challenges continuity-versus-acculturation; Sugrue historicizes the "underclass"
- Label claims as novel, revisionist, or synthetic; read works chronologically

BOOKS SPEAK TO EACH OTHER ACROSS TIME



Pre-Read: Reading the Book Before You Read the Book

A SMALL INVESTMENT FOR A DEEPER READ

- Scan the jacket, summary, author bio, and series for framing
- Skim the table of contents and index for unusual, signature concepts
- Read the introduction for the central question and thesis
- Check the conclusion for the position the author defends
- Form a hypothesis before reading; note what would overturn it



READ DEEPLY
THINK CRITICALLY
GROW FURTHER

The Critical Reading Protocol: A Repeatable Workflow

Better Questions Brighter Thinking



- First pass: thesis, structure, and conclusion before detail
- Close pass: test evidence, warrants, and counterarguments
- Read with the grain, then against it for gaps
- Note questions, thesis, chapter summaries, and critique
- Post-read: one-sentence summary; note what would change your mind



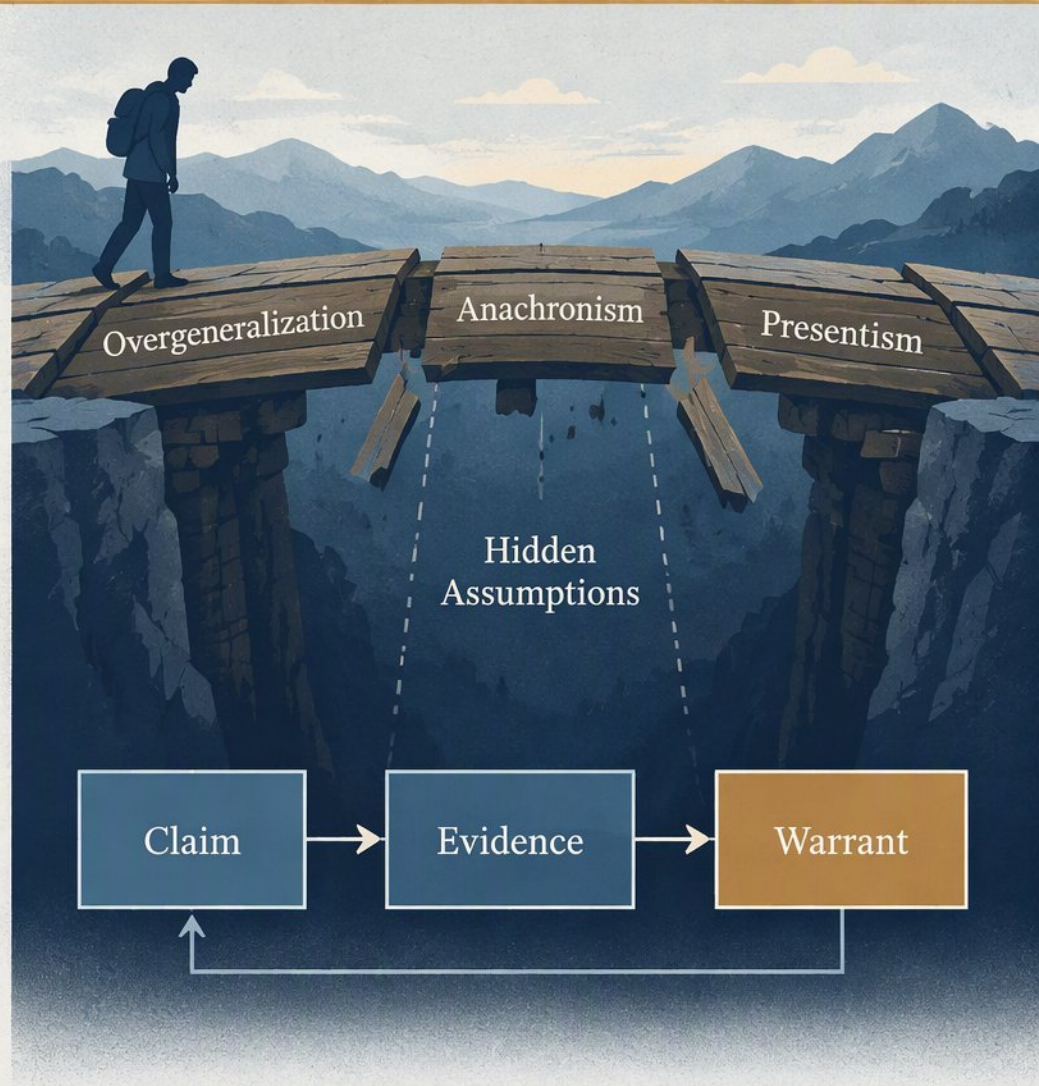


SAME TEXT A DEEPER YOU

Spotting Weak Arguments and Hidden Assumptions

THINK
QUESTION
ANALYZE
UNDERSTAND

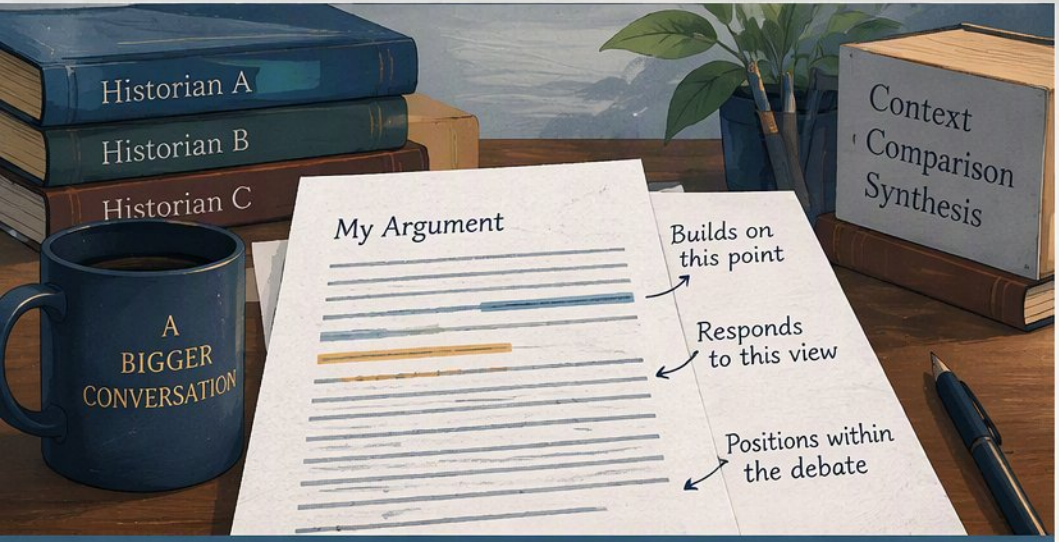
- Common flaws: overgeneralization, cherry-picked evidence, anachronism, presentism, jumbled chronology
- Probe unstated assumptions about society, human nature, and causation
- Check whether the author engages counterarguments and alternative viewpoints
- Distinguish an argument that is wrong from one that is incomplete
- Critique constructively: challenge a source without dismissing it



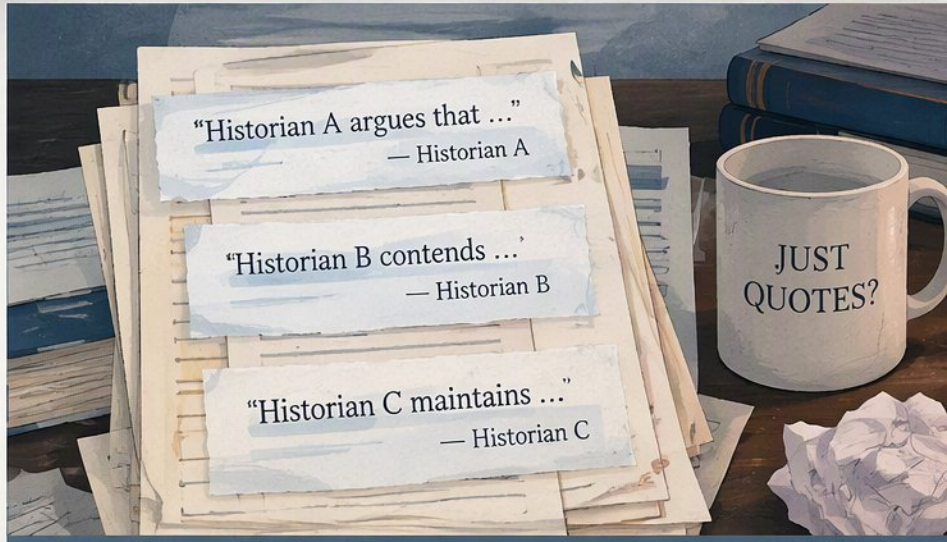
STRONGER THINKING BUILDS BRIDGES

Using Secondary Sources Responsibly: Synthesis, Quotation, and Citation

READ
THINK
SYNTHESIZE
CITE



SYNTHESIZE AND ENGAGE



DON'T JUST STACK UP CLAIMS

- Synthesize sources without flattening their disagreements; debate is your opening
- Don't just stack up historians' claims—position your argument within the debate
- Paraphrase first; quote sparingly, always introducing the source
- Cite consistently in Chicago style, using footnotes or endnotes
- Plagiarism includes borrowed findings and interpretations, not just exact wording
- Verify AI-assisted claims against cited sources and disclose your methods

BETTER
QUESTIONS
STRONGER
HISTORY

Practice Lab: Annotate, Reconstruct, and Critique

- Worked example: unpack thesis, evidence, and warrants together first
- Small groups: compare two accounts with a shared checklist
- Individual: write a one-paragraph argument map, note one gap
- Debrief: what close reading caught that first read missed
- Plan 60–90 minutes; note scaffolds for students, adults, teachers



Teaching the Skill: Scaffolding for Different Learners

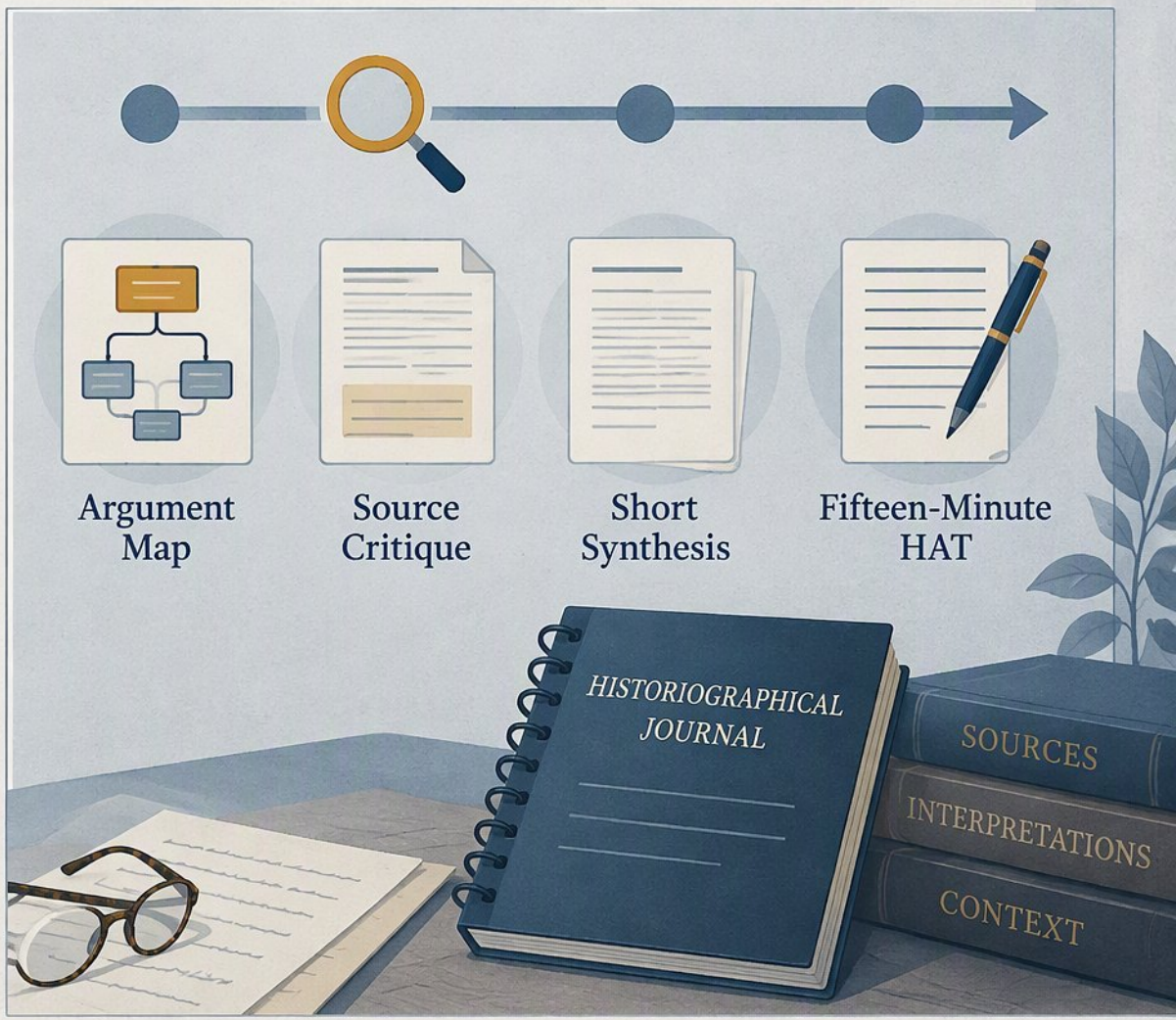
More Questions A Richer Past

- Historiography belongs in secondary classrooms, not only graduate seminars
- Beginners: scaffolded excerpts and sentence frames; advanced: full articles
- Adult learners: flexible modular sequences that fit busy schedules
- Inquiry rounds: context, then argument and sources, then synthesis
- Challenge the myth of a neutral narrative; knowledge is dialogic



Assessing and Transferring the Reading Skill

- Assess with argument maps, source critiques, and short HATs under fifteen minutes
- Score historical thinking on a continuum; don't reward source counts
- Use formative checks and annotated models to reveal student thinking
- Sustain habits: reading groups, historiographical journals, page-linked annotations
- Close: name one reading change and one step you'll teach others



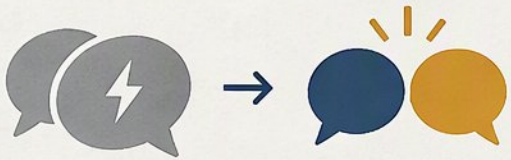
Common Misconceptions and How to Address Them



Myth: history books just report facts.
Reality: each work selects and interprets evidence.



Myth: sources are fixed as primary or secondary.
Reality: status depends on your question.



Myth: historiographical debate means history is unknowable.
Reality: debate tests interpretations.



Myth: evaluation means detecting bias.
Reality: ask if evidence fits the stated method.



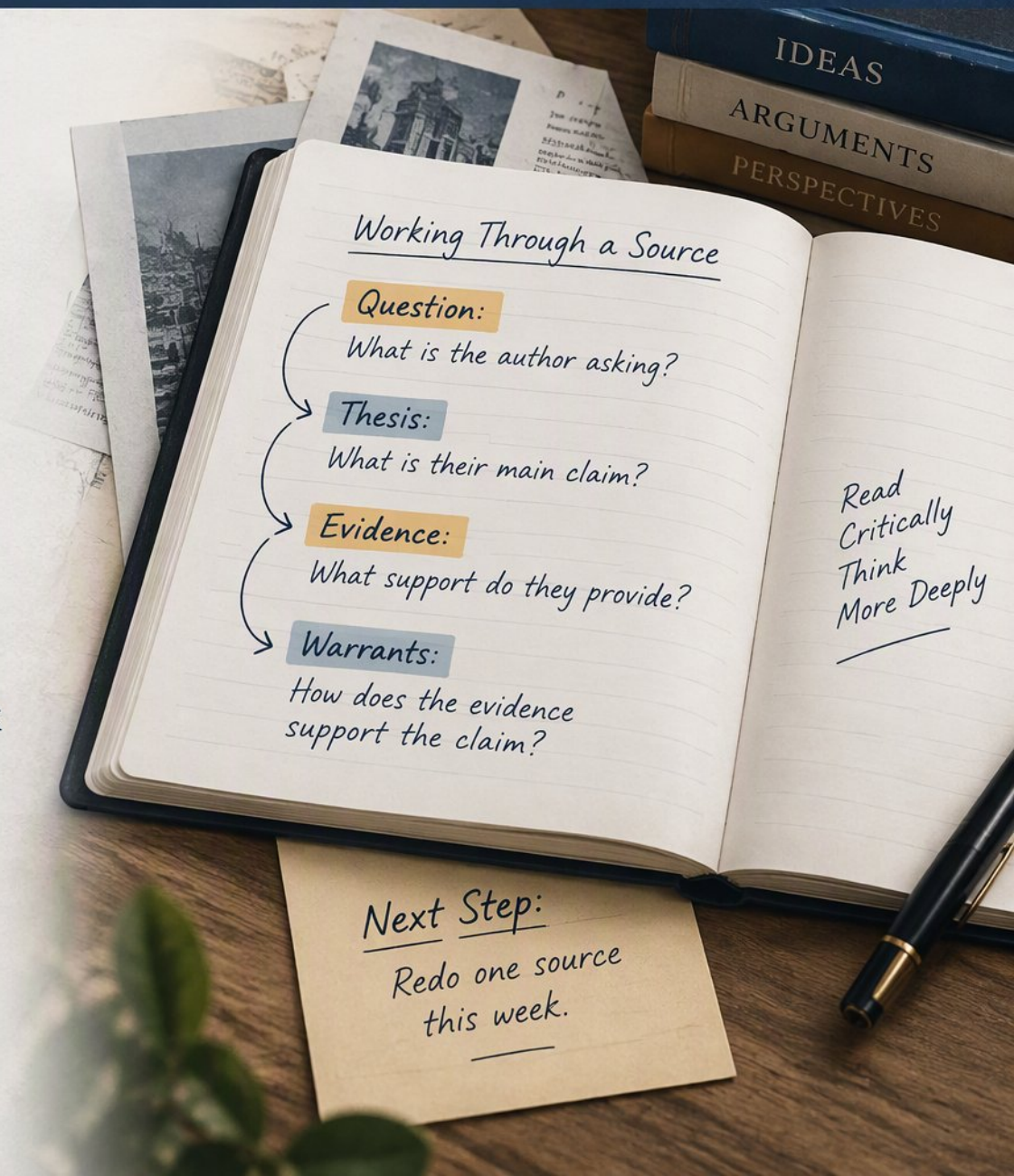
Myth: tertiary sources are neutral and safe.
Reality: useful for orientation, not original argument.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

BETTER READING STRONGER ARGUMENTS

READ ANALYZE CONNECT

- Treat every secondary source as an argument to reconstruct
- Locate the question, thesis, evidence, and warrants before judging
- Apply the four-stage protocol: pre-read, first pass, close pass, post-read
- Cite and synthesize so your work joins the scholarly conversation
- Build argument maps with students or peers; redo one source this week



SAME QUESTIONS. DEEPER THINKING.

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