Most (if not all) SU History, Art History, and other humanities and social science classes require some kind of research paper and often an annotated bibliography. Instead of merely summarizing sources for what might be important, considering origin, purpose, value, and limitations (OPVL) will help you pick and choose the best sources to include in your research papers. OPVL helps cover the major issues scholars analyse when working with primary and secondary sources. The questions included in each section of OPVL will help you read sources more closely and write about them with a critical eye.

**Origin**
What kind of source is this? Is it a Primary (an artifact, a document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, a recording, or any other source of information that was created at the time under study) or Secondary (an interpretation of historical events written by someone after the fact) source? Who wrote/created it? What are their credentials? When was it published? Where did it originate? Is there an apparent historical context (eg French Revolution or Civil War) this source is directly responding to?

**Purpose**
What is the intended audience of the source? What is the scope of the source? Is it instructive, informative, or argumentative in any way? Is it more of an internal expression of thoughts? What is the author trying to get across and what is their evidence? Summarize the central argument and the main points it’s based on.

**Value**
What kind of scholars could use this source and why? Does it lend itself to a particular kind of analysis? How strong are its arguments, are some more believable than others? *How does it help narrow your research or answer your research question?* Understanding how your sources explicitly connect to your research question is crucial for a well-written paper.

**Limitations**
This is where you highlight the source’s subjectivity and the biases that may be impacting the author. Identifying limitations helps us understand the specificity of sources and avoid using them to make general statements about time periods, people, or events. Are there any issues that arise in interpreting meaning, is it a work in translation or a transcription of a speech? How might your perspective as a scholar filter or distort the way you interpret the author’s meaning? In other words, what kind of biases do you have as a scholar that might be If you’re reading a historical document, what kind of assumptions are you making about the time period in which it was written. Does the author seem to leave things out that seem reasonable to include given the scope of their purpose? Consider the issues of race, class, and gender in thinking about what the kind of perspective the source presents. For example, what would an upper-class, white, Southerner have to gain by describing slavery in a certain way in a source written before the Civil War? Biases don’t necessarily discredit a source, but acknowledging and analyzing them helps develop a more sophisticated understanding of sources.