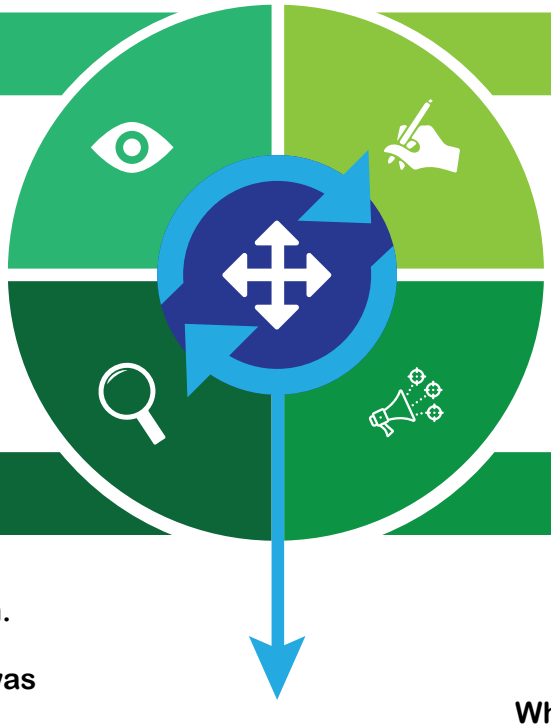
Exploring Historical Photographs: A Framework



Observe

A cursory glance of the photo will introduce you to the photo's purpose. Mentally break the photo into four quadrants and analyze each section carefully.

Identify

Identify potential useful information within the photograph. Examine embedded clues on the front and back. Make observations and take notes.

Analyze

Dig a little deeper to determine what is known. What is the photo communicating? When was the photo taken? What year, era, theme, event, etc. are present? Is this photo amateur, journalistic, or artistic?

Describe

Describe the Who, What, When, Where, and Why. Note static or in motion aspects. Ask questions. What is happening? What is visible? When did this take place? Where was the photo taken? Why did the photographer capture this moment?

Interpret

Record your observations and review your notes throughout the cyclical exploration. Repeat all steps as necessary.