



Title of Document / Excerpt

H – Historical Context —What was going on when the author wrote this document and how might this help us better understand the document? (Consider both the very specific and the general big picture stuff. If you aren't sure of the specific time period or circumstances, make good inferences based on your close reading of the document or what information you do have.)

SKIP A LINE

I – Intended Audience —For whom was this document initially created? How might this impact the author's choices in what they wrote or said and HOW they wrote or said it? (This is usually closely related to *Purpose* below.)

SKIP A LINE

P – Point of View —Who is the author? How might the author's background (race, gender, socioeconomic class) impact their written perspective? (This is usually related to *Historical Context*, although the focus here is specifically on the author.) How does understanding this POV shape our analysis or application of this document?

SKIP A LINE

P – Purpose—Why did the author create this document? What did he, she, or they want to change or be done as a result? How does understanding that purpose help us better decipher or analyze the document? (The answer is very rarely “to inform”; the author usually wants to (a) justify something they've done or are doing, (b) motivate a change in behavior or policy, and/or (c) impact how the audience thinks or feels about something.)

SKIP A LINE

O – Other Relevant Information / Observations—What else is worth noting about this document or the history surrounding it? Are there other documents or points of view we should consider while analyzing this? How might this additional information help us better understand this document and/or its importance? (There's almost always *something* – if not, fake it.)

NOTES: The breakdown and questions above are intended as a general guide to what sorts of information is often useful when doing document analysis using HIPPO. You should NOT use them as a Q&A for every document—answering them in order, whether doing so makes sense for a particular document or not. A good HIPPO should usually be between 1/2 – 1 page.



The Code of Hammurabi – Excerpts

...Anu and Bel called by name me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, who feared God, to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak... I did right... and brought about the well-being of the oppressed.

CODE OF LAWS ...

2. If any one bring an accusation against a man, and the accused go to the river and leap into the river, if he sink in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river prove that the accused is not guilty, and he escape unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser.
3. If any one bring an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death...
5. If a judge try a case, reach a decision, and present his judgment in writing; if later error shall appear in his decision, and it be through his own fault, then he shall pay twelve times the fine set by him in the case, and he shall be publicly removed from the judge's bench, and never again shall he sit there to render judgement...
21. If any one break a hole into a house (break in to steal), he shall be put to death before that hole and be buried.
22. If any one is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.
23. If the robber is not caught, then shall he who was robbed claim under oath the amount of his loss; then shall the community... in whose domain it was compensate him for the goods stolen...
55. If any one open his ditches to water his crop, but is careless, and the water flood the field of his neighbor, then he shall pay his neighbor corn for his loss.
56. If a man let in the water, and the water overflow the plantation of his neighbor, he shall pay ten gur of corn for every ten gan of land...
59. If any man, without the knowledge of the owner of a garden, fell a tree in a garden he shall pay half a mina in money.

Sample HIPPO – The Code of Hammurabi (Excerpts)

H – Historical Context

Part of a series of 282 laws posted by Hammurabi, King of Babylon, in 18th century BCE. Babylon had been expanding, partly due to trade and treaties but largely through military conquest, so Hammurabi's empire was increasingly composed of a wide variety of peoples from different backgrounds and with different cultures. Prevalence of rules related to agriculture and trade hint at priorities of all river valley civilizations.

I – Intended Audience

These laws were posted on a 7½ foot stone pillar as well as being distributed across the empire. Although technically one would have to be literate and in close proximity to the display to read it, the intended universality and transparency were clear, however – no matter your background, status, culture, etc., here are the rules and consequences.

P – Point of View

Hammurabi assumes divine mandate to make these laws. Sees himself as protector of the people, the arm of justice. Codes don't elaborate on reasoning – there's no "we're doing it this way because...". Lots of death and disfigurement – these were harsh times. The use of water to determine guilt or innocence reminds us that more than armies, diplomacy, learning, or trade, civilization was about rivers (Tigris/Euphrates) – sources of life itself.

P - Purpose

A clear, specific, somewhat comprehensive set of legal codes would help to unify and stabilize such a diverse population. The size of the empire in a time before technology allowed swift communication or travel likely contributed to harshness of penalties – prompt, consistent enforcement was difficult, so attention-grabbing consequences ensured law still had teeth. The creation and presentation of the Codes overall may also have served to glorify Hammurabi as just and strong and wonderful and pretty and such.

O – Other Relevant Information / Observations

Many rules distinguish between social/economic classes when assigning consequences, but the fact that those distinctions were spelled out and the laws written down ahead of time for all to know still created a sort of "fairness" and equity across the empire. Written laws provide a certain level of protection to all of those covered by them. 282 Codes written in 'if... then...' format – almost 'case law' more than modern statutes. Not the FIRST written laws, but certainly most famous and influential of ancient legal codes. Widely distributed and referenced long after Hammurabi's death.