[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398545) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398545)

Based on discussions with a friend who is actually pursuing an advanced degree in history, the rule of thumb for historians to prove a behavior/object/style seems to be to have three independent sources of that behavior/object/style.

This seems reasonable for a period like ours which I am finding has a great deal of printed source material. Such material is becoming ever more available to people like us. When I first started looking for period medical sources in 2007, it was a tough slog to find source material beyond what was currently in print, but that has changed in these few short years. I now have sources available via

1. [Digital archives](http://www.archive.org/details/texts) on the internet,
2. Relevant databases available via college libraries including [ESTC (English Short Title Catalog)](http://estc.bl.uk/F/?func=file&file_name=login-bl-estc) and [ECCO (Eighteenth Century Collections Online)](http://mlr.com/DigitalCollections/products/ecco/index.htm), [EEBO (Early English Books On-Line)](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home) and,
3. The recent re-publishing of all sorts of books via [Gale-ECCO print editions](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_ss_i_1_24?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=gale+ecco+print+editions&x=0&y=0&sprefix=gale+ecco+print+editions).

Three independent sources seems pretty reasonable to me, and even necessary in many ways. Why? Having waded through dozens of 18th c. texts, I can state that

* The spelling in these manuscripts is atrocious and the print frequently very hard to read, leading to all sorts of possibility for misinterpretation.
* Human error in prose description was as likely then as it is now. (How many times have you grasped for the right word and used the wrong one instead - even in print?)
* A single or even second instance of something could be an aberration. While this may prove something happened, it does not mean it happened more than the one or two times it was recorded.

Well, that's my take on it, at least as regards things that have been recorded in three different places. (Those not recorded in three different places are beyond our reach.) If we're going to say something was 'commonly done' or 'commonly used', I think the three independent source rule is fair.

What do you think?

[**jendobyns**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11262-jendobyns/)

* Pyrate Captain
* 
* 
* Member
* 562 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:Baltimore
* Interests:too numerous to mention, really. Period foodways, baroque dance, material culture, etc., etc.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398547) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398547)

You did ask...

It's a good rule of thumb, three primary sources. Of course, the more sources you have, and of different types, to back something up, the better If you only have one source, at least it makes for a good anecdote if you're telling stories in persona (remind me to tell you the story of a man's remarkable behavior at a ball sometime).

The links for online resources are great! Gotta love ECCO!

 On 4/14/2011 at 9:18 AM, Mission said:

Based on discussions with a friend who is actually pursuing an advanced degree in history, the rule of thumb for historians to prove a behavior/object/style seems to be to have three independent sources of that behavior/object/style.

This seems reasonable for a period like ours which I am finding has a great deal of printed source material. Such material is becoming ever more available to people like us. When I first started looking for period medical sources in 2007, it was a tough slog to find source material beyond what was currently in print, but that has changed in these few short years. I now have sources available via

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2. Relevant databases available via college libraries including [ESTC (English Short Title Catalog)](http://estc.bl.uk/F/?func=file&file_name=login-bl-estc) and [ECCO (Eighteenth Century Collections Online)](http://mlr.com/DigitalCollections/products/ecco/index.htm) and,
3. The recent re-publishing of all sorts of books via [Gale-ECCO print editions](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_ss_i_1_24?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=gale+ecco+print+editions&x=0&y=0&sprefix=gale+ecco+print+editions).

Three independent sources seems pretty reasonable to me, and even necessary in many ways. Why? Having waded through dozens of 18th c. texts, I can state that

* The spelling in these manuscripts is atrocious and the print frequently very hard to read, leading to all sorts of possibility for misinterpretation.
* Human error in prose description was as likely then as it is now. (How many times have you grasped for the right word and used the wrong one instead - even in print?)
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Well, that's my take on it, at least as regards things that have been recorded in three different places. (Those not recorded in three different places are beyond our reach.) If we're going to say something was 'commonly done' or 'commonly used', I think the three independent source rule is fair.

What do you think?

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
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* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398548) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398548)

Doesn't independent sort of imply primary? If you're reading a non-period book about period, it is either a dependent book or it is fiction. (But your point is taken. )

I wish I could link you into the databases, but, alas, you have to pay a bunch of money to have access to them. As I have said elsewhere, you can often get to them (in the States, anyhow) using the guest computers at large universities. Then you can copy the material onto a thumb drive. (That's what I do, anyhow.)

[**Darrel Morris**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/12267-darrel-morris/)

* Deck Hand
* 
* 
* Member
* 58 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Riverside, CA

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398554) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398554)

 Quote

Doesn't independent sort of imply primary? If you're reading a non-period book about period, it is either a dependent book or it is fiction. (But your point is taken. )

Actually, independent sources simply means that your sources are independent of each other. If you have one source that describes something and a second source that references the first one you still have only one source. The second source is "dependent" on the first. In most cases though, you would be correct in assuming that the only truly independent source is a primary one.

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398561) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398561)

It's a good rule of thumb, but shouldn't be treated too rigidly - there are always clauses and caveats to even the best rules of thumb.

For example, I have recently been looking at the social hierarchies of pirate companies, and one thing I was lokoing for was evidence of the captain not being allowed cabin furniture. Now, I have three independent sources describing the phenomenon in three different crews - Cocklyn's, Roberts', and Taylor's. So, can we say that it was common for pirate crews to restrict their captain's use of his cabin? No. Taylor was sailing master under Howell Davis before joining Cocklyn's crew, and Cocklyn and Davis were well acquainted. Taylor succeeded Cocklyn on the latter's death, just as Roberts succeeded Davis, so in fact my evidence is restricted to the practices of one group of pirates who all knew each other and at least some of whom were associated with all three crews at one point or another. We can't say, therefore, that their behaviour was commonplace in other pirate crews, despite the required three primary sources.

Mission, have you seen EEBO?

(And I suspect that the independent/primary question rests to some extent on how one defines 'primary source')

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398562) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398562)

Yes, I have seen EEBO - in fact I've gotten some of my sources from them via colleges. I think I'll add it to my database list up there as I love consolidating info in one place for future reference.

A primary source is one from period as I define it. An independent source is one that does not depend on other sources or stemming from the same source as I define that. (This actually highlights the problem of word meanings, which I hinted at above.)

Thinking further on independent sources, a funny thought occurs to me - most of the medical literature refers back other literature, particularly back to Hippocrates. So none of the medical lit. is independent from a certain perspective. (This is also not strictly true because everyone adds their two cents when they write a new medical book, but it's still sort of funny to me.)

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398563) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398563)

 On 4/14/2011 at 1:27 PM, Foxe said:

It's a good rule of thumb, but shouldn't be treated too rigidly - there are always clauses and caveats to even the best rules of thumb.

For example, I have recently been looking at the social hierarchies of pirate companies, and one thing I was lokoing for was evidence of the captain not being allowed cabin furniture. Now, I have three independent sources describing the phenomenon in three different crews - Cocklyn's, Roberts', and Taylor's. So, can we say that it was common for pirate crews to restrict their captain's use of his cabin? No. Taylor was sailing master under Howell Davis before joining Cocklyn's crew, and Cocklyn and Davis were well acquainted. Taylor succeeded Cocklyn on the latter's death, just as Roberts succeeded Davis, so in fact my evidence is restricted to the practices of one group of pirates who all knew each other and at least some of whom were associated with all three crews at one point or another. We can't say, therefore, that their behaviour was commonplace in other pirate crews, despite the required three primary sources.

I do agree, there are caveats to everything. And I am not saying that if you don't have three examples, it never happened. I'm just saying if we're going to decide that a behavior/object/style were common, we should should have three independent period sources for it. (If, as I mentioned, there are three independent period sources extant. If there aren't, you can't be sure, as I mentioned in the initial post.)

You could just as easily say that if you find three pieces of evidence that say the captain *did* have cabin furniture that use of both rules was common. Then the whole thing now becomes dependent on the specific case. (Following the speed limit is common. So is not following it. Almost anyone can find proof of both. Now you can either say both were possible or, if you want to nitpick, the behavior is dependent on a specific case - defining specific case in whatever way suits your point.) Still, if all but one example said the captain was not allowed cabin furniture, I think you'd agree that the one example did not prove that having cabin furniture was common. (Nor does it disprove it.)

However, you've sort of made my point about using the word 'independent' when describing cases - all your example pirates were interelated and stemmed from the same source in a way. So, I would argue, they were not truly independent.

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398566) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398566)

 On 4/14/2011 at 2:20 PM, Mission said:

I do agree, there are caveats to everything. And I am not saying that if you don't have three examples, it never happened. I'm just saying if we're going to decide that a behavior/object/style were common, we should should have three independent period sources for it. (If, as I mentioned, there are three independent period sources extant. If there aren't, you can't be sure, as I mentioned in the initial post.)

I agree entirely that three is a good rule of thumb, I was really thinking in the opposite direction from your comments above - "I have three independent sources for *XYZ*, therefore it was common" - but you're right that an absence of the magic three does not mean something wasn't common or never happened. I have only one source describing yellow pirate flags, but that source itself states that yellow was a common colour.

 Quote

You could just as easily say that if you find three pieces of evidence that say the captain *did* have cabin furniture that use of both rules was common. Then the whole thing now becomes dependent on the specific case. (Following the speed limit is common. So is not following it. Almost anyone can find proof of both. Now you can either say both were possible or, if you want to nitpick, the behavior is dependent on a specific case - defining specific case in whatever way suits your point.) Still, if all but one example said the captain was not allowed cabin furniture, I think you'd agree that the one example did not prove that having cabin furniture was common. (Nor does it disprove it.)

Here you make a good point that I meant to make in my earlier post. 'Common' and 'usual' are not the same thing. In specific cases it doesn't help much to make the distinction, but in a more generalised assessment (as we are wont to make here from time to time) something may be common without being usual.

 Quote

However, you've sort of made my point about using the word 'independent' when describing cases - all your example pirates were interelated and stemmed from the same source in a way. So, I would argue, they were not truly independent.

Yup, the sources may be independent, but the subjects are not.

 Quote

A primary source is one from period as I define it. An independent source is one that does not depend on other sources or stemming from the same source as I define that. (This actually highlights the problem of word meanings, which I hinted at above.)

So, for example, by your definitions, Johnson's *General History* would be a primary source but not an independent one. I'm inclined to agree with you then that 'independent' implies 'primary', but not *vice versa*.

[**Capt. Bo of the WTF co.**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2748-capt-bo-of-the-wtf-co/)

* Scourge o' the 7 Seas
* 
* 
* Member
* 2,339 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Spanish Louisiana - on the river Osage
* Interests:Many and varied.

[Posted April 14, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398568) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398568)

I used this for my Military History course a couple of years ago. I found three first-hand accounts of the Battle of Freemans Farm (Saratoga)during the Rev. War to use for my final paper. One was a British officer, and of course it was mostly how they would have beaten the rustic pioneers the next day had the rebels not attacked after the officers had retired from the field (Benedict Arnold's final blow), and one from an American officer that was of course very braggadoccio about how badly they whipped the British, the third was from an American doctor attached to Gates' command, and he was very gallant in describing the heroic effort of the British to rally upon Arnold's unauthorized attack. The details of the event were similar enough from one account to the next, it was the context of each that bears scrutiny. In the end, certain details that were included in each account supported each other, and the doctor's acount was the best for objectivity. I say that the three independent primary source rule is a very good one to utilize when ever you can. That's waht they teach us teachers anyhow.

Bo

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted April 15, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398595) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398595)

 On 4/14/2011 at 4:55 PM, Foxe said:

 On 4/14/2011 at 2:20 PM, Mission said:

A primary source is one from period as I define it. An independent source is one that does not depend on other sources or stemming from the same source as I define that. (This actually highlights the problem of word meanings, which I hinted at above.)

So, for example, by your definitions, Johnson's *General History* would be a primary source but not an independent one. I'm inclined to agree with you then that 'independent' implies 'primary', but not *vice versa*.

Well...Johnson's kind of funny. He has a lot of primary sources many of which (as far I know) are not recorded elsewhere, so lacking the actual source, the interviews he got would have to qualify as a primary source the way I am thinking of it. However, he also gets a lot of info from court records. In those cases, he is a secondary source if we have the court records. (See how I'm thinking of it - it makes sourcing a complete and utter mess. )

Of course, another problem with Johnson is that you can say, "Well the General History says thus and so with regard to Blackbeard and then it says so and thus with regard to Thomas Tew." Is that two primary sources? If you're searching for to prove something that could be based on the author's opinion, I don't see how it could be. If it's more fact-based, then you might be able to argue it is a primary source *if* you cannot source his information back to another document like court docs. (If you can, you really have to go back and get the original IMO and then you have to throw out Johnson because he is not a primary source.)

Of course the real trouble with Johnson is that he doesn't give you very good source notes - like some other authors I could name (\*cough\* Thrower \*cough\*). So if you want to use him as your proof and you're going to be strictly proper about sourcing, you have your work cut out for you.

 On 4/14/2011 at 7:01 PM, Capt. Bo of the WTF co. said:

In the end, certain details that were included in each account supported each other, and the doctor's acount was the best for objectivity.

Naturally. 

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted April 15, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398601) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398601)

 On 4/15/2011 at 8:18 AM, Mission said:

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Which is why I brought up the issue of definition. If, as you say, we define 'primary' as meaning 'contemporary' then Johnson is undoubtedly primary - the first volume was published right in the GAoP itself, and several of the stories are unfinished for the very good reason that their subjects were still active.

However, above you seem to be equating 'primary' with 'independent', in which case Johnson is undoubtedly a secondary source, since he was not (as far as we know) a participant in or witness to any of the events he describes. In those sections where Johnson had a source that is since lost to us, that doesn't make him any more primary. It's still a secondary source whether we can read the original or not.

 Quote

Of course the real trouble with Johnson is that he doesn't give you very good source notes - like some other authors I could name (\*cough\* Thrower \*cough\*). So if you want to use him as your proof and you're going to be strictly proper about sourcing, you have your work cut out for you.

The issue (as I see, that's not to say I'm right) is about how we use sources, and this is as true of primary sources and secondary sources as it is of 'in-between' sources like Johnson. Can we always believe the testimony given in court? No, of course we can't, but as long as we treat it properly court testimony can still be useful. Neither can we assume that everything said in court is false, so we cannot discard such testimony as worthless. It is up to the individual historian and reader to determine how any source should be assessed and interpreted. We won't always agree, but that's the nature of the beast.

The real work with Johnson is to first figure out where any given piece of information is likely to have come from, and then assess how reliable that source might have been. Having done that, it may be safe to proceed with the information gleaned, provided one proceeds in the right way. For example, while I endeavour not to use Johnson too much because of his reputation and inherent uncertainty, I am inclined to believe most of what he wrote about Roberts, because he had such a staggering array of genuine witnesses to call on for his information. I am less inclined to believe most of the stuff in the second volume because his sources are so much harder to track down and because much of it is, at best, 30 year old memory.

I LOVE this stuff! 

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

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[Posted April 15, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398604) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398604)

 On 4/15/2011 at 9:00 AM, Foxe said:

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That's a fair point. However, without Johnson, we have no recourse to some of the information he gathered.

 On 4/15/2011 at 9:00 AM, Foxe said:

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I think we are actually say the same thing here (although I would spell it 'endeavor').

Now, as for memory...well this is a topic of much interest to me, so you now get an earful. (Or an eyeful.) If you *really* want to delve into this, look into the psychological research on witness testimony. Current studies suggest the majority of people cannot recall what happened more than a day or two ago without 'filling in' details using things that have occurred to us within the past day. We do it so readily, we don't even realize it. We tend to remember the 'high' points (well...perhaps 'most salient' points or 'most noteworthy' points would be be a better way to state the thing) and then fill in all the rest. The further away the recollection is, the more filling in we do.

Given that (and until research finds something different, which it could), nothing recited from memory that happened more than two days ago can be truly relied upon as being truly factual. Add to that our tendency to color (or 'colour') things in a way that favor (or 'favour') us or the point we're trying to make and you can pretty much say that most history is pretty iffy other than the large, agreed upon points. (And even then...)

 On 4/15/2011 at 9:00 AM, Foxe said:

I LOVE this stuff! 

Yeah, me too. Where the hell is blackjohn? He could really get into this if he was in the right mood.

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted April 15, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398607) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398607)

 On 4/15/2011 at 9:53 AM, Mission said:

That's a fair point. However, without Johnson, we have no recourse to some of the information he gathered.

True, but it still doesn't make it any more 'primary'. Whether or not we can read the 'original' made no difference to Johnson himself, therefore the information should still be treated in the same way. Whatever Johnson's sources of information were, they still went through the same processes from the original telling, through the collating, editing, note-taking, ordering, re-editing, to the publication. If you see what I mean...

Johnson is a way for us to access those since-lost sources, but we should still treat them in the same way as his other not-lost sources.

(FWIW, I personally tend to treat Johnson in the same way as a newspaper - not as primary source but as contemporary journalism)

 Quote

I think we are actually say the same thing here (although I would spell it 'endeavor').

Yes we are (and that's because you're a Johnny Foreigner).

 Quote

Now, as for memory...

Yes, quite. Fortunately for us, much pirate testimony is limited to what you call 'salient points' anyway - these guys could condense four years into a page or two at times. There are so many other issues at stake too, and not just deliberate lying (which is often surprisingly easy to spot). We tend to remember things with levels of importance that are entirely personal to the individual, but we can also have our memories altered fairly easily but outside influences. This can be seen, for example, in some of the testimony of WWI veterans, which changed over time to suit current trends in public opinion about 'life in the trenches', even to the extent of taking on attitudes from Blackadder in the 1980s.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
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* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
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* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted April 15, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398609) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398609)

Good points.

 On 4/15/2011 at 10:33 AM, Foxe said:

There are so many other issues at stake too, and not just deliberate lying (which is often surprisingly easy to spot). We tend to remember things with levels of importance that are entirely personal to the individual, but we can also have our memories altered fairly easily but outside influences. This can be seen, for example, in some of the testimony of WWI veterans, which changed over time to suit current trends in public opinion about 'life in the trenches', even to the extent of taking on attitudes from Blackadder in the 1980s.

There is some fascinating research on conformity/social influence and 'anchoring' (Anchoring is starting with a reference point or 'anchor' and then estimating from there. The initial anchor dramatically affects the results. Experiments have shown that if an initial anchor is suggested to someone before they estimate (in this case, before they explain what happened), the anchor will completely change the results. (I am stretching anchoring quite a bit here, but it is related to what we're talking about.) So if Johnson was asking for detail, priming his subjects with other details he had come across, it could completely change the story he got to match what he already had. (And this supports your point about Johnson being a secondary source.)

At the bottom of it, you can't really rely on anything you read, even primary sources (as you define them ), to be free from bias. This seems to be particularly true in regard to opinions and minor details, which is one of the main things we all scrabble for around here. ("Now that's what you call 'ironic.'")

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.

Shooting pirates.

[Posted April 15, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398616) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398616)

 On 4/15/2011 at 10:54 AM, Mission said:

Good points.

Of course! 

 Quote

There is some fascinating research on conformity/social influence and 'anchoring' (Anchoring is starting with a reference point or 'anchor' and then estimating from there. The initial anchor dramatically affects the results. Experiments have shown that if an initial anchor is suggested to someone before they estimate (in this case, before they explain what happened), the anchor will completely change the results. (I am stretching anchoring quite a bit here, but it is related to what we're talking about.) So if Johnson was asking for detail, priming his subjects with other details he had come across, it could completely change the story he got to match what he already had. (And this supports your point about Johnson being a secondary source.)

Precisely. In my example, folks read the poetry of Brooke and Sassoon, and watch Blackadder, and start their research with an idea of the futility and desperation of the trenches. When they then interview the veterans their questions are anchored in that pre-conceived idea and the responses come to match.

In the case of Johnson, one of the things he labours as times is the democratic nature of pirate society. So, hypothetically, he goes to interview a pirate in the Marshalsea and starts with, 'Tell me about voting, did you do much voting?' The pirate scratches his ass, thinks for a minute, and says, 'Well, there was this one time when ol' Barbecue couldn't make up his mind whether to fry our eggs or scramble them, so we had a show of hands...'. Eventually this becomes the infamous 'breakfast-council' which can be found in the most obscure editions of Johnson 

 Quote

At the bottom of it, you can't really rely on anything you read, even primary sources (as you define them ), to be free from bias. This seems to be particularly true in regard to opinions and minor details, which is one of the main things we all scrabble for around here. ("Now that's what you call 'ironic.'")

One of the most respected maritime historians of my acquaintance is wont to remind her students to ask of every source 'how and why is this document lying to me'. Documents lie to different degrees, and in different ways, and over different things, and figuring out the how and why is the key to interpreting the thing.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
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* 5,082 posts
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* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted April 15, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398620) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398620)

 On 4/15/2011 at 0:01 PM, Foxe said:

In my example, folks read the poetry of Brooke and Sassoon, and watch Blackadder, and start their research with an idea of the futility and desperation of the trenches. When they then interview the veterans their questions are anchored in that pre-conceived idea and the responses come to match.

And that's referred to in the psych research as the 'framing effect.' (We're just covering a laundry list of the cognitive biases today. )

[**Jack Roberts**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2837-jack-roberts/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
* 
* Member
* 1,063 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Orlando, FL

[Posted April 18, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398697) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398697)

\*BOOM\*

My head exploded.....

You intellectuals and your discussions... why do I suddenly feel very stupid.... 

Good read by the way.

[**Silkie McDonough**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2754-silkie-mcdonough/)

* Proprietress of the Sealkies Hide
* 
* 
* Moderator
* 5,695 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:I have been a Virginian for 2 months now. LOVING it.
* Interests:Music, vocalizing, Irish balads. I love to draw, I do pencile portraits/detail drawings for barter and sale. The link in in my signature. Ireland, its history and culture. Sewing garb, mostly for myself. The arm of a strong gentleman round my waist.

Unfortunately, I don't do nearly enough of any of a these.

[Posted April 18, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398707) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398707)

Thank you Jack. I was afraid I was the only one. 

and this is why I hate research ...can't trust anyone ...danged pirates.

[**blackjohn**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1144-blackjohn/)

* Iron Age Hero Lost at Sea
* 
* 
* Member
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* Gender:Male
* Location:Columbia, Md
* Interests:Stuff... and junk.

[Posted April 19, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398730) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398730)

 On 4/14/2011 at 9:18 AM, Mission said:

What do you think?

Having been prodded by Mission, and since piracy seems to be in the air at the moment, I'll add my tuppence. Three? Eh. Why not five? Why not all you can find? Either way, I'm not really sure there is proof or truth, no matter how many sources you pile on. Here's why...

I just finished writing an entry for *The History of Cartography, Volume Six* with the catchy title "The History of Marine Charting by the United Stated in the 20th Century." Everything was going just splivvy until I hit the 1970s. It was at that point that I decided to do some "fact checking," comparing the official written history of the Coast Survey to the recollections of my peers, a half-dozen or so who were around during the period. What did I find? The official history wasn't telling the whole truth. According to the written record, in 1973 the Coast Survey produced our first nautical chart through fully automated methods. According to the people who were here, that chart had so many hands massaging it along the way that it was by no means a fully automated process. My point? I dunno... other than I don't know that one can put a limit on the number of sources checked, and that even official documents are not to be trusted.

Frankly, thinking about this further and in relation to my day job, where we often have to dig through old chart histories to find why an item is where it is on a chart, if someone actually believes they can stop at three then in my opinion that person is being a lazy historian. A good historian is like a good detective. They'll check every lead and follow it, hopefully uncovering more along the way.

Thus ends my rambling post. Carry on. See you in another month or six.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

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[Posted April 19, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=findComment&comment=398732) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17919-proper-period-proof/&do=reportComment&comment=398732)

I was actually bringing it up because we occasionally have people looking for an instance of proof against some commonly held point or an instance of proof for their particular point. So I suggested three to separate the wheat from the chaff. Perhaps I should restate it as "...at least three..."

As for finding enough proof - at least as regards period surgery - I find resources to be like looking in a magical bag of holding. One resource leads to another and that two others and on and on and one and pretty soon you have read twenty-some books (mostly covering the same procedures in slightly different ways) and you have another twenty books waiting in the wings. (As a result, you never start writing you own material, but manage to collect 952 pages of notes in Word (12pt), the material from two-and-a-half books waiting to entered and you're reading through another one. )