

## Working with historical sources

All sources need to be examined critically – this means that you need to be able to work out in what ways the source is useful but also what its limitations are.

To help you do this, always ask the following questions in order to assess the *origin* of the source:

- What type of source is it?
- Who produced it?
- What were the circumstances in which the source was produced? (this includes date, country, type of government, nature of censorship,..)

You then need to ask questions to identify the *purpose* of the source

- What was the purpose or intention of the author?
- Who was intended to hear or read the source?

You also need to consider if there is evidence from other sources which supports the message of a particular source. The language and content of the source will also help you in your evaluation.

Every source needs to be looked at in relation to the questions above. However, it is possible to ask more specific questions about each type of source:

### Key questions for analyzing cartoons

***Which political figures (if any) are shown in the cartoon?*** This means that you need a knowledge of what the key people of the period you are studying actually looked like

***Are there any symbols in the cartoon which have significance?*** Sometimes countries are indicated through symbols rather than figures and again you need to be familiar with standard signs/symbols for countries

***What event/issue is the cartoon referring to?*** Look carefully at the date and use your knowledge of the period to help you work this out

***Does the title of the cartoon help you work out what is going on? Is there any other writing in the cartoon?***

***In which country was the cartoon published?*** This will help you decide if it is subject to censorship

***Do you know anything about the cartoonist or publication that they drew for?*** This might help you work out the political stance and thus the purpose of the cartoonist

### Key questions for analyzing photographs

***Who is shown in the photograph?*** Again you need to be able to recognise key figures!

**Does the photograph look spontaneous or posed?** How can you tell? Does this affect its message?

**Do you know who took the photograph?** This might help you establish the reason or purpose for which it was taken

**Was it published in a particular country/newspaper?** Again, this might help you work out the reason for why it was taken and if there was a political purpose for the photograph

## Key questions for analyzing speeches

**Who was making the speech and to whom?** Hopefully your knowledge of the individual combined with the date of the speech will allow you to quickly establish the historical context of the speech and thus its purpose

**What rhetorical techniques are used in the speech?** You have to remember that a speech is usually carefully crafted with a clear political purpose. Often specific rhetorical techniques are used to win an audience over. This can be repetition of key points, exaggerated language, emotive/personalised language. Try to spot these and comment on them in your answer.

## Key questions for analysing Memoirs

**How long after the event did the person write their memoirs?** If they are relying on memory, then they have forgotten certain aspects of events (note that for professional historians, writing about events a long time ago is not an issue as they will be consulting a wide range of sources to help them work out what happened – if fact the further from the event they are writing, the more sources will be available) Their purpose for writing is also different

**Does the writer have a political purpose for writing their memoirs?** E.g. do they have a strong motive for ensuring that history remembers them favourably?

## Key questions for analyzing Diaries

**How close to the actual events that he/she is writing about was the author?**

**Does the author have a particular political viewpoint?**