

The origin, purpose, values and limitations (OPVL) of historical sources

Question 3 of Paper 1 for both SL and HL, as well as section C of your historical investigation will require you to evaluate the origin, purpose, values and limitations of two historical sources.

Origin

Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Who** wrote/drew/said the source?
- **When** did they write/say/draw it?
- **Where** did they write/say/draw it?
- **What** is the source? (a speech, cartoon, textbook, etc.?)

Purpose

Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Why** did they write/say/draw it?
- **For whom** did they write/say/draw it?

Values and limitations

Source	Values	Limitations
Private letters - The audience is the recipient Diaries - The audience is personal, not public at the time of writing	- Can offer insight into personal views and opinions. - Can indicate effects of an event or era on an individual. - Can suggest motives for public actions and opinions.	- Only gives an individual opinion, not a general view or government perspective. - The writer may change opinion due to later events. - May give a view not held in public. - In a letter, the motive might be to persuade the audience to act in a certain way.
Memoirs - To be published for a public audience	- Can offer insight into personal views and opinions. - Can suggest motives for public actions and opinions. - Might benefit from hindsight (an evaluation of events after the period). - Might show how the individual wants his or her motive and actions to be viewed by the public.	- The writer may revise opinions with the benefit of hindsight, not that the consequences of actions are known. - The writer might want to highlight the strengths of his actions, to improve his public image or his legacy.
Novels, Poems	- Could inform on contemporary opinion. - Can offer insight into emotional responses and motive	- Could be a "dissenting voice" (not popular opinion) - Could exaggerate the importance of an event or individual - Could have a political agenda

Source	Values	Limitations
<p>Newspapers</p> <p>Television and radio reports</p> <p>Eyewitness accounts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can give publicly held views or popular opinion. - Might offer an expert's view. - Can give insight on contemporary opinion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could be politically influenced or could be censored by specific governments or regimes. - Might only give an overview of the situation. - Might only give a narrow, one-sided perspective. - Might emphasize only a minor part of an issue. - Note: eyewitness accounts are not useful just because they are at an event. Each eyewitness will notice different aspects and may miss key points altogether.
<p>Statistics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can offer insights, for example, into economic growth and decline. - Might suggest correlations between indicators like unemployment and voting patterns. - Makes analysis or results over time easier. - Makes comparison easier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The purpose of gathering particular statistics needs considering. (could be political, economic or deliberately distorted) - Could relate only to one location or time period. - Correlations might be wrong. (there could be another causal factor not included in the statistics)
<p>Photographs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can give sense of a specific scene or event. - Can offer insight into immediate response to or impact of an event on particular people or place. - Might offer information on the environment where an event took place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cannot see "beyond the lens" - The limited view might distort the "bigger" picture. - Might be staged. (especially if everyone is looking at the camera) - The purpose of the photographer is key; what did he/she want to show?
<p>Cartoons</p> <p>Paintings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can inform on public opinion. (cartoonists often respond to commonly held views) - When governments or regimes censor the press, it can be used to portray the government's line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could be censored, so not really public opinion. - Cartoons often play on stereotypes and exaggeration. - Could be limited to the viewpoint and experience of the cartoonist or artist (or the newspaper the artwork appears in)

Source	Values	Limitations
<p>Government records and documents</p> <p>Speeches</p> <p>Memorandums</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Might show the government's position or on an issue - Can offer insight into reasons for decisions. - Might reveal motives for policies. - Can show what the public is told about an event or issue by the government - Might be a well-informed analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often does not offer insight into the results or policies and decisions. - Might not reveal dissent or divergent opinions. - Might not show public opinion. - Very sensitive information can be classified for many years. - May not explain motives for a decision or political purpose.
<p>Historians</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are usually professionals, experts in the field. - Have the benefit of hindsight, which contemporary sources do not. - May have access to a variety of documents when relevant classified documents become available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Might have a broad focus for their work. - Might have a very specific and narrow focus. - Might be an expert in another region or era. - May be influenced by their experience, politics or context.

Sources

Mimmack, Brian, Eunice Price, and Daniela Senes. *History: A Comprehensive Guide to Paper 1*. Essex: Pearson, 2009. Print.

Rodgers, Keely, and Joanna Thomas. *History for the IB Diploma*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.