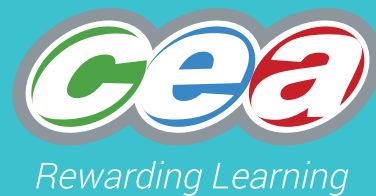


GCSE



Revised GCSE
Student Guidance
History

**Analysing and Evaluating
Sources in History**

For first teaching from September 2017



GCSE History

Analysing and Evaluating Sources in History

When analysing sources it is important to think about 3 things:

- The utility of the source.
- The reliability of the source.
- The relevance of the source.

Some sources are easier to analyse than others. Students tend to find analysing photographs, cartoons and posters more challenging than written sources.

Photographs

If you follow the guidance below and apply it to photographs as sources, you should become more confident in evaluating them.

- 1. Identify the Main Subject:** Try to identify the most important people, locations or items in the image. You can work out what the photographer wanted you to focus on by looking at what is in the centre of the photo, or what appears to jump out at you.
- 2. Identify Minor Subjects:** What appears in the background, behind or around the main subject? Things of minor importance appear to support the main subject. The photographer wanted to also show these things to help you draw certain conclusions about the main subject.
- 3. Also think about:**
Is the photograph a 'close up' of the main subject? This suggests that the photographer wanted the audience to feel 'part of the action' or to be confronted by the image head on. If it was taken from further away, it may be that the photographer wanted the viewer to feel 'detached' from the action or to get a 'bird's eye view' of things.



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A photograph taken of Majdanek concentration camp on the outskirts of Lublin in Poland, October 1941

In the examination you could be asked a question similar to: 'How useful is this photograph in telling you about conditions in the Nazi Concentration camps in the period 1939-1945?' The following answer gives you an example of how to structure your response:

This source is useful as it shows me that this concentration camp in Poland was situated close to the town of Lublin. It shows me that a barbed wire fence surrounded this camp to keep the prisoners in and it shows the huts where prisoners were likely to be housed. It shows the industrial town in the background which would suggest that people would know about the existence of this camp. It is useful as it is a primary source taken in 1941 when the camps were becoming used more extensively. One factor reducing the usefulness of this source is that it tells me little about the awful conditions in the camps for the prisoners and does not tell me if all camps were like this one.

You could be asked a question similar to: 'How **reliable** is this source in telling you about conditions in the Nazi Concentration camps in the period 1939-1945?' The following answer gives you an example of how to structure your response:

I have some concerns about the reliability of this source. I do not know who took the photo or why it was taken. The date of 1941 is a limitation and can affect reliability since it doesn't cover conditions in the camps up to 1945. The purpose of this source is likely to have been for propaganda purposes which also affects the reliability of this source. I know that the Nazi government had official photographers and that all images were censored to ensure that people in Germany did not know the 'truth' about the camps. This helps to explain why we see no prisoners or guards in the photo and therefore this affects the reliability of the source. This is one photo of one camp and captures only what the photographer wanted you to see. We see nothing of the real conditions in the camps where SS soldiers routinely shot prisoners who were too weak to work. We see no evidence of prisoners suffering beatings and torture within a short time of arriving in the camps.

Posters

You should take the same approach with posters as you would when looking at photographs and cartoons. Quickly scan the poster. What do you notice first? Are there people involved? Do you recognise them? Does the poster have a message printed on it? Are there questions or instructions? Does it say who created it?

Think about the following:

- When is this from? What was happening at the time in history when this poster was created?
- Who do you think is the intended audience?
- Why was it created?
- What are the main colours used –does one colour stand out? If so, why might this be the case?
- Can you see people or places that you recognise?
- Are there any symbols or does the poster try to persuade mainly through words, visuals, or both equally?

Write one sentence summarising the message in the poster and try to take evidence from the poster to support what you are saying. What did you find out from this poster that you might not learn anywhere else? What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?



A recruitment poster designed by illustrator James Flagg for the American government in 1917. He was well known for his political posters.

How **useful** is this poster in telling you about how the American government recruited soldiers during the First World War?’

The following answer gives you an example of how to structure your response:

This source is useful as it shows me that the American government used a very patriotic and direct approach to recruiting soldiers. By using Uncle Sam, the popular symbol of the US government in the poster, they are giving a clear message to the people. The pointing finger is directed at the person looking at the poster which makes it hard to miss. The source is a primary source which is useful in showing me how the government reacted at the time when they joined the war along with the other countries fighting against Germany. However, this poster is only one example of how the government recruited soldiers, it tells me nothing about other methods or if this recruiting poster worked.

You will also be asked to assess the reliability of the source. For example, ‘How **reliable** is this source in telling you about how the American government recruited soldiers during the First World War?’ The following answer gives you an example of how to structure your response:

I have some concerns about the reliability of this source. The poster itself is designed in American colours and is similar to the Lord Kitchener poster in England. It has a clear purpose to try to get people to join the army. The illustrator James Flagg is noted as being well known for his political posters and this means there is usually a clear message or motive in the work of cartoonists and illustrators. In this case he is clearly trying to appeal to the patriotism of the American people and to influence them by directly pointing at the person looking at the poster. The word YOU is in capital letters giving emphasis to the message, again trying to persuade or play on people’s patriotism which again makes me question the reliability of this source. The date of 1917 is a limitation and can affect reliability since it does not cover up to the end of the war and tells us little about recruitment into the army. I therefore do not feel

this source is completely reliable in telling me about recruitment of soldiers during the First World War.

Cartoons

Be aware that cartoonists are likely to use exaggeration in their work. Sometimes cartoonists overdo the physical characteristics of people or things in order to make a point. When you study a cartoon, look for any characteristics that seem overdone or overblown, such as facial expressions. Then, try to decide what point the cartoonist was trying to make through exaggeration.

Cartoons offer an insight into public opinion at the time they were published. Newspapers often employ a cartoonist to produce cartoons on political events that are happening every day. Contemporaries would have been likely to recognise the characters, the events, and understand the humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule in the cartoon and therefore the cartoon provides a view of the past.

In looking at the cartoon below you do not need to know anything about the First World War to be able to use the guidance to help you see how cartoons are used to give a view of events in the past. In this cartoon some key things stand out:

- The people in the cartoon.
- Notice the Kaiser with a glass in his hand.
- The title of the cartoon is important as it suggests the decision to sink the Lusitania was deliberate.
- The large figure is labelled 'Death' and looks quite intimidating.
- The figure of Death is pointing to the gallows which are also a symbol of death.



A political cartoon published in a British magazine, 'Punch' in May 1915 following the sinking of the Lusitania. A German submarine torpedoed the passenger ship off the Irish coast on 7 May 1915. Although unarmed, the ship was carrying munitions.

In looking at the usefulness of this source, some of the following points could be made:

- It is useful as it shows the response of the British cartoonist to the sinking of the Lusitania.
- It is useful as it shows the British view of the Kaiser who is shown proposing a toast to 'the day of reckoning' most likely with the USA.
- It is useful as it is from the time when the Lusitania was hit by a torpedo from a German U-Boat.
- However, it only gives the view of the British cartoonist and not the American view of the sinking of its passenger ship in which 1,201 people died, many of whom were women and children, and included 128 Americans.

In looking at the reliability of this source, some of the following points could be made:

- The date of this source is 1915 and gives us a view from the time.
- The cartoonist is British so this gives us the view of someone from a country involved in the war. This may impact on his view of the event and this could affect the reliability of this source.
- Cartoons are usually exaggerated. The figure of 'Death' is made to look scary and intimidating. We can see this in the source when we see the Kaiser toasting the dead and pointing to the gallows. The title of the source 'Wilful Murder' shows the bias of the cartoonist suggesting this was a deliberate act.
- The motive behind this source also makes me question the reliability of this source as it is clearly intended to play on anti-German feeling in Britain. The motive is to make the Kaiser look evil as he is celebrating the death of the people on the passenger ship.

Newspapers

We often rely on newspapers to help us understand current events and to get the viewpoint of people at the time. Newspapers can give us a real feel for how people react, how opinions can differ and offer us a snapshot of how events unfold. However, we have to remember that not all newspapers are trustworthy, accurate or reliable sources of information. In some countries newspapers are subject to censorship and control by governments or key groups. We have to be able to understand the motive of the reporter and take account of the political bias which a newspaper may have. In Britain, there is a wide range of newspapers from tabloid, such as The Sun and Daily Mirror, through to broadsheets, such as The Times. Every day hundreds of different newspapers are published. The content and layout of each newspaper reflects its target readership.

Tabloids are image led, 'popular' newspapers which report on politics and international news but tend to include more celebrity gossip and scandal. They write short stories using simple language and they have more pictures than other newspapers. Broadsheets are text led, 'quality' newspapers. The top broadsheets in Britain are The Times, The Telegraph and The Guardian. The 'broadsheets' have a higher news content than the tabloids and the style of writing differs from tabloids with longer sentences and paragraphs, and more articles offering in-depth analysis. We tend to trust broadsheet newspapers more than tabloid newspapers.



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In looking at the usefulness and reliability of newspapers think about some of the following:

- What type of newspaper is it –broadsheet or tabloid?
- Where and when was it published?
- What are the key headlines?
- Is the report factual or does it contain opinion as this will impact on the usefulness and the reliability of the newspaper as a source?
- Look for the name of the journalists and in reading the stories look for key words and the tone to help you to decide if you feel the reports are trustworthy, objective, exaggerated, emotive.
- Remember that just because information is written down it does not mean it is true! You need to assess utility and reliability based on what the source tells you, who has written it, what they say and why they have written it.

Diaries

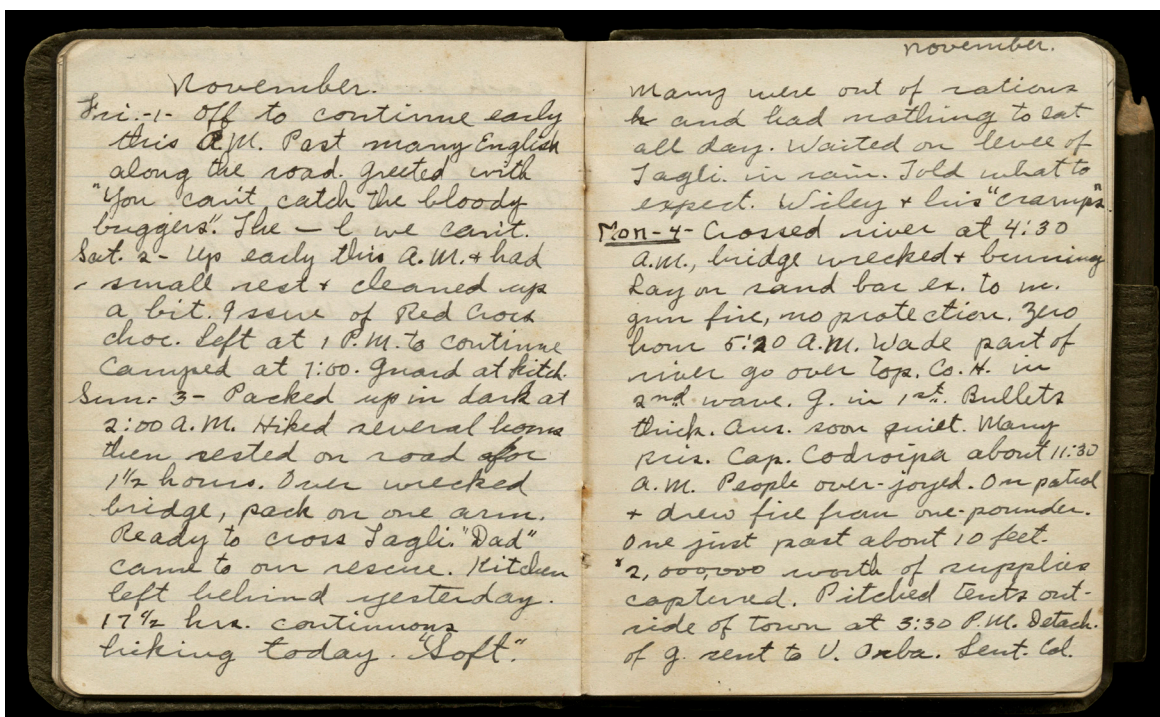
The main value of diaries as a source is that the people producing them know they can say or write what they like honestly and without concern for the views of others. For those writing a personal diary, for example, they need not concern themselves with what their relatives think. A personal diary gives a very honest insight into the feelings of the person at the time of the event.

In the diary below, you get the views of a soldier during the First World War.

This source is useful as it gives some key details about life at the Front during the war. It tells us some details about the daily routine, including marching, hiking and having very long days. The soldier also gives some very specific details as it talks about coming under fire, burning a bridge and capturing supplies. However, the usefulness is reduced as the diary does not tell us where the soldier is based nor the year the diary has been written, though we can see it is written in November. We get a view of 4 days in his life at the Front over a weekend but it omits key details like the awful conditions such as Trench Foot.

In assessing the reliability of diaries as a source there are some key things to remember:

- The person writing it does not expect others to see or read it.

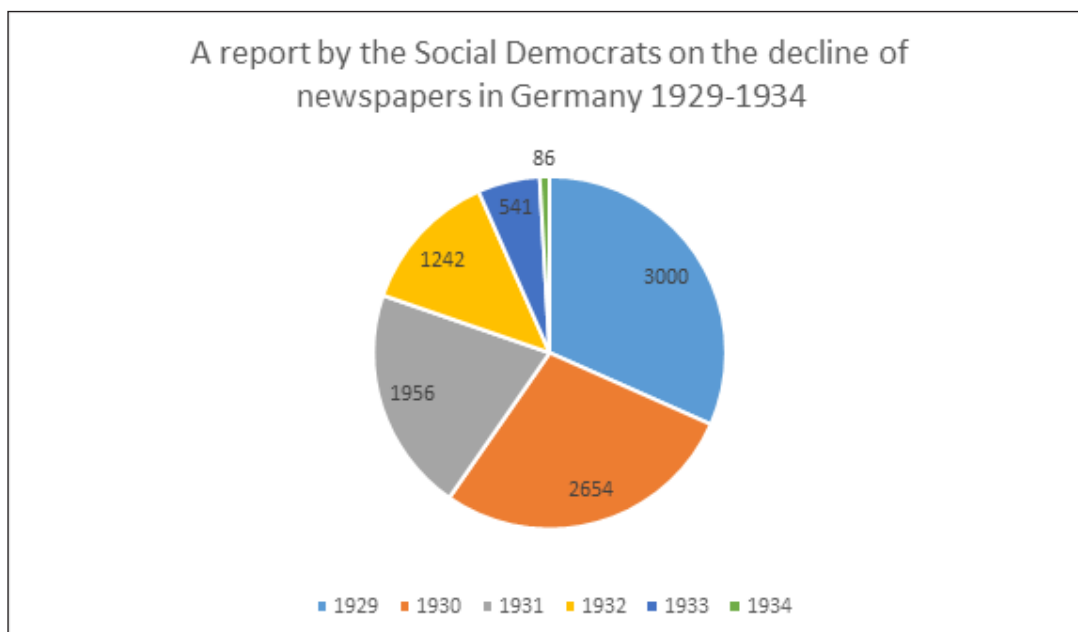


- The author will give their perspective on the events at the time and this may affect the reliability as not all people have the same view of events or the same perspective.
- In diaries people can exaggerate the event or its impact –after all it is their personal view.
- In the case of WW1, soldiers were bound by censorship and were not be allowed to write down specific details about the war, the hardships or their location and this can impact on the reliability of the source.

Statistics

Statistics are often the end result of a lot of hard work, serious research and counting. Statistics are widely used for making comparisons over time. We can create graphs that show patterns and trends which can help us to visualise the statistics. From these we can suggest reasons for historical causes and consequences or the significance of events in the past.

However, we also have to be wary of statistics. British Prime, Minister Benjamin Disraeli said, ‘There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.’ Statistics are often used to improve the power of an argument and it can be tempting to use statistics selectively in order to make a point. It is important to remember that statistics are the end result of research, which means we are not always aware of the methods that were used to arrive at the figures. It is very important to know who conducted the research and how they conducted their research. You should also remember that some governments closely control information and how it is released and this can impact on the reliability of the statistics.



In assessing the usefulness and reliability of the statistics above it is important that you think carefully about the strengths and the limitations of statistics as sources.

In assessing the usefulness of these statistics a few points worth mentioning would be:

- The statistics are useful as they show a decline in the number of newspapers in Germany.
- They show the decline in the period 1929-34, which was the period when the depression hit Germany and when the Nazis took over.
- They are useful as they show that by 1934 there was a huge drop in the number of papers and this was due to Nazi censorship.
- However, the statistics are less useful as they do not explain why newspapers declined before Hitler came to office.

In assessing the reliability of these statistics a few points worth mentioning would be:

- We do not know if these are official statistics or how accurate they are.
- We do not know exactly who did the research or their motive for gathering this information. Though I do know that the Social Democrats were enemies of the Nazis and the party was banned by Hitler in the Summer of 1933.
- We do not know when these statistics were gathered.
- For these reasons I would question the reliability of these figures.

