

	Questions to Consider
<p>Origin</p> <p>Copy the source origin completely and thoroughly <i>even if you think it is a "stupid waste of time"</i>. Think about what you are writing and what it means.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it primary/secondary? • Who wrote it and how important was the individual? • When (and with regard to the events in question) was the document written? Contemporary or retrospective? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ For memoirs how long after the event was it written? • Was the document significant at the time? • For statistics and secondary texts how reputable is the institution? • For historical texts and journal articles where was it published? (consider nationality) • For photos, was it for private/public consumption? • For cartoons it helps to know something about the journal that published it - also nationality of cartoonist and time relative to event.
<p>Purpose</p> <p>Why was the source written/created from the POV of the author?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private or public? Meant for publication? • For primary sources, attempts to justify or promote actions or policies? • Is the document intended to persuade? Are facts omitted to to suit a particular audience? • Is it propaganda or rhetoric? • For memoirs, is the document being written with an eye toward posterity (for future generations' consumption)? • If it was a speech, where was it made/who is the audience? • For statistics, are they balanced or being used for a specific agenda? • For secondary sources and journal articles, does the author seek balance or identify his/her POV or focus? • <u>Is it a general overview (notice the text title) or a specifically focused analysis?</u> • For photos is it posed or candid? Personal, artistic, or propaganda? • For cartoons, is it contemporary with the event? What is its political comment? Consider the country of origin here as well.
<p>Value</p> <p>How is the source useful to you as an historian studying this event? How completely does it answer the question at hand?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the content. • For primary sources does it provide an eyewitness account or was the actor/author part of a decision making process? Could the author be candid and honest (possibly in a memo, diary or letter)? Might this information have otherwise been lost? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Do not say primary sources are better than secondary sources; this is false. Both are important. • For speeches does it state official policy? Is it a reaction to events or a statement of intent? • For statistics, does it summarize facts or figures? Do not say statistics are objective - this is wrong! • For historical texts and journal articles, is it a reputable institution? Has the information been peer reviewed? Is the author balanced and is POV transparent? Is the document well researched? Does the historian have the benefit of hindsight? Is there analysis of cause and effect? Has there been access to new evidence? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Consider especially the opening of archives after the end of the Cold War. Post- 1991 scholars have

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to a lot of new material. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider also and acknowledge access to sources in closed or partially closed regimes such as China or North Korea. For photos, consider socio-cultural information. What does it show about lifestyle, or a particular moment in time? If origin is reputable do not mention risk of photoshopping! For cartoons and newspapers, is the analysis insightful? Does it frame political events or policies? Does it reflect popular or minority opinion?
<p>Limitations</p> <p>A well stated limitation relates both to the value of the source and the research question. A limitation does not simply identify things the source does not do. A <u>limitation tells us the parameters of the source's usefulness in this given context</u>. This question is very hard to answer if you do not already know a fair amount about the event in question. Hopefully you do. USE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EVENT HERE!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the content and especially POV of your source? <u>What other information do you, as the historian asking the question, need to obtain a balanced perspective?</u> How does the source fit relative to SPERM? Is it highly centered on only one aspect of analysis - just social or political? As with value, consider the scope of secondary sources, narrow and deep, several centuries of overview? Consider the academic validity; do we generally trust the institution/country as being reputable? For primary sources, does personal involvement in the event taint or color the author's POV? Is there blatant or subtle exaggeration? Are considerations of posterity influencing the author's characterization of events? Does the primary source show elements of propaganda (overtly or subtly)? Are facts omitted or focus shifted because of a particular audience? For diaries and journal entries, does it need to be cross referenced with other primary sources? For newspaper articles be aware of opinion/editorial pieces. Does the author cite evidence? Do you know the political reputation of the newspaper? For policy papers or government documents, does the source address reasons for the policy? Does it showcase only 1 aspect of a policy? Do you know if / how the policy was actually implemented? For statistics, were they compiled as propaganda? Are they exaggerated? Consider the origin of the institution carefully here - what are their interests and objectives? Consider ethnicities and economics, how fairly/ completely do the statistics represent all actors in the event? As with values for historical texts, journal articles, newspaper articles, consider access to information in the country of origin. Again, histories related to the former USSR or China prior to 1991 had limited access to information regardless of where they were written. For photos, consider socio-cultural information. If origin is reputable do not mention risk of photoshopping!

adapted significantly from: <http://bifshistory.wikispaces.com/file/view/OPVL+Chart.pdf> access 10/07/12

NOTE 1: Some students find it easier if they merge the first two items with the last two. For example: Value of the Origin, Limitations of the Origin, Value of the Purpose, Limitation of the Purpose. The important thing is to get in the habit of using the words: Origin, Purpose, Value, and Limitation. This is one of those times a thesaurus is not your friend. Using these four terms makes it clear and obvious to your reader/evaluator that you have touched on all the critical parts.

NOTE 2: Often a source's greatest value is also its greatest limitation. IE: a public memorandum from a leading member of the Soviet Party Congress is incredibly valuable to give you insight into the official actions of a major world player, but it is limited in the fact that those actions were cleared for publishing in the Soviet Union, and most likely were censored and approved prior to release.

Study Guide: Source Types Generic Values & Limitations

Private Letters, Diaries, Memoirs, e-Mails, Tweets, Facebook Posts, Blogs

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
Can provide an intimate glimpse into the effects of historical events and the lives of individuals experiencing them first-hand	Such personal documents are inherently limited in their scope in that they present only one viewpoint, one interpretation of what happened
If the source was never intended to be read by a large audience, its contents might be of a more candid and revealing nature	If the document was intended for disclosure, it runs the risk of being an apology, contrived to justify or defend the author's opinions or actions/inactions
Valuable as a study of the personality by whom it was written	Inevitably biased- molded by the opinions, prejudices, and cultural standpoint of the author (must be read critically)
	If the document is a result of recollections many years after the period described, the details might have become blurred with the passing of time, certain aspects consciously or subconsciously forgotten, and memoirs molded to conform to views evolved since then (i.e. benefit of hindsight)

Poems, Novels, Plays, Songs, Movies, Videos, Commercials

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
Can chronicle the experiences and feelings of specific individuals living through a period of history, providing a focused and personal portrait of a time	Often not solely concerned with providing a factual account
Often offer an emotional appeal, allowing the reader to identify more closely with circumstances and individuals of a time	A certain degree of imagination and creative license involved, and, therefore, perhaps not as useful as a factual account of history

Can provide information on a certain period of history in more easily digestible format through engaging the interest of the reader	Inevitably flavored by biases of creator
Can provide an interesting perspective into the spirit and culture of the time in which they were written	

Drawings, Paintings, Cartoons

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
Can effectively capture the spirit of a time, and the opinions and sentiments generally characterizing that time	Produced by an artist with a definite point of view, and therefore inevitably biased by the opinions and prejudices of its creator
Contain evidence about a culture at specific moments in history- its customs, styles, preferences, atmosphere, architecture, manner of dress, appearance	Artist not generally concerned with providing a factual account of a historical event or circumstance, but rather with producing a creative piece of work or expressing own opinions and emotional reactions
Provide a visually stimulating piece of historical evidence	Limited scope- generally highlights one specific aspect of a period of history
Examples of art styles of the time	

Photographs, Films

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
Can capture moments in history in vivid detail, providing a unique glimpse into a point in time and simulating piece of historical evidence	Behind every photograph of film is a creator with own personal biases and prejudices, which may be reflected in a work, either consciously or subconsciously.
Examples of propaganda	Examples of propaganda
Can show aspects of the culture-i.e. dress; often posed and thoughtfully constructed	Can be manipulated by the creator to convey a certain point or impress upon the viewer his/her own conceptions (ie parts can be edited, parts could be cut

	out, certain details can be accentuated)
Reflections of attitudes, trends in filmmaking at a specific time	The creator ultimately holds the power to decide the impression conveyed by the photograph or film (more important than the photographs is the photographer).

Newspapers, Magazines

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
Can provide indication of the nature of a society and on specific aspects of its culture	A product of the societies in which they are produced, and therefore offering only a limited perspective
Can provide a daily record of events occurring in history (albeit perhaps a limited one)	In a dictatorship, certain details might be suppressed to preserve the authority of the government in power- censorship
	A newspaper might be primarily an instrument of propaganda; all have political agendas
	Commercial motives

Statistics

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
Provide a raw factual evidence of historical trends (provided they are reliable)	Might represent only a limited sampling, not representative of the general population
Generally open to interpretation, free of the potent influence of personal and cultural biases (provided they have not been manipulated)	Can be manipulated, for example by governments wishing to corroborate claims or present themselves in a favorable light, and their accuracy must therefore be questioned

	Margins of error must be taken into account: size/nature of sample?
	Always produced for a specific purpose

Government Records

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
If never intended for disclosure, might provide a candid glimpse into the inner workings of a government	If their disclosure was anticipated, could have been manipulated, perhaps to conceal scandalous happenings or illegal maneuverings, or to maintain the image of the government
Purely factual, solid, reliable	Only what the government allows the public to know

Oral History (interviews with participants in historical events)

Generic Values	Generic Limitations
Provides a means of learning about the past from individual with first-hand knowledge of historical events	If the person being interviewed has aged significantly in the period of time between the actual experience and the interview, the physical and mental deterioration of the subjects must be taken into account- e.g. memory loss, emotional trauma
Provides important historical evidence about people, especially minority groups, who might have been excluded from mainstream publications or didn't leave behind written primary sources	Personal opinions, cultural backgrounds, must be taken into account in interpreting the information conveyed, as well as his/her motives in sharing memories- the individual might feel more compelled to justify own actions/inactions and perspectives than to paint an entirely balanced and accurate account of events and circumstances
A means of preserving details of historical legacies that might not have been included in written accounts	Experiences in the present might influence accounts of the past, and a person with the benefit of hindsight might reassess events and reconstruct their memories accordingly
Opinions held by participants in a period of history; interpretations must	Tend to be apologetic and highly subjective

be corroborated