

A.P. European History

Analyzing Sources & Determining Point of View (POV) . . . particularly when writing DBQ's

When analyzing sources it is critical that you assess their values and limitations. There are many different sources of information that be categorized as either primary or secondary sources of information. Let's address these categories first.

Primary sources of information are un-interpreted sources that provide researchers insight into the time period of the resource. They include:

- ✓ First person accounts
diaries, journals, memoirs, oral histories, letters
- ✓ Documents
maps, treaties, laws, legal arguments, architectural plans
- ✓ Physical artifacts
tombstones, tools, signs
- ✓ Scientific data
census data, population statistics, weather records
- ✓ Records
church records, tax records, court proceedings, city directories
- ✓ Other examples include:

advertisements	cartoons	paintings	wills
clothing	music	bills of sale	games
money	speeches	school books	etiquette rules

Where do you find Primary Sources?

- Library:
 - Local history room*
business directories, local histories, family histories, newspaper archives
- State archives and library (some have web sites)
- Country courthouse records
births, deaths, land sales, and deeds
- Local museums and local historians
- State library networks
 - You can often request a particular book be sent on inter-library loan; it can usually be available with a week to ten days.*
- Local and national newspapers
- Library of Congress
 - Being so close to Washington, D.C. we have a great advantage in research. You can find a copy of everything that has ever been printed in the Library of Congress.

What's the big deal about secondary sources?

Secondary sources of information are essentially compilations and interpretations of others' versions of history. Typically, if they are authoritative on their subject, they have depended on primary sources and a number of other secondary sources in order to develop the most comprehensive (and accurate) perspective on a topic. They can be just as valuable as, if not more so than, primary sources. They include the following:

- ✓ Textbooks
- ✓ Dissertations
- ✓ Most nonfiction
history books
- ✓ Novels
- ✓ Magazines
- ✓ Journals
- ✓ newspapers

Document Evaluation - Assessing Point of View (POV) using OPVL

Origin, Purpose, Value(s), Limitation(s)

These are some analytical questions and possibilities to help you learn to identify the origin, purpose, value(s), and limitation(s) of a document. They are not meant to be a comprehensive list but should rather help you to study these sources and assess their Point of View (POV).

ORIGIN - Where is the document from? Who wrote it? Where? When? What is it (publication, book, newspaper, journal, memoir, diary, letter, speech, historical study)?

PURPOSE - Why did the author write this? To inform? To persuade? Is it propaganda? A political platform? A rationale? To record? A government or other record? A personal diary or journal? To explain? An apologia? Etc.

VALUE - usually in a particular context - what value does the document provide to a researcher on a specific topic?

LIMITATIONS - how reliable is the document? who wrote it and why? what perspective did that person have? how accurate? is it opinion (biased) or fact? was it a person with authority? was it someone in the know? an observer? what was the purpose in writing (to record? persuade? apologia? was it political? written at the time? after the fact? Etc.

Value(s)	Source <i>Origin & Purpose</i>	Limitation(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide an intimate glimpse into the effects of historical events on the lives of individuals experiencing them first-hand • If the source was never intended to be read by a large audience, its contents might be of a more candid and revealing nature • An eye-witness' account of events they witnessed (but the eye-witness is not necessarily reliable) • Valuable as a study of the personality by whom it was written • Eyewitness to event and usually written immediately or shortly after occurred 	<p><u>Private letters, diaries, and memoirs</u></p> <p><i>Origin:</i> Primary, by author for author, rarely published</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i> To keep memories for later (sometimes with an eye to publication)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the document was intended for disclosure, it runs the risk of being an apologia, contrived to justify or defend the author's opinions or actions/inactions. • Such personal documents are inherently limited in their scope in that they present only one viewpoint, one interpretation of what happened. • 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 memories molded to conform to views evolved since then (i.e., benefit of hindsight) • Selective by nature (most important is what is excluded than included) Horshal Plain: "Why should I hide my memoirs? I have nothing to hide." • Only one person's view, there will be perspective issues, may be intended for publication therefore can even lie to oneself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers quick overview for student seeking easy information 	<p><u>General Text</u></p> <p><i>Origin:</i> Secondary. Usually done by panel of experts on country or topic</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i> To educate students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually NOT an expert on every topic in text so there are often gaps and errors • Not very useful for writing monographs since they are typically too brief
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers official view of speaker • It is what audience hears 	<p><u>Speech</u></p> <p><i>Origin:</i> Primary (speaker)</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i> For public (persuasive? Informative? Etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be real views of speakers • Speeches are designed to sway opinion

Value(s)	Source <i>Origin & Purpose</i>	Limitation(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually do not lie It is official view but private thoughts are often given, too 	<p><u>Internal memo</u></p> <p><i>Origin:</i> Primary</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i> For internal examination amongst officials of government departments, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not know what outsiders' know Only what officials are saying to each other May lie occasionally to get away
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide raw factual evidence of historical trends (provided they are reliable). Generally open to interpretation, free of the potent influence of personal and cultural biases (provided they have not been manipulated) 	<p><u>Statistics</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be manipulated for example by governments wishing to corroborate claims or preset themselves in a favorable light, and their accuracy must therefore be questioned. Might represent only a limited sampling not representative of the general population. Margins of error must be taken into account. Always produced for a specific purpose.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can effectively capture the spirit of a time, and the opinions and sentiments generally characterizing that time Contain evidence about a culture at specific moments in history - its customs, styles, preferences, atmosphere, architecture, manner of dress, appearance Provide a visually stimulating piece of historical evidence. Examples of art styles of the time Comment on features of regime (e.g. Rule of an artist in a one-party state.) 	<p><u>Drawings, paintings, cartoons</u></p> <p><i>Origin:</i> Primary, done by artist for public at the time</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i> To educate, entertain, and often to sell newspapers or journals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produced by an artist with a definite point of view, and therefore inevitably biased being influenced by the opinions and prejudices of its creator. Limited scope - generally highlight one specific aspect of a period of history. 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If never intended for disclosure, might provide a candid glimpse into the inner-workings of a government. Purely factual, solid, reliable. 	<p><u>Government Records</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 concerned. Only what the government allows the public to know.

Value(s)	Source <i>Origin & Purpose</i>	Limitation(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide indication of the nature of a society and on specific aspects of its culture. • Can provide a daily record of events occurring in history (albeit perhaps a limited one). 	<p align="center"><u>Newspapers</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A product of the societies in which they are produced and therefore offering only a limited perspective. • 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. • Commercial motives • All have political agenda
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can capture moments in history in vivid detail, providing a unique glimpse into a point in time and simulating a first-hand experience • Provide a visually stimulating piece of historical evidence • Examples of propaganda • Can show aspects of the culture (i.e., dress) • Reflections of attitudes, trend sin film-making at a specific time • Often posed 	<p align="center"><u>Photographs/Film</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behind every photograph or film is a creator with own personal biases and prejudices, which may be reflected in the work either consciously or subconsciously. • Can be manipulated by the creator to convey a certain point or impress upon the viewer his/her own conceptions. (e.g. parts can be edited, parts could be cut out, certain details can be excluded or downplayed, certain details can be accentuated or focused on) • The creator ultimately holds the power to decide the impression conveyed by the photograph or film (more important than the photograph is the photographer) • Tendency for commercial reasons, to seek scenes which are graphic and interesting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide an interesting perspective into the spirit and culture of the time in which they were written. • 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 offer an emotional appeal, allowing the reader to identify more closely with circumstances and individuals of a time. • Can provide information on a certain period of history in a more easily digestible format through engaging the interest of the reader. 	<p align="center"><u>Poems, Novels</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often not solely conce3rned with providing a factual account - a certain degree of imagination and creative license involved, and therefore, perhaps not as useful as a factual account of history. • Inevitably flavored by biases of creator

Value(s)	Source <i>Origin & Purpose</i>	Limitation(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a means of learning about the past from individual with first-hand knowledge of historical events. • Provides important historical evidence about people, especially minority groups who might have been excluded from mainstream publications or did not leave behind written primary sources. • A means of preserving details of historical legacies which might not have been included in written accounts. • Opinions held by people who experienced a period of history. • Interpretations must be corroborated. 	<p><u>Oral history (interviews with participants in historical events)</u></p> <p><i>Origin:</i> Primary, by author or interviewee for interviewer and often general public</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i> To offer an eyewitness' perspective on event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • In the story is being recounted a significant time after the period of history under scrutiny, details might have become confused over the passage of time or faded entirely from memory and traumatic experiences might have been deliberately forgotten. Thus, accuracy must be questioned. • Experiences in the present might influence accounts of the past, and a person with the benefit of hindsight might be compelled to reassess events and reconstruct their memories accordingly. • Personal biases, opinions, cultural background of subject 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 picture of events and circumstances. • Tend to be apologies. • Highly subjective.

This reflects a compilation of IB training materials from 12/01, 10/05, as well as teacher-created items.