

A black chess king and a white knight are positioned on a chessboard. The black king is on the left, and the white knight is on the right, both facing towards the right side of the frame. The chessboard has a standard black and white checkered pattern.

# Guidance on sources and interpretations

**GCSE (9-1) History**

---

**Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in History  
(1H10)**

---

---

# GCSE History 2016: Sources and Interpretations

---

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Paper 1 Historic Environment</b>	<b>3</b>
Question types and common problems	3
Teaching ideas	5
<b>Paper 3 Modern Depth Study</b>	<b>6</b>
Question types and common problems	7
Teaching approaches	12
Teaching ideas	13
<b>Thinking Historically</b>	<b>17</b>
Activities: Evidence	18
Activity 1	20
Activity 2	21
Activities: Interpretations	22
Activity 3	24
Activity 4	25
Activity 5	26

# Introduction

---

Students want to engage with the past. 'Why did he do that?', 'Didn't she realise...?', 'What was it really like?' are probably the most frequently asked questions. Teachers have set up mysteries to be investigated, run simulated news events, conducted interviews and used documentaries in their attempts to make history real for their students. In this way, the use of sources and interpretations has been a major feature of teaching history for many years.

In the new Edexcel GCSE (9-1) in History, engagement with sources is assessed within the Historic environment component in Paper 1 where sources are evaluated regarding their utility and then students are asked to explain how they would follow up a detail in a source in order to develop an enquiry. In the Modern depth study in Paper 3, students make inferences about a source as well as evaluate the utility of sources. The evaluation of the sources sets students up to then analyse interpretations on the same topic, helping them to form a judgement on an historical issue.

Evaluation of sources is assessed in both Paper 1 and Paper 3, while engagement with interpretations is assessed wholly within Paper 3.

**Analysis, evaluation and use of sources are assessed through Assessment Objective 3 (AO3).**

<b>AO3</b> 15%	Analyse, evaluate and use sources (contemporary to the period) to make substantiated judgements, in the context of historical events studied.
-------------------	---

Sources, as assessed in the Edexcel GCSE History course, will be contemporary to the period of study. They will be evidence from the period and may record the experiences of those directly involved, or be contemporary evidence from those without direct involvement, for example contemporary cartoons or articles in newspapers written by those who were not direct witnesses to an event. They may also feature reminiscences and reflections written after the period but by those who were involved. Sources are the building blocks of the final constructed historical account: the interpretation.

An interpretation, as defined by the Edexcel specification, is a secondary extract: 'an attempt to portray and/or make meaning of the past using evidence, that is, a deliberate construct created after the event(s)'.

**Students' understanding of interpretations is assessed in Paper 3 through Assessment Objective 4 (AO4).**

<b>AO4</b> 15%	Analyse, evaluate and make substantiated judgements about interpretations (including how and why interpretations may differ) in the context of historical events studied.
-------------------	---

Paper 3 uses two secondary extracts, labelled as 'interpretations' in the Sources/Interpretations examination booklet to distinguish them clearly from the contemporary sources also assessed in Paper 3. The extracts may be interpretations of an aspect of the period taken from textbooks or from the writings of historians, suitably eased for accessibility. Where an extract is edited, the original meaning of the author will not be altered in the process.

## Paper 1 Historic Environment

---

In Paper 1, the focus of the Historic environment is on the use of contemporary sources for an enquiry. The choice of topic for the Historic environment has been linked to the wider context of the Thematic study but the enquiry and the sources used will be clearly located in the specific geographical and chronological framework.

The focus is on using the sources as part of an enquiry and therefore the questions focus on the usefulness of the sources (Question 2(a)), as well as how the historian would follow up a detail from one source to develop an enquiry (Question 2(b)). The [guide to Paper 1](#) (page 25 onwards) has helpful advice on teaching approaches to the Historic environment and common barriers and pitfalls.

The value of contemporary sources is also assessed in Paper 3 Question 3(a).

### Question types and common problems

#### Source utility

**Question 2(b)** (also assessed in Paper 3 Question 3(a))

How useful are Sources A and B for an enquiry into...?  
Explain your answer, using Sources A and B and your knowledge of the historical context.

(8)

The enquiries in the three sample question papers for Paper 1 relate to:

- the effectiveness of...
- the problems involved in...
- what was done to...

Other enquiries are possible.

Students should be prepared to consider the specific strengths and weaknesses of the provided sources for a given enquiry. They are not required to compare the sources or reach a judgement about which is more valuable; the sources may be treated separately. In considering usefulness, students are expected to take into account the provenance of a source (aspects of its nature, origin and/or purpose) when evaluating the contribution its content can make to an enquiry. They are also expected to make use of contextual knowledge in their evaluation. Unlike in the 2013 specifications, this requirement for knowledge of context is categorised as AO3, not AO1.

For example, Option 12 Question 2(a) asks:

How useful are Sources A and B for an enquiry into what was done to protect civilians in London from bombing raids?

Explain your answer, using Sources A and B and your knowledge of the historical context.

(8)

Source A for this question – given on the following page – is a record from an interview carried out many years after the situation described in the source.

**Source A:** From the memories of Constance Holt, who was editor of a magazine during the war. She was interviewed about the Blitz for the book *Don't You Know There's A War On?*, published in 1989.

Most of the tube stations were taken over as shelters, as there weren't enough big public shelters that people could get to. Russell Square Station was one of these. I remember on several occasions coming back from the theatre by tube, and when I got out at Russell Square, bunks had been put all along the platform, and you'd see women doing up their curlers and getting ready for bed. Of course, you'd try not to look at them because they were in their 'bedrooms'.

I remember there was a little bit of snobbery about stations. I heard one woman say, 'Oh, us and our family go to Regent's Park now, it's nicer people.' And the children used to go for rides on the tube. At least their mothers knew where they were, and it was much safer than the street.

The caption gives students relevant information about the nature and origin of the source. They should make use of this information in their answer and apply it to the content of the source. The recollections come from an adult woman with an adult's perspective on the situation, but the focus of her recollections is on the social aspect of the experience of using the Underground as a shelter and in this extract she is not dealing with the experience during an actual air raid. Her reminiscences are also being put through the filter of the priorities of the author collecting the recollections for her book. Contextual knowledge could be used to confirm the extent to which, or ways in which, civilians did make use of the Underground. It could also be used to consider the limitations or typicality of the information provided. For example, the impression of calm and safety given here could be evaluated using knowledge that there were disasters when Underground stations suffered direct hits, but that such disasters were relatively uncommon.

### Common barriers and pitfalls

The most common problem seen in students' evaluation of sources is the assumption of usefulness based on the amount or relevance of the detail it contains or the idea that value is entirely dependent on reliability. In this case, students tend to focus on the provenance instead of the source and declare a source is useful because it comes from the time, is biased because of the nationality of the author, is sensationalised because it is a newspaper article. There may be some validity to this claim but it needs to be supported by direct reference to the source and an explanation of the ways in which that aspect of the timeframe, author's nationality or the nature of the source affects its value.

As noted in the Thematic study and Historic environment support material, one way to challenge these assumptions is to present students with three sources of the same type – three photographs or three newspaper articles. If they are asked to evaluate the most reliable or most useful one out of the three, they will be forced into a closer analysis and evaluation of the individual sources.

A particular issue for many students is the use of visual material. *Punch* cartoons, Victorian illustrated newspapers and photographs during the Second World War are rich sources of evidence but students often dismiss cartoons as exaggerated and drawings as imaginary while photographs are accepted unquestioningly. Better use of contextual knowledge can help students to produce a more thoughtful evaluation. Cartoons are satirical and often exaggerated but the situation they are intended to highlight needs to be recognisable for the cartoon's message to be effective; they highlight genuine issues. Illustrated newspapers also exaggerated in order to sell more copies but they still included many accurate details while photographs may have been selected or censored in order to create a particular impression. Students sometimes develop a checklist approach to source evaluation but they should be aware that superficial comments on a range of aspects are

unlikely to reach a high level response. There needs to be an evaluation of each individual source.

Additional contextual knowledge can be very generalised, merely confirming 'this was typical' without any further details. Students cannot assume that they do not need much additional knowledge because the sources and interpretations contain the information they need. They need to be able to place the sources and interpretations in context and to provide additional material to support their comments.

### Source-based enquiries

#### Question 2(b)

How could you follow up Source A/B to find out more about...?

Complete the table below.

(4)

The question is applied to one of the two sources provided. The follow-up focus is related to an aspect of the subject matter of the specified source which is also defined for study in the specification.

In the case of the sample assessment material examples, the Option 10 follow-up is related to finding out more about the effectiveness of the police in Whitechapel; Option 11 is related to the problems involved in performing operations on the Western Front, and Option 12 is related to what was done to protect civilians in London from bombing raids.

The 2(b) follow-up enquiry focus may relate to any relevant aspect of the content defined for study, but students will be rewarded only for a relevant question which relates directly to the specific content of the provided source, not for the forming of a general question about crime and policing in Whitechapel or about surgery and treatment in the British sector of the Western Front or about London and the Second World War. The answer table on the question paper is provided to direct students to structure their answer appropriately.

Hence, the answer table begins:

Details in Source A/B that I would follow up:

The following spaces prompt students to identify the question they would ask and a type of source which could be used to answer it. The final part of the table prompts students to explain how the sort of information the source could yield would help to answer the question. The mark scheme's indicative content shows that the type of sources selected should be directly related to the information they can generate and the two responses will be reviewed together. Students are not expected to have an exhaustive list of every source type available to the historian, but they should be able to go beyond the broadly generic catch-all categories of 'records', 'diaries' etc. It may be, however, that the final part of the answer will validate a more generic choice of, for example, 'a diary of a soldier' by linking it to relevant information the personal experience of a soldier could provide. The key is the valid explanation of how it would help answer the question.

### Common barriers and pitfalls

See guidance on [Paper 1 British thematic study with historic environment](#) (page 27).

### Teaching ideas

The skills required for AO3 can be taught throughout Key Stage 3 and reinforced during Key Stage 4 in the Historic environment and the Modern depth study (see the guidance on [Paper 1 British thematic study with historic environment](#) pages 27 to 30 for a range of ideas).

## Paper 3 Modern Depth Study

---

The topics in Paper 3 are particularly appropriate for the assessment of sources and of interpretations. The options are all distinct periods where there is a wealth of contemporary sources and a range of different interpretations. Each of these options highlights the background of one of the major powers in our world and a different, important aspect of our modern global society.

- Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41
- Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918–30
- Mao’s China, 1945–76
- The USA, 1954–75: conflict at home and abroad

In dealing with interpretations, the specification identifies key skills and understanding that students should develop. They should:

- be aware that interpretations are based on evidence from their period of study
- be aware of a range of evidence that can be used to reach conclusions
- study examples of such evidence and consider ways in which it could give rise to and support different interpretations
- understand a range of reasons why interpretations may differ
- be aware that differences based on conclusions drawn from evidence are legitimate and can be explained
- be able to evaluate given interpretations using their own knowledge of the period.

Note that it is not required that students are taught about different schools of thought or about historical controversies related to the Modern depth studies.

Questions may relate to any aspect of the content specified, but the focus will be a central issue. In the sample assessment materials, for example, Option 30 focuses on ‘different views about the effects of collectivisation on the Soviet Union in the years 1928–41’; Option 31 focuses on the attitudes of young people towards the Hitler Youth movement; Option 32 focuses on different views about the aims of the Hundred Flowers campaign; and Option 33 on different views about attitudes in the USA towards involvement in the Vietnam War.

In Question 3, the sources used in part 3(a) are chosen to introduce the topic that is also the focus of questions 3(b), (c) and (d). Beginning with an evaluation of sources, the question parts are designed to embed the understanding that interpretations of history are grounded in evidence.

Questions 3(b), 3(c) and 3(d) have been carefully stepped for accessibility and separated into three elements: how the interpretations differ, why they differ and an evaluation of one of the views. In this way, students can understand, before they answer Question 3(d), that there is material which supports and which counters the view they are evaluating.

Students should be aware that although individual marks are not allocated for knowledge and understanding in Question 3, contextual knowledge provides an important foundation for the tasks in all four parts.

## Question types and common problems

### Inference

#### Question 1

Give two things you can infer from Source A about...

Complete the table below.

(4)

The question wording replaces the previous 'What can you learn from Source x about...?' The revised wording makes it clear that the question target is not comprehension of source content, but goes beyond that to target the ability to read between the lines or see beneath the surface to make inferences.

Valid detail to support an inference may take the form of a quotation or paraphrase from the source, or a valid comment about the source or its content. In the examples of supporting detail below, the first is a quotation, the second a paraphrase and the third a valid comment about the source.

The source for Question 1 is placed in the question paper both to simplify the process of dealing with it for candidates and to make sure it is not used by mistake in conjunction with the material for the enquiry in Section B – which is collated in a separate booklet.

Question 1 is marked using a point-based mark scheme. Two marks are available for each inference and are awarded: one for the inference and one for the selection of valid supporting detail.

### Common barriers and pitfalls

Students often focus on details in the sources and identify information that they have learnt rather than making inferences. Writing out quotations from the source or paraphrasing sections does not show inference. Students need to extrapolate information that is not stated in the source – perhaps about emotions or attitudes, or the significance of the situation – which can then be supported by specific details in the source.

### Source utility

For Question 3(a) – see the discussion of source utility in Paper 1 Question 2(a).

Note that a particular issue for many students is their understanding of the purpose of propaganda material which leads them automatically to dismiss it as 'biased'. They fail to see how useful such material is to the historian in the way it indicates the priorities of the authorities and the messages they wish to convey.

The comment included in the discussion earlier of source utility in Paper 1 Question 2(a) about the importance of additional contextual knowledge is also very relevant here.

## Identifying difference

### Question 3(b)

Study Interpretations 1 and 2. They give different views about...

What is the main difference between the views?

Explain your answer, using details from both interpretations.

(4)

Question 3(b) asks students to use the substance of the interpretations (e.g. information, tone, emphasis contained within them) to analyse and explain how they differ. The task simply requires students to demonstrate their understanding of the key message conveyed within the texts; they are not required to bring in other matters (e.g. knowledge of historical context, methods, authorship, the date that it was written, etc.). However, an appreciation of the nature of historical interpretation (as characterised by emphasis, claim and judgement) will underpin students' appreciation of the differences.

Students should understand the differences between what they are asked to do in 3(a), where they examine sources as evidence which are the building blocks used by historians in the process of creating accounts, and what they are asked to do in 3(b), which is to analyse a difference in the finished product (the constructed account). For this reason, we have been careful not to distract students and blur the distinction between evidence and interpretations of history by choosing extracts in 3(b) which would lead them into discussing issues of provenance which they use centrally for 3(a).

In 3(b), students should focus on the overall message each extract conveys – for example, by its selection of content, its emphasis, its explanation or comment.

For example, Option 31 Question 3(b):

Study Interpretations 1 and 2. They give different views about the attitudes of young people towards the Hitler Youth movement.

What is the main difference between these views?

Explain your answer, using details from both interpretations.

(4)

**Interpretation 1:** From *Germany 1918–45* by J Cloake, published in 1997.

Many young people were attracted by the exciting and interesting activities of the youth movements. There were many outdoor events such as camping and hiking as well as sports. Some enjoyed the military aspects of the youth movements, the uniforms, the marching and the discipline. Other young people liked the music that was a frequent part of cultural activities or the military parades. There was great comradeship among the Hitler Youth.

**Interpretation 2:** From *Germany 1858–1990: Hope, Terror and Revival* by A Kitson, published in 2001.

The movement became less popular towards the late 1930s as the activities became increasingly focused on preparations for war and the discipline became more strict when membership became compulsory. There was a growing resentment at the way Hitler Youth leaders acted as if they were better than members who were barely younger than they were. Some youngsters began to kick against the restrictions of the Hitler Youth.

Good answers to question 3(b) will be explicit about the nature of the difference, usually at the very start of the answer.

The instruction to identify a 'main difference between the views' is there to encourage a brief answer with a secure focus on 'view', rather than extensive cross referencing of details in the extracts.

In the sample assessment materials these differences relate to: attitudes, aims, effects; other foci are possible, both on other areas of specification content and on other second-order concepts that historians address. They could relate to difference of view about causes or changes, for example.

In the case of attitudes or effects, students could usefully begin by thinking about whether a view suggests these were positive or negative (language, tone and emphasis or selection of material will indicate that); in the case of change, whether change or continuity is emphasised; and in the case of cause, whether different causes are emphasised by the authors. When a key point of difference has been identified, good answers will use details from the extracts to show that difference.

For example in the two extracts from Option 31 above, it is clear that the emphasis in Interpretation 1 is on positive attitudes to the Hitler Youth and in Interpretation 2 on negatives.

The table below analyses some of the details to show the way in which the differences of view are conveyed.

	<b>Interpretation 1 emphasises positive attitudes</b>	<b>Interpretation 2 emphasises negative attitudes</b>
Language and tone	Exciting, interesting, enjoyed, liked, comradeship	Less popular, growing resentment, kick against
Selection of information	Outdoor events, sports, music, parades Some enjoyed the marching and discipline	Discipline became more strict, membership compulsory, resentment of HY leaders
Points of emphasis	Many young people were attracted; there was great comradeship	Movement became less popular towards late 1930s when focused on preparation for war Some youngsters began to kick against restrictions

It is interesting to note that discipline appears in both – given a positive gloss in Interpretation 1 and a negative one in Interpretation 2. Examples such as this could help students see that passages can be analysed in terms not only of the selection, but also the treatment of material included.

### Why is there difference?

#### Question 3(c)

Suggest one reason why Interpretations 1 and 2 give different views about... (4)

This question asks students to suggest why the interpretations may differ. They are invited (but not required) to use Sources A and B. This gives students opportunities to draw on an understanding that interpretations may differ for several reasons. They may, if they choose not to use the sources, explain other reasons which are appropriate in the case of the extracts presented to them (see mark scheme and guidance below). However, students should not treat these interpretations in the same way as they treat contemporary sources. Responses based on matters such as the origin or time of production of these secondary works are unlikely to be valid for this question.

Such answers would blur the distinction between evaluation of sources in terms of authorship and purpose, and explanation of difference of views about an aspect of history presented in a secondary work. It is important to avoid the dangers of

students at this level forming assumptions that matter such as the time of or circumstance of writing will necessarily affect the thrust of interpretation. While this is a valid consideration when students have detailed knowledge of a nominated historical controversy and its historiography, it is not a useful line of argument without that detailed knowledge and may lead to invalid assumptions or unsupported assertions.

### **Common barriers and pitfalls**

The focus in Paper 3 is on how and why historians reach different views. In Question 3(b), students are asked simply to identify and explain the key difference between two interpretations and then in Question 3(c) to suggest reasons to account for those differences.

There are three broad reasons for these differences:

- the historians have used different sources or weighted the same sources differently
- the interpretations are both extracts and cover different aspects or periods
- the historians have placed different emphases on aspects of the issue.

The most likely problem is that students will treat this as a source evaluation exercise and base their comments on the nature/origin/purpose of the interpretation. However, since these will all be secondary extracts this approach is unlikely to produce adequate explanations of the differences. More importantly, an approach which focuses on the provenance of the interpretation misses the point of the task. Assumptions based on the author or date of the interpretation will not be rewarded because they are not analysing the view that is being offered. This task is about looking at the differences between the provided interpretations and the explanation of why they differ must be rooted in those specific interpretations.

A second problem is that students will write in generalisations, for example that one interpretation is more positive than the other. To avoid this, students are expected to support their comments with direct references to the interpretations and they may also utilise the sources they used in Question 3(b) or their own contextual knowledge to develop their explanation.

Generic comments based on the mark scheme also need to be supported with direct reference to the interpretations. It will not be enough to state that the interpretations are both extracts or that each historian has a different emphasis.

### **Evaluating and making a judgement**

#### **Question 3(d)**

How far do you agree with Interpretation 1/2 about...?	(16 + 4 SPAG)
--	---------------

This question focuses on evaluating the view contained in one of the interpretations. Students are instructed to do this based on their knowledge and understanding of periods/events studied, and on the other interpretation which provides a counter view. Questions (b) and (c) have provided a stepped approach to this task by requiring students to become thoroughly familiar with the material in both extracts and with the difference between the two interpretations. This approach to the evaluation of interpretations embeds the understanding that histories give rise to discussion and debate, and that judgements must be based on knowledge and understanding of period.

### **Common barriers and pitfalls**

Again the importance of own knowledge must be stressed. Students who rely on just the information in the interpretations will be limited to the lower levels of the mark scheme.

The question is phrased 'How far do you agree with ...' and, therefore, the answer needs to develop a line of argument. Consequently, answers that focus on one interpretation, answers that simply paraphrase or juxtapose points from the interpretations, or answers that adopt a checklist approach are likely to reflect the attributes of the lower levels of the mark scheme descriptors.

The essence of the task is to:

- identify the overall view being offered
- provide detail from the interpretation and from additional contextual knowledge to support that view
- examine the challenge offered from the other interpretation and own knowledge, including points additional to those in the second interpretation if appropriate
- reach an overall judgement.

There is no stipulation as to how answers are organised, and the organisation of the mark scheme does not imply that the expected approach will follow the form above. Answers may deal with points separately exploring the argument for and against each, rather than dealing with the answer in blocks of points for and points against the interpretation.

A response reflecting the qualities of the highest level of the mark scheme will be organised to provide an explained evaluation and to show a line of reasoning in coming to an overall judgement that is coherent, sustained and logically structured. Such responses might:

- identify the overall view being offered and indicate areas of challenge from the other interpretation
- identify the key points of evidence being used to support this view and assess the validity of each of them, using the other interpretation and additional contextual knowledge.
- evaluate the points in the interpretation and the points that have been provided to challenge that interpretation in order to form a judgement.

It is important that students understand what is meant by 'evaluate'. The highest level responses will use precisely selected, relevant contextual knowledge to support the evaluation of the interpretation under discussion. For example, students could use contextual knowledge to say whether the situation changed over time to show that the interpretation offers an accurate view of the first part of the period but not of the later years.

Students should not focus heavily on the accuracy of individual details but should concentrate on the overall interpretation. For example, the exact date or number of people involved in something is less important than how that event is presented.

## Teaching approaches

We asked some experienced teachers about how they plan to approach Paper 3.

### **Rebecca Jarvis, Head of Humanities, Richard Lander School**

#### **How will you structure teaching Paper 3 at your school?**

I tend to approach the content of the Modern depth study chronologically, creating a whole class timeline of 25 key dates and events which enables us to create active timelines, play 'mix and match' and various other chronological games throughout the course.

As we move through the course I also introduce thematic cards e.g. terror, propaganda, censorship, persecution, success and failure and ask students to select key dates to support these themes or place the themes at various points on the timeline. Using these chronological activities throughout the course ensures the order in which things happen and the interplay of key themes is much less daunting when it comes to revision of key dates and creating plans for exam answers.

#### **And the interpretations?**

I plan to create some interpretation assessment tasks for the KS3 curriculum to help develop these skills prior to GCSE. I'll also set interpretations regularly in GCSE lessons either as a starter activity or as homework tasks analysing the differences between them. More able students could be asked to find contrasting interpretations for homework and present their analyses to the class. A useful introductory starter could be two opposing sports fans asked to present their account of a match from the weekend. The class could then dissect the differences between them to help create interpretation success criteria. It would also be helpful to create a wall display of useful language prompts to help students compare interpretations.

### **Dan Edmunds, Head of History, Rochester Grammar School**

#### **How will you structure teaching Paper 3 at your school?**

We have a three-year Key Stage 4 and we intend to leave Paper 3 until the end of Year 10 as it is the most complex paper - it tests all three assessment objectives. The content of the Germany option is not much changed from the content we already teach but we will check it carefully. It seems there is more coverage of social and cultural aspects of the Weimar Republic but the spec ends in 1939 whereas the current spec goes to 1945.

#### **How will you develop students' interpretation skills?**

The current Edexcel Controlled Assessment focuses on the portrayal of the past in various representations so we already have various activities that can be geared towards understanding how and why interpretations differ. For example, we talk about how and why the school prospectus aimed at prospective Year 7 students is different from that aimed at prospective Year 12 students, stressing that both are true. We also talk about the different views of students held by teachers, parents and friends and about how they might choose to portray themselves on Facebook and in a job interview.

It's important to help students realise that an interpretation is not simply a matter of the historian's *opinion* but that they have reached their view based on evidence. A good activity to show how the historian's interpretation is shaped by evidence is to give groups a set of sources about a specific year but each group receives a different set of sources so that they create different interpretations: a year of achievement; a year of disaster; a focus on popular culture; a focus on international relations; a focus on the economy.

They also need to think about how the historian weighs the evidence. If they are given an enquiry and receive an evidence pack that includes a range of differing and conflicting sources, they will need to decide how much weight to put on individual sources and justify their decisions.

A court trial is an obvious exercise – what evidence is available to suggest that Charles I was responsible for the English Civil wars or that Germany caused the First World War (KS3) or that Stresemann ‘saved’ the Weimar Republic? The two sides have to convince the jury through the strength of their evidence; the jury must then explain why they found one interpretation more convincing than the other.

I’ll also set reading homework, where I give students an interpretation which they need to summarise before the next lesson when they will compare the views offered in the various interpretations. This is also a great opportunity to challenge able students by giving them an interpretation from an A Level book or from an historian.

I know from Controlled Assessment that students need to differentiate between sources and representations and teachers using those terms consistently has been helpful. Now I need to start using the terms ‘sources’ and ‘interpretations’ from Year 7 onwards.

**What advice would you give to a teacher who is worried about teaching interpretations?**

My guess is that you already cover most of the ideas involved here. I think teachers just need to be more explicit about what they’re doing and why. Source work and dealing with interpretations is not something you can teach and they can learn like content; it has to be practised regularly.

The key new bit in the Modern depth study about why interpretations differ is something students tend to ask spontaneously so we just need to ensure they write something to record the ideas they discuss.

## Teaching ideas

### Inference

In Question 1 students need to make two inferences and support them from the source yet they often find it hard to differentiate between finding information in a source and making inferences and answers will sometimes paraphrase the source and then offer a direct quotation as the support.

It can be a helpful starting point if students are encouraged to focus on working out the attitude of the writer. They are used to the idea of ‘loaded language’ from English lessons, marketing and social media and many are able to select examples of language that creates a particular impression. Structured questions can be helpful at first, moving from asking students to provide the support for an inference, to drawing the inference themselves and then to differentiating inference from information. For example:

- How can you tell the writer feels these changes were an improvement?
- Why do you think the writer gives three examples of improvements?
- What is the writer’s attitude towards these changes?

Students can also be asked to analyse a piece of text, highlighting factual information in one colour and opinion in another. The next stage is to give them a source and ask them to explain what opinion is being expressed or to explain how they can use the source to work out the attitude of the people at the time.

An **opinion line** can be used where students physically position themselves on a spectrum to show how far they agree with a statement – they must be able to justify their position through reference to the source:

- the writer thinks this was a positive event
- the writer thinks this was a significant event
- the writer thinks this situation was bad
- the source shows there was a lot of support at the time for this policy.

Once students are secure on making inferences about opinion and attitude they can move on to making their own inferences about the situation or its significance. A similar process can also be used on visual images.

### How and why there are differences

[Students] should be aware of a range of evidence that can be used to reach conclusions. They should study examples of such evidence and consider ways in which it could give rise to and support different interpretations. Students should understand a range of reasons why interpretations may differ. They should be aware that differences based on conclusions drawn from evidence are legitimate and can be explained. They should be able to evaluate given interpretations using their own knowledge of the period.

*Edexcel specification, p39*

The skills required for Questions 3(b) and 3(c) can be introduced in Key Stage 3 and many activities used in schools do already focus on portrayal and interpretation: was King John really bad? Oliver Cromwell – hero or villain? Does Haig deserve to be called the 'butcher of the Somme'?

Students now need to practise analysing an interpretation and summing up the view being offered. This could be done initially through a series of leading questions or a checklist.

Possible view	View offered in interpretation	Evidence in the interpretation
Overall positive or negative?		
Claiming this was a significant event or person?		
Suggesting things got better/worse?		
Suggesting people's emotions/attitudes?		

Alternatively they could go through an interpretation highlighting words and phrases that suggest a view and then try to sum up the interpretation in a picture.

Nuances in language play an important role in conveying an interpretation and students could be encouraged to **create a vocabulary list** where they group words together. For example, they could group words such as achievement, success, accomplishment, which all have positive overtones.

They could also play a form of **bingo**. The teacher starts by giving a brief overview of an interpretation: 'This interpretation presents a positive view of the role of Martin Luther King in the civil rights movement'. Students then create a bingo card of 20 words; 10 should be key names or events that they would expect an interpretation to mention ('I have a dream', Birmingham, prison, Selma) and 10

words should be vocabulary that the interpretation might use (important, key, achievement, leading).

In the same way, the **selection and ordering of points** included can create a positive or negative impression. Students could be given 10 separate comments (both positive and negative) about Stalin, Hitler, Mao or Martin Luther King and asked to construct a paragraph that is entirely positive, another which is entirely negative, a third which begins positively but ends with a negative and finally one which begins negatively but ends positively. They can then discuss how the selection and omission of material alters the impression created but also how the final point can alter the way in which all the preceding material is seen.

An understanding of why interpretations differ can be achieved through **group activities**, where each group is given a different set of contemporary sources and therefore reach different interpretations. At Key Stage 3 this could be about what life was like in the Middle Ages, was Henry VIII a monster, was Dunkirk a miracle or a disaster and at Key Stage 4 it could be about life in the Bolshevik state, collectivisation, Stalin etc.

Students could also be given a small number of contemporary sources and a summary of three different interpretations and asked to **match the sources to the interpretations**. For example, at Key Stage 3, they could be asked to find evidence in a range of contemporary sources for the view that:

Haig was responsible for the carnage at the Battle of the Somme because he did not see the value of developments such as machine guns or tanks and refused to listen to new ideas from Rawlinson.

Haig believed that this was a war of attrition – a view that was shared by many other generals at the time and therefore most people accepted the heavy losses as necessary.

Haig should not be blamed for the heavy losses since there were a number of factors outside his control – he was ordered into battle to relieve pressure on the French, ammunition was faulty and German defences were well constructed.

At Key Stage 4, students could be asked to find evidence in a range of contemporary sources for the view that:

Mao intended the Hundred Flowers campaign to identify remaining problems that could become targets for reform.

Mao used the Hundred Flowers campaign to identify his opponents, who could then be purged.

Mao expected to use the Hundred Flowers campaign constructively but was surprised by the level of criticism and reacted harshly.

Students should also be encouraged to use their contextual knowledge to consider the wider context. For instance, at Key Stage 3, a description of peasant life at the time of the Black Death might present a very negative view but students should realise this is incomplete. Additional knowledge could show that the situation of many peasants improved afterwards, as is suggested by the Statute of Labourers, which attempted to control wages and movement.

Other exercises could be used to show that the historian's approach can influence his/her interpretation. This could be discussed at suitable points in the study of the content with groups reaching different judgements on the 'success' of the NEP, the

persecution of the Jews, the Cultural Revolution, the Civil Rights movement in the USA, based on using different criteria, for example personal, ideological, economic or social aims; or long term/short term impact.

### **Evaluating and making a judgement**

The skills needed for Question 3(d) are the same as those in any examination question requiring evaluation and judgement. Students need to weigh the evidence on both sides of the issue and create a line of argument, explaining the judgement they have reached. In this case, students MUST use the two interpretations and their own additional contextual knowledge; they may also use the two sources if they wish but that is not rewarded in the mark scheme.

It is always worth spending five minutes planning an extended answer. This allows time for students to create a line of argument rather than producing a series of points in a random order.

Useful classroom activities include:

- card sorts to help structure an answer
- debates to help create a clear line of argument
- trials to 'weigh' the evidence.

Students can also be given cards, each with a point of argument or a direct reference to one of the interpretations or with a piece of own knowledge; they then have to form themselves into triads containing one of each type.

Another version of this activity is to form pairs (point of argument + support from interpretation or own knowledge) and then for the pairs to form themselves into lines to create a literal 'line of argument' – the longest line wins.

## Thinking Historically

---

Thinking Historically is an approach to developing students' conceptual understanding of history. It was developed with Dr Arthur Chapman at the Institute of Education, University of London and focuses on overcoming common misconceptions (assumptions/barriers) to understanding.

The [full concept map](#) outlines the misconceptions that students may typically face in the key strands:

- evidence
- cause and consequence
- change and continuity
- interpretations.

To support your teaching we have included some useful Thinking Historically activities that address elements of two of the key strands: evidence and interpretations.<sup>1</sup> Each activity aims to help students overcome a particular assumption or barrier.

You can use these activities as worksheets for homework, for intervention activities or as an in-class activity.

Students progress at very different rates in conceptual understanding, so it is likely that any given class will have students that are widely dispersed on the map. Individual students will probably not encounter all of these barriers, and it is common for more able students to completely bypass some or even most misconceptions. Although the misconceptions generally increase in complexity as you progress down each strand, students do not progress through misconceptions in a fixed order.

Each activity is labelled with a number that corresponds with the common barrier in the concept map. An edited version of the evidence and interpretation tables has been included in this guide. The full map covers typical progress from the start of KS3 up to degree level; therefore not all assumptions/barriers are relevant to GCSE.

Note that these activities are one among many approaches to teaching history. Their main aim is to improve conceptual understanding; the content within these activities is not an indication that it is required specification content.

---

<sup>1</sup> Further Thinking Historically activities are included in the Pearson GCSE History 2016 resources. These resources have not yet been endorsed. It is not necessary to buy resources to deliver our specifications. Endorsed resources from other publishers will be available at [www.edexcel.com/resources](http://www.edexcel.com/resources).

## Activities: Evidence

Assumption / Barrier to Understanding	Desired outcomes / understandings	Exemplification
<p><b>1</b> Our knowledge about the past is based on the testimony of witnesses – they report what was the case, reliably or unreliably, and historians sort out the true reports from the false reports and construct accounts by piecing together the true ones.</p>	<p>1a) Recognition that although testimony contained in witnesses' reports has a role in historical knowledge construction, history is not typically written by piecing together truths in reports.</p> <p>1b) Historians often ask questions that contemporaries did not know the answer to and historians often (and perhaps typically) create claims about the past on the basis of their inferences from what witnesses said and did not say.</p> <p>1c) Recognition of the fact that many historical claims are established by a process in reasoning (inference) often from a number of different sources and from a number of different types of sources, not just witness statements.</p>	<p>E.g. factual propositions about the past can be created by interrogating artefacts and relics (such as train time tables, archaeological remains).</p> <p>E.g. Lincoln's speeches can be read 'against the grain' as evidence of attitudes to race in nineteenth century America even though Lincoln was not intentionally setting out to 'tell' us about attitudes to race.</p> <p>E.g. claims about attitudes to gender in England in the 1920s can be established by examining relics (such as advertisements, records of employment, photographs, clothing), by examining oral history reports (even when these are not about gender issues), by examining debates about gender issues in Parliament, and so on.</p>

## Thinking Historically

	Assumption / Barrier to Understanding	Desired outcomes / understandings	Exemplification
3	<p>The value of historical source materials is a simple and fixed property – there are, for example, ‘reliable’ and ‘unreliable’ sources and this is a fixed property of the sources themselves. Historians should only use ‘reliable’ sources.</p>	<p>3a) The value of relic or report is not a fixed property – everything depends upon the question you are asking.</p> <p>3b) ‘Reliability’ is too crude a way of thinking about sources and is based on the notion of ‘witnessing’. Many sources can neither be reliable nor unreliable since they do not contain reports, but can be extremely valuable sources of evidence. It is important to know about the context from which a source emerged, and about a source’s authenticity, but reliability is not important except when a witness report is being used as a report.</p>	<p>E.g. A dishonest ‘witness’ (say a Nazi perpetrator lying to a court about his culpability) can be an excellent source of evidence for Nazi attitudes on other matters (such as gender or camp administration) and also an excellent source of evidence for an enquiry into how Nazis behaved when on trial.</p> <p>E.g. Skeletons in plague pits are an excellent source for enquiries into medieval diet, through the condition of their teeth and other skeletal features, but can be neither reliable nor unreliable. E.g. Reliability would be important when using statements that Hitler made in court about his aims in the Munich Putsch as evidence about his aims in launching the Putsch.</p>

## Activity 1

### Evidence (1b&c)

#### The message and the messenger: making inferences

There are many sources of information about the past. Historians use these sources to help them **draw conclusions** by making **inferences**. When information is used to help you form a conclusion, it is used as **evidence**.

#### Source A

From a diary entry for March 1918 by Drozdovsky, a colonel in a White army. Here he describes the events in a village that had previously been under Bolshevik control.

Our White cavalry entered the village and put to death the Bolshevik leaders. The people of this village are so brutal - the Bolshevik leaders were not thinking of murdering them, but the peasants, their women and even children, insistently demanded their death. After the execution, we ordered the village population to deliver without pay the best cattle, pigs and bread for our detachment\*.

\*detachment – a group of White soldiers numbering over 2,000 men.

Read Source A. In this source, a colonel in the White army is writing about his own experiences.

What **information** does the source contain? What was the colonel **saying**? Answer the following questions to find out.

1 What does the colonel say happened to the Bolshevik leaders?

2 What does he say about the way the White soldiers got food from the village?

Historians are not usually interested in information for its own sake. Historians are interested in **using** information to work out the **answers** to questions about the past.

**Use** the information you have just extracted from the source and the information about its **context** provided above to make inferences that would provide answers to the following questions.

3 What do you think was the attitude of the White soldiers towards the villagers?

4 How do you think the villagers felt about the White soldiers when they first entered the village?

5 How do you think the attitude of the villagers towards the White soldiers might have changed after the executions?

Imagine you are a historian investigating the attitudes of Russian peasants towards the Bolsheviks during the civil war.

6 What evidence do you think you might look for in statements by witnesses?

7 What other types of sources might you want to look at to gather evidence?

## Activity 2

### Evidence (3a)

#### The value of evidence

You are enquiring into the situation of Soviet peasants in 1933.

Read Source F, then work through the tasks that follow.

#### Source B

From an article in a British newspaper, published in 1933. It was based on the journalist's recent experiences of a walking tour in the Ukraine area of the Soviet Union.

'How are things with you?' I asked one old man. He looked around anxiously to see that no soldiers were about. 'We have nothing, absolutely nothing,' he said, 'The soldiers have taken everything away.' It was true. The famine is an organised one. Some of the food that has been taken away is being exported to foreign countries. It is also true that whole villages have been exiled. I saw a group of twenty peasants being marched off under escort. This is such a common sight that it no longer even causes curiosity.

- 1 Write down at least two ways in which the peasants were suffering in 1933.
- 2 Compare your answers with a partner, then try to come up with at least one limitation of the source for establishing the situation of the peasants.
- 3 With your partner, decide how useful this source is for establishing the situation of the peasants on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very useful).
- 4 What if the source was used to answer the question: What was the attitude of the peasants towards the government?

- a Write down any ways in which the source is useful for answering this new question.
- b Write down any limitations for answering the new question.
- c With your partner, decide how useful this source is for answering the question about the attitude of the peasants towards the government on a scale of 1 to 10.
- d Can you think of another enquiry for which this would be a useful source? Write it down and score the source on a scale of 1 to 10.

- 5 Compare your scores out of 10. How does the question being asked affect how useful a source is? Explain your answer.

- 6 Can you think of any other factors that might affect the usefulness of the source?

## Activities: Interpretations

Assumption / Barrier to Understanding	Desired outcomes / understandings	Exemplification
2 Histories are like pictures of the past – ideally, they should be accurate copies / mirrorings of ‘what happened’.	<p>2a) Historians do not aim to represent ‘the whole’ past and this is an impossible and irrelevant task.</p> <p>2b) ‘What happened’ is always debatable (and was at the time): it depends upon the theories, concepts and interests of historians as much as on ‘the past’ itself.</p> <p>2c) Historical accounts are not pictures or mirrors of past reality. Historical accounts are answers to questions about the past and are more like theories or models than like pictures.</p>	<p>E.g. The whole past ‘as it was’ is neither possible nor useful. No one would expect a biography of Hitler to pay close attention to his hairbrush or nail clippers. A comprehensive account of all the experiences of all the soldiers at Waterloo would not be a history of Waterloo – it would simply be a collection of multiple perceptions. Histories involve judgments of inclusion / exclusion and judgments about importance.</p> <p>E.g. Whether Louis XVI was ‘executed’ or ‘murdered’ is not a factual matter. The view that is taken on this question is a moral and political one.</p> <p>E.g. Whether the events of the 1640s in England constituted an ‘English Revolution’ or a ‘Great Rebellion’ isn’t simply a question of values, but also a question of the interpretive concepts that you use and the historical methodology you subscribe to.</p>

## Thinking Historically

	Assumption / Barrier to Understanding	Desired outcomes / understandings	Exemplification
3	In principle, there should be one account of the past – variations in historical accounts are signs that at least one account is flawed (due to error, bias or wilful lies).	<p><i>[See above and in addition]</i></p> <p>3a) There can be as many different accounts of the past as there can be questions about the past. It is also possible to propose equally defensible but variant answers to the same question, since there are legitimate disagreements about the concepts and the methods to use when collecting and analysing historical data.</p>	<p>E.g. It is possible to write about Mughal India from a myriad of different perspectives – political perspectives, centred on the Mughal court or centred on the Deccan; economic perspectives focused on trade or the peasant economy or artisan production or foreign factories (or all of these at once); etc. There is no necessity for these interpretations to be conflicting.</p> <p>E.g. Even if historians ask the same question they can legitimately disagree about how to answer it – for example, due to the archives they used, the time scales they considered, the methods used to interpret the sources (cliometric, microhistory, etc.).</p>
4	Interpretations are just opinions, so one is as good as another. We can never know the truth.	<p>4a) Interpretations are theories that are based on and backed up by evidence. The evidence for one interpretation may be better than for another.</p> <p>4b) Interpretations are arguments that are based on reasoned interpretations of evidence. The evidence, argument and methodologies for one interpretation may be better than for another. It is possible to compare historical arguments in terms of their validity.</p>	<p>E.g. Historians have opinions, values, and prejudices just like the rest of humanity, but they also have commitments to the disciplined and objective study of the past (and this is what makes them historians). We can come to reasoned judgments about important aspects of historians' writing by applying criteria. Which historian has consulted the available and relevant sources most comprehensively? Which historian makes the most logical and well-supported case? Which historian has clarified and grounded their assumptions most effectively? These are all aspects of historians' methods of research, interpretation and argument. All can be assessed by examining how they write; the historian's subjective values and beliefs have no bearing whatsoever on these questions.</p>

### Activity 3

#### Interpretations (2a)

##### The importance of selection

Historians do not aim to tell us about the whole past – there is just too much of it. They need to choose which aspects of the past to investigate and which details are most important to examine. For example, an analysis of why there was opposition in Germany to the Treaty of Versailles would be unlikely to examine witness statements about the Spartacist Revolt in detail, whereas a work about the nature or extent of opposition might examine such witness statements in great depth. This is one of the reasons why interpretations differ.

##### The Treaty of Versailles – some key information

A) Germany had little involvement in the discussions about the terms of the Treaty; Germans called it a dictated peace.	B) Germany had taken Alsace-Lorraine from France in 1871 but now the area had to be returned to France.	C) The Saarland was to be controlled by the League of Nations, so Germany lost control of valuable coalfields.	D) The army was reduced to a maximum of 100,000 men.
E) Germany had to accept responsibility for the war and the damage done.	F) Germany was not allowed to have any submarines or a military air force.	G) About 13% of German territory, with 6 million people living there, now belonged to other countries	H) The Rhineland was to become a demilitarised area and would be occupied by the Allies for 15 years.
I) Overseas colonies were taken away from German control, meaning that valuable resources were lost.	J) Land was given to Poland but as a result, East Prussia was separated from the rest of Germany.	K) The 'War Guilt' clause meant that Germany also had to agree to pay compensation for the damage done.	L) Although they had a lot in common, the people of Germany and Austria would not be allowed to unite.

When historians look at history they focus on a particular question to investigate. Which of the above pieces of information would be best suited for investigating the following issues? Write out each of the four statements below and then choose up to four pieces of information from the table for each.

**1** The Treaty aimed to prevent Germany from fighting a modern war in the future and also meant Germany would be unable to defend herself if another country attacked.

**2** The Treaty aimed to weaken Germany economically so that she would not be an important country in the future.

**3** The Treaty aimed to humiliate Germany.

**4** The Treaty aimed to reduce Germany in size so that she would no longer be a powerful country.

With a partner, discuss the following questions and write down your thoughts:

**5** Why is it important to be selective about the information that you put in your historical writing?

**6** How important are the questions the historian asks in deciding what information is included in their writing?

**7** Why does this lead historians to produce different versions of an event?

## Activity 4

## Interpretations (2c/3a)

## History as hypotheses

In science, you might have come across the idea of a **hypothesis** – a hypothesis is an idea that a scientist comes up with to explain what they can see happening. The scientist then tries to find evidence, through experiments, to see whether their hypothesis is correct. Historians often work in a similar way, but look at sources to find their evidence, rather than doing experiments.

These three historians are thinking about the effects of the Cultural Revolution in China.

Historian's interests	Hypothesis	Evidence
Historian A  Interested in leaders, their views and actions and the effects these had on history.		
Historian B  Interested in how economic conditions changed, and how this affected politics and society.		
Historian C  Interested in changes in how people think, what they read and listen to and their day to day lives.	The main effect of the Cultural Revolution is that Mao had encouraged young people to attack 'old' ways and therefore their role in society had become more important because they had attacked people who would normally have been in authority.	

Work in groups of three.

**1** Make a copy of the above table.

a) As a group, discuss the interests of each of the historians, and write a hypothesis that they might put forward based on their interests (Historian C has been done for you as an example).

b) Each person in the group should take on the role of one of the historians. For your historian, add at least three pieces of evidence into the table that support your hypothesis, based on the information and sources in this chapter.

c) For your historian, write a concluding paragraph, summing up your views on the effects of the Cultural Revolution. Remember to restate your hypothesis and support it with your evidence.

**2** Share your concluding paragraphs with the rest of the group and compare them.

a) Underline instances where different hypotheses use the same or similar evidence.

b) Look at each hypothesis in turn. Can you think of at least one piece of evidence that challenges each hypothesis? (Tip: you can start by looking at evidence for the other hypotheses being right!)

**3** Discuss as a group: Is it possible to say which hypothesis is correct?

## Activity 5

### Interpretations (4a)

#### The weight of evidence

Historians' interpretations are not simply their opinions. In order for interpretations to be strong, they need to be backed up with convincing evidence. When you evaluate an interpretation, you should consider how strong the evidence is for the conclusions it comes to.

Work in pairs. Read Source J and the three conclusions below, then answer the questions.

#### Source C

From an article in a Chinese national newspaper, 27 May 1957, about the Hundred Flowers campaign. This newspaper had previously played a leading role in criticising Mao.

Since April, all available wall space around the dining hall of Peking University has become filled with posters, many criticising the Party. At one corner there was the 'democratic wall' and at another corner there was the 'garden of freedom'. Some articles were written by individuals, others by groups of students. According to statistics compiled by one student, by May 22, over 500 bulletins had been issued.

In Peking University with its glorious revolutionary tradition, more than 8,000 young people had become inflamed with enthusiasm.

#### Conclusion 1

The students at Peking University were extremely critical of the Chinese Communist Party. This is shown by the fact that posters filled the wall space around the dining hall and over 500 bulletins were produced. Therefore the Hundred Flowers campaign showed that the Party had not been very successful in the attempts to carry out a communist revolution.

#### Conclusion 2

There was criticism by the students at Peking University of the Chinese Communist Party but the Hundred Flowers campaign had invited constructive criticism, so this does not mean that the students did not support the communist revolution. The students were enthusiastic because they were allowed to express their opinions freely and the names of the walls reflects that situation.

#### Conclusion 3

The posters and bulletins at Peking University show that there was opposition to the communist revolution but it was not very strong because the article says 8,000 students were inflamed but only 500 bulletins were produced. It also mentions the University's 'glorious revolutionary tradition' so this shows that the students would have had high expectations of the revolution and therefore might be quite critical if the Party had not achieved as much as was hoped.

## Thinking Historically

- 1** Write out each conclusion and then use highlighter pens to colour-code them. Use one colour for 'evidence', another colour for 'conclusions' and a third for language that shows 'reasoning' (e.g. 'therefore', 'so').
- 2** How do the conclusions differ in terms of the way that the evidence is used?
- 3** Put the conclusions in ranking order from the best to the worst. Explain your choice.
- 4** Consider what you know about the Hundred Flowers campaign. For each conclusion, add any extra evidence you can think of that supports that conclusion.
- 5** Rank the conclusions again. Does the evidence you've added change which you think is the best?
- 6** Using evidence from the source and your own knowledge, write your own conclusion about the Hundred Flowers campaign. Remember to back up all your points by reasoning about the evidence.