

Source utility

Source utility questions require you to make a judgement about **how useful** sources are for a specific **enquiry** into something. The word 'enquiry' means investigation, so you will need to think like a detective and see the source as **evidence** which you can use to find things out about the past.



In this enquiry the historian is trying to find out **how effective** the police were in Whitechapel in 1888.

3 steps to a good source utility response:

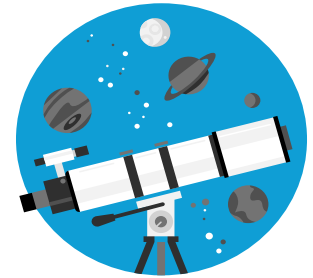
1. You will need to think about an aspect of the **source content** (inference) that makes it useful for the enquiry. In this example, you will need to analyse the source and decide what impression is being created by the way the policeman is being portrayed.
2. Take into account how a relevant aspect of the **source provenance** (Nature, Origin or Purpose) affects the usefulness of the source content.
3. Use an aspect of **own knowledge** linked to either the content or the provenance to assess usefulness.

4: An artist's impression of a scene in the Whitechapel district of London in 1888. It was printed in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, a cheap weekly newspaper. The police constable is from H Division. The building behind him is a police station.



Source utility

Source **utility** means **usefulness** – when something is useful it helps us, or we can use it for something, e.g. a telescope is useful to see distant planets. How useful a source is will depend on what you are trying to find out – it depends on the question being asked of it.



A diary entry from a soldier in the First World War could provide useful evidence about the conditions of the trenches but is unlikely to be useful for an enquiry into the general's plan of battle or a surgeon's new technique for dealing with injuries. When you look at a source in the exam you must always remember to focus on the question being asked of it, i.e. **the focus of the enquiry!**

Study Sources A and B in the Sources Booklet.

How useful are Sources A and B for **an enquiry into the effectiveness of the police in Whitechapel in 1888?**

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

Above each source you will find **the provenance** – this tells you about the Nature, Origin and Purpose of the source and will help you to decide how useful it is.

You should consider one relevant aspect of provenance:

- **Nature** – what type of source is it?
- **Origin** – who produced it? When? Where?
- **Purpose** – why was the source produced?

Source A: An artist's impression of a scene in the Whitechapel district of London in 1888. It was printed in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, a cheap weekly newspaper. The police constable is from H Division. The building behind him is a police station.

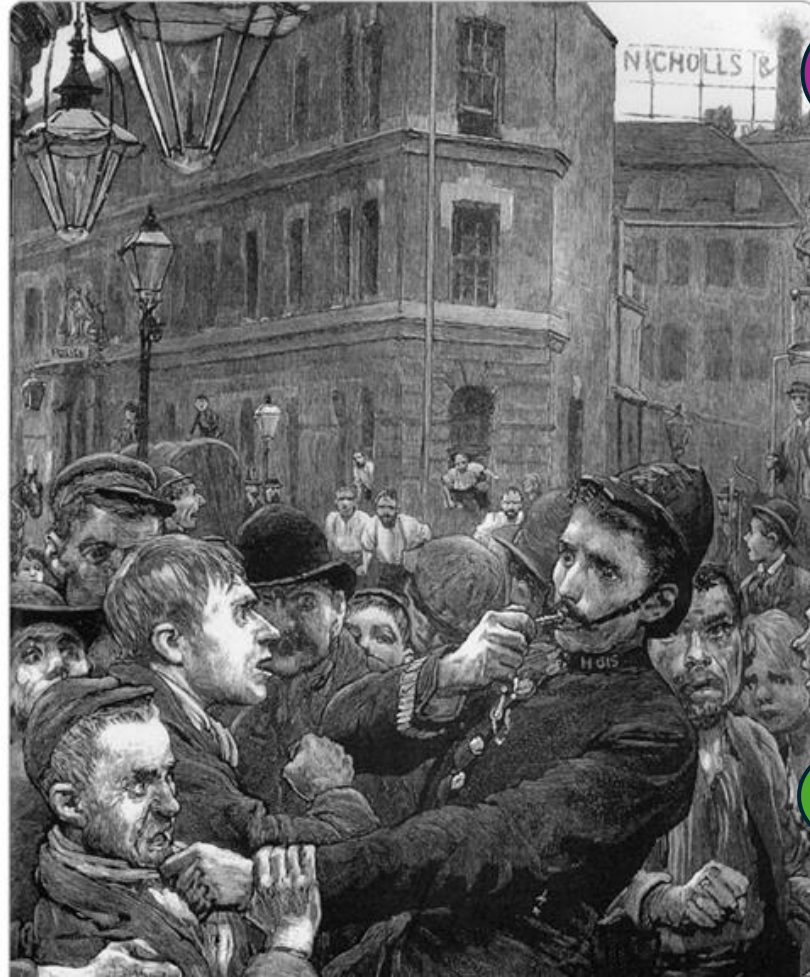
Source utility

How useful are Sources A and B for an enquiry into **the effectiveness of the police** in Whitechapel in 1888?

1. Make an inference about the **source content** – what is it about this content that makes it useful for this enquiry?

Source A is useful because it shows a police constable being harassed by a mob close to his headquarters, suggesting a lack of respect for local police.

Source A: An artist's impression of a scene in the Whitechapel district of London in 1888. It was printed in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, a cheap weekly newspaper. The police constable is from H Division. The building behind him is a police station.



2. Think about how an aspect of the provenance affects the usefulness of the source content. Does this make the source more or less useful?

It's an artist's impression, published in a cheap paper; it may be deliberately exaggerated in order to amuse readers.

3. Now apply your own knowledge of the historical context to support any inferences or to assess the usefulness of the information.

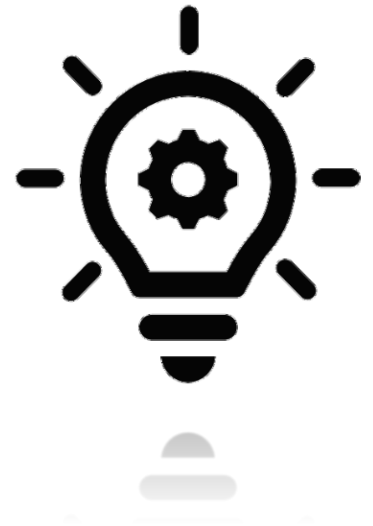
Police rules required constables to patrol in pairs – this is not shown here. Suggests artist created the image for effect.

Source utility

The use of **own contextual knowledge** is important in source utility questions. Very good answers cannot access the higher marks if they do not include contextual knowledge.

How to use own knowledge in source utility questions

- Contextual knowledge should be used to help **assess** how useful the source is.
- Contextual knowledge should be **relevant** to the specific enquiry.
- Contextual knowledge can be applied to the **source content** e.g. in order to confirm / challenge / explain.
- Or contextual knowledge can be applied to the source's **provenance** e.g. to show that the source had added weight / less authority because of the author / date / nature.



The source utility question asks you to assess the usefulness of two sources for a specific enquiry. You should focus on each source separately as there is no requirement to compare the sources.