

National Qualifications

Evaluating a source

'Evaluate the usefulness of....'



In this type of question, it is never enough just to describe what is in the source.

Evaluate means **to judge** how good a source is as evidence for finding out about something.

The short answer is that sources in exams will always be partly useful, but that it will never be entirely useful in giving all the information needed to tackle the question.

Why do Historians use sources?

- To understand why events happened
- Find out what people thought at the time
- Find out why something was significant
- To find out different peoples opinions about something

What should pupils consider when evaluating a source?

1. The **ORIGIN** of the source. (WHO? - author and WHEN? - date)
 - When was it produced and how might that help in the evaluation?
 - Who produced the source? Why might the authorship of the source be relevant and therefore useful in assessing the value of the source?
2. The **PURPOSE** of the source. WHY was it produced?
 - Why was it produced? Does this make it more or less valuable? What did the person who produced it want the reader to think or do or feel because of the content of the source?

You can get up to 4 marks for accurately commenting on the Origin and Purpose.

3. The **CONTENT** of the source. WHAT does it tell us/show us?
 - What does the source tell us/show us which can help tackle the question?

You can get up to 2 marks for extracting contents of the source which is relevant to the question.

4. **RECALL** - provide relevant information from your own knowledge that tackles the question but which the source doesn't mention.
 - What was going on at the time BUT NOT covered by the source?

You can get up to 2 marks for providing comments relating to the question but is not mentioned in the source.

Origin of a source (Date.)

If a source was written / produced at the time of the event then it is a **PRIMARY** source and is often called a **CONTEMPORARY** source.

- This can be useful because it could be written by an **eyewitness** so it will be fresh in the person's memory.
- Primary sources can sometimes tell us how people thought and felt.
- However they sometimes only give us one person's experience or viewpoint, they can be **biased** or **exaggerated**.

If it was written well after the time of the event this is a **SECONDARY** source.

- This will be written with the benefit of hindsight and can be more accurate.
- Secondary sources are often written using plenty of other evidence.

Origin of a source (Author)

TYPE OF SOURCE	USEFUL	NOT SO USEFUL
PRIMARY		
Eyewitness	Shows us how an individual or group felt about an event.	May be one-sided, biased, exaggerated or have gaps. Only one person's view.
Government Report	Official documents are usually well researched so you would expect them to be accurate / unbiased.	May only give a narrow view of one place or time. Usually show no feelings. May be following agendas.
Newspaper	Shows what was happening at the time. Gives a variety of evidence e.g. opinions, letters, photos.	Can often be biased or exaggerated.
Letters / Diaries	Not meant to be published so can give an honest account. Shows attitudes, opinions at the time.	Only one person's views / experience. More famous people write diaries to be published.
Speeches	Given to inform / influence the public by important people who should know their facts.	Can sometimes be biased especially if the person is a politician
Photographs	Shows us what is happening at the time. Usually accurate.	Could be staged. Photographer may have been selective so they can have limited use.
SECONDARY		
History book	Well researched using many different primary sources, so would be accurate. Usually gives a balanced account with the benefit of hindsight	May only deal with one aspect of a topic.
Stories passed down	May show traditions and feelings. May contain some valid reliable evidence.	Stories can change as they are passed down through generations. Usually inaccurate with gaps, bias and exaggeration.

2. Purpose of a Source

The purpose of a source affects the usefulness. Possible purposes:

- Produced to inform people, to reveal something, to attack, to defend.
- Produced to influence people – make them think, act in a certain way (propaganda)
- Produced to remain secret (e.g. a diary)
- Produced to pass on accurate information

Remember the purpose is not what it is; the purpose is an intention, a function. It may be one-sided (biased), exaggerated or have gaps. On the other hand the purpose can mean it might be factual, balanced or detailed.

3. What to look for in the content of the source

- What does it actually tell us about the issue we are looking at?
- **Bias** - Does the source give a one-sided viewpoint?
- **Exaggeration** – Has information been added which may not be true or is a bit 'over the top'?
- **Accuracy** - Is the information in the source correct, does it match your knowledge?
- **Balance** - Does the source give both sides of the argument?
- **Omission** - Has something important been missed out?

In order to prove whether the content is useful or not compare it with your own recall. Never copy out large chunks of the source.

4 Recall

You must give recall which relates to the question the source is discussing, and had **not** been included in the source.

- You must make sure your recall is relevant to the question.
- Recall must be points not mentioned in the source.

The Question

Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of?

Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of...?

Step 1

Read the source and question. Understand the main points which are being put forward in the source. Decide whether it is useful to a great extent/to some extent or not very useful.

Step 2

Think about the **ORIGIN** on the source (**Who** and **When**)

1. When was the source written? For example, '....was written at the time of Irish emigration of 1840s
2. Who wrote the source? Is that relevant? How does it affect the usefulness, if at all?

Step 3

Think about the possible **PURPOSE (Why)** of the source

Why was the source produced? Does this affect the usefulness of the source?

Step 4

Think about the **CONTENT** of the source. What does it tell us? Extract some relevant information to the question.

Make a judgement about the information in the source – can it be taken at face value? Is the author biased or exaggerating? Do they have a particular reason for putting forward a different view point to others?

Step 5

Add relevant recalled information about what was going on at the time by identifying points which are missing from the source and help tackle the question.

How to set out your answer

Introductory sentence which answers the question

The source is quite useful / very useful as evidence of _____

(Origin – author and date)

The source was produced by _____ The source was written in _____ which makes it a primary (contemporary) source as it was written at the time of..... / secondary evidence as it was written This is useful / not so useful because _____

(Purpose)

The possible purpose of the source was to _____

(Content)

The source tells us (small quote and in your own words) _____

this is useful / not so useful because _____

(Recall / Context) Context – Intermediate 2

However the source does not mention _____

Conclusion

Therefore the source is useful / not so useful as _____

Example Answer

Source B is an extract from the Treaty of Birgham written in 1290.

'The rights, laws, liberties and customs of Scotland in all matters and in all ways shall be wholly preserved for all time throughout the whole of that kingdom and its borders.'

Evaluate the usefulness of **Source B** as evidence of Edward's intentions in the Treaty of Birgham? **(5 or 6 marks)**

(Introduction)

Source B is of limited use as evidence of Edward's intentions in the Treaty of Birgham.

(Origin)

The source was written by Edward I himself who was in the best position to know his own intentions. (1) The source is useful because it was written at the time when the Treaty was signed in 1290 so it is primary / contemporary source. (1)

(Purpose)

The source was written by Edward to play down Scottish fears of an English takeover / threat to her independence. (1)

(Content)

In the source Edward clearly suggests that he would respect Scotland's independence and not harm Scotland's "rights, laws, liberties and customs" (1) It also states, (they) "...shall be wholly preserved for all time throughout the whole of that kingdom and its borders". (1)

(Recall – Context) Int. 2

The source does not mention how the Treaty also involved the marriage of Edward's son to Margaret, Maid of Norway i.e. eventually English involvement in Scotland. (1) In reality Edward did not respect Scottish independence, in August 1290 he took over the Isle of Man and appointed the Bishop of Durham to help run Scotland, so the content of the source is not accurate. (1)

(Conclusion)

Therefore the source is not a very useful account of Edward's intentions.