

Critical Use of Sources

All sources – both primary and secondary – are made by people and may be biased (one-sided) and incomplete. Two people can see exactly the same incident and yet remember it differently. So too, modern historians can study the same evidence and reach different conclusions. Therefore, it becomes important to take time to discover what strengths and weaknesses exist in each source. To do this, you need to develop **critical thinking skills**:

Critical Thinking skills:	Historical Skills
Comprehension	Understanding and explaining: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The explicit (obvious) meaning of a historical source
Interpretation	Understanding and explain meanings that are implicit (hinted at) within a historical source. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ideas described in a picture, carving or sculpture – The theme (overall message) of a speech or an article – The meanings of metaphors in written texts – Beliefs, values or motives that influenced individuals or group
Analysis	Identifying and explaining the historical aspects of sources. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What kind of source it is (primary or secondary) – What type of source (artefact, written, painting, photo, etc.) – Who was the creator of the source – When it was created – Who the intended audience of the source was – What the purpose of the source was (why it was created) – What perspective (point of view) the source contains – Whether it contains any bias (for or against people or ideas) – If the source's information can be corroborated (confirmed or supported) by other sources – If the source's information is in contradiction with other sources
Evaluation	Deciding how valuable a historical source is, according to certain criteria. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How relevant particular sources are to your investigation – How accurate the information in source is – How reliable a source, author or information is – Whether the source's point of view represents the majority or a minority opinion of the time