

Answering questions about reliability

There will be questions that ask you to comment on the reliability of a source or a pair of sources. The question might not use the word 'reliable'. It is more likely to ask you whether you 'trust' a source, or whether you think it is 'accurate'.

How not to answer:

Do not make unsupported assertions based on who wrote or drew the source. Another answer to avoid is one that only uses the content of the sources. A source is not more trustworthy because it contains more information.

How to answer:

Step 1: Start with the **nature** of the source. What type of source is it?

Step 2: Move on to the **origin** of the source, answer the question who is the author? – does that help you make a decision about reliability? But don't stop there. Go on to...

Step 3: Think carefully about the **purpose** of the source. Why was the source produced?

Step 4: Look at the **content** of the source. Is there any emotive language or biased tone?

Step 5: Compare what the source is claiming with your own **contextual knowledge**. Does it fit or contradict your own knowledge?

Step 6: **Cross reference**: do any other sources in the paper support or contradict the source? Just because you are comparing two sources does not mean you can't use the other sources to help you evaluate those two.

You might conclude that sources are equally trustworthy or untrustworthy.

NOP – found in the provenance or attribution of the source (the bit above or below)

Nature of the source.

What type of source is it? A speech, a photograph, a cartoon, a letter, an extract from a diary? How will the nature of the source affect its reliability?

Origin of the source.

Who wrote or produced the source? Are their views worth knowing? Are they giving a one-sided view? When was it produced? It could be an eyewitness account. What are the advantages and disadvantages of eyewitness accounts?

Purpose of the source.

For what reason was the source produced? For example, the purpose of adverts is to make you buy a product. People usually make speeches to get your support. How will this affect the reliability of the source?

Answering Questions about Usefulness

A common question when dealing with sources is about the utility of a source, or its usefulness.

Remember a source can never be useful or useless in their own right – it all depends what they are being used for, so read the whole question: ‘Useful for ...what?’ a propaganda source about the First World War might be useless for telling what actually happened, but very useful for telling you how the government tried to persuade people to support the war effort.

The exam will not try to trick you. The sources they ask about will be useful to some degree.

One thing to avoid is what examiners call ‘stock evaluation’ (things that could be said about any source), for example, ‘This is not useful because it is only the experience of two soldiers.’ That is where your background knowledge helps. You will know from your background knowledge how typical these are. So you will see how important it is to have background knowledge.

Often you will have to compare two sources.

Remember you don’t have to choose a source over another as being more useful, you might conclude they are equally useful, or that they are most useful taken together, or that they are useful for different things. Write what you think but always make sure you support your answers with details or inferences from the sources.

Usefulness questions are connected to reliability. Even if a source is not reliable that does not mean it is not useful. A totally unreliable source can be very useful – it all depends on what you want to use it for.

To answer a utility question you must analyse the content, nature, origin and purpose (NOP) of a source. To gain top marks you have to explain both the value and limitations of both the content and NOP of each source.

The NOP is found in the provenance or attribution of the source – the information given above or below it. A good tip is to highlight or underline key words in the provenance that show either the utility or limitations of the source.

Nature of the source.

What type of source is it? A speech, a photograph, a cartoon, a letter, an extract from a diary? How will the nature of the source affect its utility? For example, a private letter is often very useful because the person who wrote it generally gives their honest views.

Origin of the source.

Who wrote or produced the source? Are their views worth knowing? Are they giving a one-sided view? When was it produced? It could be an eyewitness account. What are the advantages and disadvantages of eyewitness accounts?

Purpose of the source.

For what reason was the source produced? For example, the purpose of adverts is to make you buy a product. People usually make speeches to get your support. How will this affect the utility of a source?

When answering focus first on the content of a source, its value and limits. Then focus on the NOP its utility and limitations. If you are comparing two sources then repeat the process for the second source. In a conclusion give a final judgement on the relative value of each source. For example one source might provide one view of an event, the other source a different view.

Answering the hypothesis type questions

In this type of question you are asked to use the sources to test a hypothesis – to decide which sources support and which sources challenge the hypothesis or view.

You should make judgements on the reliability and sufficiency of the sources.

'Sufficiency' means how much the sources explain or show about the event or person.

The examiner would expect you to write between one and two sides of A4.

This answer needs a **plan**.

- Read all the sources.
- Which sources agree with the interpretation? Why? Give a brief explanation.
- Which sources disagree with the interpretation? Why give a brief explanation.
- Now briefly judge the reliability of each source.
- In what ways is each source reliable?
- In what ways is each source unreliable?
- Then think about how your own knowledge agrees with the interpretation and disagrees with the interpretation.
- A grid may be a good way to briefly plan this answer.

	Agrees with interpretation	Disagrees with interpretation	Reliable	Unreliable
Source A				
Source B				
Own knowledge			x	x

Then follow the steps below:

Step 1:

Write an **introduction** that identifies the key issues you need to cover in your answer and your main argument.

Step 2:

After your introduction, write a good length paragraph or paragraphs **agreeing** with the interpretation. Begin by identifying the **sources** which support the hypothesis and then back this up with **evidence** from the sources themselves.

Step 3:

Make a judgement about the **reliability** of the sources that agree with the hypothesis.

Step 4:

Write a good length paragraph or paragraphs **disagreeing** with the hypothesis. Begin by identifying the **sources** which challenge the hypothesis and then back this up with **evidence** from the sources themselves.

Step 5:

Make a judgement on the **reliability** of the sources that disagree with the hypothesis.

Step 6:

Write a **conclusion** giving your final judgement on the hypothesis. Does the weight of the evidence from the sources support or challenge the hypothesis? Explain your final judgement.

Tips:

Don't go through the sources one by one. Group them into agree with hypothesis and disagree.

Refer to at least two sources on each side and more if you have enough time.

When you refer to a source don't only refer to it by letter – refer to it by content – and how that content supports or challenges the statement.

Show awareness that some sources might be more reliable than others.

Use your conclusion to say how far you agree with the statement.

Remember to use your own knowledge but only if it helps you do something useful with the sources, do not put it in for its own sake.

British Depth Study – Content Sheet

Key Question –How far did British Society Change, 1890-18?

The Liberal Reforms 1906-12

- What was it like to be poor at the beginning of the twentieth century?
- The work of the social reformers
- Why did the Liberal Government introduce reforms to help the young, old and unemployed?
- What measures did the Liberals introduce?
- How effective were the Liberal reforms?

Votes for women 1900-18

- What was the social and legal position of women in the 1890s?
- What were the Arguments for and against female suffrage?
- How effective were the activities of the suffragists and the suffragettes?
- Why had women not been given the vote by 1914?
- How did women contribute to WWI?
- Why were women given the vote in 1918?

The Home Front 1914-18

- Recruitment and conscription
- How effective was government propaganda during the war?
- How was Britain organised to fight the war?
- How were civilians affected by the war?

After the War

- What was the attitude of the British people once the war was over?
- The Paris Peace Treaty

Conclusion/Summary

- How did British society change 1906-1918?

How to answer Purpose Questions

Step 1: Study the source

The first thing to do is look carefully at the poster. Ask yourself, what is happening in the poster? Look at the poster and use your knowledge. Work out the topic and what view it has about the topic.

Step 2: Get straight to the point

Once you have worked out why the poster was published get straight to the point, do not waste time 'The purpose of this cartoon was to ...' Remember too that a source can have more than one purpose. What is the poster trying to make you think? Is it trying to get you to support or oppose a person or event? Use details from the source to back up your answer.

Step 3: Use details and infer from the source

Carefully examine the details of the source and use these to back up your answer. Draw inferences from the source. What is it suggesting? What is the tone or attitude? What is the overall message? Use details from the source to backup your answer.

Step 4: Use you own knowledge

Support your answer on the purpose of the source with your own contextual knowledge – in other words, your knowledge of what was going on at the time.

Always make sure you include why a poster was published at a particular time if a date is given in the question. Make sure you use your general knowledge here.

How to interrogate (question) sources to determine their reliability:

Familiarise yourself with the **content** of the source/s.

What is it about?

Look at the **provenance/attribution** for clues.

Apply your **own knowledge and understanding** of the historical period of the source/s.

Are the facts accurate?

Have any facts been missed out or others exaggerated?

Test out the **reliability** of the source/s by applying the following checklist.

Cross reference sources to determine the truth.

Answering source based questions:

State source/s that the answer is based upon i.e. In Source A...

Refer to the provenance / attribution of the source.

Make a judgement of the reliability of the source.

Dig into the content of the source to justify and support your answer.

The Provenance / Attribution of a source:

What type of source is it?

Is the source a diary, letter, speech, poster, cartoon, chart, statistics etc

Is the source fact, fiction or opinion?

When was the source created?

Is the source primary or secondary evidence?

Who created the source?

Is the source created with personal or second-hand experience?

Were they biased or impartial?

Were they modest or ambiguous (an exaggeration) in their explanation/interpretation?

Why was the source created (**purpose**) and for **whom** was the source intended (**audience**)?

Was the source for propaganda?

Private or public information?

Does the source give a glimpse or panoramic view of the event?

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The Provenance / Attribution of a source is...

- **What** type of source is it?
Is the source a diary, letter, speech, poster, cartoon, chart, statistics etc
Is the source fact, fiction or opinion?
- **When** was the source created?
Is the source primary or secondary evidence?
- **Who** created the source?
Is the source created with personal or second-hand experience?
Were they biased or impartial?
Were they modest or ambiguous (an exaggeration) in their explanation/interpretation?
- **Why** was the source created (**purpose**) and for **whom** was the source intended (**audience**)?
Was the source for propaganda?
Private or public information?
Does the source give a glimpse or panoramic view of the event?

Paper 2 Question Types

Type 1:

Analysing the message or purpose of a source. For example:

- What is the message of the cartoon in Source A?
- Why did the Liberal government publish this poster in 1911?
- Are you surprised this photograph was published in 1911?

Type 2:

Comparing the reliability of two sources. For example:

- Do you trust Source E more than Source F about the leadership of WSPU?
- Does Source C or D give a more accurate view of the reasons why the Liberal government introduced their Welfare Reforms?

Type 3:

Considering the usefulness of sources. For example:

- How useful is the poster in Source D for finding out about living and working conditions?
- Is Source A more useful than Source D to historians studying the attitude of women to the suffragettes?

Type 4:

The big conclusion question. For example:

- 'The Suffragettes were justified in their use of violence.' How far the sources support this statement?
- 'Civilians in Britain suffered during the First World War.' How far do the sources support this statement?