

OPVL Chart: Origin, Purpose, Value and Limitation of Historical Sources

Source Type	Origin	Purpose	Value	Limitations
Diary Entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it a primary source? Who wrote it? Was this person a key individual? When in the course of events was it written? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private reflection? Private reflection with the view to being published later in a memoir? Attempts to justify actions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content Eyewitness account Person was part of the decision-making process Could be candid and honest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal involvement could lead to mistruths, omissions, justifications for actions and undue emphasis placed on certain events. Might be written with a view to later publication and therefore wanting to appear in a positive light. Needs to be cross-referenced with other primary sources.
Letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it a primary source? Who wrote it? Was this person a key individual? When in the course of events was it written? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not necessarily intended for public consumption? Attempt to justify actions? Attempt to persuade the recipient to follow a course or action? Private and candid comments between individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content Eyewitness account Person was part of the decision-making process Could be candid and honest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal involvement could lead to mistruths, omissions, justifications for actions and undue emphasis placed on certain events. Might be written with a view to later publication and therefore wanting to appear in a positive light. Needs to be cross-referenced with other primary sources.
Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it a primary source? Who wrote/delivered the speech? Was this person a key individual? When in the course of events did it occur? Where was the speech made? Who was the audience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public statement of thoughts or of official policies? Propaganda? Facts omitted or exaggerated to suit the audience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content Statement of official policy Statement of the individual's personal ideas and thoughts Reaction to various events Statement of intention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal involvement could lead to mistruths, omissions, justifications for actions and undue emphasis placed on certain events. Propaganda? Facts omitted or exaggerated to suit the audience. Needs to be cross-referenced with other primary sources.

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Memoir Recollections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose memoir/memories? • Was this person a key individual? • How long after the period was the memoir published or the memories recounted? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to justify actions? • Attempt to remember details of events for later generations? • For the general public? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Eyewitness account • Person was part of the decision-making process • Could be candid and honest • Could be a source of valuable information that otherwise would be lost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal involvement could lead to mistruths, omissions, justifications for actions and undue emphasis placed on certain events. • Written for publication and therefore wanting to appear in a positive light. • Needs to be cross-referenced with other primary sources.
Official Government Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it a primary source? • Which institution published this material? • Was this document a significant document at the time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public statement of official policies? • Propaganda? • Facts omitted or exaggerated to suit the audience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Statement of official policy • Reaction to various events • Statement of intention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propaganda? • Exaggerations? • Only shows one aspect of government policy. • Does not show the reasons behind the policy. • Does not show how or whether the policy was actually implemented.
Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it a primary source? • Which institution published this material? • Was this document a significant document at the time? • Or is it/has it been compiled by a historian as part of his/her analysis? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public statement of official figures? • Propaganda? • Facts omitted or exaggerated to suit the audience? • Statistics used to illustrate a historian's point? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Statement of official figures • A historian's summary of facts and figures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propaganda? • Exaggeration? • Only shows one set of figures • Does not show the reasons behind the statistics. • Does not show how these statistics were collected.

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History Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationality of the historian? Where was it published? When was it published? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholarship Objectivity For students of history and for the general public interested in history To revise previous interpretations of the period or events? To present an alternative view? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectivity Thoroughly researched Access to a wide range of sources and evidence Hindsight New evidence Analysis of cause and effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only an extract Topic may have been only briefly researched because it is only a small part of general history text. May not have had access to the full range of sources
Biography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationality of the biographer? The relationship between biographer and the person? Where was it published? When was it published? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholarship? Objectivity? For students of history and for the general public interested in history and in the lives of important people? To revise previous interpretations of this person's life? To present an alternative view? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectivity Thoroughly researched Access to a wide range of sources and evidence Hindsight New evidence Analysis of events and of a person's contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only an extract Topic may have been only briefly researched because it is only a small part of the person's life. Justification May not have had access to the full range of sources.
Photograph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it a primary source? Who took the photo? Was it originally for private use or the public? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private family photo? Posed? Propaganda? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snapshot of a moment in time Shows how people lived/dressed/acted Could be a source of valuable information that otherwise would be lost. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propaganda Posed

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Cartoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was it drawn at the time? Nationality of the artist? In which newspaper or journal did it originally appear? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An interpretation of events at the time Political comment for readers about particular events or policies. Propaganda? If published in another country, is it a positive or negative comment which reflects that country's public opinion? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A reflection of public opinion at the time in one of the countries involved Insightful analysis of events and policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biased Opinionated Does not show the evidence to support opinion May reflect uninformed public opinion
Newspaper Article or Editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the article written at the time? Or was it written later? Nationality of the journalist? <p>In which newspaper did it originally appear?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An interpretation of events at the time Political comment for readers about particular events or policies Propaganda? If published in another country, is it a positive or negative comment which reflects that country's public opinion? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflection of public opinion at the time in one of the countries involved Insightful analysis of events and policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biased Opinionated Does not show the evidence to support assertions May reflect uninformed public opinion