

# BBC Bitesize - GCSE History- Exam Skills

## Episode 3: How to answer source questions

**ANNOUNCER:** BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

**DATSHIANE:** I'm Datshiane Navanayagam.

**KATIE:** And I'm Katie Charlwood.

**DATSHIANE:** And this is Bitesize GCSE History.

**KATIE:** This is the third episode in a four-part series on exam skills.

**DATSHIANE:** And in this episode we'll be looking at sources.

**KATIE:** Like ketchup and brown sauce.

**DATSHIANE:** No, Katie. Not that kind of sauce. Historical sources.

**KATIE:** Of course, I'm just messing. We'll be revising different types of sources - how useful they are and how to tackle an exam question that includes a source.

**DATSHIANE:** We'll be looking at the idea of the provenance of a source. Who produced it; in what context; and why?

**KATIE:** And how to decide whether the source is trustworthy and balanced, or a piece of political propaganda.

**DATSHIANE:** And, along the way, make your notes if it helps you to revise.

**KATIE:** Do press pause and rewind. But we'll trust you to press play again when you want to continue. So, let's get right in there then. You turn over your exam paper and there staring you in the face is a question asking you to examine a historical source which might be a document, poster, photograph, speech, cartoon, advert or even a painting.

**DATSHIANE:** You may be asked, 'How useful is this source?' Or 'How far do you trust this source?' Or 'What can we learn from this source?' Or, even to compare two sources.

**KATIE:** However the question is worded, the skills needed to ace these questions are to be able to analyse the content for provenance and reliability of the source; and make a judgement as to how useful the source is. So, Datshiane where do we start?

**DATSHIANE:** Okay. Well, as always, before you do anything make sure you understand the question. It's really handy to underline the key words to focus in on what the examiner is asking you to write about. And once you're happy, here are four useful steps to follow.

**KATIE:** First up, analyse the content. What is the source saying? That might be literally, if it's a written source like a diary entry, or figuratively, if it's a cartoon or a painting. Two, consider the provenance of the source. Who created it, when and why? Three, cross reference with your knowledge. Does the source match what you know? And four, make a judgement on its usefulness by balancing the strength and limitations of the source.

**DATSHIANE:** Katie, you know I always love an example so please tell us you have one.

**KATIE:** It just so happens that I brought this along to the Bitesize studio. Datshiane, do you want to describe it?

**DATSHIANE:** Oh, okay. So, that is a Soviet poster from 1948 showing a dove of peace flying over Eastern Europe. And, there's a caption which, if you translate it into English, says, "We defend the peace for the people while the West stirs war." Don't worry if this isn't something you're studying as the tips will still work for any other historical event and period.

**KATIE:** Okay. So, back to the poster. So, let's say, in an exam we have a question that says, 'How useful is this source in explaining the causes of the Berlin Blockade?' Datshiane, do you want to have a go?

**DATSHIANE:** Okay. Well, the important phrases in the question are 'how useful' 'explaining the causes' and 'Berlin Blockade'. So, I would start by underlining those because that helps me to focus in on what the examiner is asking and to think about what I know about the Berlin Blockade.

**KATIE:** Great. Now, so let's go down our four steps to help us answer. First, what is the content of the source? What is it saying?

**DATSHIANE:** Okay. So, this is a Soviet poster. And it's saying that the USSR is a defender of peace whilst portraying the USA and its Western allies as instigators of war.

**KATIE:** Next, it's provenance. A nice way to think about provenance is to use your wit. W-I-T, where W stands for those W questions - Who, what and where. I is the intention. What was the purpose of this source? And T is the time. When was it written, drawn or said? This helps us understand the context of the source. If it was produced during the event of history or even many years later.

**DATSHIANE:** WIT. Okay. So, in this case W is for who, what and where. So, this is a poster. It's produced by the Soviet Government in Eastern Europe.

**KATIE:** I is the intention. It was intended to influence public opinion to persuade Soviet citizens and the global community that the USSR's actions were peaceful while portraying the West as aggressive.

**DATSHIANE:** And finally, T for time. So, the poster was produced in 1948 during the Berlin Blockade when tensions were high between the USSR and the West.

**KATIE:** Great. So, we're on to the next step. Three. Cross reference with your knowledge. Does the source match what you know about the history? This is a great chance to show your knowledge and gain those lovely, lovely exam marks.

**DATSHIANE:** Okay. So, in this case, I would start by defining what the Berlin Blockade was and the causes of the blockade. And then write something like 'The Berlin Blockade was a Soviet attempt to force the Western powers to abandon their control of West Berlin by cutting off access to supplies to Berlin. It was caused by tensions between the Western allies and the USSR over how Germany should be governed after World War II. And this source is useful in showing how the USSR presented its actions. But, it doesn't acknowledge the broader context of Soviet aggression or the Western response such as the Berlin Airlift.

**KATIE:** That's brilliant. In step four, make a judgement in how useful the source is by balancing the strength and limitations of the source.

**DATSHIANE:** Okay. So, if we look at it from that point of view, there are clearly problems with this source. It's one sided. It only gives the Soviet interpretation of events. It doesn't show a Western perspective. And it claims that the USSR is defending peace, but ignores the fact that the Soviets blockaded West Berlin to pressure the Allies into leaving the city. So, as an accurate, historical record it's not useful. But it is useful in showing how the Soviets wanted to be perceived during the Berlin Blockade. So, it serves more as a tool of propaganda than as an accurate historical account.

**KATIE:** Super. We'll have loads more of these source question examples throughout the other series.

**DATSHIANE:** Remember sometimes you might be asked to look at two sources. In which case just follow the same steps again. Then in your conclusion say which you think is more useful and why.

**KATIE:** And make sure you don't miss marks on source questions because you don't comment on the provenance. You might not know exactly who the author is, but the date might be the important thing. Or the intended audience is worth commenting on.

**DATSHIANE:** Another good tip is don't just simply say that a source is biased. Because if you think about it, all sources could be biased. So, it doesn't really help you gain marks in an exam. But you can get marks by explaining the problems with the source. That's the meaty part of source analysis.

**KATIE:** All right. How about a source question summary, Datshiane?

**DATSHIANE:** Good idea. I'm ready when you are, Katie.

**KATIE:** So, before you tackle a source question, make sure you understand the question. Underline any key words if it helps.

**DATSHIANE:** Then analyse the source. What is it saying?

**KATIE:** And use your WIT to assess the provenance of the source. W: who, what and where. I: intention. And T: time.

**DATSHIANE:** Don't forget to cross reference with your knowledge.

**KATIE:** And, of course, finally make a judgement as to how you saw the source is to understanding the event.

**DATSHIANE:** Head over to the Bitesize website for more hints and tips on how to answer source questions and for examples of sources. Or just listen to episodes in the other Bitesize GCSE History series.

**KATIE:** In the final episode of this series, we'll be looking as to how to answer interpretation questions and asking why historians might see different things.

**DATSHIANE:** We'd never do that. See ya.

**KATIE:** Bye.

**DATSHIANE:** Oh, we just did.