

The grid below gives you an idea of the kinds of values and limitations connected with different primary sources. For a review of the issues connected to secondary sources, refer back to pages 16–20.

Examiner's comment

Note that value and limitations given here are general or 'generic' points that could be applied to these sources. However, your contextual knowledge and the specific provenance of any source that you get in the examination will allow you to make much more specific comments on the value and limitations of the source that you evaluate in a document question. Notice also that how valuable the source is always depends on what you are using it for.

Source	Values	Limitations
Private letters (audience is the recipient) Diaries (the audience is personal not public at the time of writing)	Can offer insight into personal views or opinions Can indicate effects of an event or era on an individual Can suggest motives for public actions and opinions	Only gives individual opinion, not a general view or government perspective Writer may change opinion due to later events, may give a view not held in public Motive might be to persuade audience (in the case of a letter) to act in certain way
Memoirs (to be published for a public audience)	Can offer insight into personal views, suggest motives for public actions and might benefit from hindsight – an evaluation of events after the period Might show how the individual wants his or her motive and actions to be viewed by the public	Writer may revise opinions with the benefit of hindsight (that is, now the consequences of actions are known) Writer might want to highlight the strengths of his or her actions – to improve his or her public image or legacy
Newspapers, television and radio reports, eyewitness accounts	Can give publicly held views or popular opinion Might offer an expert's view Can give insight into contemporary opinion	Could be politically influenced or could be censored by specific governments or regimes Might only give an overview of the situation Might only give a one-sided, narrow perspective Might emphasize only a minor part of an issue (Note that eyewitnesses are not useful just because they are at an event; each eyewitness will notice different aspects and may miss key points altogether)
Novels, poems	Could inform contemporary opinion Might offer insight into emotional responses and motive	Could be a 'dissenting' voice (that is, not popular opinion) Could exaggerate the importance of an event or individual Could have a political agenda
Statistics	Can offer insights e.g. into economic growth and decline Might suggest correlations between indicators, for example unemployment and voting patterns Makes analysis of results over time easier Make comparisons easier	The purpose of gathering particular statistics needs considering – could be political, economic or deliberately distorted Could relate only to one location or time period Correlations might be wrong – there could be another causal factor not included in the statistics
Photographs	Can give sense of a specific scene or event Can offer insight into immediate response to or impact of an event on particular people or a place Might offer information on the environment	Cannot see beyond the 'lens' The limited view might distort the 'bigger' picture Might be staged The purpose of the photographer is key; what did he or she want to show?
Cartoons and paintings	Can inform public opinion – cartoonists often respond to commonly held views When governments or regimes censor the press, can be used to portray the government's line	Could be censored so not public opinion Cartoons often play on stereotypes and exaggeration Could be limited to the viewpoint and experience of cartoonist or artist (or the newspaper or periodical the artwork appears in)

Government records and documents, speeches, memoranda	Might show the government's position or stance on an issue Can offer insight into reasons for decisions Might reveal motives for policies Can show what the public is told about an event or issue by government Might be a well-informed analysis	Often do not offer insight into results of policies and decisions Might not reveal dissent or divergent opinion Might not show public opinion Very sensitive information can be classified for many years May not explain motives for a decision or political purpose
Historians (see also page 17)	Are usually professionals, experts in the field Have the benefit of hindsight which contemporary sources do not May have access to a variety of documents, when relevant classified documents become available	Might have a broad focus to their work or might have a very specific and narrow focus Might be expert in another region or era May be influenced by their experience, politics or context

Activity

Below is a table with a variety of different sources in the first column. Try to fill in the blank columns – establishing what **type** of source each example is, and some basic ideas about the source's potential **values** and **limitations** from its

origin and purpose. Note that this activity is just a starting point, as when you evaluate your sources on Paper 1 you will be able to add depth to your evaluation, based on your knowledge of the **context** of the documents you are given.

Source	Type of source	Values	Limitations
Hsu, I., 2000, <i>The Rise of Modern China</i> , New York: Oxford University Press. One cannot question the right of any government to defend itself when threatened with the danger of extinction. The question here, however, was not survival or extinction but meeting with student leaders to discuss anti-corruption measures and political liberalization. Essentially, the issue was whether the government judged the challenge correctly and honestly and devised counter-measures appropriate to the occasion. The answer must be 'no'. The threat to the Chinese leadership in May–June 1989 was largely fabricated, ultimately giving the government an excuse to kill the peaceful demonstrators as 'anti-party counter-revolutionaries'.			
Keynes, J. M., 1919, <i>The Economic Consequences of Peace</i> , New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe. Keynes was an economist and high-ranking official in the British delegation of the Paris Peace Conference. ... The policy of reducing Germany to servitude for a generation, of degrading the lives of millions of human beings, and of depriving a whole nation of happiness, should be abhorrent and detestable... Nations are not authorised, by religion or by natural morals, to visit on the children of their enemies the misdoings of parents or of rulers...			
Cartoon published in the <i>Daily Telegraph</i> newspaper, 24 May 1967. 			