

COMMENTING ON HISTORICAL SOURCES

Historical sources are the documents, testimonies of material objects that provide the historian with information on past events. Historians use them to reconstruct and study the past of humankind. However, at times they provide incomplete or partial information, and so they should be used critically, analysing and checking them against other contemporary sources.

ANALYSING HISTORICAL SOURCES

Working with historical sources requires following a set of basic steps:

1. **Classifying the source:** it involves specifying the nature of the source (primary or secondary) and its content (political, economic, social, cultural or artistic).
2. **Describing the information it provides:** this involves identifying the author, origin and chronology of the source, if they are known.

At this time, it is also a good idea to identify the information provided by the source on the facts or events, people or social groups, institutions, ideas, etc.

3. **Explaining the information:** to achieve this, you should use the available knowledge on the subject or the historical fact to which it refers.

If possible, its **causes and consequences** should also be mentioned.

4. **Evaluating a source:** mention its importance as a historical source, the subjectivity or objectivity of the information provided as well as its reliability or unreliability.

1.COMMENTING ON HISTORICAL MAPS

A historical map shows the location of an event or set of events in the past. As with any other type of map, colours, graphic symbols and labels are used to show events and are placed in a legend.

There may be many different types of historical maps based on the topic it represents:

-**Political historical maps** show borders, conquests, battles or expeditions.

-**Economic historical maps** show trade routes, industrial and agricultural areas, etc.

-**Demographic maps** show population growth or decline and its distribution or movement

-**Cultural maps** show monuments, artistic movements or linguistic and religious differences.

Sometimes maps are grouped into a historical atlas, which includes maps with ordered information that follows specific criteria: geographical, chronological, thematic, etc.



1.1 HOW TO COMMENT ON A HISTORICAL MAP

1. **Observation:** Observation involves the type of map, the topic it represents, its chronology and the geographical areas it includes. Finally, it would be a good idea to describe the symbols used in the legend: colours, lines, dates, etc.
2. **Description:** implies making a simple list of the historical facts or processes shown using the information provided in the key.

3. **Explanation:** using the information we have about the topic, we will explain the map. To do so, we'll mention the historical context in which the event took place, its causes and consequences.
4. **Conclusion:** finally, we will make a brief summary of the historical information shown on the map.

2. COMMENTING ON HISTORICAL TEXTS

2.1 HISTORY AND HISTORICAL TEXTS

Historical texts are sources that provide information about the past. Commenting on them allows us to discover the information they provide and to explain it from a historical point of view, relating it to the time period in which the events took place.



2.2 HOW TO COMMENT A TEXT

1. **Reading:** a first reading will allow us to get an idea of the document's content. In the second reading you should:
 - ★ Underline the relevant events and concepts: dates, names, events, etc.

- ★ Write down the terms you do not know and then look them up in the dictionary.
- ★ Write the ideas that are associated with the terms, classifying them into main or secondary ideas, and organise them in an outline.

2. **Classify the text:** based on the main ideas, we must specify the subject matter and nature of the document, specify if it is a **primary (historical)** or a **secondary source (historiographical)**.

- ★ By their subject matter or theme, you may know if texts are political, economic, social, demographic, cultural, legal, such as laws, constitutions or treaties; historical-literary, such as autobiographies, letters and memoirs; narrative, such as economic reports or chronicles. These types of texts are historical, it means that are primary sources
- ★ The texts can also be historiographical (secondary source), such as history books or essays written by historians with the intention of researching or disseminating historical information.

3. Analysing the text:

You should make a note of:

- ★ **The time-space circumstances.** They include the **date**, or when the events being narrated took place and the **place** where they happened: local, regional, national or global.
- ★ The **author or authors**, (**public or private**, name and short biography).
- ★ The **purpose**.
- ★ The target audience (**individual or collective**).

4. Commenting on the text:

- ★ You must explain the most important historical concepts that appear in the text, commenting on the information or people mentioned in the text, and then organise the main ideas, using the outline you made earlier.
- ★ Lastly, make a brief historical reference to the: general historical context and make an assessment of the text highlighting its historical importance, its consequences, and the objectivity or Subjectivity of its content.

3. COMMENTING ON HISTORICAL PICTURES

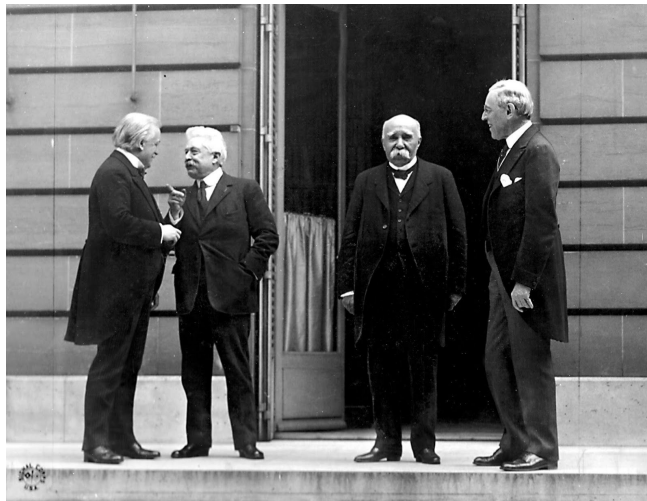
3.1 TYPES OF HISTORICAL PICTURES

Pictures with historical content are iconographic sources that are used for the study of historical events. They can be of several types:

-**Before the invention of photography**, historical pictures were limited. In general, they were reduced to paintings such as official pictures, scenes from daily life or significant historical events, **engravings**, political propaganda such as **posters and caricatures** published in the press.

-**Following the invention of photography** historical pictures increased. Moreover, in addition to photographs, we now have pictures captured from live television and cinematic film frames.

Thanks to these techniques, nowadays all historical phenomena can be recorded, such as political, economic and social events, acts of war, demonstrations, strikes, migratory movements, etc.



3.2 HOW TO COMMENT A PICTURE

1. **Observation and description:** this consists of observing the picture analytically and making a general description of It:

- ★ the subject that it represents.
- ★ its chronology
- ★ spatial location, and the figures who appear in It.

2. **Picture analysis:** this involves identifying and describing each of its parts, scenes or planes, its leading and secondary figures, and the relationships between the figures, if there are any.

3. **Interpretation:** involves framing the image within its historical context, briefly explaining the historical moment to which it belongs.

4. **Personal assessment:** to finish, a personal reflection should be made about its historical importance, what knowledge it provides to us about its time about its objectivity or subjectivity, and about the artist's intent.