

Questions for critical source analysis (not all questions may be relevant for your purpose)

Place the source in its context

- › Who wrote it?
- › What do you know about the author?
- › Where and when was it written?
- › Why was it written?
- › To what audience is it addressed?
- › What do you know about this audience?

Classify the source

- › What kind of work is it?
- › What was its purpose?
- › What are the important conventions and traditions governing this kind of source?
- › Of what legal, political, religious or philosophical traditions is it a part?

Interpret the source

- › What are the key words in the source and what do they mean?
- › What point is the author trying to make? Summarise the thesis.
- › What evidence does the author give to support the thesis?
- › What assumptions underlay the argument?
- › What values does the source reflect?
- › What problems does it address?
- › Can you relate these problems to the historical situation?
- › What action does the author expect as a result of this work?
- › Who is to take this action?
- › How does the source motivate that action?

Evaluation of the source

- › How typical is this source for this period?
- › How widely was this source circulated?

- › What problems, assumptions, arguments, ideas and values, if any, does it share with other sources from this period?
- › What other evidence can you find to corroborate your conclusions ?
- › How reliable is the source?
- › How relevant is the source for your purposes?