

Section V: Reading and Analyzing the Sources

Source Characteristics

What notes should one take as one reads the Sources? Much of that depends on the question being asked, but there are several common characteristics in each source that one should look for because any of these characteristics can influence how a source should be interpreted/analyzed. The acronym “SOAPSTone” is often useful as a guide for these characteristics.

Subject	What is the main topic of this source?
Occasion	When was this source produced? Was it created for a particular event or occasion, or even during an era when other, similar sources were produced?
Audience	Who was this source’s intended audience? Was the source written to be read privately by a specific person (who?), a public announcement, or an official proclamation?
Purpose	Why was this source produced? What was the purpose or motivation of the writer/author of the source, based on what limited information you have about them? What effect did the author hope this source would have? What did the author want the reader(s) of this source to <i>do</i> ?
Speaker	Who was the Speaker of this source? Was it an official person representing a government, or an informal, anonymous individual? Usually a source’s author and speaker are the same individual, but occasionally they may actually be different. (e.g. a speech may be written by a speech writer, but spoken by a government official)
Tone	Is there any apparent tone or “voice” in this source that would influence one’s interpretation? Is it filled with any apparent emotion? (e.g. sarcasm, exuberance, anger, disdain, admiration, etc.) Underline any unusual vocabulary in the source that serves as a clue to this interpretation. ⁷

Additional Evidence Source

After you read a source, you’ll be able to use information in the source to help answer the question, but no single source contains everything needed to answer the question fully. No matter how much information a source contains, it will never provide the answer to all parts of the question, and in fact it will often raise *new* questions.

So, what kinds of information would you like to have to help answer the question better? You don’t have to name a specific actual source, but you must do two things with this Additional Evidence Source:

1. Describe the *kind of information* you’d like to see in an additional source.
2. Explain of *how* that information *would help a historian answer the question* more completely. (“...because it would help” is not an acceptable answer.) What would you *do* with such information? What conclusion could you make with “Information *x*” that you can’t make now?

We’ll come back to the Additional Evidence Source later in Section VIII on p. 23.

⁷ These questions are all taken from Ane Lintvedt’s APWH Listserv message, 4/28/2004.

Characteristics Shared with Other Sources (aka “Grouping”)

After you’re finished reading all the sources, look back over your SOAPStone notes written. Do you notice any characteristics that *more than one source share*? These characteristics are vitally important to note because they will become the topic sentences of your essay’s body paragraphs.

Note: You won’t be able to complete this part of analyzing the sources until you finish reading all the sources. So, after you read each individual source and note that source’s characteristics, go back for a “2nd pass” at all of the sources and look for characteristics that appear in more than one source. Examples of the kinds of shared characteristics might (hypothetically) include:

- Buddhism became less popular after imperial structure was restored in 589 C.E. (as seen in Source #4 by Han Yu and Source #6 by Emperor Wu)
- Government officials frequently tried to influence imperial attitudes toward Buddhism. (as seen in Source #4 by Han Yu and Source #5 by Zong Mi)
- Chinese often didn’t trust Buddhism because it was “foreign” or “unfamiliar” (as seen in Source #3 by the Anonymous scholar and Source #4 by Han Yu)
- Chinese often relied on Buddhism to provide a spiritual sanctuary from the cares of everyday life. (as seen in Source #2 by Zhi Dun or Source #5 by Zong Mi)

Maximizing your Score

Compare sources to each other. For example: Zhi Dun (Source #2) and Zong Mi (Source #5) were both Buddhist scholars, but Zhi Dun favored Buddhism exclusively, while Zong Mi spoke favorably about Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Why the difference?

Context (aka “Point of View” or POV)

The purpose of the EBQ is to test students’ ability to *do* what professional historians actually do. Well, what do professional historians do? One essential task is to interpret historical sources. History is not *just* facts, a large part is also *interpretation* of facts. This is one area that makes history both fun and controversial, because different historians interpret identical sources differently.⁸

So as you read and interpret each source, what clues are there that any particular source means anything *other* than the literal words on the paper? Are there any reasons why although a source says “x” it should be interpreted as meaning something more, less, or different? All the intangible circumstances surrounding a source that influence how one should interpret that source comprise what is called the “Context.”

If this concept seems vague or meaningless to you, imagine that two people tell you *exactly the same words*. Would you interpret and respond to each person identically, or would you take each person’s identity into account when you weigh whether to take their words seriously? For instance:

⁸ This brings up a related point. As long as your interpretation of the sources is *plausible*, your reader will *never* grade your writing according to whether he/she *agrees or disagrees* with your interpretation of the sources. It is of course possible to misinterpret sources, which does carry a penalty for Rubric category #2, but as long as you include all the sources somewhere in your essay and misinterpret no more than one source, you’ll earn full credit for your interpretation(s).

Source 1

“If you park your car there, you’ll get in trouble,” says your six-year-old sister.

Source 2

“If you park your car there, you’ll get in trouble,” says the police officer.

You’d interpret these two statements *very* differently, wouldn’t you? Obviously the identity of the source makes a huge difference in how seriously one interprets the Source. Note, however, that one should not automatically come to the conclusion that Source 1 is “wrong” while Source 2 is “right.” (Can you think of any circumstances that might make your sister be correct? Just because she’s six years old doesn’t mean she’s *automatically* wrong, it just means that you’d probably want some more information re: the context of your sister’s comments before you render judgement on her words. After all, she might have just heard your parent say, “If that car isn’t moved out of the middle of the street [your name] will be punished!”)

Context is far more subtle than simply labeling Sources as “right” or “wrong.” You have to be *very specific* in deciding *to what degree* a Source should be interpreted *about a certain topic*. Ultimately you should be able to place each Source on a spectrum of the Source’s “trustworthiness.”

Value

Limitations

What characteristics **strengthen/enhance** the value of this Source?

What characteristics **limit/reduce** the value of this Source?

So, how does one interpret the context surrounding a Source? Some common ways are listed below. (Many are SOAPSTone characteristics with which you’re already familiar.)

1. *Who* produced this Source? Is this author have any special knowledge about the topic? How credible is this author? Discuss the author’s gender, age, ethnicity, social status, religion, level of education, political philosophy, etc.
2. *When* was this Source produced? *What else* was happening at that time? Can it be connected with a significant historical event or era? (Think back to the Historical Background information.) Note the date of each Source. Was this source created before/after/at the same time as any *other* Source?
3. Who was the intended *audience*? Was the Source written to be read by a specific person? Is it a public announcement, a private letter to a friend, or an official proclamation?
4. *Why* was this Source produced? What was the author’s *purpose* or *motivation*, based on what limited information you have about them? What *effect* did the author hope this Source would have? What did the author want the reader to *do* after reading the Source?
5. Is there any apparent *tone* or “voice” in this Source that would influence one’s interpretation? Is it filled with any apparent emotion? (e.g. sarcasm, exuberance, anger, disdain, admiration, etc.) Underline any unusual vocabulary in the Source that serves as a clue to this interpretation.

If these questions seem too overwhelming to remember, here’s a simplified way of earning Context/POV:

Maximizing Your Score: Context/POV

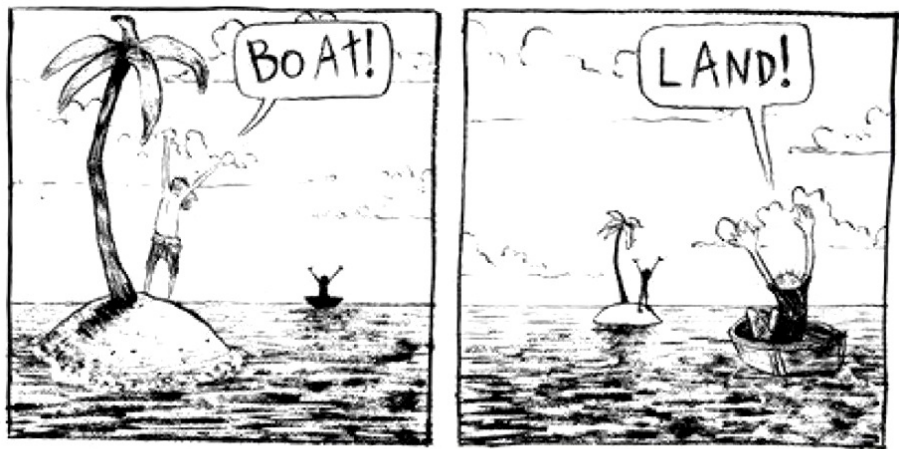
Answer this question re: each Source:

Why did *this* person create *this* Source at *this* time?⁹

Big Mistake #7: Point of View ≠ “View” or “Opinion”

Too many students misunderstand what a “Point of View is, thinking that “Point of View” is the same as “View.” (or “Opinion”)

If you’re not sure if you’ve correctly interpreted a source’s Point of View, after you’ve written a POV statement, try substituting the word “opinion” instead of “point of view.” Does the sentence still make sense? If yes, then you have NOT done it correctly.



Perspective...

View	POINT of View
The man on the island is excited to see a boat	... <u>because</u> he thinks it will save him.
The man in the boat is excited to see land	... <u>because</u> he thinks it will save him.

Without the “because” clause, there’s no Point of View, only “View.” Even if you write, “The Point of View of the man on the island is excitement,” you will NOT earn the POV credit. Simply calling something “Point of View” doesn’t make it a Point of View.

⁹ Great advice from one of the giants of AP World History, Ane Lintvedt, McDonough School, MD.

Big Mistake #8: Misuse of “Bias”

Too many students attempt to interpret the value or limitation of historical sources by using the term “bias.” While it is entirely legitimate to analyze bias in historical Sources, most students do it so poorly that it actually hurts their score. (Students *think* they’ve interpreted more than they really have, and smugly stop trying to think any deeper.)

The term “bias” can be used effectively, but only IF you answer these 4 questions:

- 1) The specific *topic/issue* about which the source/author is biased. (Is the author biased toward *everything*?)¹⁰
- 2) *In what direction* is the Source biased? Remember that bias can be positive and/or negative. Is the Source/author *in favor* of a particular issue, or *against* it? If you just say, “the author is biased,” your reader won’t know whether the author is biased *for* or *against* something.
- 3) *How much* bias does the Source contain? Someone can be *strongly* biased in favor of their favorite sports team or *slightly* biased against a political philosophy, etc.
- 4) *Why* is the Source (or Source’s author) biased? (Cannot simply repeat a word in the source’s background info. Bias must “connect” a specific characteristic of the context behind the source to a specific characteristic in the text of the source.)

¹⁰ Here’s a vignette that illustrates this point. Practically every year one of my students uses the term “bias” in a vague or inappropriate way, such as writing, “Source #3 is biased because the author is British.” When I anonymously quote such an example out loud to the class I immediately declare that I won’t award credit for such a statement. When the students ask, “Why not?” I respond, “Because you’re Sophomores.” There’s usually an awkward pause, and then one brave student quite understandably asks, “Why does being a Sophomore mean the bias statement won’t earn any credit for Context/POV?” “Absolutely nothing,” I respond. “What does being British have to do with being biased? Are *all* British *completely* “biased” about *everything*? Are you saying that all British persons were never objective or reliable on any topic at any time?”

At that point there’s usually a chuckle around the classroom as my students realize how simplistic and inappropriate the “biased because he’s British,” attempt was, and how much more specific (and more difficult) truly valid historical interpretation really is.

Source 1

Source: According to Buddhist tradition, "The Four Noble Truths," the first sermon preached by the Buddha (563 BCE-483 BCE), India, fifth century BCE.

The First Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow.

The Second Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow, it arises from craving, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure-the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for continued life, and the craving for power.

The Third Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that craving, so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Way that Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow.

- 1. Summarize the overall meaning of this Source. (In one sentence. Think of it as a "1-sentence book report.") You may paraphrase the Source, but don't quote from it.

- 2. List 3 specific concepts, vocabulary terms, or phrases unique to this Source? (NOT found in Sources #2-6.) You'll need to read every other Source first before you can come back and answer this question. These examples don't have to be super-complex. They can be just a short phrase, or even a single word.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

- 3. Look at the shaded section of the box above the document. What possible reasons can you think of that would explain WHY this author created this document at this time? (Why didn't some other author create some other document at a different time?)

- 4. Now combine #1-3 above all into ONE sentence that summarizes the document's overall meaning, (Step #1) using a specific piece of evidence, (Step #2) to explain a reason WHY this author created this document at this time. (Step #3)

Source #2

Source: Zhi Dun, Chinese scholar, author, and confidant of Chinese aristocrats and high officials during the period when northern China was invaded by central Asian steppe nomads, circa 350 CE.

Whosoever in China, in this era of sensual pleasures, serves the Buddha and correctly observes the commandments, who recites the Buddhist Scriptures, and who furthermore makes a vow to be reborn without ever abandoning his sincere intention, will at the end of his life, when his soul passes away, be miraculously transported thither. He will behold the Buddha and be enlightened in his spirit, and then he will enter Nirvana.*

*Nirvana: the extinction of desire and individual consciousness

1. Summarize the **overall** meaning of this Source. (In one sentence. Think of it as a “1-sentence book report.”) You may paraphrase the Source, but don’t quote from it.

2. List 3 **specific** concepts, vocabulary terms, or phrases unique to this Source? (NOT found in Sources #1, 3, 4, 5, or 6.) You’ll need to read every *other* Source first before you can come back and answer this question. These examples don’t have to be super-complex. They can be just a **short phrase**, or even a **single word**.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. Look at the shaded section of the box above the document. What possible **reasons** can you think of that would explain **WHY this author created this document at this time?** (Why didn’t some *other* author create some *other* document at a *different* time?)

4. Now combine #1-3 above all into ONE sentence that summarizes the document’s **overall meaning**, (Step #1) using a **specific piece of evidence**, (Step #2) to explain a **reason WHY this author created this document at this time**. (Step #3)

Source #3

Source: Anonymous Chinese scholar, "The Disposition of Error," China, circa 500 CE.

Question: If Buddhism is the greatest and most venerable of ways, why did the great sages of the past and Confucius not practice it? In the Confucian Classics no one mentions it. Why, then, do you love the Way of the Buddha and rejoice in outlandish arts? Can the writings of the Buddha exceed the Classics and commentaries and beautify the accomplishments of the sages?

Answer: All written works need not necessarily be the words of Confucius. To compare the sages to the Buddha would be like comparing a white deer to a unicorn, or a swallow to a phoenix. The records and teachings of the Confucian classics do not contain everything. Even if the Buddha is not mentioned in them, what occasion is there for suspicion?

Question: Now of happiness there is none greater than the continuation of one's line, of unfilial conduct there is none worse than childlessness. The monks forsake wives and children, reject property and wealth. Some do not marry all their lives.

Answer: Wives, children, and property are the luxuries of the world, but simple living and inaction are the wonders of the Way. The monk practices the Way and substitutes that for worldly pleasures. He accumulates goodness and wisdom in exchange for the joys of having a wife and children.

1. Summarize the **overall** meaning of this Source. (In one sentence. Think of it as a "1-sentence book report.") You may paraphrase the Source, but don't quote from it.

2. List 3 **specific** concepts, vocabulary terms, or phrases unique to this Source? (NOT found in Sources #1, 2, 4, 5, or 6.) You'll need to read every *other* Source first before you can come back and answer this question. These examples don't have to be super-complex. They can be just a **short phrase**, or even a **single word**.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3. Look at the shaded section of the box above the document. What possible **reasons** can you think of that would explain **WHY this author created this document at this time**? (Why didn't some *other* author create some *other* document at a *different* time?)

4. Now combine #1-3 above all into ONE sentence that summarizes the document's **overall meaning**, (Step #1) using a **specific piece of evidence**, (Step #2) to explain a **reason WHY this author created this document at this time**. (Step #3)

Source #4

Source: Han Yu, leading Confucian scholar and official at the Tang imperial court, "Memorial on Buddhism," 819 CE.

Your servant begs leave to say that Buddhism is no more than a cult of the barbarian peoples spread to China. It did not exist here in ancient times.

Now I hear that Your Majesty has ordered the community of monks to go to greet the finger bone of the Buddha [a relic brought to China from India], and that Your Majesty will ascend a tower to watch the procession as this relic is brought into the palace. If these practices are not stopped, and this relic of the Buddha is allowed to be carried from one temple to another, there will be those in the crowd who will cut off their arms and mutilate their flesh in offering, to the Buddha.

Now the Buddha was a man of the barbarians who did not speak Chinese and who wore clothes of a different fashion. The Buddha's sayings contain nothing about our ancient kings and the Buddha's manner of dress did not conform to our laws; he understood neither the duties that bind sovereign and subject, nor the affections of father and son. If the Buddha were still alive today and came to our court, Your Majesty might condescend to receive him, but he would then be escorted to the borders of the nation, dismissed, and not allowed to delude the masses. How then, when he has long been dead, could the Buddha's rotten bones, the foul and unlucky remains of his body, be rightly admitted to the palace? Confucius said: "Respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance!" Your servant is deeply ashamed and begs that this bone from the Buddha be given to the proper authorities to be cast into fire and water, that this evil be rooted out, and later generations spared this delusion.

- 1. Summarize the overall meaning of this Source. (In one sentence. Think of it as a "1-sentence book report.") You may paraphrase the Source, but don't quote from it.

- 2. List 3 specific concepts, vocabulary terms, or phrases unique to this Source? (NOT found in Sources #1, 2, 3, 5, or 6.) You'll need to read every other Source first before you can come back and answer this question. These examples don't have to be super-complex. They can be just a short phrase, or even a single word.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

- 3. Look at the shaded section of the box above the document. What possible reasons can you think of that would explain WHY this author created this document at this time? (Why didn't some other author create some other document at a different time?)

- 4. Now combine #1-3 above all into ONE sentence that summarizes the document's overall meaning, (Step #1) using a specific piece of evidence, (Step #2) to explain a reason WHY this author created this document at this time. (Step #3)

Source #5

Source: Zong Mi, a leading Buddhist scholar, favored by the Tang imperial household, essay, "On the Nature of Man," early ninth century CE.

Confucius, Laozi and the Buddha were perfect sages. They established their teachings according to the demands of the age and the needs of various beings. They differ in their approaches in that they encourage the perfection of good deeds, punish wicked ones, and reward good ones; all three teachings lead to the creation of an orderly society and for this they must be observed with respect.

- 1. Summarize the overall meaning of this Source. (In one sentence. Think of it as a "1-sentence book report.") You may paraphrase the Source, but don't quote from it.

- 2. List 3 specific concepts, vocabulary terms, or phrases unique to this Source? (NOT found in Sources #1, 2, 3, 4, or 6.) You'll need to read every other Source first before you can come back and answer this question. These examples don't have to be super-complex. They can be just a short phrase, or even a single word.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

- 3. Look at the shaded section of the box above the document. What possible reasons can you think of that would explain WHY this author created this document at this time? (Why didn't some other author create some other document at a different time?)

- 4. Now combine #1-3 above all into ONE sentence that summarizes the document's overall meaning, (Step #1) using a specific piece of evidence, (Step #2) to explain a reason WHY this author created this document at this time. (Step #3)

Source #6

Source: Tang Emperor Wu, Edict on Buddhism, 845 CE.

We have heard that the Buddha was never spoken of before the Han dynasty; from then on the religion of idols gradually came to prominence. So in this latter age Buddhism has transmitted its strange ways and has spread like a luxuriant vine until it has poisoned the customs of our nation. Buddhism has spread to all the nine provinces of China; each day finds its monks and followers growing more numerous and its temples more lofty. Buddhism wears out the people's strength, pilfers their wealth, causes people to abandon their lords and parents for the company of teachers, and severs man and wife with its monastic decrees. In destroying law and injuring humankind indeed nothing surpasses this doctrine!

Now if even one man fails to work the fields, someone must go hungry; if one woman does not tend her silkworms, someone will go cold. At present there are an inestimable number of monks and nuns in the empire, all of them waiting for the farmers to feed them and the silkworms to clothe them while the Buddhist public temples and private chapels have reached boundless numbers, sufficient to outshine the imperial palace itself.

Having thoroughly examined all earlier reports and consulted public opinion on all sides, there no longer remains the slightest doubt in Our mind that this evil should be eradicated.

- 1. Summarize the overall meaning of this Source. (In one sentence. Think of it as a "1-sentence book report.") You may paraphrase the Source, but don't quote from it.

- 2. List 3 specific concepts, vocabulary terms, or phrases unique to this Source? (NOT found in Sources #1-5) You'll need to read every other Source first before you can come back and answer this question. These examples don't have to be super-complex. They can be just a short phrase, or even a single word.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

- 3. Look at the shaded section of the box above the document. What possible reasons can you think of that would explain WHY this author created this document at this time? (Why didn't some other author create some other document at a different time?)

- 4. Now combine #1-3 above all into ONE sentence that summarizes the document's overall meaning, (Step #1) using a specific piece of evidence, (Step #2) to explain a reason WHY this author created this document at this time. (Step #3)

