**OPCVL Source Evaluation**

Use these questions as a **guide** to evaluating your sources. These are **not** the only questions you can consider as you critically analyze your texts and other sources. Additionally, not all questions necessarily have to be answered for each document.

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| **O**RIGINS  Questions to consider:   * Primary or Secondary? * Who created it? * Who is the author? * Is there anything we know about the author that is pertinent to our evaluation? * When was it created? * When/where/who published it? | **V**ALUE  Questions to consider:   * Value of primary/secondary * What can you tell about the author from this piece? * Does the author represent a particular ‘side’ of a controversy or event? * Is the author credible? | **L**IMITATIONS  Questions to consider:   * Limitation of primary/secondary * Does the author represent a particular ‘side’ of a controversy or event? * Is the author credible? * Did the author play a major or minor role in the event? Were they in a position to access information? * Is this a translated document? |
| **P**URPOSE  Questions to consider:   * Why does this document exist? * Who is the target audience and how can I tell? * Why did the author choose this format?   **Remember**: one-sided sources help us understand people’s views | **V**ALUE  Questions to consider:   * Under what circumstances was this piece created and how does this piece reflect those circumstances * What can we tell about the author’s perspectives from the piece? * Is the author attempting a balanced perspective? How do you know? | **L**IMITATIONS  Questions to consider:   * What does the author leave out and why does he/she leave it out (if you know)? * What is purposely not addressed? |
| **C**ONTENT  Questions to consider:   * What is this document telling us? * Who is involved? People, Leaders, Nations * Where is this? * What impact/significance does this have and on who or what? * Why did this take place/happen? | **V**ALUE  Questions to consider:   * What can you learn about the time period? * Does this corroborate (support, confirm) other sources from this time period? * How does the content relate to the origins and purpose? | **L**IMITATIONS  Questions to consider:   * What part of the story can we NOT tell from this document? * How could we verify the content of the piece? * Does this piece inaccurately reflect anything about the time period? * Was the source made with intent to persuade/deceive? |

**Primary versus Secondary Sources**

A **primary** source may be:

* Information about an event by an eyewitness or participant
* Information about a person by someone who knew that person
* A statement of information or ideas given by someone who lived at the time of the event
* A government or legal proclamation or publication

It is essential that you evaluate a primary source to determine its reliability and the bias of the information provided. While primary sources are valuable because they bring the reader as close as possible to the event or time period under discussion, you can never be sure whether even an honest eyewitness is presenting an accurate picture. Four people all watching the same event – such as a traffic accident – may interpret the event in four different ways as a result of their subjective experience, which may include limitations such as memory loss, an obstructed view or heightened emotional response.

A **secondary** source may be:

* Information taken from many sources and constructed by a historian
* Information not directly from a witness to an event

A secondary source must be evaluated as critically as a primary source as the author who constructs or presents the information will undoubtedly have a perspective they are attempting to present. It is important to consider what sources the secondary source relied on to construct their narrative: the wider the range of evidence, the more perspectives the secondary source considers, the more reliable the value.

**Writing an OPCVL Source Evaluation**

An OPCVL source evaluation typically is written as a paragraph. Each sentence within the paragraph includes **multiple** detailed pieces of information.

**Basic** **5-Sentence Evaluation Sentence Starters**:

1. The origin of the source is…
2. The purpose is…
3. The content includes…
4. The values of the origin, purpose, and content are…
5. The limitations of the origins, purpose and content are…

**Examples of advanced OPCVL source evaluation paragraphs:**

The first source which will be evaluated in depth is Julia Kirk Blackwelder’s book “The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995”, written in 1997. The **origin** of this source is **valuable**because Blackwelder is a professor of history at Texas University, specializing in Modern US and American women’s history, and has written extensively on women’s employment in scholarly journals and books, indicating that she is knowledgeable on this topic. Furthermore, the date of the publication of this source, 1997, strengthens its **value**, as it indicates that Blackwelder, benefitting from hindsight, has been able to analyze a comprehensive range of sources, including government documents, interviews and statistics. However, the **origin** of the source is limited in that Blackwelder is not a professional expert in economics, with which this topic is closely related and, consequently, might have misinterpreted some of the economic data presented. The **purpose** of Blackwelder’s book is to analyze the trends of American women’s employment in the 1900-1955 period, and “to let evidence speak for itself” (Blackwelder xiii). This is **valuable**, for it indicates that an extended period of time has been examined, permitting for connections to be made between the trends discovered. However, the fact that the author has covered nearly a century of  economic  developments  **limits  its  value**  to  a  historian  studying  economic developments within a short time period.  
  
The second source evaluated in depth is Mary Anderson’s 1944 address American Economic Association “The Postwar role of American women”, which was delivered in March, 1944. The **origin** of this source is **valuable** because the address was delivered by the head of the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor, and therefore provides an insight into the views of a well-known figure regarding women’s employment and post-war plans. Additionally, the date of delivery of the address, 1944, indicates that the source allows for a **valuable**understanding of contemporary views on women’s employment. However, this date is also a **limitation**, for it suggests that the source, having been written before the completion of the war, is likely to fail to analyze extensive research on women’s employment. In terms of **origin**, the source is also **limited**in that Anderson was herself a former factory worker and was “ particularly well attuned to the thinking of female employees” (Weatherford 256), indicating that she might have tended to shape the address according to her views, and, consequently, may have provided a slightly subjective insight into government plans. The **purpose** of this source is to underscore the importance of the adoption of measures to secure the position of women in the American post-war workforce. The address therefore provides a valuable insight into government plans at the time. The source is, however, **limited**in its **purpose** in that the address, having been written to convince others of Anderson’s point of view, perhaps omits some ‘inconvenient truths’ about the government’s views, merely describing encouraging plans for female workers.

Source: http://ibhistoryia.weebly.com/section-1.html

**Alternative sentence starters**:

The origin of the source is….and the value of this is… However, the limitations of the origin are…..

The purpose of the source is…and the value of this is…. However the limitations of the purpose are…

The content shows that….and the value of this is…. However the limitations of the content are…