**IB History Skills**

This document is designed to help you develop a historical skill set that will enable you to be successful in this course and in future history courses. This list is by no means exhaustive of all the skills you should attempt to develop…but it is a good start! ☺

**Good Reading Techniques – see Marking the Text Document**

It is SUPER important that you do the reading and you actively engage yourself WHILE you read. Use the “marking the text” strategies and be sure to use the outlines that are provided to you. The idea is that there is A LOT of historical information that you will be presented with and you need to find a way to manage it all. If you develop these strategies you will feel confident when you come to class and feel ready to discuss what you read. Good reading will lead to good questioning in history.

**Levels of Questioning in History**

**This class is MORE about questions than it is about answers. We will work to get you to engage in the 3 levels of questioning in history.**

1. **Level 1 – Recall** – the answer is in the text and there is only one very specific answer. Nothing is implied.
2. **Level 2 – Analysis/Inference** – Derive logical conclusions based on the information gained from the text. It asks for implicit, or implied, analysis. It asks how and why. Analysis of the text is required, also reading between the lines and looking for the hidden meaning.
3. **Level 3 – Synthesis** – go beyond the test and inquire into the value, importance, and application of the information presented.

More simply put, in IB History you will acquire historical information, do something with it, and then use the information in a new and creative way.

**Good Writing**

**As a historian, much of your reading and questioning will lead you to develop an interpretation about historical topics. Your interpretations will be expressed as argumentative writing in the format below.**

Good writing is extremely important when clearly expressing ideas in social studies. At the heart of effective writing is argumentation – persuasive analysis supported by appropriate evidence. Historical writings always reflect the historian’s background, bias, and perspective. It is important to be able to explain your own historical vision in a logical and analytical way, and this comes with practice and experience. The more you read and write, the better your own writing will become. APEC is useful for constructing academic paragraphs in social studies. Be sure to edit and revise your writing repeatedly in order to effectively state your argument.

* **A – Assertion** – a statement of what you intend to prove
* **P – Proof** – some evidence or examples that illustrate the assertion
* **E – Explanation** – an explanation of how the evidence proves the assertion
* **C – Connection** – a statement connecting the assertion to the thesis of your paper

**What the IB will ask you to do when you write - IB Command Terms**

**Analyze** – Break down in order to bring out the essential elements or structure.

**Compare** – Give an account of the similarities between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.

**Compare and Contrast** – Give an account of similarities and differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.

**Contrast** – Give an account of the differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.

**Define** – Give the precise meaning of a word, phrase, concept or physical quantity.

**Describe** – Give a detailed account.

**Discuss** – Offer a considered and balanced review that includes a range of arguments, factors, or hypotheses. Opinions or conclusions should be presented clearly and supported by appropriate evidence.

**Distinguish** – Make clear the differences between two or more concepts or items.

**Evaluate** – Make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations.

**Examine** – Consider an argument or concept in a way that uncovers the assumptions and interrelationships of the issue.

**Explain** – Give a detailed account including reasons or causes.

**Identify** – Provide an answer from a number of possibilities.

**Justify** – Give valid reasons or evidence to support an answer or conclusion.

**To** **what** **extent** – Consider the merits or otherwise of an argument or concept. Opinions and conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.

**Source Analysis - Primary vs Secondary Sources**

**Since you will be DOING History as a historian, you will be looking at historical evidence. We call the examination of historical evidence source analysis.**

* **Primary Source** – first person account from someone who was there and saw the event happen themselves. They are not necessarily factually accurate, because people see different versions of the same event, but they are valid because someone is recording their interpretation of the same event.
  + **Usefulness** – reading primary sources of past events gives us an understanding of how people at the time perceived and were impacted by a particular event. It helps us understand what people thought about an event or a time period at the time it occurred.
  + **Things to look out for** – witnesses are often biased or see different versions of the same event. It is important to understand who the witness was; a politician would perceive the 1860 election differently than a slave, a woman, a farmhand or a business owner. Some are educated, some are not, some may have stronger biases than others. It doesn’t make the witness any less valid, but it is important to understand who they are.
  + **When to use** – when you are trying to understand motivations and attitudes, or when you are researching a little-known event.
* **Secondary Source** – a retelling of someone else’s story. A textbook or a nonfiction book are a secondary sources because they were created by someone who has read a variety of primary sources and created their own interpretation of a historical event. It is not more or less reliable than a primary source, it is simply an interpretation created by analyzing multiple primary sources.
  + **Usefulness** – some secondary sources, like textbooks, deliberately attempt to present an unbiased version of events in order to allow you to draw your own conclusion. Others, like a nonfiction book you might find in a library, may have a specific and obvious bias (for example, the author of a book about the survivors of the Nazi death camps in WWII would probably not present the Nazis sympathetically).
  + **Things to look out for** – it is extremely difficult to present something in a completely unbiased way. Often it is difficult to find primary sources from the “losing” side of an event, so a secondary source may give more time and/or space to one side. It is just as important to know who the author of a secondary source is as it is to know who wrote a primary source. For example, someone who has a doctorate in medieval history is probably more qualified to write an accurate book about the Crusades than an author who usually writes mysteries set in the 1920s.
  + **When to use** – when you are researching the basics of an event; the who, what, when, and where. They can also be used to understand why something happened.

**A Guide for Using Primary Source or Original Source Documents**

**OPVL Origins, Purpose, Values, Limitations**

Origin, Purpose, Value and Limitation (OPVL) is a technique for analyzing historical documents. You will be required to do this in Paper 1 and also your Internal Assessment. It is used extensively in the International Baccalaureate curriculum and testing materials, and is incredibly helpful in teaching students to be critical observers.

**ORIGIN:**

In order to analyze a source, you must first know what it is. Sometimes not all of these questions can be answered. The more you do know about where a document is coming from, the easier it is to ascertain purpose, value and limitation.

1. **Primary** – letter, journal, interview, speeches, photos, paintings, etc. Primary sources are created by someone who is the “first person”; these documents can also be called “original source documents.” The author or creator is presenting original materials as a result of discovery or to share new information or opinions. Primary documents have not been filtered through interpretation or evaluation by others. In order to get a complete picture of an event or era, it is necessary to consult multiple—and often contradictory—sources.
2. **Secondary** – materials that are written with the benefit of hindsight and materials that filter primary sources through interpretation or evaluation. Books commenting on a historical incident in history are secondary sources. Political cartoons can be tricky because they can be considered either primary or secondary.
3. **Other questions** must be answered beyond whether the source is primary or secondary and will give you much more information about the document that will help you answer questions in the other categories:
4. Who created it?
5. Who is the author?
6. When was it created?
7. When was it published?
8. Where was it published?
9. Who is publishing it?
10. *Is there anything we know about the author that is pertinent to our evaluation?*

**PURPOSE:**

This is the point where you start the real evaluation of the piece and try to figure out the purpose for its creation. You must be able to think as the author of the document. At this point you are still only focusing on the single piece of work you are evaluating.

1. Why does this document exist?
2. Why did the author create this piece of work?
3. What is the intent?
4. Why did the author choose this particular format?
5. Who is the intended audience?
6. Who was the author thinking would receive this?
7. What does the document “say”?
8. Can it tell you more than is on the surface?

**VALUE:**

Now comes the hard part. Putting on your historian hat, you must determine:

Based on who wrote it, ***when/where (origin)***it came from, ***why (purpose)***it was created, and its historical context, what **value** does this document have as a piece of evidence?

This is where you show your expertise and put the piece in context. Bring in your outside information at this point.

1. What can we tell about the author from the piece?
2. What can we tell about the time period from the piece?
3. Under what circumstances was the piece created and how does the piece reflect those circumstances?
4. What can we tell about any controversies from the piece?
5. Does the author represent a particular ‘side’ of a controversy or event?
6. What can we tell about the author’s perspectives from the piece?
7. What was going on in history at the time the piece was created and how does this piece accurately reflect it?

The following is an example of a student’s value analysis on a primary source:

Journal Entry—July 25, 1945. President H. S. Truman

*We met at 11:00 a.m. today. That is, Stalin, Churchill, and the U.S. president. But I had a most important session with Lord Mountbatten and General Marshall before that. We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world. It may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley era, after Noah and his fabulous ark. Anyway we think we have found the way to cause a disintegration of the atom. An experiment in the New Mexican desert was startling - to put it mildly. Thirteen pounds of the explosive caused the complete disintegration of a steel tower sixty feet high, created a crater six feet deep and twelve hundred feet in diameter, knocked over a steel tower a half mile away, and knocked men down ten thousand yards away. The explosion was visible for more than two hundred miles and audible for forty miles and more.*

*This weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10. I have told the secretary of war, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on the old capital or the new) He and I are in accord. The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement asking the Japs to surrender and save lives. I'm sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance. It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful.*

**Student’s Analysis:**

“The journal entry was written by President Truman prior to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan and demonstrates the moral dilemma he was having in making the decision of whether to drop the bomb or not. It shows that he was highly conflicted about the decision and very aware of the potential consequences both for diplomatic/military relations and for the health and welfare of the Japanese citizens.”

**LIMITATION:**

The task here is not to point out weaknesses of the source, but rather to say: at what point does this source cease to be of value to us as historians? With a primary source document, having an incomplete picture of the whole is a given because the source was created by one person (or a small group of people), naturally they will not have given every detail of the context. Do not say that the author left out information unless you have concrete proof (from another source) that they *chose* to leave information out.

Also, it is obvious that the author did not have prior knowledge of events that came after the creation of the document. Do not state that the document “does not explain X” (if X happened later).

1. **Being biased does not limit the value of a source!** If you are going to comment on the bias of a document, you must go into detail. Who is it biased towards? Who is it biased against? What part of a story does it leave out? Sometimes a biased piece of work shows much about the history you are studying
2. What part of the story can we NOT tell from this document?
3. How can we verify the content of the piece?
4. Does this piece inaccurately reflect anything about the time period?
5. What does the author leave out and why does he/she leave it out (if you know)?
6. What is purposely not addressed?

This is again an area for you to show your expertise of the context. You need to briefly explain the parts of the story that the document leaves out. Give examples of other documents that might mirror or answer this document. What parts of the story/context can this document *not* tell?