



CIE IGCSE History 0470 Paper 2 (Sources) Exam Tips

This is a transcript of the [CIE IGCSE History Paper 2 Exam Tips](https://www.mrallsophistory.com) podcast from www.mrallsophistory.com

This podcast is based on the examiner's report from previous Paper 2 exams. This is a document written by the chief examiner – that's the person in charge of marking all your exam papers – in which they explain what students do well in the exam and what needs to be improved.

Therefore, it's a really helpful guide for discussing how to survive Paper 2 – which is seen by most people as the most difficult history exam. But there's no need for you to panic, as with some guidance and a clear head on the day you will be able to meet all the demands of the questions.

Before looking at how to answer specific types of source questions, there are a few general rules to remember.

Firstly, remember that this is a source paper and as such requires you to **USE THE SOURCES** in your answer! It seems really obvious when I say it, and it should be obvious on the day when it's printed on each question, but one of the biggest ways that students lose marks is by failing to include specific examples from the sources. If you're answering a question by referring to what a written source says, include a quote from the source as evidence to support your point. If you're using a cartoon, make sure you refer to specific details in the drawing and explain what they represent.

It's very likely that you will know quite a lot of detail about the topic you are being examined on, but remember that the examiner is not interested in how much you know about the topic – they want to see that you can use the sources to answer the question you have been set. Contextual knowledge does often have an important part to play in reaching the higher levels in the mark scheme but it needs to be used relevantly. This knowledge can be used to explain the interpretation of a source. It is often very useful in helping to explain the message and purpose of sources. It can also be used in conjunction with the provenance of a source – that's the bit in italics at the bottom that says who created the source, when and where. Knowledge isn't there to use as an alternative to the sources. You must use the sources as your main focus, and only use your own knowledge to help to explain the source in context.

Another common tendency is to spend a long time summarising sources at length.

Remember that the examiner already knows what the sources are! They're more interested in knowing whether you can use your understanding of the source to answer the question. It is much better to directly address the question in the first sentence of an answer. This will help you to focus on what is being asked. For example, if a question asks 'What is the message of this source?' the answer should begin 'The message of this source is...' It's a



waste of your time to go on for a paragraph paraphrasing the source when that doesn't answer the question, because you won't get any marks for it!

Remember, also, that questions need you to be critical about the sources. Avoid only using sources for their surface information - what sources say or show – as this is rarely enough to score high marks. The question at the back of your mind when studying a source for the first time should really be “what does the author/artist mean, what point are they trying to make, why are they saying this - what is their purpose?” Answering these questions involves making inferences about sources and this is often best done by reading the source as a whole rather than by focusing on details within it. If you take a source by a sentence at a time then sometimes you miss the big point. Study the whole thing first to get a feel for the tone of the source, in order to work out the “big” point it is making. The ability to infer the overall attitude, meaning, message or purpose of a source is an important one. This is particularly important when using cartoons as they often contain several sub-messages but there will be one big point that the cartoonist wants to make - the reason why they have gone to the trouble of drawing the cartoon. However, these points are not just relevant to cartoons. Written sources often work in the same way - they should be read and interpreted as a whole.

A common type of question in paper 2 is one that asks ‘How far do sources agree?’ These are the kind of “distance” questions you're used to from the 8-mark questions on paper 1. These questions need you to produce a balanced argument showing both agreements and disagreements. It may well be that an agreement or disagreement is shown in the specific detail of a source, but that another might be shown in the overall message. This is why it's important to spend time studying the sources before writing so that you know exactly what you're looking at.

Another common mistake with agreement/disagreement questions is to answer showing similarities and differences. These are not the same thing, and consequently many candidates lose marks by answering – in effect – the wrong question! An agreement/disagreement question is asking you about the message of a source. Whether they were both written in Britain or in 1936 might make their context similar, but if one source says that Nazi Germany is a threat peace and the other says that nobody has anything to worry about then their content is clearly not similar. They disagree. If, however, they both say that they want to see a peaceful world then they agree – and that doesn't matter whether one was written by Chamberlain in 1938 or a newsreel presenter in 1936.

A further common type of question is the one that focuses on how “surprising” something is. When a question asks you to, for example, explain if one source makes another surprising, you will always be placed in the bottom level of the marks if they fail to do what is asked - no matter how good the rest of the answer is. I mentioned it earlier, but the best way to keep focused in your answer and avoid this trap is to directly address the question in the first line



of your answer. In this case, “In some ways source X does make source Y surprising because...” You can then go on to compare the content of the Sources and to use this to support either surprising or not surprising. In these questions, you can’t be wrong – as long as you explain ways that the source is or isn’t surprising and use evidence from the sources to support your answer then you get marks. As with all comparative questions, though, you will always score higher marks for arguing both sides. The best answers will often use your own knowledge of the period to support their arguments about surprising or not surprising, but remember that you should only do this AFTER you have used the sources to create an argument. You can’t get the higher marks unless you’ve ticked all the boxes for the lower ones.

If you are asked why somebody wrote a source or a drew a cartoon, again it’s a good idea to directly address the question in the first sentence of your answer. For example, 'The cartoonist drew this cartoon to...' Indeed, some of the best answers I’ve ever marked have clearly reached a high level in the mark scheme after just a few lines because their answer was focused on the question from the start. It’s pointless summarizing the source for half a page if what you’re writing doesn’t answer the question, because you won’t get any marks!

When answering a question like this about a cartoon, remember that there is more to a cartoon than just thinking about what cartoons show. You need to focus on the bigger issue of what is it that the cartoonist wants to say. Cartoons are drawn for a purpose and candidates reach the top level by being able to explain a legitimate purpose or important message, rather than just what each element of the cartoon shows.

The big marks come on the last question – which is worth a whopping 12 marks. However, many students throw away a lot of marks by not answering the question in the way they need to. Here’s some advice on how to get the best marks:

- The question is about the sources, answers must be based on the sources.
- There will always be some sources that support the statement and other sources that disagree with statement. The key is to explain how some sources support the statement and how other sources disagree with it. It is not enough to assert this, it must be explained by using specific details from the sources and by showing why they support or disagree. BECAUSE!
- Sometimes a source can be interpreted in different ways and can be used both for and against the statement – but not every source.
- It is not necessary to use all the sources. Sometimes there might be a source that does not have a bearing on the statement. The quality of the explanation is as important as the number of sources used.
- Candidates can simply go through the sources in the order in which they appear in the paper, explaining whether each one supports or disagrees with the statement.



Alternatively, you might instead create a balanced argument by dividing your answer in half and explaining firstly all the sources that support the statement, and then all the ones that disagree.

- There are extra marks awarded for evaluation of the sources – this means you can get bonus marks for assessing sources critically, for example by mentioning whether the source is reliable or not and why.

Remember that this podcast is simply here to provide guidance and advice on how to answer the most common source questions that appear on CIE IGCSE History papers. The best way to see how well you put it into practice is through testing yourself – and your teacher will be able to point you towards past papers and mark schemes to help you. If you want more general guidance on answering source papers, download my other podcast called "[Succeeding at Sourcework](#)". Although it's not designed specifically for the CIE paper 2, it still contains lots of good tips that you might find helpful.