

THE HISTORIAN'S TOOLKIT: CONCEPTS AND SKILLS

In Stage 4 History, you were introduced to a range of concepts and skills that historians use in their investigations. These historical concepts and skills can be thought of as the historian's 'tools of the trade', which form the basis of all historical inquiry (see Source HT.1). This toolkit reviews the range of historical concepts and skills that you need to keep developing in Stage 5 to become a successful student of history. Your understanding of them will continually improve as you gain experience working and thinking as a historian.

Source HT.1 The historical inquiry approach

Historians use an inquiry approach in their investigations. They:

- develop an inquiry question to clearly identify the problem or question
- form theories or hypotheses – stating what they think the likely answer might be
- conduct research to gather evidence from a range of sources
- evaluate the usefulness of the sources and analyse the evidence gathered from them
- confirm or modify their hypotheses on the basis of this evidence.

HT.1 HISTORICAL CONCEPTS

You should already be familiar with the six key historical concepts that are shown in Source HT.2. Using these concepts correctly, either individually or in combination, is at the heart of all historical inquiry.

Continuity and change

Historians use the concept of continuity and change to help them understand the impact of developments and events on human societies – that while some things change over time, others stay the same. Those features that remain largely unchanged over time are referred to as continuities, while those features that change over time are known as changes. Throughout Stage 4 History, you would have practised identifying a number of continuities and changes over time. In Stage 5 History, you will also have to start considering the causes of the continuities and changes you identify.



Source HT.2 Historical concepts

Examples of continuity and change

The experiences of Australians at war, such as the different experiences of Australians on the home front during World Wars I and II, provide an opportunity to identify many examples of continuity and change.

- 1 Australia's support of Great Britain in both World Wars I and II is one example of continuity and change. Although Australia supported Great Britain in both world wars and committed Australian soldiers to fight abroad (continuity), the attitude of the Australian people from one war to the next diminished considerably (change).

At the start of World War I, there was proud and unwavering support of the British Empire among the Australia public. At the start of World War II, there was great sadness at the prospect of facing yet another devastating war and further loss of life. As a result, there was initially far less support for enlisting in the armed forces. Evidence of this change in attitude can be seen when comparing two speeches given by the sitting Australian prime ministers at the time – Prime Minister Joseph Cook at the start of World War I (Source HT.3) and Prime Minister Robert Menzies at the start of World War II (Source HT.4)

Source HT.3

Whatever happens, Australia is a part of the Empire right to the full. Remember that when the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war.

Prime Minister Joseph Cook during a speech before the Federal election, 1 August 1914

Source HT.4

Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially, that in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.

Prime Minister Robert Menzies' announcement to the Australian people, 3 September 1939

- The use of propaganda in Australia during World War I and World War II is another example of continuity and change. Propaganda was designed to glorify the efforts of Australian soldiers overseas, maintain public anger towards the enemy, motivate people to join the war effort and regulate their behaviour.

Although propaganda campaigns were a significant part of both wars (continuity), the format and content of propaganda from World War I to World War II varied considerably (change). During World War I, the vast majority of propaganda took the form of printed posters that were displayed on the streets and in workplaces (see Source HT.5). Although printed posters were also important during World War II (continuity), a far greater percentage of propaganda at that time was delivered in the form of moving pictures known as newsreels (change). Newsreels were produced by governments with the goal of boosting morale for Australians at home, and were even sent to troops fighting overseas to lift their spirits. One newsreel of Australian troops on the Kokoda Trail, called *Kokoda front line!*, even won the Oscar for best documentary in 1942 (see Source HT.6).



Source HT.5 This propaganda poster from World War I encouraged Australia men to serve their country overseas rather than stay home in Australia.



Source HT.6 A still from an Oscar winner newsreel *Kokoda front line!* shows Australian soldiers happy to receive letters from home. Newsreels were effective forms of propaganda in Australia during World War II

APPLY HT.1

- Explain how Sources HT.3 and HT.4 provide evidence of continuity and change in Australia's attitudes towards going to war alongside Great Britain.
- Examine Source HT.5. What message does this poster convey?
- Explain how Sources HT.5 and HT.6 could be used in a historical argument examining continuity and change in 20th-century Australian history.
- Select another aspect of Australians at war and find sources that help you demonstrate the concept of continuity and change.

Cause and effect

Cause and effect is a critical concept in historical understanding. It is used by historians to identify the events or developments that have led to particular actions or results.

It is rare that there is a single, straightforward cause of an event. Generally, there are many, complex causes (reasons) that have led to an event or result. The effects can also be complex: there may be many effects or outcomes, both intended and unintended. Effects or outcomes may take place over a long period of time, so that the significance of the event or development may not be immediately apparent to people at the time.

Historians often consider a combination of historical concepts in their inquiries: an understanding of continuity and change can provide a deeper understanding of cause and effect.

Examples of cause and effect

A study to identify the causes of World War I is a complex task, which requires detailed investigation of a wide range of sources. As a history student, you can draw on secondary sources, such as this book, to help you understand the range of reasons given for World War I. The key factors that led to the outbreak of World War I are explored in 'Causes of World War I' in 'Chapter 6 Australians at War (World Wars I and II)'.

It is also valuable to explore a single event and analyse its effects. A single event prior to the declaration of World War I in August 1914 was the assassination of the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in June 1914.



Source HT.7 An artist's impression of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife Sophie

APPLY HT.2

- 1 There is a considerable amount of historical information known about the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Investigate the event by asking and answering historical questions such as:
 - Who was involved?
 - Why did they do it?
 - What were they hoping would happen?
 - What did happen?
- 2 In your notebook, list the effects of the assassination in a table such as the one shown below.

Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand	
Intended effects	Unintended effects

Perspectives

People bring their own personal perspective to any event, shaped by their personal experiences, values and beliefs. Historical sources will usually reflect each participant's or commentator's perspectives, and it is critical that you learn to identify not only different perspectives, but why they are held. This will often depend upon historical context – the times in which an event takes place.

Examples of perspectives

Sources HT.8 and HT.9 both relate to the impacts of the Industrial Revolution. The first was written during the early stages of the Revolution, the second over 200 years later when people were reflecting on the long-term impacts of the Industrial Revolution.

Source HT.8

Within the last twenty or thirty years, the vast increase of foreign trade has caused many of the Manchester manufacturers to travel abroad, and agents or partners to be fixed for a considerable time on the Continent, as well as foreigners to reside at Manchester. And the town has now in every respect assumed the style and manners of one of the commercial capitals of Europe.

'Manchester, account of its trade and manufactures', in New-York Magazine, 1797

Source HT.9

It was the fossil fuel coal that fuelled the Industrial Revolution, forever changing the way people would live and utilize energy. While this propelled human progress to extraordinary levels, it came at extraordinary costs to our environment, and ultimately to the health of all living things. While coal and other fossil fuels were taken for granted as being inexhaustible, it was American geophysicist M. King Hubbert who predicted in 1949 that the fossil fuel era would be very short-lived and that other energy sources would need to be relied upon.

The Ecological Impact of the Industrial Revolution, Eric McLamb, 2011

APPLY HT.3

- 1 Identify the perspectives on the Industrial Revolution that each source presents, and the evidence in the sources that shows you the perspective.
- 2 Explain why you think perspectives on the Industrial Revolution may have changed across time.

Empathetic understanding

Empathetic understanding requires you to understand the actions, values, attitudes and motives of people who lived in an earlier time within the context of that time. In other words, it becomes important to understand that the reasons why people in the past made decisions or acted in a certain way cannot be judged in accordance with today's attitudes and values. An easy way to understand this is to accept that what happened in the past is not better or worse, but simply different. It can be very difficult to apply empathetic understanding to slavery, for example, but that is the challenge a historian must meet.

Examples of empathetic understanding

Empathetic understanding requires that you understand the actions of people based on the context of their **society**, not your own. Consider the story outlined in Source HT.10. The context of this incident is a town in Virginia whose citizens voted overwhelmingly to secede (withdraw) from the northern states at the start of the US Civil War, and was a major supporter of the Confederacy. The Confederacy was comprised of the seven southern states that chose to secede from the Union, in part to defend their right to own slaves.

Source HT.10

A fine looking negro woman aged about 28 years, belonging to Mr. Joseph Cline, living about four miles from Staunton, becoming unruly, he determined to bring her to town and sell her. While she was going to get her clothes, she picked up an axe which she had concealed, and deliberately cut three of her fingers off, taking two licks at them. She was brought to town, placed in jail, and her hand was dressed by Dr. Baldwin. She did the act for the double purpose of preventing her sale and taking revenge upon her master.

Extract from 'Desperate Negro Woman', *Staunton Vindicator* (newspaper), Staunton, Virginia, 1861

APPLY HT.4

- 1 Would the community reading the newspaper article (Source HT.10) regard the slave as heroic or as deserving of punishment?
- 2 Why did the slave act in the way she did?
- 3 Was owning slaves illegal in Virginia at this time? What rights did Mr Joseph Cline have taken from him by the slave's action?
- 4 Explain this incident:
 - a from the perspectives of the slave
 - b from the perspective her owner.

Significance

The concept of significance relates to the importance that historians assign to aspects of the past, such as events, developments and movements, individuals or groups, discoveries and historical sites. Historians continually make judgements regarding the significance of these aspects of the past.

It is important to understand that significance is a concept that is not static – it constantly changes. It relies on interpretations that often change several times over the years. For example, on the day that Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914, historians would have regarded it as an event with only local significance. Subsequent events proved its greater importance, and historians still argue today about its ultimate significance as a factor in the outbreak of World War I.



Source HT.11 A painting of the *Lady Juliana*, the first convict transport ship in the Second Fleet, which arrived in Sydney Cove in June 1790

Examples of signipcance

The Second Fleet transporting convicts to Sydney Cove landed in 1790. Source HT.11 is an illustration of the *Lady Juliana*, the first of the Second Fleet ships to arrive in June 1790, almost two and a half years after the arrival of the First Fleet that established the first European settlement in Australia. A key question for historians is whether this event was significant when it occurred, and whether its significance has changed across time. Different perspectives can also change the significance of an event.

APPLY HT.5

- 1 Consider the significance of the arrival from the perspective of:
 - a convict on the *Lady Juliana*
 - local Indigenous people as it was happening
 - Captain Arthur Phillip, the governor responsible for the new colony, and the convicts, sailors and marines from the First Fleet who faced starvation before the arrival of the Second Fleet
 - Indigenous Australians during the 1988 bicentennial celebrations
 - a student studying Australian history in the 21st century.
- 2 Explain how these different perspectives help you understand the nature of significance as a historical concept.

Contestability

When you listen to a song, watch a film or play a game, you respond to it in your own way, and develop your own interpretation. Someone else may do the same thing and respond differently. Neither view would be right or wrong – each is simply contested. This is exactly the same in the study of history. Two historians may examine the same sources and come to completely different conclusions. Alternatively, they may study different sources in isolation from each other and reach conclusions that could be changed as more sources are examined. Contestability explains why history is not about absolute truth; rather, it is about conclusions that can be supported by evidence. As the evidence changes, so too do the interpretations, creating more and more contestability.

Examples of contestability

The concept that Australia was *terra nullius* ('empty land' or 'land belonging to no-one') before the arrival of Europeans was legally accepted in Australia until late in the 20th century. This concept became increasingly contested in Australian history over the 200 years of European settlement. The Indigenous perspective was finally presented to the Federal High Court in the Mabo case in 1982. On 3 June 1992, the High Court ruled that the lands of the Australian continent were not *terra nullius* when Europeans first settled here. The competing understandings of *terra nullius* are a good example of historical contestability.

APPLY HT.6

- 1 Read the section '*Terra nullius*' in 'Chapter 4 Making a nation'. Briefly state what the concept of *terra nullius* means and outline the two competing views of *terra nullius* in Australia.
- 2 European relations with and treatment of Indigenous Australians has been one of the most contested areas of Australian history. Read the section 'Violence on the Australian frontier' in 'Chapter 4 Making a nation' and identify areas of potential contestability.

HT.2 HISTORICAL SKILLS

Historians work by conducting historical inquiries or investigations. To successfully complete these they apply a range of skills. You have already had some experience applying the skills shown in Source HT.12. The range of tasks in your Depth Studies will ask you to apply a single skill, or you may need to combine a range of skills to complete a more extensive investigation.



Comprehension: chronology, terms and concepts

Source HT.12 Historical skills

When we comprehend something, this means we understand it. The comprehension of chronology, as well as historical terms and concepts, will certainly help you to understand historical material.

Chronology

Chronology is the skill of sequencing historical events in the order in which they occurred. **Timelines** are the most effective method of organising material in **chronological order**, and the method you would be most familiar with. You should now be able to understand the value of chronology in allowing you to understanding relationships such as cause and effect.

APPLY HT.7

- 1 Create a timeline in your workbook and place these events in chronological order:
 - Australia federates (1901)
 - Gold Rushes in Australia start (1851)
 - First Fleet established European settlement in Australia (1788)
 - Eureka Rebellion (1854)
 - Aboriginal resistance fighter Pemulwuy is killed (1802)
- 2 Why is knowing the correct chronological order important for the creation of this timeline?
- 3 In what way does knowing the correct chronology help you to establish relationships between any of these events and assist with your historical understanding of them?

Terms and concepts

Like all subjects, History has its own vocabulary. These are the terms and concepts that allow you to understand historical material. In Stage 4, you were introduced to:

- terms and concepts related to historical time, such as BC and AD
- terms and concepts related to sources, such as **evidence** and **provenance**
- the key historical concepts (see HT.2) that you will learn to apply with increasing complexity in Stage 5
- specific terms from your Depth Study topics that should form part of your vocabulary when you are creating responses to historical questions.

Your Stage 5 Depth Studies will require you to add to your historical vocabulary of specific terms with terms such as:

- **colonisation**
- **egalitarianism**
- **nationalism**
- **anti-Semitism**
- **dispossession**
- **industrialisation**
- **imperialism**
- **appeasement**
- **federation**
- **fascism**
- **commemoration**
- **reparation.**

Analysis and use of sources

The key points to remember when working with sources is to make sure that you:

- identify the type, origin, content, context and purpose of the source
- process the information from the source to use as evidence in a historical argument
- evaluate the reliability and usefulness of the source for a specific historical inquiry.

Identifying the type of source

Sources can be written, visual, oral or archaeological. As you have previously learned, when you are analysing sources keep in mind whether the sources are primary or secondary sources:

- **primary sources** – objects created or written at the time being investigated; for example, during an event or very soon after, or
- **secondary sources** – accounts about the past that were created after the time being investigated and that often use or refer to primary sources and present a particular interpretation.

Identifying the type of source makes it easier to interpret and draw evidence from the sources. It is also important to recognise that different societies created different types of sources. Indigenous Australians, for example, relied on a largely oral (not written) tradition. Despite what early British colonists may have thought about this at the time, oral traditions are in no way inferior to information passed on in written form by Europeans. Historians need to make sure they do not make value judgements based on the type of sources they are using, and their own personal cultural or religious backgrounds.

Identifying origin, content, context and purpose in sources

Making sure you know where a source originated is an important first step in source analysis. In your earlier studies in History you would have become aware of the different perspectives you might gain from, for example, the written account of an educated person, or an oral tradition passed down by illiterate (unable to read or write) peasants. If two countries are in conflict, the origin of a source is essential information you need to check for possible **bias** (pre-judgement about something, usually without considering facts).

Identifying the content of a source requires you to check what the source is saying and verify the information using another source.

Identifying the context of a source means looking at when and under what circumstances a source has been produced. Is a source more or less reliable if the author was paid or if it was testimony produced under torture, for example?

Purpose is also critical in source analysis. Is the source trying to persuade or simply relate information? Was it the result of personal involvement or gain? These are all important questions to consider about any source you are planning to use.

Examples

- 1 Wikipedia has recently emerged as a widely used historical source, but the origin and content it provides is often contested and reliance on Wikipedia is regarded by many historians as controversial. Wikipedia is a free Internet encyclopaedia that is written and edited by its users. It has become a much relied upon source for millions of people around the world. It is reviewed by a committed community of online users, who

APPLY HT.8

- 1 Find the meaning of the listed terms. When you come across one of these terms during your Depth Studies, check to see if your understanding of its meaning has changed when used in a specific historical context.

Origin: the URL is shown.

Content: largely factual information about the organisation WikiLeaks.

Context: the entry is open to widespread analysis for accuracy and impartiality.

Purpose: to give the reader basic information about the organisation WikiLeaks.

check that non-factual material is highlighted, commented on, and ideally removed. However, there is no guarantee of this. Wikipedia features entries on a vast range of topics. In recent years an entry was added on a group known as WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks is an organisation that is challenging established rules about what information is private and what is public. Source HT.13 is a Wikipedia entry about WikiLeaks that has been annotated to identify the origin, content, context and purpose.

Source HT.13

WikiLeaks is an international, online, non-profit^[3] organisation which publishes secret information, news leaks,^[6] and classified media from anonymous sources.^{[3][7]} Its website, initiated in 2006 in Iceland by the organization Sunshine Press,^[8] claimed a database of more than 1.2 million documents within a year of its launch.^[9] Julian Assange, an Australian Internet activist, is generally described as its founder, editor-in-chief, and director.^[10]

*Section of opening paragraph of Wikipedia entry on WikiLeaks
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks*

- 2 Propaganda is information that attempts to influence behaviour or opinions. Propaganda posters were commonly produced in both world wars, using different techniques to prey on people's prejudices or instil feelings such as fear, anger, guilt or pride in order to convey their message.

Historians can gain insight into the period being studied by analysing sources such as the poster shown in Source HT.14. They would ask questions, like those below, to analyse this example of a World War II propaganda poster.

- *Are the messages in the poster visual or textual, or both?*
Image and text work together to convey the message.
- *What are the main colours used and what is their effect?*
The poster uses bright, bold colours to attract attention.
- *What image or symbols are used?*
The poster shows a hospital ship exploding and about to sink, with survivors attempting to reach lifeboats. The survivors in the foreground are obviously the female nurses. The ship clearly shows the Red Cross symbol and green bands that indicate it is a hospital ship.
- *Are images or symbols clear and memorable?*
The poster is memorable, using one clear and dramatic image.
- *Who is the intended audience?*
This poster is aimed at Australian soldiers and civilians.
- *What is the historical context of the poster?*

This poster was issued by the Australian government after the sinking of the hospital ship *AHS Centaur* in May 1943. It was torpedoed off the Queensland coast by a Japanese submarine. The ship exploded and sank within minutes and only 64 of the 332 passengers and crew were rescued.

- *What is the poster's intended message?*
It provokes people's anger about an attack on a hospital ship and the deaths of those on board, particularly Australian nurses. It sends the message that *all* Australians need to be involved in the war effort.
- *What is the purpose of the poster?*
It is meant to encourage all Australians to increase their war efforts.
- *Is this an effective poster?*
Yes, because it uses one memorable image, and has a simple, clear and direct message.



Source HT.14 A poster issued by the Australian government in 1943 [AWM ART V09088]

APPLY HT.9

- 1 Examine Source HT.13
 - a Can you identify any nonfactual material in this extract?
 - b What does the existence of footnotes in the article (shown by the numbers) indicate about the integrity of the article as a secondary source?
 - c In what circumstances would this be a useful source?
- 2 Examine Sources HT.15 and HT.16.
 - a Conduct some research and use the questions accompanying Source HT.14 as a guide to analyse the origin, content, context and purpose of these sources.
 - b Which of the three posters do you consider the most effective? Explain your reasoning.



Source HT.15 World War II poster (AWM ARTV09225)



Source HT.16 World War II poster (AWM ARTV00047)

Processing information from a range of sources as evidence in a historical argument

If you are looking for evidence to support a historical argument, it is vital that you never rely on a single source. It is also important that you include a source even if it does *not* support your argument. You have to allow your argument to fit the evidence, not just look for evidence to support your argument or point of view. It may require taking notes from your source, or asking questions of it to make sure you are able to extract the evidence you require.

Evaluating a source for reliability and usefulness

A source is reliable if you can check its **provenance**. Put simply, this means knowing where a source has come from. You should be able to trace a source from its origin to the form that you are accessing it in. In the digital age, manipulation of visual sources represents real challenges for establishing the reliability and provenance of sources.

A source's usefulness depends on the purpose you are using the source for. A soldier's account of his life in the trenches in World War I would be extremely useful for a historical inquiry into the conditions of World War I, but not as useful for an inquiry into the decision to place the trenches in that location, which would have been made at a much higher level.

APPLY HT.10

The sources below show the experiences of three generations of an Australian family.

- 1 Explain what you would have to do to establish the provenance of these sources.
- 2 Identify the type of source in each case, and comment on its probable context.
- 3 The sources are in chronological order. Explain whether this is essential to establish meaning.
- 4 Explain what sort of purpose each one would be useful for.
- 5 Which of the following aspects of 20th-century Australian history do these sources provide evidence for?
 - where Australians fought in World War II
 - Australian fashion
 - how Australians spend their leisure time
 - the influence of British and American culture in Australia
 - the changing role of women in Australian life

For those that are relevant, outline the evidence these sources could provide.



Source HT.17 A proud Australian car owner in 1920s Sydney



Source HT.19 Backyard cricket in Australia in 1960s Sydney



Source HT.18 Australian infantry forces during training in World War II

Perspectives and interpretations

It is an essential part of historical research to understand that different people have different perspectives on a wide range of events. These may include personal, social, political, economic or religious points of view. Historians can also interpret the same evidence very differently because of the perspectives they bring to their work.

Example

The **Holocaust** was the systematic persecution and murder of Jews and other 'undesirable' groups during World War II. Throughout Nazi-occupied territories, Jews were rounded up and initially imprisoned in **ghettos** (fenced-off parts of a city)

or camps where the food and living conditions were very poor. This policy was followed by one of planned extermination where, as a 'final solution to the Jewish question', Jews were transported to **concentration camps**, where they were shot or gassed to death. It is estimated that over six million Jews died as a result of the Holocaust. Many other minority groups such as gypsies and homosexuals, also labelled as **undesirables** by the Nazi party, were rounded up and sent to camps or murdered.

Holocaust deniers assert that the Nazis had no official policy to exterminate Jews, and deny that six million people were systematically murdered during World War II. They are renowned for imposing a particular perspective and interpretation on sources. This is because they are trying to impose their own pre-determined perspective (their prejudice or bias) on sources, rather than developing their interpretation from the available evidence.

Source HT.21

This note is written by people who will live for only a few more hours. The person who will read this note will hardly be able to believe that this is true. Still, this is the tragic truth, since [this is the] place your brothers and sisters stayed, and they, too, died the same death! The name of this locality is Kolo. At a distance of 12 km from this town [Chelmno] there is a 'slaughterhouse' for human beings.

Extract from a letter written by a Nazi concentration camp prisoner, written on 2 April, 1943, Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research

Source HT.22

I have found that in numerous respects, Irving has misstated historical evidence; adopted positions which run counter to the weight of the evidence; given credence to unreliable evidence and disregarded or dismissed credible evidence ... In my opinion there is a force in the opinion expressed that all Irving's historiographical 'errors' converge, in the sense that they all tend to exonerate Hitler or to reflect Irving's partisanship [strong support] for the Nazi leaders. If indeed they were genuine errors or mistakes, one would not expect to find this consistency ... Mistakes and misconceptions such as these appear to be by their nature unlikely to have been innocent. They are more consistent with a willingness on Irving's part to knowingly misrepresent or manipulate or put a 'spin' on the evidence so as to make it conform with his own preconceptions.

An extract from Justice Gray's finding against David Irving, 2000



Source HT.20 Corpses at Belzen Concentration Camp

APPLY HT.11

- 1 Consider Source HT.21 and think about how a World War II historian and a Holocaust denier would approach the source.
- 2 Source HT.22 is an extract from a judge's finding against a Holocaust denier, David Irving. (Irving was attempting to sue historian Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher for portraying him as a 'Holocaust denier'.)
 - a What does the judge accuse Irving of, in terms of his use of historical evidence?
 - b Why does the judge think Irving misrepresents or manipulates evidence, rather than simply make 'historiographical errors'?

APPLY HT.12

- 1 From 1790, an Indigenous leader known as Pemulwuy led raids and attacks against the early settlers in the Sydney region. How could historical empathy help you understand Governor King's decision to call for Pemulwuy to be delivered dead or alive in 1801?

Empathetic understanding

As has been shown earlier, empathetic understanding requires that you interpret history through the actions, values, attitudes and motives of people from the past. In other words, you should not base your interpretations and historical understanding on what you personally think is right or wrong; you should instead consider all historical actions within the context of their particular time and place.

Research

Research is a critical process for historians and students of history, enabling them to draw conclusions if carried out properly.

Getting started

Research usually starts with a broad field of inquiry that is made more specific by posing specific questions linked to the field of study. Asking questions and evaluating their usefulness allows historians to develop a clear focus to frame their research.

For example, if you were told to conduct research about Australia at war, it would be necessary to ask a range of questions to develop a clear focus. These questions might include:

- *What is meant by 'Australia'?*
Does it include involvement of colonies before Federation? This is a useful question because it helps you establish limits on the time period you have to research.
- *Can I focus on only one war?*
This is a very useful question in a classroom situation. A historian would know where they wanted to concentrate, but a school student may have to ask the person setting the research for clarification.
- *Can I make the focus a personal one?*
This is a useful question if you have access to family history or sources.
- *Does the research have to include primary sources?*
This question will help you clarify your approach to the research, and the sources that will help you come to a conclusion.

Planning

Planning is an important part of the research process. It is vital that you have a plan that suits the purposes of your investigation, and is realistic in terms of what you can achieve. For example, if you plan to focus on primary sources you should first make sure you have direct access to them. The digital storage of information has made many sources easier to access, but realistic planning about available time and accessibility remain a crucial part of successful research.

Identifying, locating, selecting and organising information

The hard work in research comes in the process of gathering information. Professional historians can spend years to conduct research and write a book. You will have significantly less time to complete your research tasks, but will go through a similar process.

Identifying and locating information in the digital age often means starting with a search engine. That can be a useful first step; but, as with all research, it is important that you ask the right questions. A search engine cannot think for you, and will only search using the information you give it. It is therefore vital that you be as specific as possible when setting the limits of your search, and then only select the most appropriate information once you have located it. Refer to Source HT.23 as a guide to some of the most common websites and their reliability as sources for research.

Source HT.23 Guidelines for determining the reliability of websites

Domain name	Description
.edu	The site is linked to an educational institution such as a university or school. These sites are generally very reliable.
.gov	The site is linked to a government institution. These sites are generally very reliable.
.net	This site is linked to a commercial organisation or network provider. Anyone is able to purchase this domain name and generally there is no one to regulate the information posted on the site. As a result, these sites may be unreliable.
.org	This site is linked to an organisation. Generally, these organisations are not for profit (e.g. Greenpeace, World Vision International, British Museum). If the organisation is reputable and can be contacted, this generally means that the information provided has been checked and verified by that organisation. You need to be aware of any special interests that the organisation may represent (e.g. particular religious, commercial or political interests), as this may influence what they have to say on a particular issue. If you are unsure about the reliability of information found on a website with this domain name, check with your teacher or librarian.
.com	This site is linked to a commercially based operation and is likely to be promoting certain products or services. These domain names can be purchased by anyone, so the content should be carefully checked and verified using another, more reliable source.

If you are selecting digital information, make sure you ask these questions of your source:

- What is the domain name?
- Is an author identified?
- Are there links or other bibliographic information to help with confirmation?
- Is it fact or opinion?
- Does it access other verifiable sources?

If you feel that is still a useful source, make sure you record the URL (web address), the date you accessed it and brief comments about why it was useful and reliable. These will be required when you compile an annotated bibliography (comments on each source).

Also remember that librarians are trained professionals in information storage and retrieval, and can provide valuable assistance to you.

One golden rule of effective research is to never rely on one source. Always check information against another source, making sure you consider how useful and reliable it is. Another rule is to make sure that you put information in your own words, and acknowledge any direct quotes from sources.

APPLY HT.13

- 1 You have been asked to conduct research about the reasons why Australia was settled in 1788. List the questions you would ask before you start researching. How would you start looking for information?

Organising information requires a clear understanding of how you are going to use it. There is no perfect method for organising information, but the most important thing is making sure that your notes can be understood by you, and can be retrieved when you need them. You may find that you work best by putting points under relevant headings. Another approach may be using graphic organisers to lay out your information. Yet another may involve highlighting key words, terms and concepts. There is no magic formula, and it is important that you develop an approach that works effectively for your individual learning style.

Explanation and communication

No matter how well you have researched your topic, effectively communicating your findings is vital for success. In historical communication you are required to show your understanding, and support that understanding with specific reference to your sources. This allows the reader to see that your opinion is based on evidence, as this is what makes it valid.

Developing historical texts

Source HT.24 can be used as a guide to writing a historical argument that will effectively communicate the evidence from your research that supports your inquiry.

Source HT.24 Guidelines for writing a historical argument

Structure of a historical argument	
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly states the topic of the investigation. Outlines the line of argument that will be followed and why that line is being taken. The aim of the introduction is to make it clear to the reader the line of argument you are adopting.
Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information should be presented in paragraphs that link sequentially and logically. Each paragraph should introduce a key point of your argument and the evidence that supports it. All evidence and specific examples used are analysed explaining why they are an important part of the argument. Each paragraph is linked to the one that follows it in the body. The aim of the body is to provide the evidence and specific examples that convince the reader of the validity of your argument. It should contain a range of relevant sources that support your point of view.
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a short and clear overview of the main ideas presented in the body. States a conclusion drawn from the evidence. The aim of the conclusion is to reinforce to the reader why your argument is valid.

Selecting and using a range of communication forms

Examinations and other written assessments still focus on traditional written responses. It is important that you recognise the key terms that are often used in exam and assessment questions. Some of the key terms are shown in Source HT.25. A full list and glossary of the terms is available from the New South Wales Board of Studies website.

Key terms used in examination and written assessment questions

Identify	Recognise and give a name to a historical artefact or event
Outline	Provide the main features of an event or occurrence
Explain	Show the relationship between events; provide information about how and why something happened; indicate cause and effect
Describe	Indicate the physical features and characteristics
Sequence	Show events in chronological order (the order in which they happened)
Investigate	Conduct research; make inquiries about something
Analyse	Indicate the relationship between events; identify the implications of an event or occurrence
Assess	Make judgements about an event or choice in terms of its value and results, as well as its size and impact
Account for	Provide reasons for an event or a choice that was made; recount a series of events, providing reasons for those events

Other communication formats may be used in other tasks or assessments. In the digital age, the range of formats available to communicate your historical understanding is extremely diverse. Some common approaches include:

- oral – if you are required to produce an oral response, ensure that your information is organised into key points. You will need to consider what the main thrust of your argument is, and exactly which evidence is crucial to support your argument. Organising that information onto palm cards may help you remember these during your oral presentation.
- visual – you may be required to present information in the form of a poster, graphic organiser, cartoon or model. This also requires you to rearrange your research to ensure that there is a clear focus for your argument and the evidence required to support it.
- digital – it is important that you not allow all the possibilities available in digital formats to overshadow the argument. Visual and written material can be effectively combined in formats such as PowerPoint and Prezi, while formats such as Twitter require you to condense your argument into its most basic form. A website will allow you to create links to collections of primary and secondary sources that can add depth to the evidence supporting your argument. A variety of film-making software has increased opportunities to use visual material, but again, what your presentation looks like should not compromise or dominate the historical content.

Your teacher may specify the style of response required. If your teacher does not specify the communication format and asks you to choose, it is important that you think carefully about which is the most appropriate format for your argument and audience. Always revisit the criteria you are being assessed by before deciding on the most effective way of presenting your research.

APPLY HT.14

- 1 If you were asked to conduct research about conditions Australian soldiers faced at Gallipoli or Kokoda, how would you best present your research findings to an audience? Outline the strengths and weaknesses of each of the following formats for such a presentation:

- written
- visual
- oral
- digital.

Which one would you decide on if you were presenting to your classmates, and why?