**DBQ essay – values and limitations of a document**

Document based exam questions always include the following instructions:

**Using the documents and your own knowledge**…. answer the question

**and**

**Discuss** the **values and limitations** of the document in your essay

You must **use** the document in your answer (e.g. quote pertinent information from it but do not copy it word for word, and use it to inform and develop your response to the question). You must also use your **own knowledge** from your studies in your response – you cannot rely on only using information from the document.

**Critical evaluation of a document**

Discuss the values and limitations of the document (or documents) means you must **critically evaluate** the document:

- comment on the strengths/weakness of a document,

- consider the reliability of a document (e.g. reliability of newspaper accounts, cartoons)

- consider the objectivity/bias of the author

Generally, the closer the information is in time and space to the event itself the more accurate or reliable it should be. However, you should keep in mind:

\* Who is the author?

\* Why was it recorded?

\* When was it recorded?

\* What is it?

Eyewitness accounts are the most obvious primary sources of information, but they can be selective, inaccurate, limited and undetailed. Personal experience accounts are often invaluable but don’t necessarily contain much factual information.

**Factors that affect the reliability of a document:**

**Bias/Prejudice** – occurs when one point of view is favoured over other points of view.

**Propaganda** – using half-truths or lies to convince the receiver of a certain point of view

**Subjectivity (subjective)** – occurs when one person’s viewpoint is given, reflects an emotional input

**Exaggeration** – adding additional fictitious details – bigger/smaller, better/worse

**Cross-checks** – have the details been verified through another source

**Evaluating cartoons**

Cartoons are useful to historians when trying to understand how people or events in the past were viewed by contemporary observers.

\* They give insight into mood and attitude at the time, however

\* Cartoonists are not interested in a balanced view

\* They rely heavily on **caricature** and **exaggeration** to make their points

\* They assume the viewer has a certain amount of background knowledge in order to understand the image

**Evaluating Maps**

Consider the title of the map and what it purports to show. Think about who or what organization produced it, where and when. Maps can be very useful but they may be overly complicated or overly simplified. The legend may be poorly organized and certain characteristics may be represented in an unusual way in order to emphasize a feature (e.g. anamorphic maps).

You must comment on the organization of the legend and think how have symbols, points, flows and areas been subdivided underneath different headings.

**Please remember: You are evaluating the usefulness of a document in answering the question being presented.**

About 25% of a DBQ essay should be about document analysis. This means you must **discuss** the document: ‘It is useful because…’ or ‘there are limitations because’, or ‘these voices are not heard in the document which means that…’ are some simple ways to incorporate this analysis though **more sophisticated candidates will be able to integrate the analysis throughout their essay**.