

Written sources – Making texts “speak”

Written sources are texts that are written in a specific historical context and that are available to us either in the original or as transcripts. Since no source “speaks for itself,” it has to be subjected to verification. What that is, you will find out here.

In working with sources, pay attention to these points:

- There is no **one** written source, but rather many different “**source materials**” are subsumed under this term: files, newspaper articles, letters, diaries, speeches (scripts and accounts protocols), chronicles, annals, autobiographies, memoirs and so on. All are written with their own individual viewpoints and have completely different value as testimony.
- Verification of sources is absolutely necessary, because written sources can be falsified – intentionally or not – containing mistakes, untruths and holes, and are always co-determined by the **perspective**, the cultural, societal and ideological position of its creator – even if the material in question is a »neutral« document, such as a protocol or report.

Guide for the interpretation of sources

Determining the research goals

- For which historical connection should the source deliver information?
- What do you (as researcher) want to learn from the source von? What are your questions (for example, how the author of the source evaluated something; how a described circumstance appeared in the source; which point of view is represented in this source, as opposed to other sources ...)?

**Determining the
research goals**

Understanding sources

- What is the source material?
- What additional information is necessary in order to understand the source and its statements (dictionaries, historical encyclopaedias, etc.)?
- When, where and from whom is the text composed? How close is this person (in terms of time and geographical location) to the described processes?
- To whom is the text directed, who is the addressee?

**Understanding
sources**



- What does the text report? What are its main assertions? How are they supported, illustrated?
- Are there terms that are repeated (key terms)?
- Are there terms for which you need explanatory material outside the text?
- Can you determine how the source was delivered?
- Are there contradictions, seeming inconsistencies in the text?

Verification of sources

- Is the source fully believable?
- Could the relationship between the author and addressee have had an influence on the content of the text?
- Are there statements that are weighted more heavily than others How do you explain this?
- Which statements do you consider to be factual, and which are evaluations, suppositions? Why?
- How do you explain the contradictions within the text or in comparison to other information with which you are familiar?
- For whom and to what purpose do you believe the text was created? What hints does the text deliver in that context? What additional "evidence" do you have?
- In which sequence of events does the source fall? What happened before or after this event? How can the information, statements and evaluations mentioned in the source be judged with our without this knowledge?

**Verification of
sources**