

How do historians determine if a source is reliable?

Objective:

- **Describe** how historians determine if a source is reliable.
- **Determine** the reliability of sources from the lunchroom fight.

Lunchroom Fight Introduction

The principal interviewed many students about the lunchroom fight. He asked each one,

What happened during the fight?

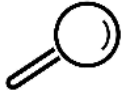
Below are three responses that the principal determined were *unreliable for his purpose*.

→ **Directions:** Read each of the responses from students below and write you think the principal found the response unreliable for his purpose.

Student's response to the question, "What happened during the fight?"	Why do you think the principal found this response <i>unreliable for his purpose</i> ?
Sam: "Justin started it, but Max totally won! Justin is a jerk who never stops picking on me in Math, but Max is one of my best friends."	She's biased towards Max, her best friend.
Reggie: "The fish sticks were great! What do you think they put in that tartar sauce? It's got to be addictive."	Not even relevant!
Harper: "I don't know, I wasn't in lunch...Err...I wasn't skipping either. I couldn't see what was happening from my table, but I could see that Justin wasn't holding back."	Harper's giving contradictory answers. Can we trust him?

How do historians determine if a source is reliable?

Reliability is the *usefulness* of a source for a given purpose.



Source

Historians **determine** if a source is reliable for their purpose by considering their **purpose for reading the source** and by answering the following questions.

Is it **related to my purpose**?

What **limitations** does the source have?

Limitations are related to **topics discussed** in the text and the author's **purpose, point of view, intended audience, and bias**

What **other sources** would be helpful to corroborate?

If a historian were examining Reggie's statement from the introduction, they would have different responses to the question of reliability depending on the research question.

Reggie's response: "The fish sticks were great! What do you think they put in that tartar sauce? It's got to be addictive."

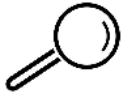
Purpose	Is it related to my purpose?	What limitations does the source have?	What other sources would be helpful to corroborate?
What happened during the lunchroom fight?	No, Reggie does not discuss the lunchroom fight at all.	This is just one student's response and there is no evidence that he even knew a fight occurred.	Sources from students who witnessed the fight and who have statements that are about the fight.
What do students think about school lunch?	Yes, this source discusses one aspect of the school lunch.	This is just one student's response about school lunch, and he only has strong feelings about one dish.	A survey of many students on each of the dishes served.

When discussing the reliability of a source historians rarely ever respond with **"YES"** or **"NO."** Instead, they discuss all **three aspects of reliability** like this historian responding to Harper's response:

Is it related to my purpose?	What limitations does the source have?	What other sources would be helpful to corroborate?
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Harper's statement is not a reliable source for determining what happened during the lunchroom fight, because it is unclear if she was in the lunchroom. Though she states that "Justin wasn't holding back," Harper reveals that she might have been skipping lunch and not in the room. This makes her statement unreliable for finding out what happened during the fight. Sources from students who were witnesses to the fight would be more reliable.

Practice Determining Reliability



Source

→ Directions: In the space below evaluate the reliability of Sam’s response for the purpose of determining what happened during the lunchroom fight.

Sam: “Justin started it, but Max totally won! Justin is a jerk who never stops picking on me in Math, but Max is one of my best friends. “

Purpose	Is it related to my purpose?	What limitations does the source have?	What other sources would be helpful to corroborate?
What happened during the lunchroom fight?	Yes.	Max is his best friend.	Other people who were in the lunchroom.

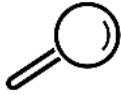
In the space below, compose a response to the question, is Sam’s response reliable for determining what happened during the lunchroom fight?

Sam's response is not reliable because

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SQ 5: How do historians determine if a source is reliable?

→ Directions: Based on the information provided, respond to the prompts below.



Source

Part I

Describe how historians determine if a source is reliable.

Historians determine if a source is reliable by asking three questions:

1. Is it related to my purpose?
2. What are its limitations?
3. What other sources are helpful?

Part II

Is this response below from Max, one of the students involved in the fight, a reliable source of evidence for determining what happened during the lunchroom fight? Explain.

Max: "That kid is psycho. He turned around and punched me out of nowhere. Me and my friends were standing in line just joking around, and he turned around and punched me for no reason. He's messed up and creepy. Ask anyone."