



What is History?

McFahn's view

[www.historyresourcecupboard.com](http://www.historyresourcecupboard.com)

## In order to construct history, historians and TV documentary makers:

### A: Pose questions and gathering evidence

- They decide upon an area to research.
- They then pose themselves a big question, lots of small questions or come up with a hypothesis.
- Next they search and gather the evidence that they need to help them answer their questions / test their hypothesis.
- When they have gathered all of the evidence they think they need they examine the evidence and work out what it says and suggests. Some of the evidence might not be reliable or useful so this needs to be tested.
- They also need to organise the evidence that is useful to them. This could involve grouping the evidence under themes or in date order, or even as types of evidence. They may also arrange it in order of priority.
- This could lead to them refining their questions or changing the hypothesis.

In order to construct history, historians and TV documentary makers:

B: Make inferences and deductions when constructing the past

- Historians never have enough evidence.
- They are left with a fragmentary view of the area of history they are attempting to construct.
- This leads them to imagine the parts where there are gaps in the evidence. They therefore make inferences and deductions based on their professional judgement.
- However, their inferences and conclusions are based on their professional judgement **and** on their own political, cultural or religious views **and** they are influenced by the time in which they are writing.
- Also page constraints (or time constraints for TV documentary makers) mean that they have to decide what to include and what to leave out of their version of the past.

In order to construct history, historians and TV documentary makers:

C: Come to different conclusions or arrive at different historical interpretations

Because history is constructed by historians using evidence, their imagination and based on their own view points:

- Historical constructions (books, TV documentaries etc) differ even when they are written about the same topic.
- Historical constructions (books, TV documentaries etc) about the same topics differ in the style they are written.
- Historians argue and debate with each other and sometimes do not agree about certain events.
- (But there are many historical facts that we all agree on...)