



Disciplinary Takeaways

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****disclaimer – this is not an exhaustive finished list of disciplinary takeaways. These are not solely based on scholarship, but personal experiences/ views. We would like to thank all of those who have gone before us to shape our thinking including Counsell, Ford, Sexias, Shemilt, Lee, Byrom, Riley, George and loads of others.**

Interpretations

- McAleavy describes an interpretation as: ‘a conscious reflection on the past, not made by participants in past events.’ Pieces of historical writing are interpretations of the past of some sort. The past is not fixed but constructed by those writing about it.
- We need to work out the message of an interpretation. Can do this by making inferences and working out the style and tone of the writing.
- We need to work out how much of the interpretation is real and how much has been imagined. We can do this by comparing the interpretation to evidence / our knowledge about the event that has been constructed. This helps us work out how valid and plausible the interpretation is.
- We need to consider the view point and approach of the interpretations author. Therefore, we should consider the purpose of writing and the audience it was written for.
- We should also consider the context in which the interpretation was written in. What were the views at the time of writing? What else was happening at the time of writing that might influence its author?

Evidential Understanding

- When we evaluate contemporary sources (so we can write an interpretation) we need to draw valid inferences from them. What do they suggest?
- To check that a contemporary source is valid we should cross reference it against other evidence to prove that it can be trusted. This means comparing what it says / suggests with other evidence.
- We need to realise that contemporary evidence is useful to us even though it might be unreliable. It tells us about the time in which it was created and often it tells us about the views of the author.
- When we evaluate contemporary evidence we need to think hard about the audience it was created for and the purpose behind its creation.
- We should also consider the context in which the contemporary was written in. What were the views at the time of writing? What else was happening at the time of writing that might influence its author?
- When working with contemporary sources we should be careful and use tentative language when making claims about them.

Change and continuity

- When considering change and continuity we should consider change as a process. We should think about its flow: how quickly or slowly the change happened.
- When considering change we avoid ‘eventification’ that is seeing events as the change themselves rather than seeing change as a flow and a process.

- When considering change and continuity we need to consider how much changed / stayed the same and the extent that this was the same for everyone who experienced the change.
- We also need to consider whether the change was an improvement (progress) or whether it made things worse (regress).
- We should also consider the type or nature of the change: economic, social etc
- We should also consider why change happened.
- We should also consider how people themselves at the time actually experienced change.

Causation

- Events in history happen for a number of different reasons / causes which can often be classified together in different groups and in different ways (thematic/ long term and short term).
- Different reasons / causes link together in what Ford describes as causal webs.
- Causes can be prioritised and we should explain how and why some causes are more important than others.
- Change happens in history due to the actions of historical actors (e.g. Hitler) and the time and conditions they were operating in (e.g. the Great Depression). We should consider what these conditions are and how they are linked to the historical actors.
- We need to be mindful that any explanation of causes offered is in itself an interpretation. Historians can and do disagree about why events happen.

Significance

- When evaluating the significance of events, we need to use criteria to make our judgements. We can adopt different criteria given by different experts, eg Counsell's five Rs, Phillips's GREAT. We also need to be able to create our own criteria for judging whether or not an event is significant.
- We need to be able to see that any judgement of historical significance is actually an interpretation / a construct and therefore we should spend some time evaluating what different experts say about historical significance.
- We need to realise that historical significance can vary over time depending on those interpreting it.

Chronological understanding

- We need to develop a complex language of time to help us make sense of time and the past eg past / present, BC/AD, century, decade, epoch, era etc
- We need to be able to place events and people into chronological order. This is logical and helps us begin to spot patterns and groups of change and continuity.
- We need to have a sense of the scale of time and therefore look at broad sweeps of time as well as shorter time periods.
- We need to understand that historians construct labels for time periods to help them make sense of them and these labels are sometimes different eg Tudor / Early Modern / Elizabethan.
- We need to gain a 'sense of period' to be able to view what a time period was really like. This helps us create a mental map of the past.

- We should be able create a mental map of the past / a framework of the past so we can start to slot into this framework the different aspects of history we study.

Diversity

- We need to realise that different people in the past experiences were different to our own due to their differing values, beliefs and experiences.
- It is also important to realise that different people in past experienced the same event / time period very differently to each other. This was also because of their differing values, beliefs and experiences. We need to look for this complexity.
- We can also think about diversity by deciding how similar and different people and places at a particular time were and how different they were to us today.
- We should also consider how people actually experienced events in the past – what did things mean to them at the time? How did they experience the event? This links carefully with empathy.