POV

How to Analyze Point of View (POV) Effectively

When studying historical sources you need to be aware of documents' sources and their authors' points of view. The Document Based Question (DBQ) rubric requires you to analyze point of view in the documents (anywhere from 2 to all of the documents). Awareness of the documents' sources and their authors' points of view requires demonstration of the analytical skills of understanding context, point of view and frame of reference. Pay attention to both internal evidence (the content and tone of each document in relation to the others) and external evidence (identification of the author, purpose or intended audience, and the date when each document was written). Below are some guidelines of how to do this. Keep in mind: you only need to provide a single analysis of the document's point of view. Below you will find a myriad of ways to do so; you will not need to use them all on each document, just one.

1. Read the documents very carefully. In the source line you should be given most if not all of the documents' attribution, that is, information about the document: What is the document (name or kind)? Who wrote it? What was their occupation, or some other identifying characteristic? When was it written or compiled? Where? Why? Etc.

2. Now--this is the hard part--you need to answer the question: Why was THIS person producing THIS piece of information at THIS time or in this manner? Where is the author coming from? Determine how the information given to you in the attribution, and other information you have deduced from the document and perhaps even other documents or outside information, could affect the point of view. Ask yourself, what would have to change to make the person say something different? There are several methods and acronyms to help you do this. The one I will use is called SOAPSTONE.

S - Who is the Speaker/Source?

• Who is saying this?
• Who is the person who produced this piece?
• What is his or her background?
• Generally trying to find what makes that person the most different from you is a useful approach, unless there is something about them that is familiar to you and then you can use that. You can use these acronyms or variations on them to help you remember

H – Home - country of origin, national or ethnic identity

O – Occupation or profession
G – Gender
W – Worldview – values reflecting religious/philosophical, or other ideals
A – Age
R – Real Knowledge – that is what are the limitations of the speaker – what could they know or not know
T – Theoretical Ideals - political [conservative, liberal, radical, pacifist, fascist, etc.], economic [mercantilist, capitalist, feudal, socialist, communist, etc.], or other social / intellectual values
S – Social Status, including class, caste, wealth and education

O - What is the Occasion? (Sometimes close to Purpose)

• When was this said – that is under what circumstances?
• What is the time and place of the piece; the current situation?
• What else (some historical event or period) was going on at that time that might have had an influence on the author?
• What is the context that might have encouraged the writing to happen?
• Is there another document that was produced before this that the author might be thinking of when writing this?
• Why was it written (or drawn or photographed)?

A - What is the Intended Audience?

• To whom is this piece directed? The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group; it may be a certain person or a certain people.

• How does this affect how it is written?
• Was it written as a private record? Was it written to be read/heard by others and if so whom? Is it an official document for a ruler to read? Is it a commissioned painting or photograph?
• Are they responding to arguments or concerns that are not clearly stated? What position is that and why?
• Helpful in analyzing the audience would be to look at what presumptions and preconceptions do we bring to this text and how might this point a difference in values or ideas of those writing it versus those reading it? Does this affect our understanding? How do you know this – what about the text makes you think this? Therefore who would understand it differently than you and why?

P - What is the Purpose?

• Why did they say this?
• For what purpose was the document produced? What were their reasons, motives or goals?
• What is at stake for the author in this text? What in the document tells you this? What does this tell you about the author? You need to connect some motivation on the part of the person creating the text with the document itself. This is one of the harder ones to do correctly and the one most often mistakenly cited.

S - What is the Subject? – NOT for POV itself, but to support POV claims or to help answer the question.

• What is being said? What are the general topics, content, and ideas contained in the text (summarized)?
• What do you learn that helps you answer the question?
• What is missing or unexplained and why would that be the case? (This really helps when considering the additional document).
• Compared to other texts with similar topics or backgrounds, what makes this text different or similar?
• Does other evidence support the source? Does other evidence contest the source?
• What does the document tell us without actually telling us? Try to distinguish between interpretation and fact.

TONE – What is the tone of the document? (Will overlap with Speaker)

• How is this being said?
• What vocabulary (especially but not only adjectives) does it use? How does this convey the intent, the point of view of the author (anger, disdain, admiration, etc.)?
• What is the reason for them to adopt this tone? Are they trying to make a case and if so how does it affect their presentation? Are they successful with their strategy?
Consider the SWEET AND SOUR approach. Is the speaker or message:

> S – Sad or wistful?
> W – Worried or panic stricken?
> E – Exasperated, outraged or disgusted
> E – Excited or guilty / ashamed?
> T – Tolerant, sympathetic or unsympathetic?
> A – Arrogant, condescending or insensitive?
> N – Negative, defensive or judgmental?
> D – Deferential or respectful?
> S – Sarcastic or humorous?
> O – Obsessed, fanatical or just committed?
> U – Uncertain or knowledgeable?
> R – Ruthless, cruel or antagonistic?

Other Hints for Students

1. Identify unusual or loaded words, phrases in the text.
2. List standard or expected alternatives that would carry the same meaning.
3. What are the differences between the alternative and original words (social, cultural)?

4. Ask why didn't the source use alternative words?

Again, don't assume just because it is written by a historian that there is no point of view. Take this excerpt from a textbook World History: The Human Experience:

"The Byzantine Empire came to a pitiful end at the hands of the savage Turks."

It is the use of terms such as "pitiful" and "savage" that indicates to us the point of view of the author. Reading carefully will make us more aware of this.

3. Once you have determined the point of view (every document will have one), you need to express it appropriately. Simply repeating the attribution will not get you any points for POV; nor will claiming bias without justification. Stating "the author is biased because he is _____" is not sufficient for a good POV statement.

You essentially need to say, the author might write _____ /use ____tone/etc. because _____.

Consider your POV statement as a triangle sentence whose three parts are:

SOAPSTONE
(Insert a triangle here, it won't let me do it for some reason)

Text Why – or rather what connects them?

Avoid using the word bias, since it is often misused and misinterpreted. Avoid trying to cast aspersions on the source. All sources can tell you something, no matter what you think about the author. This kind of POV attempt (This information is biased/wrong because the author is _____) rarely gets the POV point.

Ideal POV Statements

Source: Isocrates, Greek philosopher; description of Artaxerxes II, a Persian king who gained control over Greek city-states in A.D. 387.

He is a despot to whose course we sail to accuse each other. We call him the Great King, as though we were subject prisoners of war, and if we engage in war with each other, it is on him that our hopes are set, though he would destroy both sides without compunction.

POV - Speaker: As a Greek, Isocrates would have ill-will towards his conquerors and would thus be inclined to describe him harshly with such terms as "despot" or "subject prisoners of war" and "without compunction."

Source: Emperor Qianlong, Qing Emperor of China, addressing the British sovereign.

You, O King, from afar have yearned after the blessings of our civilization, and in your eagerness to come into touch with our converting influence have sent an Embassy. Your Ambassador has put forward requests which completely fail to recognize the Throne's principle to 'treat strangers from afar with indulgence,' and to exercise a pacifying control over barbarian tribes the world over. Nevertheless, I do not forget the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world. I have therefore commanded my minister to enlighten your Ambassador on the subject.

POV - Tone: Qianlong's belief that Chinese civilization was superior to all others is indicated in his use of phrases such as "the blessings of our civilization," "our converting influence," "barbarian tribes" etc.

POV - Audience: When addressing what in his mind was an inferior culture, Qianlong condescends: "the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world."

Source: Marx and Engel's Communist Manifesto in 1848

The bourgeoisie has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superior,' and has left remaining no other nexus [link] between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' It has drowned the most heavenly of ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm in the icy water of egotistical calculation. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and

political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation."

POV - Purpose: Marx and Engel are trying to inspire a revolution and therefore are trying to arouse negative feelings about the bourgeoisie and capitalism in general by describing them with such words as "pitiless," "egotistical" and "exploitation."

Rare Cases

The following cases rarely occur in DBQs, but many students rush to assume them first. Pause and seriously consider before you question these.
• **Veracity** - In very few cases you would be correct to question the truthfulness of the document. If you do you will still need to include it in your answer somehow and tell what you can learn from it.
• **Reliability** - More often you might want to examine the reliability of the source: is what they are saying verifiable? Is all that they are saying verifiable? Was the source in a position to know that information? For instance a soldier might know the details of the campaigns in which they took part, but that does not make them a reliable source for all military campaigns. Is it an opinion or a fact? An author whose tone is overtly not neutral [that is strongly conveys their cultural biases] should lead us to question their credibility. At the same time, they could still be a credible source while an author who is neutral or objective could not be credible.
• **No Source Given** - when no primary source is given for a document, you should question your ability to analyze the point of view as no source is given.

Unusual Sources

Maps
• What projection is used? What does this do the size and shape of the countries or states being shown? What is at the center of the map? Does the culture/map maker place themselves at the center (literally of the world)? What is the map's orientation? Is the direction at the top significant, (as in the west when for years east was at the top because that was where the Holy Land was)?
• Can you tell anything about the culture making the map from the title, scale/units, legend, grid, etc? (e.g. a map of religions in Africa from the late 1800s - shows Christians, "Mohammedans" and Others)
• How was the information for the map collected? Does it reflect anything about the cultural, power or historical context of the map?
• What is the map intended for, what is it supposed to communicate?

Statistics / Charts
• Where did the data come from for these figures? Who collected it? For what purpose?
• How was the data collected? The manner that the initial collection was done is crucial in understanding the information you are given as it could reflect cultural, economic, political or historical contexts that could affect the data.
• Who published the data? When? How was the information used once it was collected? How did it affect things? Do not negate a source just because it was collected a long time ago (or recently) or likewise do not negate or accept it just because it is from the government, but do question the means and motives.
Photograph / Painting / Political Cartoon
• Who created the image? Why? For what audience? Who commissioned (is paying for) the painting, photograph or cartoon? How is this image being used? Is it for private viewing, in which publication, etc.?
• What is being shown? What is their relationship with the author (photographer, cartoonist, etc.)? Are they aware that they are being included in the image? If so, why are they willing to be in this image?
• What decisions were made in creating this image? How is the image/subject positioned/staged? Why did they choose the setting (background, location etc.)?
• Why have they chosen to depict the items they way they have (consider shape, form, dress, especially for political cartoons)? What visual imagery is being used that we might not understand? Might someone living in that day and age more accurately interpret it? What is not being shown in the image?
• How was the image created? What equipment was used that might have constrained or limited the image (e.g. flash photography? Absolute stillness or posing? Other sketches of shots taken?) If other sketches or shots existed why was this one chosen and not the others? What could we learn from what was not shown or chosen?
• What is the title of the image? In what context was it presented? Were any captions included? What can we learn from the image?
Advertisement
• What is the ad trying to do – buy a product for the first time or switch products?
• Which group is the advertisement trying to reach? Where was it published?
• What strategies are used to sell the product? Reasoning? Emotion? Famous people? Commands? Price cuts? How does it attract your attention?
• What cultural trends are reflected (women's role, ethnic bias, class, childhood)?

Pieces of literature/Songs /Editorials
• Who wrote it? In what format? Where was it published? By whom? When?
• What is it talking about? What does it tell us about the times?
• What genre does it fit into? What vocabulary or imagery is being used? Is anything repeated? Is there any pattern? Is it indicative of the times?
• How does the piece end? What is the final message or image?

Final Cautions (POV No-Nos):
Don't just repeat information from the attribution and assume that you have identified POV. It must be information that is not given to you specifically in the attribution. "According to the British colonial governor" is not POV. Saying "He is unreliable because he is British" is both insufficient and untrue.

Don't assume that people from the same place, ethnicity, gender, etc. have the same POV. Likewise, do not list several documents whose authors share some characteristics and try to get POV points for all of them (e.g. "Documents 3, 6 and 10 are all from women and therefore would know firsthand what women's roles are like"). You need to address each document/author specifically as each will have a different perspective (the upper class does not always know about the lower classes' roles).

Don't equate time or distance with unreliability ("Bentley is not reliable because he's writing 1000 years after the events happened.") Time and distance can provide or affect objectivity, but it doesn't affect reliability or credibility.

Even when the facts are undeniable (some statistics and pictures), the conclusions drawn or the data selected can reflect a bias or POV based on who paid for the research or their purpose in doing the research or what is not being discussed.

Do not say: "This document is biased." It is a pet peeve of most readers. Instead try "The author's perspective is influenced by . . . "