Origin, Purpose, Value, Limitation (OPVL) is a technique for analyzing historical documents. Throughout the year, we will use this language frequently when referring to primary and secondary sources. You will be expected to know and understand each of the steps.

O: Origin

In order to analyze a source, you must first know what it is. The more you know about where a document came from, the easier it will be to answer questions about its purpose, value, limitations, etc.

➢ Who created it?

➢ When was it created?

➢ Where was it created?

➢ Who published it? When?

➢ Is there anything we know about the author that is relevant to our evaluation?

➢ What is the Historical Context?

P: Purpose

This is where you start the real evaluation, trying to figure out the purpose for the documents creation. You must be able to think as the author of the document. At this point you are still only focusing on the single piece of work you are evaluating.

➢ Why does this document exist?

➢ Why does the author create this piece of work? What is the author's intent?

➢ Why did the author choose this particular format?

➢ Who is the intended audience? Who was the author thinking would receive this?

➢ What does the document say?

Avoid broad claims such as saying "*I think the document means this....*" Obviously your analysis of the document is your own, but the appropriate way to express this is to say "*The document means this... because it is supported by x evidence.*"

V: Value

This gets a little bit harder. You must determine - based on who wrote it, where/when it came from and why it was created – what value does this document have as a piece of evidence? This is where you will show your expert historical skills, bringing in outside information to put the piece into context.

➢ What can we tell about the author from this piece?

➢ What can we tell about the time period from the piece?

➢ Under what circumstances was the piece created and how does the piece reflect those circumstances?

➢ What can we tell about any controversies from the piece?

➢ Does the author represent a particular 'side' of a controversy or event?

➢ What can we tell about the author's perspectives from the piece?

➢ What was going on in history at the time the piece was created and how does this piece accurately reflect it?

L: Limitation

This is probably the hardest part. Your task is not to point out the weaknesses of the source, but rather to ask yourself, *at what point does this source cease to be of value to us as historians?* This is an area for you to show your mastery of the content. You need to briefly explain parts of the story that the document leaves out. Give examples of other documents that might answer this document. *What parts of the story/context can this document not tell?*

➢ What part of the story can we NOT tell from this document?

➢ How could we verify the content of the piece?

➢ Does this piece inaccurately reflect anything about the time period?

➢ What does the author leave out and why does he/she leave it out (if you know)?

➢ What can this document *not* tell you?

** Being Biased does not limit the value of the source! If you are going to comment on the bias of a document, you must go into detail. *Who is it biased towards? Who is it biased against? What part of a story does it leave out? What part of the story is missing because parts are left out?*