How to: reliability

New Material

What is the reliability question?
The reliability question is the first of three questions in Paper Two of the Higher Modern Studies exam and is worth 8 marks. It assesses your ability to evaluate the reliability of different sources. Usually, it is the most straightforward and a good way of scoring 8 marks.

What does it look like?
You are given three sources of information, A, B and C. You need to examine each source and identify aspects that are reliable and unreliable. You then need to decide overall, which is the **most** reliable.

How long does it take?
It should take around 20 minutes to complete.

Do I need background knowledge?
Unlike History, you do not need background knowledge. You are not being assessed on what you know, but rather the skills you have to assess the reliability of a source. However, you will need good levels of political and media literacy to know different about the different sources you will see.

What sort of things should I be looking out for?
There are a range of things to consider when assessing the reliability of a source. However, some common things to look out for include;

Common Points	Key info
Date	• Less than 1 year old = reliable • More than 1 year old = not reliable
Author	• Do we know the author? • What are their qualifications? • Are they an expert?
Source	• Is it a reputable source? • Have you heard of them before?
Bias	• Are they pushing an agenda? • Are they trying to influence you?
Sample Size	• More than 1,000 people surveyed? Reliable • Less than 1,000 people surveyed? Not reliable
Adapted	• Has it been adapted from somewhere else? • Is this the original work? • Why has it been changed?

Practice
Now that you are familiar with the basics of what makes a source reliable, we are going to practice with a range of different sources. Using the table, identify anything about the source that could be reliable and anything that could be considered unreliable.

Source 1

Source 2

Source 3

SCOTTISH DAILY EXPRESS

"VOTE REFORM IN HAMILTON, LARKHALL & STONEHOUSE TO GIVE SMUG JOHN SWINNEY A WAKE-UP CALL"

ENDORSED

The Scottish Daily Express backs tactical voting for the candidate best placed to beat the SNP.

We believe in the Hamilton, Larkhall & Stonehouse by-election that is now Ross Lambie.

REFORM UK

VOTE REFORM. GET REFORM.

Source 4

Europe Invasion
@EuropeInvasionn

🚨BREAKING

A man attacked a nursery in Southport and stabbed 6 children. Multiple ambulances attended the scene. 1 child died. The attacker is alleged to be a Muslim immigrant.

SOUTHPORT - If this is true, then all hell is about to break loose.

Southport Stabbings suspect, **Ali-Al-Shakati**, was on MI6 watch list and was known to Liverpool mental health services. He was an asylum seeker who came to UK by boat last year.

Source 5

BBC N For you   🔔   Home 🏴 News 🏴 Sport 🏴 Weather ▶ iPlayer

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What the capsizing and relaunching of a warship tells us about North Korea's regime

Experts say Kim Jong Un has used the botched warship launch to strengthen people's loyalty to the regime and its ideology

Jean Mackenzie
Seoul correspondent

Reporting from
📍 Seoul

_____

17 June 2025, 00:08 BST

Source 6

DAILY STAR

WE'RE No1 FOR RACING

FREE £2 SHOP BET WITH William HILL

FREE ROYAL ASCOT 12-PAGE PULLOUT INSIDE

HOSEPIPE BAN'S A CERT

We failed abuse girls PAGE 9

Michelle in Enders PAGES 16-17

Reservoir Dregs
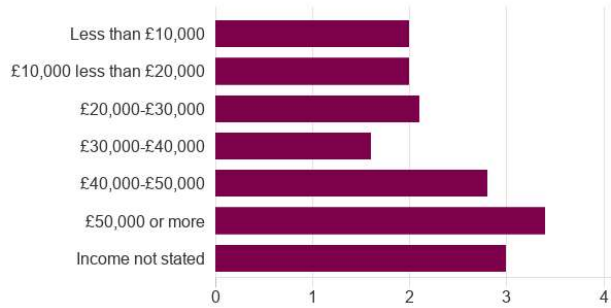
Source 7

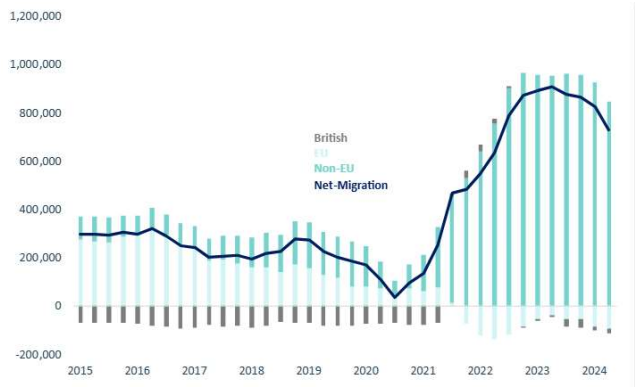### How does household income affect cocaine use?

% of 16 to 59-year-olds reporting use of powder cocaine in the last year by household income 2017/18

Source: 2017/18 Crime Survey for England and Wales   BBC

Source 8

Source	Reliable Points	Unreliable Points
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

New Material

How to answer the reliability question?
Reliability is very simple to answer. However, like all source questions it is important that you follow the structure given to you. This is the quickest way to gain the most marks.

Step 1 - Assess the sources
Work through each source one at a time. Go through it forensically and identify points that make it reliable and points that make it seem reliable. Think about what you can see but also what you cannot see. Use highlighters if you wish.

Step 2 - Write Up
Write one paragraph **per source.** You should look to have **two** points in each paragraph about the reliability of each source. This could be;

A) 2 points about why it's reliable
B) 2 points about why it's not reliable
C) 1 point each

As well as stating what makes the source reliable or not, you **must explain** why this makes it reliable or not. You should be using the word **because** every time!

Source 8 can be considered unreliable there is no indication of who created it.

Source 8 can be considered unreliable as there is no indiciation of who created it. This makes it unreliable because we do not know who gathered the evidence within the source and whether or not they are expert enough to comment on the issue of migration. This means we have no way of knowing if the information is trustworthy or not.

Step 3 - Overall Conclusion
Having written a paragraph for each Source, you should now look to write an overall conclusion. In this, you must reach a conclusion on what is the **most** reliable source of information. You should then explain why it is more reliable than the other two sources.

Overall, Source A is the most reliable source.

Overall, Source A is the most reliable source.

Source A is more reliable than Source B because Source A was published in January 2025 and is therefore up to date, whereas Source B was published in May 2018 and is now over 7 years old.

Source A is more reliable than Source C because Source A was published by the BBC a trusted news corporation who cannot be biased by law, whereas Source C was published by the Daily Mail which is a newspaper and subject to political bias.