

History Core Concepts

Causation: Model based on (Scott, 1990) and (Morton & Seixas, 2012)

Understanding 'causation' in history is crucial for students to make sense of the past. At a basic level, causation appears to be the bread and butter of history. The causation model outlined here attempts to get student to understand a number of key strands:

1. Change happens because of MULTIPLE CAUSES and leads to many different results or consequences. These create a WEB of related causes and consequences.
2. Different causes have different LEVELS OF INFLUENCE. Some causes are more important than other causes.
3. Historical changes happen because of two main factors: The actions of HISTORICAL ACTORS and the CONDITIONS (social, economic etc.) which have influenced those actors.

	Lacking Understanding	Beginning	Sound	Secure	Mastered
Signpost 1 Causal Webs	<i>Causation is attributed to a single cause, usually ST, or multiple causes are given but not explained.</i>		Y7/8	Y9/10+	<i>Multiple short term and long terms causes of events are identified and explained. Relationships between causes are recognized</i>
Signpost 2 Ranking Causes	<i>There is no differentiation between the influence of various causes.</i>	Y7	Y8/9	Y10+	<i>The causes of historical change are analysed and different causes are ranked by their influence</i>
Signpost 3 Underlying Causes	<i>Historical causes are personalized to be the actions of great leaders or are seen as abstractions with human intentions.</i>	Y8	Y9	Y10+	<i>Historical change is explained through the interplay of the actions of historical actors and the underlying conditions (SPERM) in which they operated</i>

Change & Continuity: Model Based on (Blow, 2011), (Morton & Seixas, 2012) and (Foster, 2013)

Understanding the processes of continuity and change enables students to appreciate the past, not as a homogenous whole, nor indeed as a series of events, but as a complex flow of currents and counter-currents. It helps students to appreciate the complexity of the past and creates uncertainty around loaded terms such as “primitive” and “progress”. Again, there are four key strands to this concept:

1. Past societies are not fixed, there are changes which have occurred spanning centuries. Changes in the past can be identified by looking at DEVELOPMENTS between two periods.
2. Change and continuity are INTERWOVEN and both can be present together in history. CHRONOLOGIES can be used to show change and continuity working together over time.
3. Change is a process which varies over time. Change can be described as a FLOW in terms of its PACE and EXTENT and can be said to TRENDS and have specific TURNING POINTS.

	Lacking Understanding	Beginning	Sound	Secure	Mastered
Signpost 1 Identifying Change	<i>Seeing the past as homogenous and unchanging. Failing to perceive that changes happen over time.</i>		Y7	Y8/9/10+	<i>Understanding that changes can be seen as differences between two periods of time ie. What has changed between two points in history, or conversely, what has stayed the same.</i>
Signpost 2 Interweaving Continuity and Change	<i>Failing to appreciate that continuity and change can happen simultaneously.</i>	Y7	Y8/9	Y10+	<i>Continuity and change are shown to be INTERWOVEN. Some things change whilst others remain stable.</i>
Signpost 3 Process of Change	<i>Seeing all changes as individual events with short term impacts.</i>	Y8	Y9	Y10+	<i>Understanding that historical change can be described as a flow over a longer period of time in terms of pace, extent, trends or specific turning points and that these flows might have greater importance than the changes individually.</i>

Historical Evidence: Model based on: (Lee & Shemilt, 2003), (Wineburg, 1999) and (Morton & Seixas, 2012)

Without evidence, there is of course no history to speak of, only speculation. This was one of the trickiest aspects to create a model for as working with evidence is such a complex process. I have tried to take some of the complexity of Wineburg's thinking on the issue whilst also looking at the practicalities of the classroom. When working with sources the danger is that we simply read them uncritically or through a modern lens. As Wineburg notes, the "spread of activation" effect leads us to think down similar lines of thought once we have been pushed in a certain direction. For example, when looking at a document which discusses slavery, then the modern mindset overrides other aspects of the document and leads us to condemn the practice without engaging with the meaning of the source itself. Wineburg gives the example of a group of people given an 1892 document about Columbus Day. Non-historians used the document to comment on the shame of Columbus' conquest in 1492, these readers used these source to "...confirm their prior beliefs. They encountered the past here and labelled it." (Wineburg, 1999, p. 498). Yet on the other hand, "...historians used the document to puzzle about 1892, not 1492. They paused long enough to allow their eyes to readjust from the flashing neon of Columbus's name to go down to the bottom of the document to ponder the context of the document's production' Historians contextualised the document about Columbus instead of using it as a window on the past." (Wineburg, 2007, p. 11)

Meanwhile the "availability heuristic" leads us to privilege information which is more readily available in our memory regardless of the trustworthiness or the reliability of less readily available sources. This means we often deal with sources uncritically as they are available to us rather than test them against harder to obtain information. This is especially true of the use of textbooks by students. The "availability heuristic" leads us for example to believe that we will not contract lung cancer from smoking, despite all the evidence to the contrary, if we know of a close relative who smoked and lived to the age of 95 (Wineburg, 2007). With this in mind, the strands for the evidence concept are quite complex:

1. When we write history we need to create interpretations of the past based on evidence. INFERENCES are drawn from a variety of primary sources to create interpretations of the past.
2. Historical evidence must be CROSS-REFERENCED so that claims are not made based on single pieces of evidence. CROSS-REFERENCING means checking against other primary or secondary sources.
3. Historical evidence has multiple uses. The UTILITY of a piece of historical evidence varies according to the specific enquiry or the questions being asked.
4. Working with evidence begins before the source is read by thinking about how the AUTHOR, intended AUDIENCE and PURPOSE of an historical source might affect its WEIGHT for a purpose.
5. Historical evidence must be understood on its own terms. This means thinking about the CONTEXT in which the source was created and what conditions and views existed at the time.

	Lacking Understanding	Beginning	Sound	Secure	Mastered
Signpost 1 Drawing Inferences	<i>Seeing evidence as a series of windows on the past or a collection of facts to be unearthed.</i>		Y7/8	Y9/10+	<i>Understanding that the past is not a set of fixed and known events. Evidence isn't a collection of facts about the past. Understanding that inferences can be drawn from evidence which go beyond the obvious content of the sources.</i>
Signpost 2 Cross Referencing	<i>Claims about the past are often shaky or unwarranted as they are based on single pieces of evidence.</i>	Y7	Y8/9	Y10+	<i>Understanding that history is a complex web and should be constructed from a wide array of complimentary and contradictory sources. Commenting on the certainty of inferences drawn from multiple sources.</i>
Signpost 3 Utility of Evidence	<i>Seeing evidence as inherently useful or otherwise based only on what it says.</i>	Y8	Y9	Y10+	<i>Understanding that all evidence can have multiple uses and that its utility depends on the questions which are being asked. Evidence does not have a fixed value of utility, it varies according to the enquiry.</i>
Signpost 4 Evaluating Evidence	<i>The provenance of evidence is not questioned.</i>	Y8	Y9	Y10+	<i>Understanding that a source will reflect the views of its author. Explaining the impact of author, audience, purpose on a source.</i>
Signpost 5 Evidence in Context	<i>Understanding historical evidence and inferences from evidence through a modern mindset. Judgments are made without reference to context.</i>	Y8	Y9	Y10+	<i>Historical evidence should be understood on its own terms and be recognized as an area of complexity and confusion. Interpreting historical evidence in historical terms rather than understanding it through a modern mindset. Sources cannot be understood quickly and easily – they require work. Context has an enormous impact on the meaning of a source.</i>

Historical Interpretations: Model based on (Lee & Shemilt, 2004)

Understanding historical interpretations means asking students to step back and appreciate the processes of the discipline of History itself. In many cases, this is a skill we do not expect of students until they are much older as the contextual knowledge required is so great. It is also important to note that historical interpretations here refer to conscious reflections on the past, deliberate attempts to make sense of past events, and should not be confused with sources or personal views.

1. Historical interpretations are everywhere. Every piece of historical writing is an interpretation of some sort. The past is not fixed but CONSTRUCTED through interpretations.
2. It is possible to draw INFERENCES from interpretations of the past, just like with historical sources. INFERENCES will reveal the MESSAGE of a particular interpretation.
3. The APPROACH of an author must always be considered. This means considering their VIEWPOINT, PURPOSE, AUDIENCE and EVIDENCE chosen to build their interpretation.
4. Historical interpretations must be understood on their own terms. This means thinking about the CONTEXT in which they were created and what conditions and views existed at the time.

	Lacking Understanding	Beginning	Sound	Secure	Mastered
Signpost 1 Identifying Interpretation	<i>The past is seen as knowable and therefore interpretations of the past are all just different ways of relating the same events.</i>	Y7	Y8	Y9/10+	<i>Interpretations are understood to be particular viewpoints and constructions of the past.</i>
Signpost 2 Inferences from Interpretations	<i>Inferences are not drawn from interpretations. Information may be extracted from an interpretation.</i>	Y7/8	Y9	Y10+	<i>The messages and main points of an interpretation are identified. This is done through reference to the interpretation itself.</i>
Signpost 3 Evaluating Interpretations	<i>Accounts of the past are either used uncritically or are seen as accurate versions of the past containing mistakes – either deliberate (bias) or accidental.</i>	Y8	Y9/10+		<i>An interpretation is seen as the product of a particular author. The APPROACH of the author is identified and an understanding is shown of the viewpoint of the author, their purpose, their intended audience and the evidence they have chosen to use.</i>
Signpost 4 Interpretations in Context	<i>Interpretations are seen as views on the past but are not understood in the context of their own time.</i>		Y9/10+		<i>Understanding that the context of an historical interpretation is often more important than the period it is talking about. Interpretations can reveal a lot about the context in which they were created and could be put to this purpose.</i>

Historical Empathy/Viewpoints: Model based on (Wineburg, 1999; 2007) and (Morton & Seixas, 2012)

One of the most crucial aspects of understanding history is trying to see the past on its own terms. Too often students place modern values on top of the past and therefore fail to understand why people acted in the way they did. When speaking to students about the Holocaust, Primo Levi once noted that he increasingly faced the question: why did you not escape or rebel? These students are viewing History through their own modern lens of understanding rather than trying to engage with the strange world of the past. As Richard White notes: 'Any good history begins in strangeness...the past should not be a familiar echo of the present...' (White, 1998, p. 13). History exposes our inability to understand people in the past on their own terms. In order to do it well we need to try and understand the mentalities of those in the past. History helps us to practice understanding peoples we cannot hope to understand – this is a crucial lesson today (Wineburg, 1999).

1. There are major differences between modern WORLD-VIEWS and those of people in the past, this means their beliefs, values and motivations. We must avoid PRESENTISM.
2. The perspectives of HISTORICAL ACTORS are best understood by thinking about the CONTEXT in which people lived and the WORLD-VIEWS that influenced them.
3. Looking at the perspective of an HISTORICAL ACTOR means drawing INFERENCES about how people thought and felt in the past. It does not mean using modern WORLD-VIEWS to imagine the past.
4. A variety of HISTORICAL ACTORS have very different (DIVERSE) experiences of the events in which they are involved. Understanding DIVERSITY is key to understanding history.

	Lacking Understanding	Beginning	Sound	Secure	Mastered
Signpost 1 Appreciating World-Views	<i>There is an assumption that the beliefs, values and motivations of people in the past were the same as those of people today. Presentism abounds.</i>		Y7/8	Y9/10+	<i>An understanding of the differences between the world-views of people in the past and the present day. Understanding that caution is needed when trying to understand Historical Actors through shared human experiences eg. Death, fear, love or hunger.</i>
Signpost 2 Perspectives in Context	<i>A lack of historical empathy with people of the past. An assumption that people in the past were stupid or ignorant because their historical context is ignored.</i>	Y8	Y9	Y10+	<i>Understanding that the perspectives of people in the past have to be explained with reference to their historical context. A respect for the lives of people in the past.</i>
Signpost 3 Perspectives through evidence	<i>Empathising with Historical Actors is often conducted as an imaginative exercise with little or no reference to evidence or historical context.</i>	Y8	Y9/10+		<i>Evidence based inferences are used to empathise with an Historical Actor. Evidence is used to reconstruct beliefs, values and motivations. Limitations of our understanding are recognised.</i>
Signpost 4 Diversity	<i>A failure to recognize that there are a diverse range of perspectives in the past.</i>	Y7	Y8/9	Y10+	<i>The ability to distinguish a variety of diverse perspectives and experiences in the past. Evidence is used to reconstruct these different perspectives with respect.</i>

Knowledge & Communication: Model based on personal experience

Finally there is the issue of communication. It cannot have gone without notice that History is now one of the few subjects requiring extended answers throughout the school system. Unfortunately, the propensity of other subjects to remove a focus from extended writing means that History is now one of the few places where essay writing is actually taught. This model is built from my own experiences of trying to encourage students to write coherently and borrows from many places and discussions with colleagues over the years.

1. Historical knowledge and evidence is used to develop and prove an argument. Historical evidence should be ACCURATE and RELEVANT.
2. All writing needs a clear structure. This means introducing your work, developing ideas in paragraphs and reaching an overall conclusion.
3. All historical essays require some form of argument to develop. This means you need to clearly answer the question set and build a clear line of argument throughout your work.

	Lacking Understanding	Beginning	Sound	Secure	Mastered
Signpost 1 Knowledge	<i>Failing to provide specific evidence and details to back up historical arguments</i>	Y7	Y8	Y9/10+	<i>Giving multiple pieces of evidence to back up the points being made. These are both ACCURATE and RELEVANT.</i>
Signpost 2 Structure	<i>Failing to structure work in a formal way. Questions tend to be answered in a single paragraph with no real structure. Alternatively questions are answered with a series of short responses.</i>	Y7	Y8/9	Y10+	<i>A clear structure is evidence in writing. Paragraphs clearly address the question. Conclusions come to a judgment about the question and weigh up the arguments. Introductions are focused on the question and provide some background (context).</i>
Signpost 3 Argument	<i>Failing to link the answer to the question set. This might include covering topic knowledge but not addressing the specific point of the question.</i>	Y7	Y8/9	Y10+	<i>Work is analytical and based on key factors. Evidence is used to back up points clearly and there are very clear links back to the question. Links are made between multiple pieces of evidence as well as between factors. Clear links are made back to the question in each paragraph. Argument flows and is cogent.</i>