

O-Level Social Studies — Question Formats Cheat Sheet

1 INFERENCE

Spot it by:

- General → "What can you tell/learn from this source?"
- With focus → "What can we learn from this source about ____?"
- Message → "What is the message of the source?"
- Attitude → "What is the attitude of [author] towards ____?"

Format (3 steps):

Step	What to do
1. Copy question phrasing	"I can tell..." / "I can learn that ____ is..." / "The message is..." / "The attitude is..."
2. Evidence	Source A states, "....."
3. Explain	This shows that...

⚠ **Message Qs** → must cover the *whole* source (read entire text, or describe entire picture/cartoon) ⚠ **Attitude Qs** → MUST name the attitude (positive / supportive / negative / critical / mocking)

2 PURPOSE ("Why...?")

Spot it by: "Why do you think this poster was produced?" / "Why did he make this speech?"

Method: **PAMEO** (one paragraph)

Letter	Meaning	Notes
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P – Purpose	convince / criticise	
	verb	
A – Audience	specific group, NOT "people"	e.g. Singaporeans, the government
M – Message	main message (inference)	do NOT lift words from source
E – Evidence	quote or describe	Source A states, "..."
O – Outcome	visible action wanted	✗ NOT understand/trust/feel/believe

Sentence template:

This poster was produced to **[PURPOSE VERB]** ____ **[AUDIENCE]** that ____ **[MESSAGE]**. Source ____ states ____ **[EVIDENCE]**. This poster was produced so that **[AUDIENCE]** would ____ **[OUTCOME]**.

3 COMPARISON

Spot the question type first:

Question wording	What's needed
How similar/different / To what extent	1 similarity + 1 difference
In what ways different?	2 differences
In what ways similar?	2 similarities

➤ Similarity (one paragraph)

1. Common criteria
2. Source A evidence (+ explain if needed)
3. Source B evidence (+ explain if needed)

Sources ____ and ____ are similar in showing that ____ **[COMMON CRITERIA]**. Source ____ states that, "" **[EVIDENCE A]**. **SIMILARLY**, Source ____ states that, "" **[EVIDENCE B]**.

➤ Difference (one paragraph)

1. Common criteria
2. Inference (Source A)
3. Inference (Source B) — **must be DIRECTLY OPPOSITE**
4. Evidence (Source A)
5. Evidence (Source B)

Sources __ and __ are different in showing whether ____ **[COMMON CRITERIA]**.
 Source __ shows that ____ **[INFERENCE A]**. IN CONTRAST, Source __ shows that ____ **[INFERENCE B]**. Source __ states that, "" **[EVIDENCE A]**. **IN CONTRAST**, Source __ **states that, ""** **[EVIDENCE B]**.

📌 Always **copy the question phrasing** (e.g. "similar in..." / "agree in...") 📌 If evidence doesn't clearly match the criteria → add an explanation sentence linking it 📌 Extra option if time permits: compare tone (optimistic vs pessimistic) or purpose & outcome (PAMEO A vs PAMEO B)

4 UTILITY (Usefulness)

Step 1 — Inference from the stated source

Source __ is useful as evidence. Source __ shows that ____ **[QUESTION FOCUS]** ____ **[INFERENCE]**. Source __ states, "" **[EVIDENCE]**.

Step 2 — Check reliability via Cross-Referencing (CR)

Pick ONE side only:

Supports (reliable → useful):

Source __ tells me that ____ [inference repeated]. Source __ supports Source , **hence Source __ is reliable, and hence useful. Source __ shows that ____ [FOCUS] ____ [INFERENCE]. Source __ states, "" [EVIDENCE]**.

Does not support (unreliable → less useful):

Source __ tells me that ____ [inference repeated]. Source __ does not support Source __, hence Source __ is unreliable, and hence less useful. (then same INFERENCE + EVIDENCE structure)

⚠ Inference for the CR source must **match** the inference from the original source.

Step 3 (OPTIONAL) — Provenance & Purpose

Only do this if the source's origin clearly suggests a motive/bias.

Source ___ is reliable/unreliable, and hence useful/less useful, based on provenance and purpose. Source ___ is ___ **[PROVENANCE — who/where/when]**. It is likely to be ___ **[analyse motive, representativeness, context/timing]**. The source was produced to convince/criticise **[PURPOSE VERB]** ___ **[AUDIENCE]** that ___ **[MESSAGE]**. Source ___ states ___ **[EVIDENCE]**. This source was produced so that ___ **[AUDIENCE]** would ___ **[OUTCOME]**.

Priority order: Step 1 → Step 2 (do this first) → Step 3 (only if time / no good CR source available)

Same 3-step approach works for "prove", "surprise", "reliability" questions too — just match the wording of the question (e.g. "Can you trust...?" / "How reliable is...?").

5 ASSERTION (Agree/Disagree)

- Take a stand: **2 Agree** or **2 Disagree**
- **4 separate paragraphs**, ONE source per paragraph — never lump sources together
- No background info; each paragraph must be unique, not repeated

Each paragraph needs:

Part	Description
(i) Clear Action	who is doing what — e.g. Govt implementing new policies
(ii) Evidence	quote/describe from source
(iii) Outcome/Impact	explain the effect — e.g. leads to better well-being

Bonus (+2) — pick ONE if time allows:

1. **Contextual knowledge** linked to a source (bring in outside knowledge)
2. **Reliability via provenance** (e.g. "reliable as written by a professor with expertise")
3. **Balanced conclusion with a stand** — not just a summary, add your own insight/solution

Quick Reference — Which Format for Which Question?

Question keyword	Format to use
"What can you tell/learn..." / "message" / "attitude"	Inference (3 steps)
"Why...?"	Purpose (PAMEO)
"How similar/different..."	Comparison
"How useful..." / "Can you trust..." / "reliable"	Utility (3 steps)
"Do you agree..."	Assertion (4 paragraphs)