

Interpretations

- An interpretation is an overarching explanation of a broad event, e.g. why the Tsarist system failed in Russia in early 1917
- Unlike a simple set of explanations, an interpretation often prioritises one set of factors over another, e.g.
 - Nicholas II fell as Tsar due to the long-term weaknesses of the Russian ruling system. (Therefore less to do with his own mistakes or the impact of WWI on Russia.)
 - Nicholas II fell as Tsar due to his own personal weaknesses and failings. (Therefore less to do with the weaknesses of the Tsarist system or the effects of WW I on Russia.)
 - Nicholas II fell as Tsar due to the impact of WW I. Other monarchies collapsed too, viz those of Austria-Hungary, Germany and Turkey. (Therefore less to do with factors solely inside Russia and more to do with the extraordinary circumstances produced internationally by WW I).
- Interpretations are sometimes shaped by theories that try to produce universal explanations for why things happened. E.g. Karl Marx argued that conflict between social classes was an overarching explanation for historical change. Other historians have emphasized the roles played by factors such as climate, food supply, the growth of literacy, industry, capital and trade.
- Some historians also use historical interpretations to query or challenge what is, or is not, studied and how it is approached. E.g. the representation in History of women, minorities, non-European and non-North American societies, and non-elite individuals.
- Most historians do not rely on a single theory or interpretation to explain complicated events.
- When writing an answer in response to an interpretation, you need to identify the underlying arguments behind that interpretation and
- ...find evidence in the sources and your own knowledge that either supports or challenges the interpretation.
- Ensure that your conclusion offers a response to the key argument underlying the interpretation.