

Surely the answer to this question is very simple. The historian researches his or her information, checks for accuracy and then reproduces it in a readable form. To an extent this is of course true, everybody from the Year 7 student researching the process of mummification in Ancient Egypt to the PhD student considering the role of fascist paramilitary groups in 1930s Australia goes through a similar procedure. However, consider the following issues:

- From where do historians get their information?
 - Do they use previous secondary accounts? If so, from where did those writers gain their information?
 - Should the historian use only primary sources?
- This begs the question 'who produced these primary sources?'
 - Can they be trusted?
 - Might there be some inherent biases present in primary sources as much as there might be in secondary accounts?
- Up until the mid-19th century, the overwhelming majority of people were illiterate; they never left any written sources.
 - Will this colour the view of the past that is produced?
 - Only a narrow upper class tended to leave written records, so is our view of the past being presented through an upper class prism?
- Is it possible to escape an upper class bias by focussing on non-written sources?
 - Most works of art, sculpture and architecture were commissioned by the upper classes or those groups trying to push certain values, eg the church
 - Do these sources not leave us in the same dilemma?
 - Non-written sources need interpretation (as do written of course), and so the role of the historian becomes crucial.
- The writing of history is crucially dependent on what 'facts' the historian chooses to look for, consider important, overlook, emphasise or deliberately underplay. It is possible

for historians dealing with similar facts to come up with entirely different conclusions. Consider the following:

- The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, has overseen a decade of economic prosperity, industrial peace, sound economic management, a tough immigration program and has built up the closest relationship with the United States this country has ever known. He will surely go down in history as one of our greatest prime ministers.
- The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, has allowed the gap between rich and poor to widen, has broken the power of the trades unions, given tax cuts to the rich, allowed children to spend years in detention and meekly does whatever the United States tells him to do. He will surely go down in history as one of our worst prime ministers.

Who is right? The 'facts' the historian chooses to write about determine the nature of the history produced.