

Identifying Frame of Reference and Point of View

What is it? Someone’s frame of reference includes all the things that influence how that person thinks and the way that person sees the world. Point of view is a person’s individual opinion or perspective.

How to do it. First, identify everything you know about the writer of the passage. Consider background, age, culture, the historical period in which he or she lived, and beliefs. Next, look for expressions of the person’s perspective. They may be stated directly—“I believe that....” Or they may be expressed in value judgments, such as “the worst ever....” How do you think this person’s frame of reference might have influenced his or her point of view?

Try it. During the Civil War, the Union at first refused to enlist African American soldiers. Consider these two quotes from that time.

Do you know that this is a white man’s government; that the white men are able to defend and protect it; and that to enlist a Negro soldier would be to drive every white man out of the service?

— Ohio Governor David Todd, in response to a group of African Americans who asked to form a regiment

Why does the government reject the Negro? Is he not a man? Can he not wield a sword, fire a gun, march and countermarch, and obey orders like any other? . . . Men in earnest don’t fight with one hand, when they might fight with two, and a man drowning would not refuse to be saved even by a colored hand.

— African American anti-slavery leader Frederick Douglass

Identify the point of view and frame of reference of each man. How do you think frame of reference might have shaped each man’s perspective?

	David Todd	Frederick Douglass
Point of view		
Frame of reference		