

## APUSH In-class DBQ instructions

The Document-based Question (DBQ) requires the construction of a coherent essay which integrates interpretation of the supplied documents with a demonstrated knowledge of the historical period in question. Higher scores are earned only by essays that both cite key pieces from the documents AND draw on outside knowledge of the period. The student who simply describes the contents of the documents and fails to place them into historical perspective will receive a low score on the DBQ essay.

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### Simple sequence for writing a DBQ essay:

1. During the 15-minute reading time:
  - a. Read the question and identify the historical period being discussed.
  
  - b. Brainstorm a list of relevant issues, historical terms, names, or events which are significant to that period of history. When complete, this list should be examined for logical division into sub-topics.
  
  - c. Read the supplied documents. In the margin of the documents, make notes which add to or embellish your brainstorm list. Make an “instant SOAPS” document key, asking for each document: what is the source? *Why was it written?* And how can this source help answer the question? Use any remaining part of the reading time to sketch an outline of your essay.
  
2. Thesis paragraph:
  - a. Write an introductory sentence that sets the scene or states a relevant maxim.
  
  - b. Briefly lay out a counter-argument: other possible answer(s) to the question.
  
  - c. “BUT” (however, yet, still....)
  
  - d. Write one clear sentence which states the thesis your essay will prove.
  
  - e. Specify three or four sub-topics to the thesis: logical segments or divisions of the overall thesis. Elaborate on each of these sub-topics with simple defining sentences.
  
3. First main-body paragraph:

- a. Begin with a topic sentence which re-introduces one of the sub-topics.
  - b. Support that topic sentence with outside information from your brainstorm list.
  - c. Support your outside information with a reference to one or more of the supplied primary sources.
  - d. Be sure to use and cite the documents properly.
    - i. Use half-plus-one of the documents.
    - ii. In the words of M. L. Rampolla, "Do not quote when you can paraphrase."<sup>1</sup> Merely copying from the documents does nothing to make your argument. You must include your own analysis, and paraphrasing helps you do that.
    - iii. When you cite a document, do not call it by its letter (Document A, Document B...). Instead, refer to the actual document by its contents, e.g., "In his letter to Henry Lee, Washington argues that..."
  - e. Write a concluding sentence which relates the paragraph's topic back to the thesis.
  - f. Write a transitional sentence introducing the next topic.
4. Subsequent paragraphs:  
Continue this procedure until you have exhausted your brainstorm list for possible sub-topics. If you have outside information that is not supported by the primary documents, include that information anyway.
- a. Accurate student-supplied information will garner points, even without support from the documents.
  - b. BUT...any use of the primary documents not supported with outside information will not garner points and should be avoided.
5. A conclusion is not necessary, but will score you extra points if done properly. If you decide to write a concluding paragraph, be sure that what you write is more than just a restating of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, 3rd ed. (New York: Bedford, 2001), p. 57.