

## *Writing the DBQ Essay*

The **Document-based Question (DBQ)** requires the construction of a coherent essay that integrates interpretation of the supplied documents with a demonstrated knowledge of the historical period in question. Higher scores are earned with essays that successfully incorporate primary evidence from the documents with traditional historical themes and maxims. 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.

Simple sequence for writing a DBQ essay:

1. Read the question and identify the historical period being discussed.
2. Brainstorm a list of relevant issues, historical terms, names, or events that are significant to that period of history. When complete, this list should be examined for logical division into sub-topics.
3. Read the supplied documents. In the margin of the documents, make notes that add to or embellish your brainstorm list.
4. First Paragraph:
  - a. Write one clear sentence that states a thesis, what the essay will prove.
  - b. Specify three or four sub-topics to the thesis. (logical segments or divisions of the overall thesis).
  - c. You may elaborate on each of these sub-topics with simple defining sentences.
5. Second Paragraph:
  - a. Begin with a sentence that 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. Be sure you use and cite the documents properly.
  - d. Write a concluding sentence that relates the paragraph's topic back to the thesis.
  - e. Write a transitional sentence introducing the next topic.
6. 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. Accurate student-supplied information will garner points, even without support from the documents; any use of the primary documents not supported with outside information will not garner points and should be avoided.
7. A conclusion is not necessary, but it 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.
8. DBQ Documents check site <http://www.perno.com/apush/dbqdocs.htm>  
and <http://www.perno.com/apush/docs.htm>

## **Writing the DBQ: A Seven-Step Process**

**Step 1: Read the question, making sure you understand all parts of the question.**

**Step 2: Construct a preliminary thesis statement. The thesis statement should be a single sentence that answers the question.**

**Step 3: Create a “Yes / But” chart that will be used to test your thesis.**

**Step 4: Brainstorm or “cluster” everything you know about the topic.**

**Step 5: Read and analyze all documents using APPARTS. Circle information that catches your attention. Jot down outside information. Fill in the “Yes / But” chart.**

**Step 6: Put everything together. Make final adjustments to your thesis. Select information to defend your thesis. Acknowledge and prepare to destroy counterarguments.**

**Step 7: Write the Essay. The DBQ should take 60 minutes to answer. Spend 15-20 minutes on the first six steps. Writing the essay should then take 40-45 minutes.**

# APPARTS

## Author

Who created the document?

Does the author have a viewpoint that affects the meaning of the document?

## Place and Time

Where and when was the document created?

Do the place and time affect the meaning of the document?

## Prior Knowledge

What do you know beyond the information provided in the document?

## Audience

For whom was the document created?

Does the intended audience affect the document's reliability?

## Reason

Why was the document produced at the time it was produced?

## The Main Idea

What is the document about?

What point is the document trying to convey?

## Significance

So what? How does the document relate to the topic you are studying?

Why is the document important?

**Annotated Rubric for Evaluating  
DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS  
(2013-2014)**

**8 – 9 (High)**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Well-developed thesis that addresses the question (*support of thesis is overwhelmingly persuasive / “well-developed” is determine after reading the entire essay*)
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Considerable specific and relevant outside information to support the thesis (*information from documents and outside sources is balanced*)
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Effective analysis of a substantial number of documents (*half plus one*)
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ May contain minor factual errors that do not detract from the overall quality of the essay
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Well-written and clearly organized

**5 – 7 (Medium)**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Acceptable thesis (*answers the question / passes the “show me” test*)
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Some specific and relevant outside information to support the thesis
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Effective analysis of some of the documents and outside information (*explains the significance of the information / demonstrates an ability to make inferences / addresses and refutes counterarguments*)
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Acceptable writing and organization
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ May contain factual errors that do not seriously detract from the quality of the essay

**2 – 4 (Low)**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Thesis is nonexistent, confused, or unfocused
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Little specific or relevant outside information
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Little or no analysis of the documents
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Problems in writing and organization that detract from the quality of the essay
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Contains major factual errors

**0 – 1**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Incompetent or inappropriate response to the question
- \_\_\_\_\_ Little or no factual information; substantial factual errors

**U**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Completely off topic; the paper is blank or not turned in