

Strategies for Teaching the U.S. History DBQ

What is a Document-Based Question?

A Document-Based Question (DBQ) requires students to write an essay in which the defense of the thesis comes primarily from an analysis of original source documents.

How Can a Teacher Best Prepare Students to Answer a Document-Based Question?

- 1. Help students feel comfortable with the process of writing.**
 - a. Require students to write often.
 - b. Use short writing assignments to isolate problems and develop one skill at a time.

- 2. Help students feel comfortable with the process of analyzing historical documents.**
 - a. Ask students to analyze charts, graphs, diaries, paintings, photographs, speeches, political cartoons, etc.
 - b. Teach students to analyze documents using the acronym **APPARTS**.

APPARTS

Author (Point of View)

Who created the document?

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

Place and Time (Context)

Where and when was the document created?

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

Prior Knowledge (Outside Information)

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 (Purpose)

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?

Writing the DBQ: A Six-Step Process

Step 1: Read the question, making sure you understand all parts of the question and can break it down into its component parts and categories.

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 for each category or topic of the question. Use the Yes / But chart to test your thesis against each of the categories or topics.

Step 4: Read and analyze all documents using APPARTS. Circle information that catches your attention. Jot down outside information. Fill in the “Yes / But” chart.

Step 5: Put everything together. Make final adjustments to your thesis. Select information to defend your thesis. Acknowledge and prepare to destroy counterarguments.

Step 6: Write the Essay. The DBQ should take 60 minutes to answer. Spend 15-20 minutes on the first five steps. Writing the essay should then take 40-45 minutes.

DBQ Rubric

Maximum Possible Points: 7

A. THESIS (Skills Assessed: Argumentation plus the Targeted Skill)

_____ 0 POINTS

_____ 1 POINT

- States a thesis that directly addresses all parts of the question. The thesis must do more than restate the question.

B. ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL EVIDENCE AND SUPPORT OF ARGUMENT (Skills assessed: Use of Evidence, Argumentation, + targeted skill)

_____ 0 POINTS

_____ 1 POINT

- Offers plausible analysis of the content of a majority of the documents, explicitly using this analysis to support the stated thesis or a relevant argument.

_____ 2 POINTS

- Offers plausible analysis of the content of a majority of the documents, explicitly using this analysis to support the stated thesis or a relevant argument.
- Contains at least one of the following for the majority of the documents:
 - intended audience
 - purpose
 - historical context
 - the author's point of view

_____ 3 POINTS

- Offers plausible analysis of the content of all or all but one of the documents, explicitly using this analysis to support the stated thesis or a relevant argument.
- Contains at least one of the following for all or all but one of the documents.
 - intended audience
 - purpose
 - historical context
 - the author's point of view

_____ AND / OR (1 POINT)

- Offers plausible analysis of historical examples beyond/outside the documents to support the stated thesis or a relevant argument

C. CONTEXTUALIZATION (Skill Assessed: Contextualization)

_____ 0 POINTS

_____ 1 POINT

- Accurately and explicitly connects historical phenomena relevant to the argument to broader historical events and/or processes.

D. SYNTHESIS (Skill Assessed: Synthesis)

_____ 0 POINTS

_____ 1 POINT (Accomplishes at least ONE of the following.)

- Appropriately extends or modifies the stated thesis or argument.
- Recognizes and effectively accounts for disparate, sometimes contradictory evidence from primary sources and/or secondary works in crafting a coherent argument.
- Appropriately connects the topic of the question to other historical periods, geographical areas, contexts or circumstances.

Tips for Writing the DBQ

1. Students should use the introductory paragraph to define terms, provide historical background, define the time period, and state points of validation. In most cases, students should not write an introduction that is too long; introductory information should be kept to a minimum.
2. Students should refer to documents within the text of their essay (e.g., “According to the Census Report of 1890 ...” or “As evident in John Kennedy’s Address to Congress in 1961 ...”). Student might also refer to documents in parentheses using the letter of the document (e.g., “Doc A”).
3. Simply restating what a document is about is not enough. Students should make sure they analyze documents and make inferences from the documents. (“Analysis” of a document is evident when a student explains the significance of the document, makes an inference from the document, or presents a counterargument to the main idea of the document.)
4. Students should avoid writing a “laundry-list” explanation of each document.
5. Students should avoid quoting long passages from the documents.
6. Outside information earns an extra point on the AP U.S. History DBQ. Students can use specific names, terms, and events (i.e., proper nouns) as outside information. Making an inference from a document can also count as outside information.