Writing the Free Response Essays 2012

Document Based Question Success Tips

The DBQ is designed to see if a student can analyze historical evidence to create a logical hypothesis and argument. Students recognize similarities in the documents by organizing them into groups, understand that documents have an author and purpose, and recognize that the evidence historians have to work with is always incomplete (or that the discovery of a new source might change the interpretation of the evidence). Perhaps the most difficult task for a student is to quickly read through and understand the documents and then attempt to address all parts of the prompt in formulating a working hypothesis or thesis. Students will find that knowledge of APWH Themes will help them in the DBQ. No specific knowledge of a particular Key Concept is required, but may be brought in for additional analysis.

DBQ Thesis
A good thesis statement helps students write the rest of the essay. While many good approaches are possible, often a simple formula helps younger or less confident writers remember all the bases they need to cover. Essentially, the thesis has two parts: an acknowledgment that the student understands and is responding to the parameters set by the prompt and the student’s own argument:

- Parameters of prompt
  - place, time, regions or societies, theme
  - task from prompt such as compare, analyze, or examine change over time
- Student’s opinion or hypothesis
  - + how, why, or to what extent (value added),
  - + in what ways (a preview of the groups)

For example, the 2008 prompt was: “Based on the following documents, analyze factors that shaped the modern Olympic movement from 1892 to 2002.”

The parameters include the modern Olympic movement and the years, while the task is to analyze the factors that shaped the movement. [Note: This DBQ is a good teaching DBQ for many reasons, but first of all because many students reversed the cause-effect relationship from the prompt and discussed the impact of the Olympics on women’s rights or nationalism instead of what the prompt required. Students MUST read and understand the prompt.]

DBQ Thesis example: “The modern Olympics (1892-2002) [parameters of prompt] have changed drastically from Coubertin’s original ideal of gentlemanly competition between athletes [value added] because of [analysis] the growing influence of national rivalries on the competitors [1st group], the rise of feminism [2nd group], and the intrusion of greed [3rd group].”

Point of View
Another task of historians that students must demonstrate in the DBQ is an understanding that all sources reflect the person, purpose, time, and place that shaped them. To help students understand point of view, it is useful to use SOAPStone and APPARTS when reading and analyzing primary source documents throughout the year.
Students learn to realize that documents reflect the points of view of the authors (shaped by such things as gender, nationality or ethnicity, occupation, class, religion, time and location), or that documents are of different types (such as legal codes, official government decrees, scholarly essays, or private journals) and are created for particular purposes or audiences (sharing ideas with other scholars, propaganda to convince the populace, official government decrees, etc.) . Students should also learn to question the reliability or validity of a source by looking at the author, purpose, and intended audience or by comparing it to other sources or their knowledge of world history. Point of View on the AP exam usually involves the student's discussion of either the author or the type of source.

*Point of View—Author*

- Long time APWH teacher Ane Lintvedt asks students to consider “Why would this person feel or think this way at this time, in this place?” Older or more sophisticated students may also look into the tone the author uses to try to understand his/her perspective.

  Example: “Because she was a Buddhist, Trang hated to eat meat. Her attitude can be seen in her use of ‘disgusting’ to describe the ‘happy’ meal.”

*Point of View—Document Type*

- What is the type of document?
- For what purpose was it created?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the validity or reliability of the document?

Examples: “Since this excerpt is from Pepys diary and was not intended for anyone else’s eyes, one can assume that it reflects his real opinion.”

  “Because this chart is from the WHO, which studies health factors around the world, we can assume that it is an accurate representation of infant mortality rates in South America.”

*DBQ Additional Document*

Historians never have all of the evidence: we are limited by those few sources we have and must be ready to change our interpretation of the evidence if more sources are discovered. In the DBQ, students are asked to recognize the limitations of the evidence at hand and to explain how a different type of source might alter their interpretation. Logical places in the essay for a student to discuss the additional document are immediately following the introduction (not as part of the thesis), in the conclusion, or in each group of documents. Often the student looks for “whose voice is missing” from the sources.

The good response:
- Must be specific (can’t merely say “I’d like to hear from a peasant woman”);
- Cannot overlap an existing source in the DBQ;
- Must explain how this document might change or expand the interpretation of the available evidence and the prompt.
Additional Document Example: “I’d be interested to see if the point of view of an Olympic athlete from a non-aligned nation shared the Cold War rivalry of the Soviet and American athletes.”

**Change and Continuity over Time Success Tips**

The Change and Continuity over Time (CCOT) essay is designed to test the student’s awareness of cause-effect relationships and how global processes or events might impact a local region or culture. CCOT essays ask the student to explain the local impact of the forces for change—as well as what remains constant. The essay usually invites a student to focus on one or more of the APWH Key Concepts and Themes in a particular region of the world. A good essay for the CCOT must:

- restate the parameters of the prompt (the time period and location(s) in the thesis and stay within that time period for supporting material in the essay;
- answer all parts of the question;
- deal with both change and continuity;
- use specific, relevant facts to support ideas (the facts must be from the time period stated in the prompt);
- analyze the reasons for specific changes/continuities (cause-effect analysis, not just a list), especially how global processes or forces impact a particular region or culture;
- use transitional words to clearly indicate change or continuity and cause-effect.

The CCOT thesis may be one or more sentences in the introduction (or in the conclusion) of the essay. Usually options are provided in the prompt and students must clearly identify which region/state/empire they are discussing. Just as with the DBQ, the thesis statement for the CCOT will not be used to score any other points, so students must be certain to deal with all facets of the essay in the body of the essay as well as addressing them in the thesis. For example, mentioning a global process or pattern in the thesis alone will not earn that point and the thesis point; the student must discuss the process or pattern in the body of the essay. Since students must address both changes and continuities, it sometimes helps to refer to “the rule of three:” if a student addresses two changes, they must also address at least one continuity (and vice versa). Of course, the student may discuss four or five changes and continuities, but a good rule of thumb is that a response that covers fewer than three will not adequately deal with the topic.

**CCOT Thesis:** “During the period from ___ to ____ [must include the exact time period from prompt] in _______ [location chosen from prompt], ______ changed little because of _____ [reason why remained same], but _______ [reason why changed] led to _____ changes.”

**CCOT Thesis Example:** “While social and gender roles remained relatively unchanged in 19th century China because of enduring Confucian values, the intrusion of foreign powers led to increasing problems for existing economic and political structures, and producing widespread calls for reform or revolution.”
Comparison Essay Success Tips

The Comparison and Contrast Essay (C/C) is designed to test the student’s ability to recognize that cultures in different places and/or times may be affected by common phenomena and will react in similar or different ways based on the special circumstances of those cultures. The essay should be organized by theme or specific similarity/difference, not by listing everything the students knows about the first country or culture and then everything about the second country or culture (sometimes called a geographical dump). Also, just as in the CCOT, the comparative question draws directly from the AP Key Concepts and Themes. A good comparative essay must:

- address both similarities and differences;
- have thesis that identifies the major similarity and difference;
- directly compare and contrast in the body of the essay—several times;
- use specific supporting facts or examples for each similarity or difference appropriate for the time and places of the prompt;
- analyze the reasons for the similarities and differences discussed;
- show the action of global processes or events on the specific region/culture being discussed (agricultural revolution, Industrial Revolution, plague, Cold War, etc.)
- use transitional words to clearly show similarities/differences.

Just as for the DBQ and CCOT, the student’s response must take account of the parameters of the prompt and address all parts of the question, including recognizing both similarities and differences.

C/C Thesis Template: “During _____ [time period from prompt], _____ and _____ [countries, regions, or cultures from prompt] responded to __________ [world process] similarly in ________, while there were differences in _________.

C/C Thesis Example: “Anti-colonialism and independence movements [common phenomenon or world process] were widespread during the decades following World War II. Countries in both sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia obtained independence from European powers but there were key differences in the ways the new states resolved political and economic challenges.”

C/C Thesis Example: “During the period from 1350 to 1650, the Black Death [common phenomenon or world process] repeatedly swept through Afro-Eurasia. While both the Middle East and Eastern Europe suffered great loss of life from the plague, the political and socio-economic impact was far greater in Europe than in the Middle East.”
Signal or Transitional Words to use in AP Essays

Examples or supporting detail:
  For example
  Including
  For instance
  Such as
  “Many men viewed women’s work as confined to the home. For example, John Jones (doc.4), a union worker from Manchester…”

Comparison:
  Like, likewise
  Similarly
  Also
  Resembling
  In addition to
  Just as
  Not only… also
  Both/neither
  “The Mughals imported military technology from the West. Similarly, the Ottomans also imported much of their military technology from France and Italy.”

Contrast:
  But
  Although
  On the other hand
  Instead of
  However,
  On the contrary
  While
  Unlike
  “While many countries in Latin America continued to export cash crops to Europe, Japan, on the other hand, chose to build their own industrial base by leap-frogging developmental stages of industrialization.”

Analysis/Cause-effect:
  Because
  Since
  Consequently
  Therefore
  So
  As a result
  “Germany had to pay high reparations following WWI because the Allies wanted compensation for their lost infrastructure and the lives of their soldiers and civilian populations.”