

## Writing a Document Based Question (DBQ)

Review the process for writing a DBQ. Pay particular attention to how to document other people's ideas. Follow the steps below in writing the DBQ. See the do's and don'ts.

### Step 1

Carefully read the question. Know exactly what the question asks you to do:

- **underline the verb in the question:** evaluate, assess, analyze, establish the validity (truth), etc.
- **look carefully at any conjunction in the question:** i.e. does the question ask you to contrast AND compare, or does the question ask you to contrast OR compare.

### Step 2

Quickly **make a list of everything**--the people, documents, issues, topics, battles, social changes, Supreme Court cases, etc.--**that you feel is relevant** to the question.

### Step 3

**Read all of the documents** looking specifically for things you can use. Underline everything relevant. You want to use all of the documents if possible. As a rule, the more you use, the better the essay. Look for "bias", change over time, etc.

### Step 4

Write your introductory paragraph and do it in the following pattern [NOTE: Most students should write the thesis sentence *first*, then build the paragraph backwards from the thesis toward the more general statements.]:

- Write **two sentences that address the topic of the question in a general way**. Do NOT restate the question as it was worded!
- Write **an organizational statement** in which you mention the two or three issues or aspects of the topic about which you are going to write (your argument categories).
- Write **a clear thesis sentence** that expresses your response to the question. The best place for your thesis is at the end of the introductory paragraph. [Tip: Try beginning the thesis sentence with the word "although." This may help you frame a thesis sentence that addresses the "complexity" of the question.]

### Step 5

Begin the first body paragraph with a topic sentence about the **FIRST** thing mentioned in your organizational statement. Mention lots of specific, relevant information to support your thinking. The more information, the more accurate it is, the more you interpret it, the better the essay will score. The topic sentence of the next body paragraph should be the **SECOND** thing mentioned in your organizational statement.

## Step 6

Write a conclusion paragraph.

- Look back at your introductory paragraph. This paragraph should express the same things, but in a more defined way. Your thesis should now be your conclusion, the main point to which you have written throughout the essay.

### DBQ Do's & Don'ts

<b><i>Do the following things with a DBQ</i></b>	<b><i>Don't do the following things</i></b>
Read carefully and make sure you understand the question being asked.	Respond to a question that isn't asked.
Quickly jot down the major themes/events/people you associate with this topic or question.	Use "I" statements such as "I think that Document A portrays..."
Read over the documents, noting the year and author/source of each one. If the document seems to support or oppose a possible perspective or opinion on the question, note that in the margin.	Summarize the documents. The reader knows the content of the documents and is interested in how you view the document relating to the question.
Write out a preliminary thesis and outline of your major points.	Quote long passages from the documents. Use an ellipsis "..." if you need to quote.
As you begin to write, remember to weave the documents into your answer, always focusing on the thesis.	Try to impress the reader with big words that are used incorrectly. This has the opposite effect of what is intended.
Include your knowledge of the era along with your analysis of the documents.	Spend so much time reading and underlining the documents that you have to rush your writing.
Be sure to include your own analysis/perspective on the question.	Begin writing your answer until you have a good sense of your thesis and how you want to approach the question.
If you can knowledgeably quote or refer to an historian who has a perspective on this question, include his or her perspective.	Write "I ran out of time" on the bottom of your essay. You had as much time as every test-taker in America.
Keep an eye on the clock so that you can have time to re-read your essay for any obvious technical errors.	
Be as specific as possible when you include historical information.	
Be assertive and forceful in making your points.	