

DBQ ESSAY WRITING FORMAT

General Rules

1. Essays should consist of at least six paragraphs (1 intro, 4 body, 1 conclusion)
2. Length is typically two typed (double-spaced) or three handwritten pages

Steps in Writing for a Document Based Essay Question (DBQ)

The purpose of the DBQ is to show students that everything is open to questioning. In other words, all documents or quotes from a time period are not necessarily fact, but they are points of view offered up for historical analysis by the reader. Every time you read a document you should question why it is being said and why the person is saying what they are saying. The DBQ allows students to demonstrate their ability to use evidence found in documents to formulate and support a response to a question. Students are not expected to have prior knowledge of the topic and outside information is not required. If students choose to include outside information in their response, it should be appropriate and generally accurate. After reading the background for the question, students are expected to understand the proper time frame and historical context. Students should read and analyze the documents individually and then plan and construct an appropriate response to the essay question based upon their interpretation of the documentary evidence as a whole. Though your interpretation and analysis of the documents should show complexity, your DBQ essay is not expected to have the complexity of a Harvard historian's analysis or interpretation. Simply try to analyze and interpret the documents. What is desired is a unified essay which integrates analysis of documents with treatment of the topic.

Analyze the Question

1. Without a clear understanding of the question and what it is asking you to do, you cannot write an adequate answer.
2. Understand key terms within the question
 - Analyze* – determine their component parts; examine their nature and relationship
 - Assess/Evaluate* – judge the value or character of something; appraise; evaluate the positive points and the negative ones; give an opinion regarding the value of; discuss the advantages and disadvantages of
 - Compare* – examine for the purpose of noting similarities and differences.
 - Contrast* – examine in order to show dissimilarities or points of difference.
 - Describe* – give an account of; tell about; give a word picture of.
 - Discuss* – talk over; write about; consider or examine by argument or from various points of view; debate; present the different sides of the topic.
 - Explain* – make clear or plain; make clear the causes or reasons for; make known in detail; tell the meaning of.
3. All DBQs should address either attitudes and reactions or political, economic, and social (class) aspects within the question (you will know what to address because those specific words will be in the question).
4. Pay attention to the chronology of the documents. Look for change over time (or for LACK of change over time). Analyze it.

Develop a Thesis

1. Thesis – your opinion on the given topic
2. Thesis must be stated in your opening paragraph. The reader must immediately know your position on the question before reading the rest of your essay. For full credit on your essays you must clearly state your position.

Analyze and Group the Documents

1. Read through the documents and see how they relate to the question
2. Notice who is writing or saying it and what perspective they are taking – are they taking a position?
3. Group the people by either what they are saying, believe in, or what social class they belong to (rich upper class, middle class, poor lower class, or something along those lines). Doing this step will allow you to establish the all-important “point of view” in your essay. While writing this essay you **must** write about what different people were thinking during the time. You should strive for at least FOUR points of view.
4. Notice how many documents are given, in order to pass this essay you must use more than half of the documents given. You do not have to use all of the documents, but try to use the majority of them.
5. Treat charts, graphs, maps, or pictures very seriously. They provide good information and are included for a purpose. Discuss their meaning and incorporate in your essay.
6. Some documents will be more important than the others as they relate to the question more significantly.
7. On scratch paper write down a table of some kind (like the example given) and categorize each document. This will make it easier when writing your essay.

Writing the Introductory Paragraph

1. Start with a sentence that grabs the reader's attention - can be from historical background
2. State your thesis
3. Explain what you are going to talk about (lead your reader through your essay)
4. DO NOT explain the historical background – the graders already know the background (THEY GAVE IT TO YOU)

Writing the Body Paragraphs

1. It is important that you support your thesis while referencing the documents
2. When referencing the documents make sure to analyze what the document or person is saying and, if possible, why they are saying what they are saying (explain their background)
3. When using the documents do not quote directly – remember you are only referencing them, like in a term paper.
4. If you decide to quote one of the documents directly do it in a meaningful way. This usually means quote sparingly (quote only part of the document, and only do this method with one or two documents)
5. DO NOT just list the documents as they are presented in the DBQ. You **must** have some kind of analysis involved with them.
6. When referencing documents, always name the person and what they are in your sentence. At the end of each sentence write the document number in parentheses in abbreviated form. e.g. Peter Kropotkin, an anarchist, mocked the idea of “order” by illuminating the disease-ridden peasants, stolen peasant’s crops, & uncultivated land (doc 4).
7. Facts should be organized in logical sequence
8. Each set of facts should be in a separate paragraph
9. Refute arguments contrary to your thesis if you can

Writing the Conclusion

1. The conclusion should bring the reader back to your thesis and the question
2. Put in the historical significance of the event that the question asks about – how did this event impact history? Doing this will impress the person that is grading your essay, it will show that you know your stuff.

If you decide to write a DBQ without referencing any documents or including points of view, the best grade that you can hope for is 1/3 of the total points. You must include the majority of the documents in order for your essay to be considered a strong essay.

Main tip for writing any essay – Before you start writing the essay, **always** write a *brief* outline on scratch paper that will allow you to organize your thoughts completely. If you do this it will allow for a neatly organized, well thought out essay. Additionally, it will lead to much less stress trying to remember whether or not you are forgetting something while you are writing.