

How to Write a DBQ Essay

This packet will be your guide to writing successful DBQ essays for social studies. Keep this in your binder ALL YEAR (it will also probably be helpful in 8th grade).

Name: _____

Class Period: _____

What is a DBQ?

DBQ stands for Document Based Question. It is a type of essay that provides you with documents to serve as sources of information for your writing. Each DBQ you take will look very similar. There are certain things that are always given to you:

- Historical Context: This is a paragraph that tells you some background information about the topic of the essay. This will help you write your introduction.
- Task: This is the actual question that you are attempting to answer in the essay. This will help you write your THESIS, or last sentence of your introduction.
- Documents and Scaffolding Questions: There will typically be 5-7 documents that will be used to help you write your essay. Each document will also have 1-3 questions that you must answer before writing the essay. These questions will help get you thinking about how to shape your essay.

Writing a DBQ: A step by step guide

Step 1: Read the Historical Context and write the first sentence of your essay.

This step will let you know what the essay is about and give you ideas for writing your introduction. Let's look at the historical context for this essay together.

Historical Context: Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, different groups of English colonists began settling in North America. These colonies were established for a variety of reasons. Some were attempts to make profit by using the natural resources of a particular geographic region. Others were simply efforts by particular groups of people to build new communities where they could freely practice their religions.

Sometimes, the most difficult sentence to write in an essay is the first one. The historical context will help you do this. From that paragraph, we need to find the **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, and WHERE** of this essay.

WHO-

WHAT-

WHEN-

WHERE-

Now, we need to combine those 4 pieces of information into one "Historical context statement." Give it a try below. Write one sentence that states all 4: Who, what, when, and where.

Historical Context Statement: _____

Remember this sentence, because it will be the first sentence of your essay!

Step 2: Read the task and write your thesis.

This step is one of the most important in writing a DBQ. Your thesis is the last sentence of your introduction, and it is the most important sentence in the entire essay. To write a thesis, you have to know what task you are being asked to complete. Let's look at the task together.

Task: Based on your learning and the documents that follow, write an essay that addresses the following task.

- Discuss at *least two* examples of colonies founded for religious reasons
- Discuss at *least two* examples of colonies founded for economic OR political reasons

Now that you know what you have to do, you are ready to write your **thesis statement**. This is your **1-sentence** answer to the task question. In other words, you need to answer all parts of the question in 1 sentence so that I know basically what you will say in your essay. Give it a try below.

Thesis Statement: _____

Remember this sentence, because it will be the LAST sentence of your introduction! You now have the first and last sentences of your introduction. That, however, is NOT an entire introduction. You still need the sentences that come in the middle and get you from your historical context to your thesis. There is not one correct way to do this, but many. We will come back to this step later.

Step 3: Read the documents and answer the scaffolding questions.

This step will take some time, but it is important because this is where you will get most of your information for the essay. As you read and examine each document, you must do 3 things:

1. Answer the scaffolding question(s)
2. Fill out your outside information box (this can be bullet points, but the information must be something that is NOT in the document but is related)
3. Label each document based on which topic you think it would fit best with. For this essay, it would make sense to put an "R" for religious or an "E" for economic next to each document.

Document 1: The Mayflower Compact was written and signed on November 21, 1620. This was a written plan of self-government for the members of the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts.

Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the [21st] of November, 1620.

Outside Information

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The Pilgrims talk about the “glory of God” and the “advancement of the Christian faith” in this document. How do these statements relate to the reason for establishing the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts?

What does the Mayflower Compact mean when it refers to meeting for “the general good of the colony?”

Document 2: The following is from William Penn’s *Declaration of Rights* for citizens of the Pennsylvania Colony.

All men have a natural and indefeasible[not removable] right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates[beliefs] of their own consciences; no man can of right be compelled to attend, erect [build], or support any place of worship, or to maintain any ministry against his consent; no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience, and no preference shall ever be given by law to any religious establishment or modes of worship.

-William Penn

Outside Information

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What policy about religious practice is William Penn establishing for the Pennsylvania Colony?

Document 3: The Virginia Colony, founded in 1607, attempted to make profit for the Virginia Company. Over time, these profits began to come primarily from the sale of tobacco.

English Tobacco Imports from America	
Year	Weight in Millions of Pounds
1620	0.1
1630	0.5
1672	17.6
1682	21.4
1688	28.4
1708	30.0
1717	32.0
1722	35.0
1730	41.0
1740	41.0
1745	55.0
1755	64.0
1760	85.0
1775	102.0

Outside Information
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How did the Virginia Company make most of its money?

What changes in the number of slaves living in Virginia might have happened from 1620 to 1775?

Document 4: Lord Baltimore established the colony of Maryland as a safe place for English Catholics. Below is the Act of Toleration established in Maryland.

...no person or persons...professing to believe in Jesus Christ, shall from henceforth be any ways troubled, molested or discountenanced[disturbed] for or in respect of his or her religion nor in the free exercise thereof within this Province.
—Maryland Toleration Act, 1649

Outside Information
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In Maryland, which groups are given religious freedom? Which groups are not?

Document 5: The map of the Southern Colonies shows the farm products that were produced by each colony.



Outside Information

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Which natural resource is grown in Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, but not Virginia or Maryland?

Which natural resource is grown in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, but not in South Carolina or Georgia?

Document 6: The following is an excerpt from an article about James Oglethorpe on ABC-CLIO

In 1728... a friend of his was sent to London's Fleet Prison for failure to pay his bills, a common fate for English debtors. The condition of the prison was very poor, and the friend contracted smallpox and died. Oglethorpe was deeply upset by this, and he resolved to do something about it. He began a campaign in Parliament to improve prison conditions and to free men who only owed small sums. To give debtors a way to start new lives, Oglethorpe decided to start a colony for them in America...He was able to obtain a charter in 1732 from King George II for a tract of land between the Altamaha and Savannah Rivers. The new colony, Georgia, was named after the king.

Outside Information

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What type of people was Oglethorpe trying to help with the creation of the Georgia Colony?

Based on the context in which it is used, what is a *debtor*?

Step 4: Outline your essay

Before you can begin writing your essay, you should always create an outline. You do not need to follow the format of the outline below, but you should have an outline containing all of the same parts. In your body paragraphs, you should use 4 out of the 6 documents total. That would equal out to 2 documents for each of the body paragraphs (or 1 per topic).

Intro

Historical Context Sentence:

Thesis:

Body Paragraph 1 Topic: _____
Document #s:

Outside Info:

Body Paragraph 2 Topic: _____
Document #s:

Outside Info:

Conclusion

Restated Thesis:

Step 5: Write the essay

Introductions

Start by writing your historical context sentence. This is the first sentence of your introduction. Now, you need 2-3 sentences to get to your thesis. A good idea is to set up the examples that you plan to talk about in your essay. These should be in your outline, so you don't have to think them up from scratch. For this essay, it might be good to have one sentence setting up your religious colonies and another sentence setting up the colonies established for other reasons.

The last sentence of your introduction should be your thesis. Remember, your thesis is ALWAYS only **1-SENTENCE**. If your thesis is more than one sentence, then it is wrong! It should answer all parts of the task question within that one sentence.

Body Paragraphs

You should have at least one body paragraph for each part of the task question. For this essay, you will probably either have 2 body paragraphs (one for religious and one for economic/political) or 4 paragraphs (1 for each document). Your body paragraphs will consist mostly of information from the documents. However, you will also need outside information (that is why we put it on the outline).

Each body paragraph should start with a topic sentence. Think of a topic sentence as half of your thesis. Instead of addressing all aspects of the task, your topic sentence addresses one aspect of the task. In this essay, that would mean that one paragraph is set up as about religious colonies and the other is about the economic and political colonies.

After your topic sentence you will get into the substance of your essay. I recommend using what I like to call the "rule of 4s." The rule of 4s means that you should have 4 sentences any time that you use a document and 4 sentences when you bring in an example of outside information. This works out to 4 sentences about a document, 4 sentences about a second document, and 4 sentences of outside information. The outside information can be done in two ways. It can be 4 sentences paired up with the discussion of one of the document topics OR it can be a stand alone topic that was not in a document.

You must also remember to use transition sentences when changing topics. This means writing a sentence like: "Another colony that was formed for economic reasons was..." Any time you change topics, ALWAYS use a transition sentence. You should also be sure to not end abruptly. Have a sentence at the end to wrap-up the big topic of the whole paragraph.

Your body paragraph will be structured something like this:

- Topic sentence
- 4 sentences of document information
- Transition sentence
- 4 sentences of document information
- Transition sentence
- 4 sentences of outside information
- A sentence to wrap-up the paragraph

Conclusions

Conclusions should be easy because you don't have to say anything new. Basically you start by just restating your thesis in different words. Next, summarize each of the topics you discussed. A good way to do this is to write one sentence for each document that you used. Finally, wrap-up the entire essay with one good concluding sentence. Make sure your last sentence isn't cheesy. Read it to yourself... if it sounds lame, it probably is lame.

Peer Editing Directions

Directions: With a partner, read over each others' essays on the computer. As you read, look for several things:

1. Using the highlight function, highlight the **THESIS STATEMENT** in **GREEN**.
2. In the body paragraphs, highlight the **TOPIC SENTENCES** in **GREEN**.
3. In the body paragraphs, highlight any information that comes specifically from any of the **DOCUMENTS** in **RED**
4. In the body paragraphs, highlight any **OUTSIDE INFORMATION** in **YELLOW**
5. In the conclusion, underline the **RESTATED THESIS STATEMENT** in **GREEN**.
6. In the conclusion, highlight the **SUMMARY** of each document or argument in **RED**.

Using the comment function under the "Review" tab, provide comments, suggestions, or feedback throughout the essay.

Social Studies 7/8 Rubric

Score	Areas to Improve
___/5	Introduction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear thesis • No question included • Appropriate length – 3-5 sentences
___/20	Document Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who, what, where, why, when • Consistent use of document support – quotes, details • Includes Analysis of documents • Supports thesis more than describes documents • Includes at least 1/2 documents + 1 • Appropriate length – 8-10 sentences
___/10	Organization/Mechanics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes transitions (Another reason...) • Clear topic sentences • Logically organized to answer question • Demonstrates conventions of language (spelling, grammar, language, “I” voice - no I, you, us, our, me or we) • Avoids use of slang language.
___/10	Outside Information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes 2 examples of outside information • Outside information is richly supportive • 3-5 sentences per example • Outside information is relevant to topic and accurate
___/5	Conclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion re-states thesis with no new information • Summarizes main ideas • Uses proper writing mechanics (Leave out - This essay was about, As you can see, In conclusion, That makes America the..., No Cheese Please!!) • Appropriate length – 3-5 sentences
___/5	Scaffolding Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers all questions • Answers written in complete sentences • Re-state questions
___/5	Outline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete-includes doc #s and outside information • Demonstrates clear plan for writing essays

Total: ___/60