

Document Based Question Skill Review

Your AP exam will be a DBQ. That's it... a DBQ. You will have an essay prompt with FIVE documents. Successfully analyzing documents will be one of the main KEYS to your acing this test. This is NOT something you can search your notes for. You will need to confidently analyze documents and make connections to the topic of your prompt ON YOUR OWN.

So... **every opportunity you have to practice these skills... EMBRACE them!**

Fight Fiercely!

You CAN ace the test if you prepare and develop that confidence!

I believe in you! 😊

Planning Your DBQ Essay in 5 Strategic Steps -10 minutes

- 1. Read the prompt not once, not twice, but thrice!** Make sure you understand the entire prompt, and make sure you identify the big three skill. Make note of any qualifier and categories. (The big three are: causation, comparison, and CCOT)
- 2. Read and analyze the documents.**
As you do this,
 - a. Make inferences** --identify the context/topic/event-- and **determine how the document will be used as a piece of evidence to defend an argument.** If the prompt provides categories, use them when grouping your documents. Otherwise simply determine if the document can be used to defend your X or your Y. You'll use these notes to help you go after the Use of Documents point.
 - b. HIPP** each (or at least 2 of them). *You'll use these to make sure you get the document sourcing point!*
 - c.** When you notice one document **corroborating or contradicting** another, make note of it. You'll use this to go after the argumentation (unicorn) point.
- 3.** When you finish analyzing the documents, brainstorm **one to three pieces of evidence NOT given to you in the documents and NOT inferred from a document. You need at least two for the body paragraphs.** *How many pieces you have will help you determine which points to target!*
- 4. Which points are you going to target?** *Be strategic!* You don't need all the points to earn a 5 on the exam! Choose at least five and go for them.
- 5. Write your essay!**

Let's walk through a DBQ.

Step 1 – Developing your Argument

Reviewing the skill:

Creating Your Argument...The Thesis Statement – What are you defending?

Your thesis **your** answer or stand on a question. It is **more than just restating the prompt.** It should clearly communicate **your answer/stand** and what you will be expounding upon in your body paragraphs. Your thesis may only be one sentence, but it is okay if it is more than one sentence. Make sure your thesis is in your FIRST paragraph. (The rubric says it can also be in your last paragraph, but I highly recommend you begin with your argument.)

Use your thesis formula to develop a complex thesis: Although X..., Y because AB...

'X' represents the strongest point against your argument. We call this the counter-argument. It can also be a alternate viewpoint. This X needs to be explained (with evidence) in your introduction.

'Y' represents the position you will be taking – in other words, your stand on the prompt. Your Y must be clear and ATRP... *address the full prompt!*

'A, B' represents the two strongest points for your argument. We call these your organization categories. It is okay to only have one category here; however, if the prompt gives you categories make sure to include every single one.

Sample Prompt and Thesis:

Explain how political debates on how to interpret the Constitution impacted American politics from 1789-1815.

Although political debates on how to interpret the Constitution impacted American politics from 1789-1815 by causing division among politicians regarding the First Bank of the United States, the debates impacted politics to a greater extent because they resulted in the first two party system.

Step 2: Contextualization

Your contextualization is your opportunity to to connect historical events related to your topic to other events or eras. Try to think about the significance of the topic or development to U.S. history. A basic strategy is:

- a. Identify the main topic of the essay and define it. This is local context (who, what, when, where, etc.)
- b. Identify the big picture or broad context... why is this event historically significant? Try to connect to another era, because this will prevent you from defending your thesis in your contextualization. It is very important that your contextualization does NOT defend your argument. You are simply setting the scene for your essay by showing you understand the significance of the question.
- c. Explain how your contextualization relates to the topic of the essay.

TIPS:

--Do NOT describe documents or use documents in your contextualization.

--Ask yourself, "Why are they asking me this question?" "How can I show the reader that I understand why they chose this topic?"

--"What is going on in this era? What led up to this era/topic?" "How is development relevant to another era?"

--LC – Local Context = who, what, where, when

--BC – Broad Context = Big Picture (this is the most important part of your contextualization)

--Try to talk using the lingo of a skill not being tested by the prompt. If it is a causation prompt, talk about similarities and differences, for example. This is not required, just a way to help you avoid defending your thesis.

--Include at least **one piece of specific evidence**, and make sure to NOT use that piece of evidence again. (What happens in contextualization, stays in contextualization!)

--Shoot for at least 4 sentences... many students fail to get this point, because they do not thoroughly explain!

--Don't underestimate the value of the **linkage statement**. End your contextualization with "This relates to the topic of.... Because..."

Sample Prompt and Contextualization:

Explain how political debates on how to interpret the Constitution impacted American politics from 1789-1815.

The Constitution was written and ratified in the 1780s as a replacement for the Articles of Confederation. The AOC was the rule of law establishing a weak central government and strong state governments. The weak government was unable to address the needs of the young nation, because it prevented a national army among other things. This relates to the topic of the Constitution, because as the new government was much stronger than it was under the AOC, many people feared the government would gain too much power thus resulting in many political debates on how to interpret it.

Step 3 – Using the documents to defend your argument

How to Reference the Documents in the DBQ Body Paragraphs

Most students fail to earn the document analysis points on the DBQ because they simply string together facts they pull from documents which results in story-telling. Never lose sight of your purpose: defending an argument/thesis!

Using documents as evidence requires showing understanding of the content and then applying that understanding to the defense of your argument. Ask yourself questions such as, “How does this document address my prompt?” and “What is this document saying?”

TIPS

DO NOT quote the documents. Go Beyond the Obvious! GBO!

It is okay to have separate paragraph for each document, or you may group them.

You cannot group them in order to generalize any one step, however.

If you do group them, add a couple of sentences explaining how they corroborate or contradict each other. *This will help you get the complex analysis point.*

Step 1: Describe the document... GO BEYOND THE OBVIOUS AND DON'T QUOTE. You can say “Document 1...”

or use the name of the document. Then... explain how it relates to the main topic of your essay, Do this for every document, unless you are not targeting the use of six documents point.

“Document #__ shows/explains... This document relates to _____ because...”

(Identify the number of the document you are describing and describe it GBO.)

(Identify the main topic of your essay.)

(Explain how or why it relates.)

Step 2: Use the HIPP strategy to analyze the documents. Choose 4 to thoroughly source, even though you only need

three according to the rubric. Remember you only need *one* of the HIPP.* Make sure you also explain how you came to your conclusion, showing the reader how or why you came to your conclusion or how you analyzed the document. Then... explain how or why the HIPP relates to your argument/thesis. (CLOSE THE LOOP)

GO BEYOND THE OBVIOUS and explain how or why it is relevant to the argument. *Tip: USE THE LINGO!*

“The _____ of document #__ was.... because....”

(purpose/POV/audience/context)

(Identify doc.)

(Describe HIPP.)

(Explain how/why the HIPP is evident.)

This is relevant to the argument that ... _____ because...”

(Identify X or Y from your thesis or other relevant argument connected to it.)

(Explain how or why the HIPP relates to your argument/thesis)

*H: Historical Situation, I: Intended Audience, P: Purpose, P: Point of View

Step 3: Apply your analysis to your essay. *How does each document support your thesis or support an opposing view?*

To get this point you must use *at least six* of the seven documents AS EVIDENCE to support your X or Y. I recommend you use all seven in case you don't get credit for one.

“Therefore, document #__ supports the argument that ... because....”

(Identify doc.)

(State your X or Y from your thesis.)

(Explain how or why it supports the argument.)

Sample Prompt and Document Analysis:

Explain how political debates on how to interpret the Constitution impacted American politics from 1789-1815.

Document 1

Thomas Jefferson, Opinion on the Constitutionality of the Bill for Establishing a National Bank, 15 Feb. 1791

“...I consider the foundation of the Constitution as laid on this ground that "all powers not delegated to the U.S. by the Constitution, not prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states or to the people..." To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specially drawn around the powers of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no longer susceptible of any definition.

The incorporation of a bank, and other powers assumed by this bill have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the U.S. by the Constitution...”

Document 1 highlights Thomas Jefferson's interpretation of the Constitution in regards to the First Bank of the United States. This relates to the topic of political debates, because as he debates Alexander Hamilton on the legality of the Bank division among politicians emerges. Jefferson's point of view regarding the Constitution was strict. He did not believe the government had to right to assert powers beyond those included in the document. He is very clear about this view as he quotes the 10th Amendment reserving powers to the states. This point of view is relevant to the argument that political debates on how to interpret the Constitution impacted American politics from 1789-1815 by causing division among politicians regarding the First Bank of the United States, because his views clashed with Hamilton's and led them down the path to political parties. Therefore, Jefferson's interpretation of the Constitution led to political debates that caused division.

Step 4 – Outside Evidence

Include at least TWO pieces of outside evidence in the DBQ body paragraphs that are NOT included in the documents. Thoroughly explain these pieces of evidence and how they defend your argument. I recommend you make your outside evidence its own paragraph and shoot for at least three sentences.

Tips:

- define the evidence
- don't forget to close the loop (use the evidence to defend your argument)
- use the lingo, "a piece of evidence not found in the documents that supports the argument is..." (this will help ensure you get the evidence point instead of historical context)

Sample Prompt and Outside Evidence:

Explain how political debates on how to interpret the Constitution impacted American politics from 1789-1815.

One piece of evidence not found in the documents that supports the argument that *political debates on how to interpret the Constitution led to the formation of political parties is the protective tariff created during Washington's term. This tax on imports was supposed to help American businesses compete with British manufacturing, but Jefferson's response once again focused on states' rights. A second piece of evidence is the Whiskey Tax which hurt farmers and further led to political divide as Jefferson protested the tax. Followers of Jefferson became the Democratic - Republican Party and they faced off against the Federalist Party.*

If you are aiming for the unicorn point (complexity), consult the rubric for strategies. Remember to earn this point, you must use at least two of the strategies and complexity must be present throughout... not just tacked on the end.