

Updated AP Exam Tips 2024



*Fighting Fiercely For a Five
Requires Strategies!*

AP Exam Tips

Know what to expect. The first section will have the MCQ and SAQ.

Section	Question Type	Number of Questions	Exam Weighting	Timing
I	Part A: Multiple-choice questions	55	40%	55 minutes
	Part B: Short-answer questions	3	20%	40 minutes

Document Analysis

Analyzing documents is required for about 80% of the exam.

The only time you're analyzing history fully on your own is the LEQ and #3/4 SAQ.

Remember these basic strategies:

- a. Read the source and examine the document.
- b. Identify the main topic of the document.
- c. Consider the context AND the POV.

Source: Dwight D. Eisenhower, recollections of a July 1945 meeting with President Harry S Truman (1948)

Another item on which I ventured to advise President Truman involved the Soviet's intention to enter the Japanese war. I told him that since reports indicated the imminence of Japan's collapse, I deprecated the Red Army's engaging in that war. I foresaw certain difficulties arising out of such participation and suggested that, at the very least, we ought not to put ourselves in the position of requesting or begging for Soviet aid. It was my personal opinion that no power on earth could keep the Red Army out of that war unless victory came before they could get in.

Example:

Topic is the decision Truman had to make regarding ending the war Japan.

Source line reveals important leaders, President Truman and General Eisenhower so the context is WWII in the Pacific and potential use of atomic weapons.

POV of Eisenhower was positive toward ending the war before Soviets could get there.

Taking time to ensure understanding of documents before answering your MCQ and SAQ in section I is SOLID strategy!

MULTIPLE CHOICE TIPS

- Look at the SOURCE before reading the document. (years, author, title may have important clues to the context, topic, and perspective)
- Read and analyze the document carefully. Don't assume you know what it's about just by reading the first few lines or by looking at the title. Pay attention to details such as author, date, etc. *All your multiple-choice questions will be grouped with a document. Most will address the document in some way, but you may have a few questions that can be answered independently. Many mistakes are made when students do not take the time to analyze the document first.*
- DO NOT SEARCH FOR ANSWERS in the document. The test is a skill-based test... not a search and find test! You are applying YOUR knowledge of history with your ability to analyze and interpret documents.
- If you narrow it down to two choices, look back to the document and ask yourself, "which answer does the document point to?"
- Read the question carefully. Pay more attention to the question than you do to the answers. Note the verbs! If you know the era... make a note of it. Students typically spend most of their time considering the answer choices and not enough time analyzing the document and the question. Don't make this mistake!
- Identify the skill, the theme, and the era. If you understand what is being tested it may help you eliminate choices.
- Don't over-analyze! *They are not trying to trick you.*
- Answers will likely emphasize a theme. Know your MAGPIES and objectives!
- Don't change your mind! *The odds are against you. Go with your first choice!*
- There is no guessing penalty. If you are unable to eliminate choices, have a plan beforehand to guess the SAME letter OR longest or shortest answer on all questions that you cannot answer.
- If you have extra time, brainstorm & brain dump... what eras/events were NOT on the multiple choice?
Your SAQs and Essays will most likely differ!



Fight Fiercely!

SAQ Reminders

- Answer, Cite, Explain. Answer, Cite, Explain. ***ANSWER, CITE, EXPLAIN!!!***
- ***Use the lingo*** to set up your answer! Ensure you are ATFP (Address the Full Prompt).
- ***Include one piece of specific evidence or analysis*** NOT in the document or prompt. Shoot for proper nouns!
- ***Explain HOW or WHY*** your evidence supports/answers the question! If you are using “this is significant because” make sure your statement is explaining!

Other Tips

1. *Identify the skills being tested and the topics/eras. Keep your answers focused on what is being tested.*
2. *Plan your answer before you write. You'll have approximately 10-15 minutes for each SAQ set.*
3. *Write in complete sentences, and separate your answers. It is not one paragraph... it is three separate answers.*
Remember each answer should stand alone. Don't let one answer depend on another. Indent each answer (or separate in some way).
4. If the prompt says “one,” ONLY discuss One! If you talk about three things and one of the three is incorrect... you may not earn the point. So just focus on the ONE that you are most confident about.
5. Don't skip any SAQs! If you aren't sure how to address it, set up your answer and wing it! You never know what may come to mind as you are writing!
6. For two-source SAQs- clearly identify each historian's interpretation and HOW they differ from each other. DO NOT QUOTE unless it is brief, and you are using it to explain how “this is evident because.”
7. For images/cartoons/charts/graphs- make sure you include a simple description of the document in one of your answers. Let the reader know that you understand what you are looking at.
8. **DO NOT REPEAT YOURSELF!** You will not get credit for “double dipping.”

AP Exam Tips

After section I you will have a ten-minute break.
Eat a snack, drink water, and think about your writing strategies.

II	Free-response questions	2		
	Question 1: Document-based		25%	60 minutes (includes a 15-minute reading period)
	Students select one:		15%	40 minutes
	Question 2: Long essay			
	Question 3: Long essay			
	Question 4: Long essay			

Remember you will have one big chunk of time (100 minutes) for both essays. You can answer them in any order. Most students begin with the DBQ. Don't use all the time for that, though! That 15% LEQ is essential. 😊



Tips on Thesis Writing



STUDENTS ARE YOUNG HISTORIANS! YOU ARE DEVELOPING AND DEFENDING YOUR HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS IN RESPONSE TO A PROMPT.

On the DBQ essay, the thesis can earn one of seven points. On the LEQ essay it can earn one of six points. This point and process is essential to a successful essay, and students should begin their planning with development of a complex thesis.

TIPS

- **No Absolutes!** Do not say things like “all, none, always, never...” Absolutes are NOT historically defensible claims. *History is GRAY.* There is always an opposing view! Remember your thesis must be defensible!
- **ATFP!** (Address The Full Prompt) Many students fail essays because they are not answering the question! Take time to break down the prompt before writing your thesis (identify the skill, qualifiers, eras, and categories)
- **SLOW DOWN** in preparation and ensure they are addressing the entire prompt. Many students score low because they jump in without proper processing and planning their argument. Using the lingo of the prompt, including all topics and categories, and **targeting the skill are essential!**
- **Identify parameters** of prompt and stay within it.
- **FIRST or LAST PARAGRAPH!** *The thesis should not appear in the second paragraph, for example.*
- **BOTH SIDES!** I encourage my students to target both sides even though the prompt only addresses one side.
- **Your thesis doesn't have to be complex. If you haven't mastered the Although X, Y because... strategy... the simple approach is FINE!**
 - a. Restate the prompt.
 - b. Take a stand on the qualifier.
 - c. Provide a line of reasoning.



More on Thesis Writing



Thesis statements must have some meat to them. Students should not rely on generic categories... gone are the days of “political, economic, and social” as generic categories. Instead, students should have categories that clearly relate to the prompt and topic. If you are using generic categories... you must follow it up with a “because” statement with an example. For example: Although the American Revolution was caused by social issues because the Patriots resented the way the British military looked down on them, the war was caused by political and economic issues to a greater extent as many colonists desired more freedom to live and work as they pleased. A thesis of “Although the American Revolution was caused by social issues, it was caused by political and economic issues to a greater extent,” NOT be adequate.

Thesis statements should not include quotes or topics from the documents. When students develop their argument on the DBQ essay... remember you are NOT searching the documents for the “answer to the question.” It is important for you to understand how documents address the prompt/topic, but you are NOT finding answers in them. You need to develop your argument blending what you know and what you read... remembering YOU are the young historian.

Contextualization Tips

Your teacher/reader is looking for evidence they understand what is going on in the era ...and can relate that knowledge to their overall topic in their essay!



- It can appear anywhere in the essay.
- It can include evidence and connections from other eras, but they must explicitly link it to the topic/era of the essay IF it is not obviously relevant to the topic of the essay.
- Needs to include at least ONE piece of specific evidence. If they cannot identify something specific it is okay to focus on developments... *[And encourage them NOT to include that evidence anywhere else in their essay... not in their thesis... not in their body paragraphs.]*
- Rarely is there a length requirement; however, try for at least two sentences. A good “prelude” can often only be only one sentence.

Contextualization Strategy

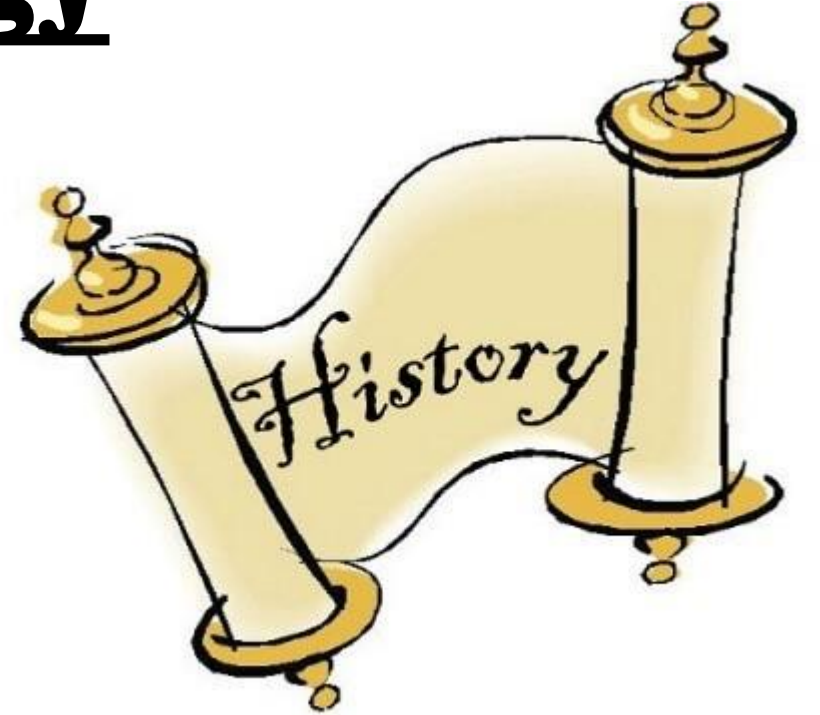
If you are struggling to “set the scene” by explaining the historical context of the essay topic, here is a question to consider:

What do you need to know in order to understand the historical significance of this topic? “Brain-dump” who, what, when, where, why, how.
You might also begin your contextualization with...

*In order to understand the historical significance of (topic), one must consider...
The backstory is...*

Remember that chronological framing is not enough, but is a good start. You need to show understanding of the topic in the big picture.

Also ask yourself, “Why is College Board asking this question? What do they want me to understand or know about history?”



What happens in contextualization...

Stays in contextualization!

One frequent weakness I've seen is double-dipping.

Include at least one piece of specific historical evidence

BUT... *and this is important...* do **not** repeat that evidence in the thesis or in the body paragraphs.

Set the scene... *contextualization...* and then ***let it be.***

Don't connect back to it, don't use it to defend a thesis, and don't use the evidence or development again in body paragraphs or in document analysis.



Describing Documents - Tips

In a Document Based Question for APUSH, students can earn one of seven points by showing they essentially understand at least three of the seven documents. In addition to showing that they understand what they are seeing or reading, they should also be able to explain how it relates to the topic of the essay as well as use it in some way. If you are using the three step document strategy, combining steps one and three will help students ensure they earn this point.

Example: In the political cartoon, “Ograbme,” a merchant is trying to sell his goods despite the embargo that had been placed on trade. This relates to the topic of Market Revolution, because the economic expansion in that revolution could not occur until the embargo was lifted. The end of the War of 1812 led to the end of such policies and the economy grew rapidly.

Remind students that the readers already know the documents inside and out... go beyond simple descriptions and quotes!

GO BEYOND THE OBVIOUS!



OGRABME, or. The American Snapping-turtle.

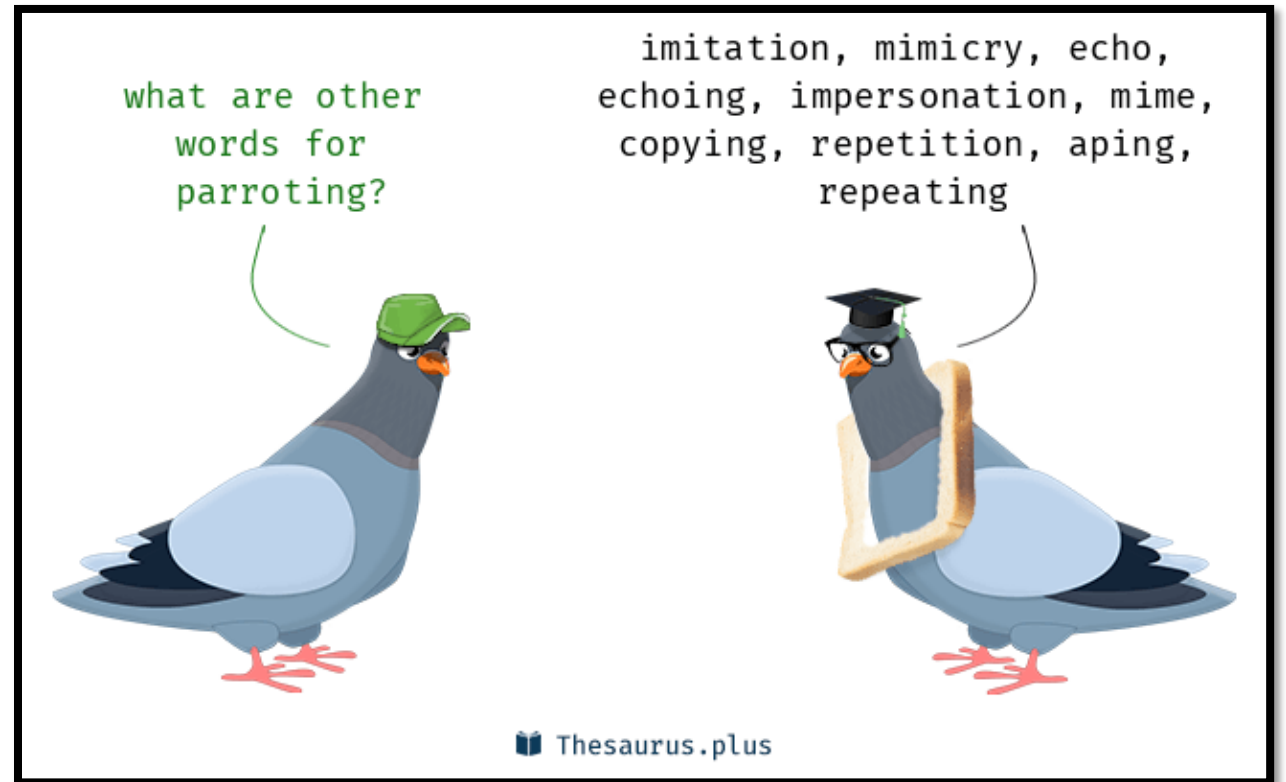
614 for the Proprietor, by D. Longworth 11 Park.

Encourage students to describe and relate MORE than three documents. Many bright and talented students are overconfident in their ability to understand documents. I recommend at least four (if not more).

HIPPING TIPS

On the DBQ essay for APUSH, students can earn one of seven points by successfully analyzing **h**istorical situation, **i**ntended audience, **p**urpose, or **p**oint of view for at least two of the seven documents.

- “use the lingo!” If you are analyzing point of view... say, “the author’s point of view was...”
- HIPP more at least three... students are often overconfident in their understanding of the document.
- It is important that they **do NOT parrot the document**. Encourage students to ***Go Beyond the Obvious***.
- Quoting is a sign of weakness... unless you are briefly quoting in order to prove their analysis of the HIPP. (“This is evident because...”)
- It is not enough to HIPP well... you must also explain how your analysis of the document relates to an argument... ***closing the loop!*** This means a typical HIPP is at least two sentences.
- Stay within the parameters of the prompt even if documents written in other eras.



HIPPING STRATEGY

REMEMBER THE HIPP POINT IS NEVER AN EASY POINT TO EARN, SO STUDENTS NEED TO BE THOROUGH IN THEIR EXPLANATIONS.

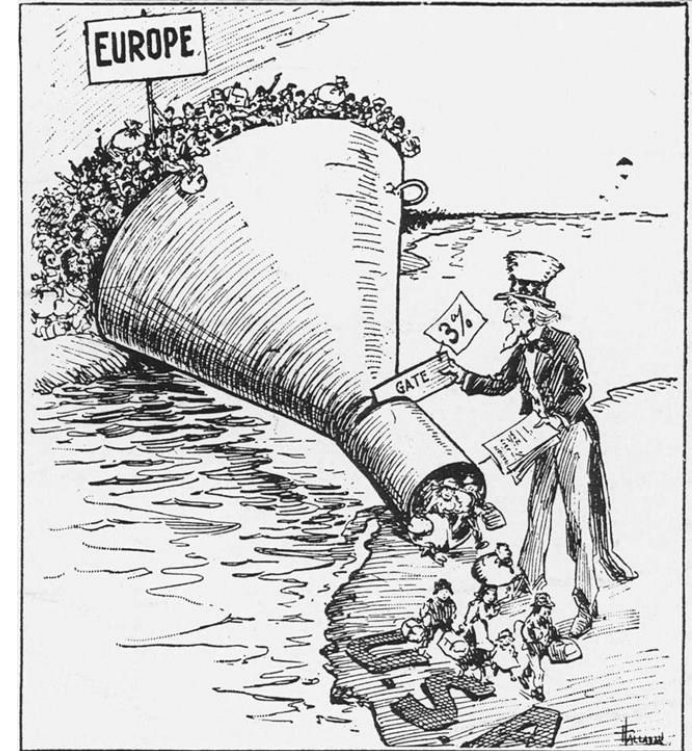
While grading mock exams, I noticed many of my students were weak in their HIPP analysis. If you are seeing this, too... consider this strategy for practice/skill review.

One HIPP strategy to ensure thorough analysis is a **three step process** of:

1. Choosing ONE of the HIPP and describing it.
2. Adding a sentence explaining how or why you “figured it out,” such as “This is evident because...”
3. Closing the loop!

Example:

The historical situation of the political cartoon includes the quota acts of the 1920s which limited immigration from places such as Italy. This is evident because the number of Europeans at the wide end of the funnel is much greater than the number actually emerging from the narrow end of the funnel where “3%” is applied. This limitation is relevant to the argument that immigration policies in the early twentieth century were very different from immigration policies in the later twentieth century, because such quotas were removed in the 1960s.



Using four of seven documents in a DBQ essay

Students can earn one of seven points on the APUSH DBQ essay if they **successfully use four of the seven documents to defend their thesis/argument**. If you are using the three step strategy, this point is in step three. Practicing this skill involves **first understanding the document and how it relates to their topic, and then using the document as a piece of evidence to defend their thesis or argument**. Your argument may be present as a body paragraph topic sentence, or it may be evident in a “closing the loop” statement at the end of the paragraph.

One of my concerns about this point is that students often spend a great deal of their time on this step... EVEN THOUGH the requirement for this point has been reduced from six to four. It requires more time than many other parts of the directions/rubric. If you are not confident that you truly understand *and* can apply five of the documents to your argument, I encourage you to spend your time targeting other parts of the directions/rubric.

It is good practice for students to use all three document steps for at least four documents, in my opinion... and you may want to remind them that excellence does not require perfection. If you use the three steps well for four documents, you will earn this point as well as the description point and HIPP point. 😊 Be strategic with time... be aware of the rubric.

“Excellence does not require perfection.”

- Henry James

Tips on using Outside Evidence in a DBQ essay

On the DBQ essay for APUSH, students can earn one of seven points by using historical evidence NOT found in any of the seven documents to defend their thesis/argument. There are a few strategies that can help students earn this point, and I encourage all students to try to include at least one piece of outside evidence in their essays. For the DBQ... they only need ONE! (LEQ needs two) But the key is... it cannot be found in the documents.

- The piece of evidence MUST **fall within the parameters of the prompt.**
- It **should not be a brief comment or passing reference.**
- **Thoroughly explain how or why the evidence supports their argument.**
- **Include specific evidence any time you think of something.** I recommend making your EBD a separate paragraph, but it doesn't have to be.
For example, you may be reading a document about the Declaration of Independence and it brings to mind Common Sense. Drop in any connection you make and elaborate on the connection. If it doesn't end up being an EBD you may end up with a ping-pong.
- If you make an **inference from a document** that leads to a specific piece of evidence, that is usually enough.



Tips on Complexity

The “unicorn” point is a site to see! If your students are aiming for a **truly complex essay**, remind them of what the teacher/reader is looking for. They are looking for evidence that the student **understands deeply... understands nuances of documents and topics...** can write a **sophisticated essay...** and is clearly one of the most talented writers among peers.

Unicorns are REAL! It is basically your opportunity to go BEYOND EXPECTATIONS!

Other tips for increasing complexity (the best options):

- Well organized essay with body paragraphs that clearly address both sides of the skill being tested.
- Making connections to other eras/topics along the way. (Ping-Pong)

This point isn't your top priority, BUT remember many students do this naturally (making connections especially). For many, this point is easier to earn than the HIPP point.

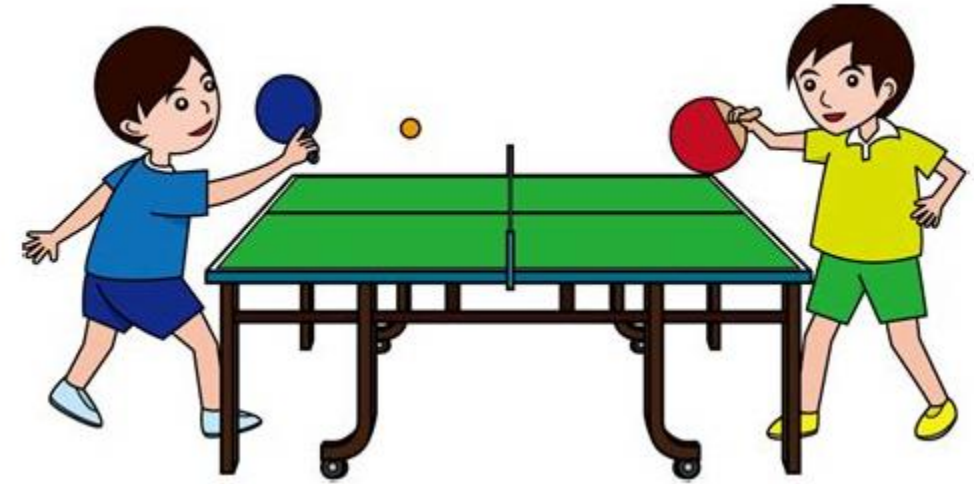
Remember: Target as many points as you can but not to stress out if they are not able to hit every target.



In case you don't know "Ping Pong" Complexity Strategy

*The complexity point is hard to earn... you have to clearly show depth of knowledge and analysis throughout the essay. Make sure your essay is nuanced or refined! One way to target that is to **ping pong your way through extending your analysis into another era.***

Identify one key concept from your essay and then connect it to a similar or different concept from another era. Define the concept, making sure it is relevant to your topic and thesis, and then shift across the table and do the same for the topic you're connecting to. Go back and forth at least three times, clearly explaining how your topic and thesis | relates to that other topic/era/region. This is called synthesizing, and it is one way to refine your essay.



If you make a connection while you write your essay... DROP IT IN! Your ping-pong can be anywhere, and remember your essay is a rough draft!

Example from an essay about identity (1800-1850):

The Nullification Crisis brought the nation dangerously close to civil war as regional identities strengthened. **Later the nation did go to war following the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. In the Era of the Common Man, war nearly occurred over the tariff of abominations. Later in 1860 the same state that threatened to secede over the tariff did secede following Lincoln's election. Regional identity had split.**

The Importance of Defending an Argument

Once you develop an argument and state your thesis, it is important to **remain focused on defending that argument** as you write their essay. If you do not keep in mind your purpose... you may end up storytelling instead of analyzing history and defending an argument. For the DBQ, you may end up summarizing documents instead of analyzing them and using them to defend an argument. Many bright students tell beautiful stories on the essay test and score very low. **Your purpose is to defend an argument** that clearly addresses the prompt and illustrates historical analysis.

Over-simplification is a common pitfall. Avoiding absolutes can help you avoid an over-simplified essay. It is also good to avoid over-simplification by not presenting history as overly idealistic (sugar-coated) as well as not presenting it as overly cynical. Remember there is always another side to the story... there is always another POV.

In general,... Remember to **close the loop!**



The Importance of Knowing the Rubrics

Your essays will have directions which are nods to the rubric. If you follow the directions, you are targeting the rubric. Most students ignore directions. This is not wise. Use them as a checklist and as a reminder of the points you are targeting.

Set priorities! Target the points with the lower bar first: Thesis and Context. Then prioritize the remaining points based on your level of confidence.

Remember if you score 4 or higher, you are doing well!