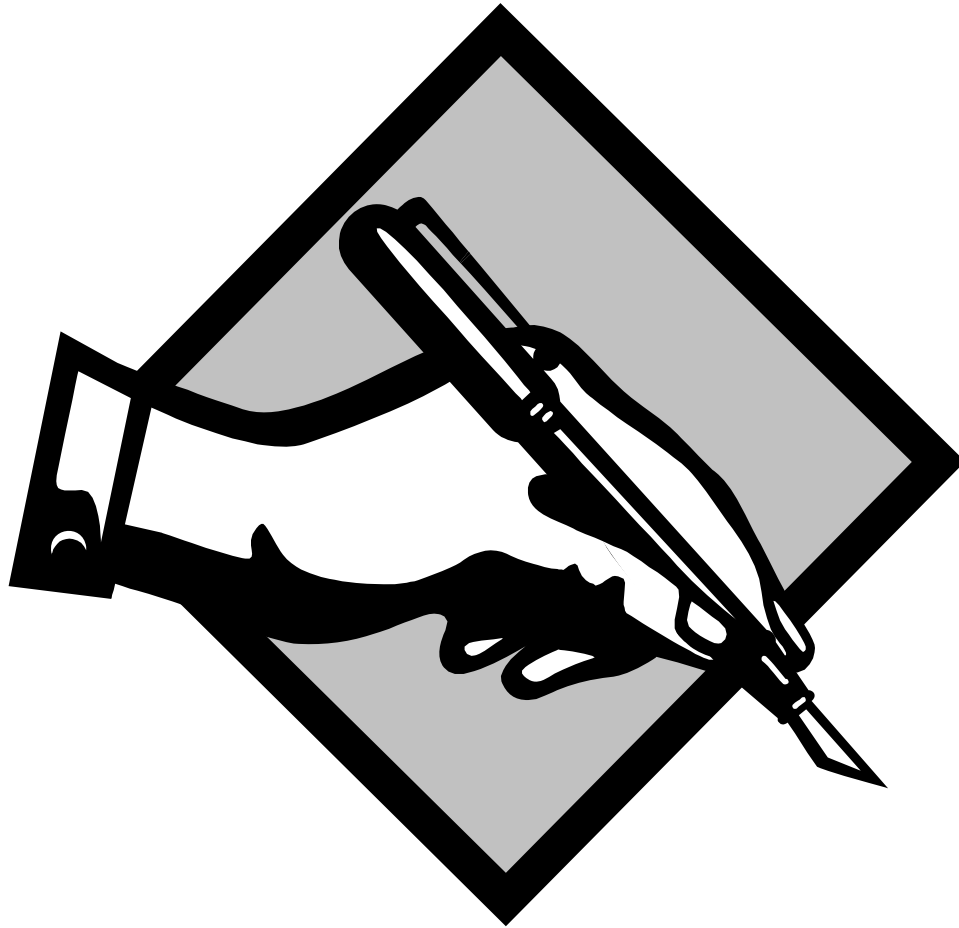


Breaking Down the DBQ - 8 Steps to Success!

John P. Irish

Seven Lakes High School - Katy ISD



Recent Publications:

Instructors Resource Guide to The American Pageant (13/e)

The Quizbook: A Test Manual for Instructors to The American Pageant (13/e)

Edward Bellamy: *Looking Backward* (Fall - 2006: The Center for Learning)

AP U.S. History Workbooks (revised edition, 3 volumes) - The Center for Learning, forthcoming

Seven Lakes High School

9251 S. Fry Road

Katy, Texas 77494

A Bit O' Irish:

www.orgsites.com/tx/ap-us-and-european-history/index.html

johnirish@katyisd.org

jirish@houston.rr.com

U.S. History Essay Writing Information

The AP U.S. History Exam is three hours and five minutes long. In Section I, students are given 55 minutes to answer 80 multiple-choice questions. In Section II, students are given a 45-minute exercise in the use of historical evidence (the document-based question or DBQ), which includes a 15-minute reading period; then students select 2 other essays to write on (one essay will be from the first half of the course, the other will be from the second half of the course).

	% of Grade	Number of Questions	Time Allotted	Reading Period
Section I	50%	80	55 minutes	
Section II	50%	3 Essay Questions		
Part A	25%	1 DBQ Essay	45 minutes	15 minutes
Part B	12½%	1 FRQ Essay	35 minutes	
Part C	12½%	1 FRQ Essay	35 minutes	

AP United States History Exam - Writing Requirement

Part A: Document Based Question (DBQ) Essay

Part B: Free Response Question (FRQ) from the 1st half of the course

Part C: Free Response Question (FRQ) from the 2nd half of the course

Irish's Eight Commandments of Writing the History Essay

- I. **Thou Shalt Have a Thesis Sentence.** The thesis must state the argument and everything in your essay must support your argument.
- II. **Thou Shalt Get to the Point.** Make your case, don't make sweeping generalizations. Don't waste time using fluff and stuff, tell it like it is.
- III. **Thou Shalt Use Factual Evidence.** Your thesis is only valid if the evidence supports it. The evidence gives the reader reason to believe your thesis.
- IV. **Thou Shalt Take Contrary Evidence Into Account.** Showing that there is at least another side to the story is not only necessary, it helps strengthen your argument not weaken it.
- V. **Thou Shalt End the Essay Simply and Cleanly.** If you must use a concluding sentence or paragraph, don't introduce new evidence or make moral judgments.
- VI. **Thou Shalt NOT use Personal Pronouns in the History Essay.** Using such words as I, you, we, us, my, or they is not acceptable.
- VII. **Thou Shalt NOT Misspell Words or Use Poor Grammar.** An abundance of misspelled words or grammatical errors can detract from a well-written essay.
- VIII. **Thou Shalt NOT Use Rhetorical Questions.** Stick to answering the question, not to introducing another.

DBQ Do's and Don'ts

- The Do's:
1. Read and interpret all parts of the essay question, looking for keys such as **Change Over Time**.
 2. Read and analyze each of the documents, looking for **Point of View**.
 3. Determine the working order of the documents, **Grouping Them**.
 4. Read the historical background, **Determine its Significance**.
 5. Reread documents, looking for significant keys; **Name, Position, Reliability**.
 6. Develop the thesis, **Address All Parts of the Question**.
 7. Develop paragraphs being sure to answer all parts of the question, **Refer Frequently to the Terms of the Question**.
 8. One does not have to use all documents, but for a "Nine" **You Must Use a Preponderance**.
 9. Integrate the documents into your response, **Be Sure to Analyze**.
 10. Common indicators of analysis include; essay structure, juxtaposition of documents, recognition of contradictory point of view, use of external information to illustrate the documents.

- The Don'ts:
1. **Don't** use the documents in a laundry list fashion, quickest way to a low score.
 2. **Don't** simply explain or summarize the documents, group them together.
 3. **Don't** forget to analyze the documents when incorporating them into your essay.
 4. **Don't** fail to answer the question in an effort to use all the documents.
 5. **Don't** "parrot" the views of the documents, analyze those views.

The Thesis Statement - What is it?

The Thesis Formula: Although X; A, B, C.

'X' represents the strongest point against your argument.

'A, B, and C' represent the three strongest points for your argument.

You also need to let the reader know what side of the issue you will be arguing - take a stand!

Prompt: Assess the validity of the following statement, "Teaching is the most important profession in the world and everyone should consider it as a possible career choice."

Pros	Cons
Emotionally satisfying	Physically demanding
Make a difference in the world	Low pay
Summers off	Long work hours
Work during the summer for more pay	Not much respect in our society
Not much competition - job market	Requires certification
Only need a bachelors degree	Have to do additional work - coach, etc.
	Work usually comes home with you

Thesis Statement: Although teaching is an emotionally satisfying profession; the fact that teachers consistently rank among the bottom of the pay scale, are asked to work long hours often at home without compensation, and the lack of respect they receive in our society clearly shows that this is not the most important profession in the world and would be an unwise career choice.

To Conclude or Not To Conclude - What is the Answer?

There are lots of different theories about whether or not you need a conclusion; my belief is that if you have time to write one, then great. But if you are running short of time, then scrap it and don't worry about it. There is nothing in the AP rubric that says you have to have a conclusion and as a grader, I can tell you that not having a conclusion ever lowered a grade. But adding a bad conclusion did. So my advice is, if you have one, you better make sure it is good - **DO NOT** introduce any new information in the conclusion!

In no circumstance should your history essay have fluff in it, this is not an English class (I apologize to all the English teachers). They have different requirements and a different rubric for their class. In History class you are expected to write a history essay, in English class you are expected to write an English essay - they are two different tasks, skills, and assignments, learn what each is asking of you and be like Nike - just do it.

Name: _____

Period: _____

8 Step: DBQ Analysis Chart

Step One: Read and rewrite the prompt (note any key dates, terms, and phrases).

Step Two: Decide how and in what ways the prompt can be answered.

Step Three: Brainstorm information that should or could be included in the essay.

Step Four: Go through each of the documents; who, what, when, where, and why?

Doc. A:

Doc. B:

Doc. C:

Doc. D:

Doc. E:

Doc. F:

Doc. G:

Doc. H:

Doc. I:

Doc. J:

Doc. K:

Step Five: Decide which way you want to argue with regard to the prompt (e.g., create your T-chart).

Step Six: Group the documents, create your A, B, C categories (i.e., statements).

Category A:

Documents to Use:

Outside Information:

Category B:

Documents to Use:

Outside Information:

Category C:

Documents to Use:

Outside Information:

Step Seven: Determine your X statement.

Step Eight: Create your thesis statement, **use the formula** – “Although X; A, B, C.”

Name: _____

Grade: _____

Predicted AP Score: _____

- 100 - 90 _____ Contains a well developed thesis which clearly addresses all aspects of the prompt.
_____ Presents effective analysis of all aspects of the prompt and has organized material and documents around major categories; treatment and analysis must be even among all aspects of the prompt.
_____ Effectively uses a substantial number of the documents.
_____ Supports thesis with substantial and relevant outside information.
_____ Is clearly organized and well-written.
_____ May contain minor errors.
- 89 - 80 _____ Contains a thesis which addresses the prompt.
_____ Has limited analysis and has organized material and documents around major categories; is mostly descriptive and treatment of the prompt is uneven; also may contain some chronological flaws.
_____ Uses some documents effectively.
_____ Supports thesis with some outside information.
_____ Shows acceptable organization; language errors do not interfere with comprehension.
_____ May contain errors that do not seriously detract from quality of essay.
- 79 - 70 _____ Presents limited, confused and / or poorly developed thesis.
_____ Deals with the prompt in a general or superficial way; offers a simplistic explanation of the prompt.
_____ Quotes or briefly cites documents and uses only minimum number of documents (50% + 1) , almost no analysis of documents.
_____ Contains little outside information, with confused chronology.
_____ Demonstrates weak organizational and / or writing skills with interfere with comprehension.
_____ May contain major errors.
- 69 - 50 _____ Contains no thesis or a thesis which does not address the prompt.
_____ Shows inadequate or inaccurate understanding of the prompt.
_____ Contains little or no understanding of the documents or ignores them completely.
_____ Includes inappropriate or no outside information.
_____ Is so poorly organized or written that it is difficult to understand.
_____ Contains numerous errors, both major and minor.
- 49 - 0 _____ Did not attempt to complete the assignment as given.

Name: _____

Grade: _____

Predicted AP Score: _____

- 100 - 90 _____ Contains a well developed thesis which clearly addresses all aspects of the prompt.
_____ Presents effective analysis of all aspects of the prompt and has organized material and documents around major categories; treatment and analysis must be even among all aspects of the prompt.
_____ Effectively uses a substantial number of the documents.
_____ Supports thesis with substantial and relevant outside information.
_____ Is clearly organized and well-written.
_____ May contain minor errors.
- 89 - 80 _____ Contains a thesis which addresses the prompt.
_____ Has limited analysis and has organized material and documents around major categories; is mostly descriptive and treatment of the prompt is uneven; also may contain some chronological flaws.
_____ Uses some documents effectively.
_____ Supports thesis with some outside information.
_____ Shows acceptable organization; language errors do not interfere with comprehension.
_____ May contain errors that do not seriously detract from quality of essay.
- 79 - 70 _____ Presents limited, confused and / or poorly developed thesis.
_____ Deals with the prompt in a general or superficial way; offers a simplistic explanation of the prompt.
_____ Quotes or briefly cites documents and uses only minimum number of documents (50% + 1) , almost no analysis of documents.
_____ Contains little outside information, with confused chronology.
_____ Demonstrates weak organizational and / or writing skills with interfere with comprehension.
_____ May contain major errors.
- 69 - 50 _____ Contains no thesis or a thesis which does not address the prompt.
_____ Shows inadequate or inaccurate understanding of the prompt.
_____ Contains little or no understanding of the documents or ignores them completely.
_____ Includes inappropriate or no outside information.
_____ Is so poorly organized or written that it is difficult to understand.
_____ Contains numerous errors, both major and minor.
- 49 - 0 _____ Did not attempt to complete the assignment as given.

Step-by-Step: How the Process Works

1. Step One: Rewrite / Reread the Prompt - noting key dates, terms, phrases.

In this step, students should carefully read the prompt, figuring out exactly what it is asking them to do.

- **Analyze**: determine the component parts; examine their nature and relationship. "Analyze the major technological changes that took place in America from 1870 to 1900 and describe what significant social ramifications they had."
- **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. "Assess the validity of the following statement, 'Thomas Jefferson's political philosophy can best be described as revolutionary.'"
- **Compare**: examine for the purpose of noting similarities and differences. "Compare the religious revival of the First Great Awakening to that of the Second."
- **Contrast**: examine in order to show dissimilarities or points of difference. "Contrast the Federalist and Antifederalist arguments for or against ratification of the new Federal Constitution."
- **Describe**: give an account of; tell about; give a word picture of. "Describe and analyze how effective FDR's New Deal program was in ending the Great Depression."
- **Discuss**: talk over; write about; consider or examine by argument or from various points of view; debate; present the different sides of. "Discuss the extent to which nineteenth-century Transcendentalism was or was not a conservative cultural and intellectual movement."
- **Explain**: make clear or plain; make clear the causes or reasons for; make known in detail; tell the meaning of. "Explain how economic, political, and religious factors promoted European explorations from about 1450 to about 1525."
- **Identify**: cite specific events, phenomena, and show a connection. "Identify the social and economic factors in pre-industrial America that explain why it was one of the first countries to industrialize."

In this step, the student should also be aware of any time period constraints; when the prompt says, "from the period 1650 to 1775" THAT'S WHAT THEY MEAN - do not stray outside the time period.

2. Step Two: Decide how, and in what ways, can the prompt be answered?

There is no right or wrong way to answer the DBQ, in most cases, the DBQ can be answered in more than one way. The important part about writing the DBQ is picking a side and supporting that side! The students should be thinking of how the prompt can be answered; in theory, what are the different ways in which the prompt can be analyzed. Try to come up with as many ways as possible, the more complex an analysis is the better the paper will be.

3. Step Three: Brainstorm information that could be in the essay and in the documents.

Notice, students do this before ever looking at the documents; they need to see what they know first before going to the documents. Students will be able to come back to this section, obviously as they go through the documents it will trigger new information they may have forgotten. I like for them to write down as much as possible, this is the section in which they see how much they can remember from the time period.

4. Step Four: Go through each of the documents; who, what, when, where, and why?

Students now go through each of the documents, they should summarize each of the documents; in this stage, and we are still collecting information. Students will want to go back to Step Three once they have gone through all the documents to note other outside information that was not included in the documents. They will also need to go back

and possible correct any incorrect information they noted earlier, if the documents helped them to clarify when things occurred, who said them, etc. There is a space on the DBQ worksheet for each document, there should be enough spaces for each document, and I have tried to include more than they normally have, just in case. When students transition off of the worksheet, they will need to do this information on the DBQ itself, next to the documents.

5. Step Five: Decide which way you want to argue (e.g., create your T-chart).

In this step, students begin the thinking process; they have to begin thinking about how they want to answer the prompt. I always ask my students to create a T-chart, which gives them a visual as to what they have come up with thus far. The T-chart should contain the points that they have gathered in the process thus far. For example; "To what extent had the colonists developed a sense of their own identity and unity prior to 1775?"

<u>Had</u> a Unique Identity and Were Unified	<u>Did NOT Have</u> a Unique Identity and Were NOT Unified
Geographically Separate Blending of Different Races Creating a Unique Identity Politically Unified in Response to British Injustices Shared Values in Natural Rights and Equality Very Little Economic Stratification Town Hall Meetings Already Began Exercising Political Independence	All Attempts at Unity Failed (until the Second Continental Congress) Distinct Geographic Economic Differences (South, N.E., Middle) Fragmented Religious Differences ONLY 1 out of 3 supported the Revolution

6. Step Six: Group the Documents and create you're A, B, C categories (i.e., statements).

In this step, students will begin forming their arguments; students are asked to come up with three major points or themes that support the position they are taking with regard to the prompt. These are not to be specific points, specific points are used to support the more general argument that you are making. The statements from the T-chart above should be used in this process of writing the DBQ, these should be you're A, B, C categories. For example, if I am going to write a paper which argues that the colonists had developed a unique identity and were unified, I would use the points on the left hand side of the T-chart to create my categories. I would want to choose the strongest points, I can also combine points to create a more sophisticated analysis. I will assume that I like these points the best; **(A)** the colonists were politically unified in response to British injustices, **(B)** the colonists shared values with regard to natural rights and the notion of equality - there was also very little economic stratification among the colonists, and **(C)** the colonial Town Hall meetings already began showing that the colonists exercised a certain amount of political autonomy. So these are going to be the categories that I use to support my claim that the colonists were unified and had developed a unique identity prior to 1775.

Students don't necessarily have to come up with three points, they may only be able to come up with two, or the DBQ prompt may push them in one direction or the other - what I tell them in the end is that, the more categories you have the more sophisticated an argument you have. Students will also need to come up with the outside information they will use to support their different categories, this information should be listed here.

7. Step Seven: Determine the 'X' statement.

I always ask students to consider the other side of the argument and incorporate that into their essay; it also shows a level of sophistication if you can adequately show the reader you are aware of the other arguments. Students don't have to address this directly in the essay, I ask them to incorporate it as part of their thesis statement. This should be easy to do, if they have done Step Five properly, because the list they created is a list of 'X' statements. I ask them to pick one, or they can combine two into a strong 'X' statement and use that to show you are aware of the other side of the argument. For example; I believe the strongest argument against the colonists developing their own identity and

unity is the fact that all attempts at colonial unity really had failed. So I would want to incorporate that into my thesis statement.

8. **Step Eight:** Create your thesis statement, use the formula - "Although X; A, B, C."

This is the student's final stage to actually writing the essay, all the student needs to do at this point is to pull the information together and add a little creative flare and then you have a well developed and sophisticated thesis statement.

Although all attempts at political unity had failed prior to the Second Continental Congress; because the colonists showed universal political opposition to British policies, the colonists shared values with regard to natural rights and notions of equality, and the fact that the colonial Town Hall meetings planted the seeds of political autonomy, clearly shows that the American colonists had developed a unique identity and shared a bond that would lead them to declare their independence from the British Empire in 1776.

Final Analysis and Thought:

Although this may seem a bit rigorous and mechanic, I find that giving the students specific steps to work on as they work their way up to the actual writing process, gives them focus and centered direction to help them write an essay that is both well prepared and covers all the necessary requirements for a good grade according to the AP guidelines and rubric. (Did you like the 'Although X; A, B, C' formula?)

We take this through various steps throughout the school year; in the first six weeks students work through the worksheet in groups, we take baby steps at first. By the second six weeks students are doing the worksheet during class and developing the skill of writing a thesis statement. By the third six weeks students are writing the DBQ essay and are allowed to use the worksheet as they write. Second semester, students should have internalized the process they need to go through to complete an in class DBQ essay. Students are on their own for this and the essays are done in the same fashion they would on the actual AP Exam.

Final Form of the DBQ Essay:

Opening Paragraph:	Global Statement - introducing the topic. Thesis Statement - 'Although X; A, B, C.'
1 st Body Paragraph:	Evidence and Analysis of First Category.
2 nd Body Paragraph:	Evidence and Analysis of Second Category.
3 rd Body Paragraph:	Evidence and Analysis of Third Category.
Closing Paragraph:	If you have time and you follow all the caveats.