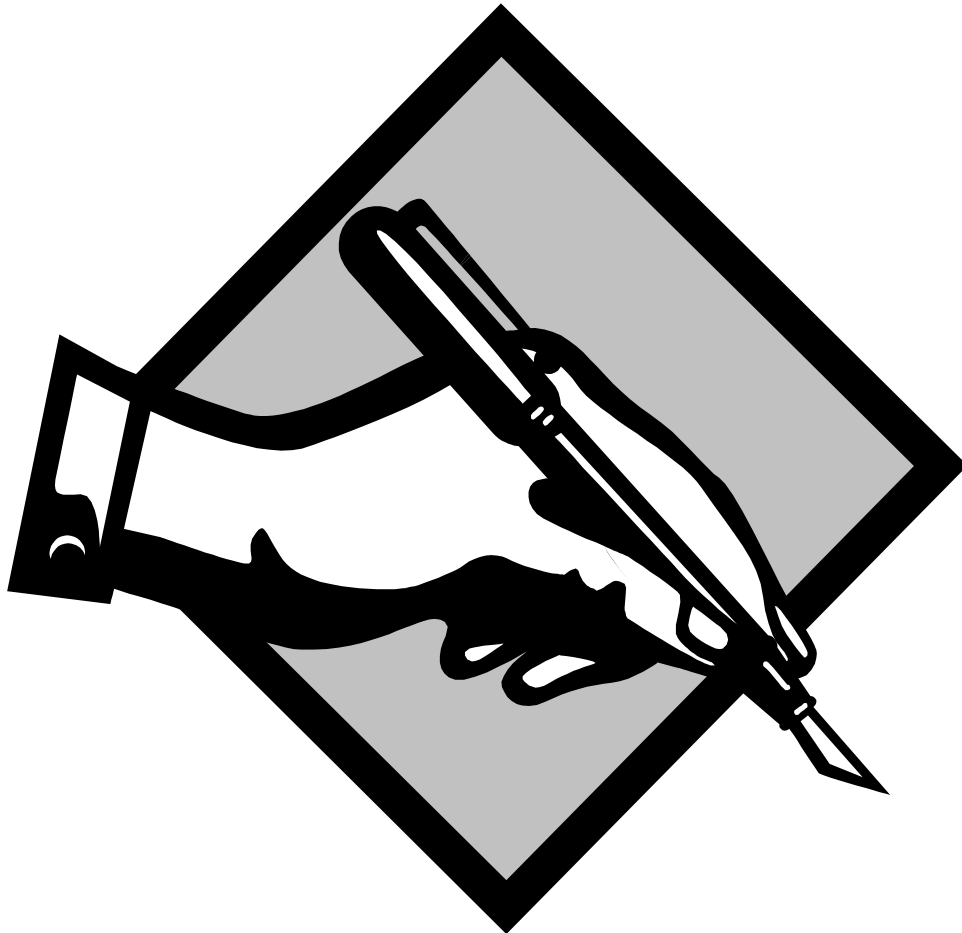


# Writing in AP U.S. History

## Introduction to Writing

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**A Bit O' Irish**

[www.orgsites.com/tx/ap-us-and-european-history/index.html](http://www.orgsites.com/tx/ap-us-and-european-history/index.html)  
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## 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	30 minutes	5 minutes
Part C	12½%	1 FRQ Essay	30 minutes	5 minutes

### AP United States History Exam - Writing Requirement

Part A: Document Based Question (DBQ) Essay

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

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

## Irish's Eight Commandments of Writing the History Essay

- I. **Have a Thesis Statement.** The thesis must state the argument and everything in your essay must support your argument.
- II. **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. **Use Factual Evidence.** Your thesis is only valid if the evidence supports it. The evidence gives the reader reason to believe your thesis.
- IV. **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. **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. **Do NOT use Personal Pronouns in the History Essay.** Using such words as I, you, we, us, my, or they is not acceptable.
- VII. **Do NOT Misspell Words or Use Poor Grammar.** An abundance of misspelled words or grammatical errors can detract from a well-written essay.
- VIII. **Do NOT Ask Rhetorical Questions.** Stick to answering the question, not to introducing another.

## Things You Will Be Asked To Do in a History Essay

**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 1450 to 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.”

## The Thesis Statement - What is it?

The Thesis Formula: X. However, A, B, and C. Therefore, Y.

‘X’ represents the strongest point against your argument.

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

‘Y’ represents the position you will be taking - in other words, your stand on the prompt.

**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:** Teaching is an emotionally satisfying profession. However, teachers rank consistently at the bottom of the pay scale, often work at home without just compensation, and receive a lack of respect in our society. Therefore, teaching is clearly not the most important profession and would be an unwise career choice.

Consider the following 2008 DBQ prompt: “Analyze the ways in which the Vietnam War heightened social, political, and economic tensions in the United States. Focus your answer on the period 1964 - 1975.”

## Grouping and Categorizing the Documents and Outside Information

The first thing that you are going to need to do, in order to answer the question fully, is to brainstorm outside and background information that you know about the topic. The categories are already given to you in this prompt, so label them and start writing down whatever you can about the topic. Some prompts may not give you the categories, if that is the case you can always rely on PERSIA - politics, economics, religion, social, intellectual, etc., to help you organize the information. After you have gotten as much information as possible, go to the documents (if it is a DBQ) and see what else you can come up with. After you have grouped the information, you will need to develop a Level 2 summary statement about what all of them have in common. This will be discussed in the next section.

Level 3	Social	Political	Economic
Level 2	Growing unrest and disenchantment over why the war was being fought	Who should run the war and how it should be waged	How much should we spend to win the war
Level 1	Black Panthers Great Society War on Poverty Hippies Woodstock Bob Dylan Tet Offensive Walter Cronkite Kent State Pentagon Papers	Selective Service 26 <sup>th</sup> Amendment Silent Majority Peace with Honor Vietnamization Hawks v. Doves Eugene McCarthy War Powers Act Gulf of Tonkin Resolution	Recession Stagflation New Nationalism Revenue Sharing Gas Rationing Guns and Butter

### Levels of Specificity / Developing a Summary Statement - How Much Do I Say?

Suppose we are at a conference in Ireland and someone asks you, “where do you go to school at?” There are a number of answers you can give them, the best answer to this question in this particular situation would be “I go to school in the United States.” Now consider the following new situation, suppose we are at a conference in Washington, D.C., the answer “I go to school in the United States” would be wholly inadequate to answer the question. You have not given the person enough information. In other words, your information was too general. Suppose you told them, “I go to school at Seven Lakes High School.” This is probably too specific information and unless they are familiar with the Katy area, they will have no clue where you are talking about. A more appropriate response for this situation might be “I go to school in Houston, Texas.” Now consider the following new situation, suppose we are at a conference in Houston, Texas with all Houston residents attending. An appropriate answer might now be, “I go to school at Seven Lakes High School in Katy.” So the situation will call for different levels of specificity in order to be properly understood.

How much specificity to include in the Summary Statement should be a balancing act, on the one hand, you don’t want to be too general (Level Three Generalization), but on the other hand you don’t want to be too specific (Level One Specification). Let them know where you are going, but don’t give away all your information. We want the reader to keep reading! We will call the right amount of specificity **Level Two Specificity**.

**Level Three Thesis (not enough):** The Vietnam war was only one phase in a greater struggle with communism that ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, there was an increase in social, political, and economic tensions in the United States from 1964 - 1975. In the end the war damaged America’s confidence in themselves and their government. *(Comment - This really tells me nothing more than what has already been stated in the prompt. You have a thesis statement, however, it is much too general. This is the most common mistake students make.)*

**Level Two Thesis:** The Vietnam war was only one phase in a greater struggle with communism that ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, during the period 1964 - 1975 America was racked by growing unrest and disenchantment over why the war was being fought, who should run it and how it should be waged, and how much American economic investment should be expanded into winning the war. Therefore, in the end, the war damaged America’s confidence in themselves and their government.

**Level One Thesis (too much):** The Vietnam war was only one phase in a greater struggle with communism that ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, during the period 1964 - 1975 Black panthers rioted, a great rift divided the country over the Great Society’s war on poverty and the economic ability to continue the war, college sit-ins plagued the college campuses, Hippies and the Silent Majority continued to clash over America’s role in International affairs, and Congress and the President fought over the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the War Powers Act with regard to just how much power each should have in waging the war. In the end the war damaged America’s confidence in themselves and their government. *(Comment - there is too much specific information in this thesis.)*

## The Opening - A Global Statement

There are lots of different theories about whether or not you need a global statement to open your first paragraph. You can have one, it's not critical, but some students like to have it as a way of introducing the topic. The global statement should not be your thesis statement - that comes next.

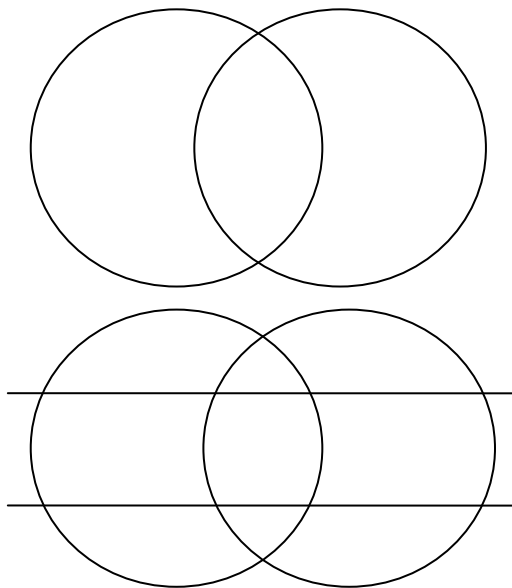
## To Conclude or Not To Conclude - What is the Answer?

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. As an AP reader / 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!

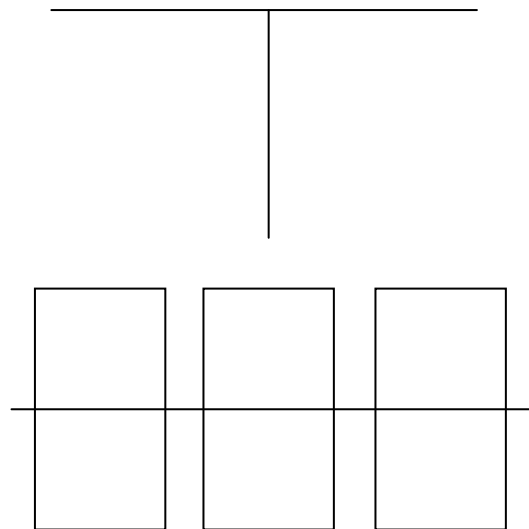
In no circumstance should your history essay have fluff in it, this is not an English class (I apologize to all the English teachers). They have different requirements and different expectation for their essays. In History class you are expected to write a history essay, in English class you are expected 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."

## Pre-Write and Setting Up the Essay: Conceptual Frameworks

Before writing the essay, it's necessary to establish what exactly the essay is asking the writer to do. This means conceptually setting up the essay. For example, if the prompt is asking you to compare and contrast (or just compare or just contrast), you need to create a Venn Diagram. Whichever side you decide on, the "x" statement will come from the opposite source of information. For example, if the prompt asks you to compare and contrast the Chesapeake and the New England colonies, you need to decide if they are more similar or different, whatever position you take, the information in the other area will be your "x" statement. If the prompt asks you to decide whether the 1920's was a time of conservatism or radicalism, you need to create a three column content frame. Draw a line through the middle of the boxes, the upper half will be information of conservatism, the bottom half will be information of radicalism. Whichever side you decide on, the "x" statement will come from the opposite source of information.



Essays that ask you to compare and / or contrast.  
You can use either one or two lines through the circles.



Essays that ask you to take a position.  
You can have either two or three boxes.

These two methods will be the most common way of setting up your pre-writing essay preparation. However, some prompts will not fit neatly into this scheme. The more you internalize this most common method, the more comfortable you will be with developing other ways of organizing your information.

## How to reference the documents in the DBQ?

The most unsophisticated way to reference a document in a DBQ essay is to do the following, “According to ‘Document A’ blah, blah, blah.” This is supposed to be a historical paper. DO NOT laundry list the documents in your paper, “Document A says this, document B says this . . . etc.” Instead, you should show the reader that you understand the documents and use them effectively within the argument of your paper. DO NOT quote documents, the readers know the documents, quoting may be appropriate for an English paper, but is not appropriate for a history paper. So how do I use a document? Suppose you have an excerpt from the Clayton Antitrust Act, you could make the following assertion, “The Clayton Antitrust Act was implemented during the Wilson administration to help support the antitrust legislation of the earlier and somewhat inefficient Sherman Antitrust Act.” There you go, you just used the document.

### DBQ Do’s and Don’ts

- 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.

- 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.

### Scoring Rubric for both the DBQ and the FRQ

100 - 90	_____	Contains a well developed thesis which clearly addresses all aspects of the prompt.
9 - 8	_____	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.
7 - 5	_____	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.
4 - 2	_____	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.
1 - 0	_____	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.
	_____	

