

Guide to Answering the Document-Based Question (DBQ)

1. Read the question very carefully and begin preparing to answer it by following the procedure you usually follow when you answer a free response essay question. That is,
 - a. Identify clearly what issue or issues you are being asked to analyze.
 - b. Identify the time frame within which you must work.
 - c. Identify the directive verb—explain, evaluate, assess
2. Briefly write down any important background knowledge you possess and (assuming you have some familiarity with topic) any important points or pieces of information you want to be sure to include in your response.
3. Formulate a tentative thesis to serve as the focus of your essay and, if possible, indicate in brief outline form what the most important evidence drawn from your background knowledge will be. (It is good practice to try to answer a DBQ from a previous exam without reading the documents).
4. **Only after completing steps 1 through 3 should you read the documents.**
5. As you read the documents, concentrate on finding evidence to support your thesis.
 - a. The documents will always contain conflicting evidence. When you find evidence contrary to your thesis, try to discredit it. (Does the evidence come from a biased and/or unreliable source?)
 - b. Don't be afraid to make some concessions to an opposing point of view, especially if you are unable to discredit a document. However, try as far as possible to maintain a clear emphasis.
 - c. Analyze each document keeping AP5Ws in mind (audience, purpose, who [author], what, when, where, why).
6. Use as many of the documents as you can. Refer to specific documents, preferably by mentioning the author or subject, as evidence in support of your thesis. If a document contains an assertion that runs contrary to your thesis, you should briefly refute that assertion. Omit a document only if you do not understand it or its relevance.
7. You should quote, paraphrase or refer to documents as evidence to support your thesis. You should not quote from a document or summarize its contents solely for the purpose of making reference to that document. You receive no credit for doing so.
8. Be sure to combine evidence drawn from your background knowledge (that is, outside information) with the evidence drawn from the documents to support your thesis.
9. Keep in the mind that the teacher reading your essay is going to be reading hundreds of essays and will be anxious to evaluate your essay as quickly as possible. The clearer your thesis and the better organized your presentation of evidence, the easier it will be to assign to a high grade.