

Guidelines for Writing

Answering a Document Based Question (DBQ)

General Guidelines

- A good strategy to get the most out of the document is write any outside information that you already know next to the document. This information is what you knew before you read the document and the after reading the document, you were reminded of it. The document acts to "trigger" this information.
- After reading the document you should also be able to summarize it in a phrase or two. You should also consider what you have learned from the document. Information is revealed in the document itself. It should teach you something. To get the significance of the document, you should consider: Is the author careful to show respect to certain individuals? Is the language or structure of the document a reflection of values or beliefs in society?
- You will need to be critical of the documents. Compare them. Do they disagree with each other? Why? Is there any bias in the document? If someone had one point of view on the topic, yet adopts a different position in the document, account for this and call it to the reader's attention.
- After looking at all of the documents, go back to the question paper where you have your categories and your list of events written and "place" the documents where they belong.
- Suggestion. You may want to write your opening paragraph on the test paper, perhaps on the back of the question paper.

Writing your answer

Your DBQ should follow the following format:

1. Opening paragraph with a sentence for each category and a thesis statement (Include a definition if a term is presented such a "radical" or "liberal").
2. "Setting the Scene" paragraph: This is crucial. This will allow you to load up on the outside information and bring the reader to the "heart" of your essay. Do not overdo it. Remember that you will need time for your other paragraphs. It should be no longer than six sentences.
3. The next three to four paragraphs will be your discussion of the outside information with your use of the documents to back up your thesis statement.

4. Remember our work with documents. The outside information that you would include in your essay would be the facts that you already knew about the topic; you probably have these facts under your categories before you even looked at the documents; you were reminded of these facts by the documents.
5. However, you also need to include the significance of each document or what each document reveals. In some cases, you might be familiar with the information revealed by the document. Weaving the "significance" of the documents is a bit tricky, but you will get it with time.