

Comparative Essay: Tips for Timed Writing

Improving student writing in World History AP

Successful social studies essays have an underlying shared core structure. This core plays an essential role in a student's ability to construct a logical argument. This core consists of a thesis, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. (How many supporting paragraphs, you ask. That depends on the question asked.)

Follow the guidelines below when writing a timed Comparative essay.

Budget your time. It's a first draft.

1. Determine the task

What are you being asked to do?

Directive Terms which will Clarify Essay Questions

Look at the following list of key words which appear frequently in essay topics, these are outlined in *Marshall and Rowland (1998, p.88)* (to help you work out your approach to the topic.)

Analyze: Show the essence of something, by breaking it down into its component parts and examining each part in detail

Argue: Present the case for and/or against a particular proposition

Compare: examine for the purpose of noting similarities AND differences

Contrast: compare to show points of difference

Criticize/ Critique: Give your judgment about the merit of theories or opinions about the truth of facts, and back your judgment by a discussion of the evidence

Discuss: Investigate or examine by argument, sift and debate, giving reasons for and against

Evaluate: Make an appraisal of the worth of something, in the light of its apparent truth or utility; include your personal opinion

Interpret: Bring out the meaning of, and make clear and explicit; usually also giving your own judgment

Justify: Show adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions

What are the parameters of the assignment? Look for dates, places, people, ideas, etc.

Identify the key terms. Look for words like economics, nationalism, gender, etc.

Exercise A: Consider the questions listed below.

❖ Use a yellow highlighter to identify the verb(s) (or underline if you don't have a highlighter)

❖ Use a pink highlighter to identify the parameters of the assignment, what's this essay about? (or box)

❖ Use a blue highlighter to identify the key terms in the question (or circle)

I. Compare and contrast the political and economic policies of Joseph Stalin in the period before WW II and those of Mikhail Gorbachev from 1985-1991.

II. It is often stated that "Han China, Rome and the Gupta Dynasty fell because of gender inequality." Address the validity of this statement as you compare the reasons for collapse.

III. "Leadership determines the fate of the country." Evaluate this quote as you compare and contrast Spain's leadership under Phillip II and England's leadership under Elizabeth I.

IV. Compare three developments that enabled Great Britain to achieve a dominant economic position between 1700 and 1830 while France stagnated.

V. Compare and contrast the attitudes of Martin Luther and John Calvin toward political authority and social order.

VI. Compare the influence of the theory of mercantilism on the domestic and foreign policies of France from 1600-1715 and Spain from 1492-1800.

VII. Identify four specific changes in science and technology and compare their effects on Western European family and private life between 1918 and 1970.

VIII. Compare the validity of the following statement: “Developments in transportation, rather than in manufacturing and agriculture, sparked economic growth in the first half of the nineteenth century,” in the United States and Great Britain.

2. Pre-Write

Organize your thoughts. A VENN Chart works great for comparative writing. (Think about comparisons as you fill in both sides simultaneously.)

Brainstorm specific facts to support your essay.

Create organizational categories (trade, gender, social status, religion, government, technology, etc). These categories become your paragraph topics.

3. Develop an analytical **thesis** in your opening paragraph.

THE THESIS

The thesis is a major component of a successful student essay in the social studies. Often a thesis is embedded in a longer introductory paragraph, at other times it stands alone. A thesis may be one sentence; in other cases it is multiple sentences. In all cases, an effective thesis:

- Fully addresses the question being asked;
- Takes a position with regard to the question being asked; and
- Provides organizational categories that will be used in the essay.

In some cases, broad categories such as political, economic, social or cultural **may** be appropriate, while in **MOST** cases an essay should be organized around a more specific concept. Instead of the broad topic of economics, use more specific language like agriculture and trade.

Exercise B: Consider the following prompts and theses. Does the thesis contain the three elements of a good thesis?

Exercise B

- I. Write “yes” or “no” in the left margin if the thesis fully addresses the prompt.
- II. In the thesis, highlight the “position” with a yellow highlighter (if present).
- III. In the thesis, highlight the organizational categories in pink (if present).

Prompt 1: Compare and contrast a chocolate chip cookie and an Oreo cookie.

Thesis A: There are many types of cookies in the world; two favorites are the chocolate chip and the Oreo. Both are similar in the fact that they contain chocolate although in one the chocolate is internal and in the other it is external. A major difference is the filling. (yes, categories=chocolate and filling, position=chocolate is similar, filling is difference)

Thesis B: There are many types of cookies in the world; two favorites are the chocolate chip and the Oreo. Oreos taste better than chocolate chip cookies, however they both go well with milk. (yes, categories= taste and go with milk, position is weakly defensible)

Prompt 2: Compare and contrast the views of the U.S. and Japan when assessing the justification for the dropping the atomic bomb at the end of World War II.

Thesis C: The U.S. was both justified and not justified in dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima to end W.W. II for military and moral reasons.

Thesis D: The U.S. was not militarily or morally justified in dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945.

Thesis E: The U.S. and Japan can both see the military justification for dropping the Atom bomb to end World War II; however, morally Japan can not see any value in destroying cities that were mostly civilian in nature.

Prompt 3: Compare the major results of the Neolithic Revolution in Asia and the Americas.

Thesis F: The Neolithic Revolution had many results. In the Americas one result was the growth of civilization in Mexico; another result was the development of a writing system in the Andes Mountains.

Thesis G: The Neolithic Revolution resulted in many changes in both Asia and the Americas. The results were similar in that diet improved in both regions leading to population growth. However, the domesticated animals of Asia were used for more than just food compared to those in the Americas.

Prompt 4: Compare the positive and negative effects of the West's policy of containment between 1945 and 1965 in Latin America and Asia.

Thesis H: The West adopted a policy of containment on communism and Soviet aggression directly following the aftermath of World War II. The West formed NATO which consisted of many different nations in order to provide peace in Europe. The policy of containment was adopted for Asia, as the West's way of preventing the spread of communism, but not overthrowing existing communist countries.

Thesis I: One difference of the policy of containment between 1945 and 1965 in Latin America and Asia was that wars against communist aggressors were sometimes successful. In both regions foreign governments began to look on Western policy as selfish, thus resulting in a loss of clout for the democratic nations.

Prompt 5: Compare and contrast the impact of philosophy on the Roman and Han Empires.

Thesis J: Philosophy causes people to question the world. One similar impact in both Rome and Han empires was the development of philosophies that caused people to not get involved. However, Confucianism was a Han idea about respect in society while the rationalist ideas of Rome were concerned about the self and not society.

Thesis K: When comparing the impact of philosophy during the period of classical empires, it can be argued that the Romans were weakened by philosophies that emphasized the individual over the state, while the Han government was strengthened by Confucianism. However, some philosophies in each empire emphasized detachment from political actions.

Thesis L: Philosophy was different yet similar in Rome and China. First, they happened in completely different locations; Europe and Asia. Next one had religion and one had philosophy. However, both were caused by chaos in the society.

Exercise C: You try one:

Prompt 6: Compare and contrast the way of life of sedentary agriculturalists with those of pastoralists.

<u>Agriculturalists</u>	Both	<u>Pastoralists</u>

4. Develop your SUPPORTING PARAGRAPHS

Supporting paragraphs include the information necessary to support the thesis. These paragraphs vary in length but must contain:

*A **comparative topic sentence** that relates back to the thesis as one of the **relevant** categories of organization. What is wrong with the following comparisons?

“The Aztec used hieroglyphics but the Inca did not”

Just refuting something is not a category.

“The Han Chinese are credited with starting the Great Wall while the Romans built roads.”

This is not a DIRECT comparison. The writer is inferring that the Chinese did not have roads and the Romans built no walls.

“Both the Han Empire and the Gupta Empire were located in Asia.”

Geography is NEVER a relevant historical category for comparison.

“The Gupta Empire was Hindu while the Roman Empire had multiple religions.”

This is not an AP World quality comparison; it is a statement of fact but does not contain the elements of a comparison that leads to analysis. (see next example)

“The Gupta Empire was strengthened by Hinduism while Christianity quickened the collapse of the Roman Empire.”

This comparison is a valid AP World comparison. It compares the effect that religion had on two of the classical empires. Analysis of this comparison is obtainable.

***Logically organized evidence (facts); pack your essay with appropriate historical evidence. Count the facts in the paragraph below.**

The uses for which domesticated animals were put differed greatly depending on the type of animal that was available in Asia and Latin America. (Comparative topic sentence) In Asia, horses were domesticated as food sources but also to provide fertilizer, as power to pull carts and plows and as weapons to ride into war. However, in America the domesticated llama was not well built for pulling carts or riding, but it did provide food and wool for clothing. The main Asian animal for wool production was the sheep. Both regions domesticated birds: the turkey in America and the duck in Asia for example, because they were quick to reproduce and large enough to be a good food source...

Analysis of why your evidence is relevant; close paragraphs with analysis of the comparison.

...This happened because the number of animals that were domesticatable in the Americas was limited while Asia had many more options of large animals that could provide power as well as food...

Address all parts of the question as equally as possible. At least one well thought out similarity paragraph and one well thought out difference paragraph is the minimum. An additional paragraph over a similarity or a difference serves as insurance.

TRANSITIONAL PHRASES

Use transitional phrases to help clarify meaning. These include:

- Sequence words like *first, second, next, finally*, etc
- Comparative words

like	like	in the same way	similarly
likewise	equally	alike	just as
just	in like manner	similarity	as in a similar fashion
comparable	akin	parallel	analogous to
related	corresponds to	as well as	but also
but	yet	variation	conversely
however	differ	still	otherwise
in contrast	difference	on the contrary	on the other hand
while	despite		

- Show result like *therefore, hence*, etc
- Summative words like *in short*, etc
- Illustrative words like *for example, for instance*, etc

Exercise C: Write a thesis statement and, using the formula for a supporting paragraph, write one body paragraph that would support that thesis in an essay answering the following question:

Compare how the Classical empire builders gained their power? Be sure to use example from at least two empires: Persia, Rome, Han, and Gupta

Need more practice?

Exercise D: Write a thesis statement and, using the formula for a supporting paragraph, write one body paragraph that would support that thesis in an essay answering the following question:

*Compare how the Classical empire builders maintained their power? Be sure to use example from at least **two** empires: Persia, Rome, Han, and Gupta*

5. Write a CONCLUSION

A conclusion does **not** merely restate the thesis statement. Often students have a clearer organizational picture of their essay after they have finished writing. Review the body paragraphs and write a concluding paragraph based on the similarities and differences you have actually discussed. This could also be a place to include the global context extra point – this must be relevant to the subject and not just a random fact.

6. Read your Essay

Did you address the prompt?

Do you have sufficient evidence?

Do you have analysis in each paragraph?

Did you make DIRECT comparisons and contrasts – with NO parallel construction?

Did you avoid faulty comparison?

7. How it's graded

Comparative Essay: Compare China's interactions/reactions with the West to the interactions/reactions of Japan and the West.

Japan, "I love you"...China. "I hate you!" The reactions and interactions of China and Japan to the encroachment of Western foreign powers determined the roles they would play on the world stage in the 20th century. Both powers were reduced to the status of subordinate land by European nations seeking economic benefits from them. China and Japan took steps to try to force the foreigners off their soil; each attempted to use their military to regain autonomy, but with different results. China and Japan also attempted to improve the intellectual ability of their nations, again with different results. In the end, however, Japan would be able to attain great standing on the world stage, whereas China would be submitted to humiliating occupation and longstanding economic difficulty.

- Comment [h1]: Address the prompt
- Comment [h2]: Similarity
- Comment [h3]: Similarity
- Comment [h4]: Similarity
- Comment [h5]: Difference

Both China and Japan went to war with the West. China immediately attempted an impossible victory against the foreign powers in the Opium War (1839-42) and would try to use uprisings later, like the Taiping Rebellion. This led to humiliating defeats and the irrevocable loss of their national sovereignty through Unequal Treaties with European powers like Britain, Germany and even the US. Japan however waited until they had developed their military, testing their power on China in the Sino-Japanese War, before they tried to force Europeans off their shores. Because Japan was able to use the lessons learned from the interactions between the Europeans and the Chinese, they were able to keep their national sovereignty and gain respect from Europe instead of becoming a sphere of influence.

- Comment [h6]: Similarity and generalization
- Comment [h7]: Facts
- Comment [h8]: Facts
- Comment [h9]: Fact
- Comment [h10]: Fact
- Comment [h11]: Difference
- Comment [h12]: Fact

Both nations attempted to catch up with the West through government reform. Intellectual Development was a key factor in the results of China's and Japan's reactions to European incursions. Japan and China sought to industrialize and develop their military. Japan's government sponsored and funded industrial growth through zaibatsu because of a lack of a middle class who could and worked to improve literacy through universal primary and secondary education. China's reforms, the Self-Strengthening Movement, failed because bureaucrats saw reformers as a threat. Later, the Hundred Days Reforms, failed due to lack of organization. One can see that while Japan's government embraced western progress, China saw it as against traditional values. The significance of this is that China fell behind and was carved up into spheres of influence while Japan remained independent.

- Comment [h13]: Analysis and conclusion
- Comment [h14]: Similarity and generalization
- Comment [h15]: 4 facts
- Comment [h16]: Fact
- Comment [h17]: Fact
- Comment [h18]: Fact

The futures of China and Japan, like those of Latin America and Africa, have been very different based on their choices when faced with imperialism. Both societies reacted and interacted with the West. China has suffered great economic setbacks, whereas Japan has seen incredible growth.

- Comment [h19]: Analysis and conclusion
- Comment [h20]: World

WHAP Comparative Essay Generic Rubric

Basic Core <i>Historical skills and knowledge required to show competence.</i>	Expanded Core <i>Historical skills and knowledge required to show excellence.</i>
<p>1. Has acceptable thesis. 1 Point <i>(addresses comparison of the issues or themes specified)</i></p> <p>2. Addresses all parts of the of the question, though not necessarily evenly or thoroughly. 2 Points <i>(Addresses most parts of the question: for example, deals with differences but not similarities)</i> (1)</p> <p>3. Substantiates thesis with appropriate evidence. 2 Points <i>(Partially substantiates thesis with appropriate evidence.)</i> (1)</p> <p>4. Makes at least one or two relevant, direct comparisons between or among societies. 1 Point</p> <p>5. Analyzes at least one reason for a similarity or difference identified in a direct comparison. 1 Point</p>	<p>Expands beyond basic core of 1-7 Points. The basic core of a 0-2 Points score of 7 must be achieved before a student can earn expanded core points.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a clear, analytical, and comprehensive thesis ▪ Addresses all parts of the question (as relevant): comparisons, chronology, causation, connections, themes, interactions, content. ▪ Provides ample historical evidence to substantiate thesis. ▪ Relates comparisons to larger global context. ▪ Makes several direct comparisons consistently between or among societies. ▪ Consistently analyzes the causes and effects of relevant similarities and differences.
Subtotal 7 Points	Subtotal 2 Points

TOTAL 9 Points

Comparative Essay Outline

X. "First Term" was A + B, while "Second Term" was C + D. Therefore, Y.

Essay Pre-write:

"First Term"

"Second Term"

A

C

B

D

I. Thesis Paragraph (1 point, t)

a. Restate the Question (X).

b. Address "First Term" in TWO categories (A + B)

c. Address "Second Term" in TWO categories (C + D)

d. Conclusion (Y) – Take a position!

II. **Topic Sentence A.** Connected to thesis and question. Discusses **direct comparison** among societies. **(1 point, p)**

a. Analyze one reason for similarity or difference identified in direct comparison. (1 point, a)

b. Evidence to support thesis. Specific causes and/or factors for direct comparison. (Why?!!!)

i. _____ (2 points, e)

ii. _____

iii. _____

III. **Topic Sentence B.** Connected to thesis and question. Discusses **direct comparison** among societies. **(1 point, d)**

a. Analyze one reason for similarity or difference identified in direct comparison.

b. Evidence to support thesis. Specific causes and/or factors for direct comparison. (Why?!!!)

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

IV. Topic Sentence C. Connected to thesis and question. Discusses **direct comparison** among societies. **(1 point, p)**

a. **Analyze one reason for similarity or difference identified in direct comparison.**

b. **Evidence to support thesis. Specific causes and/or factors for direct comparison. (Why?!!!)**

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

V. Topic Sentence D. Connected to thesis and question. Discusses **direct comparison** among societies.

a. **Analyze one reason for similarity or difference identified in direct comparison.**

b. **Evidence to support thesis. Specific causes and/or factors for direct comparison. (Why?!!!)**

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

VI. Conclusion/Summation

a. **Restate thesis in new way.**

b. **Analyze one reason for similarity or difference identified in direct comparison.**

c. **Show continuation to next chronological period, NOT TO THE PRESENT!!!**