

Writing a History FRQ or DBQ Essay

Structure of the Essay

- **Answer the question!** It may seem a bit obvious, but many history essays simply do not answer the question posed.
- **Introduction.** It should state what you will do in the essay.
 - Have a Thesis Statement that directly answers the prompt (question.).
 - A background sentence works well next and it should set the time, place, people and situation. Do not argue in this part.
 - The rest of the introduction should explain what to expect in the coming paragraphs, sort of a “plan of attack.” This sentence proves you are organized and prepares the reader for what to expect (and look for.)
- **Body.** Here you offer historical evidence that supports what you were saying in the introduction. Each new paragraph should have a topic sentence which supports your Thesis Statement. The sentences in the paragraph should then support the paragraph's topic sentence. Organize your body paragraphs in the same order as the ideas are presented in your thesis.
- **Summary.** Do not scrimp here. This is where you quickly remind the reader of the points you have made and how they support your Thesis Statement which answers the Prompt. A good way to remember how to do a summary is to ask yourself, “So, what was the point I was trying to make.” For a little added touch, you can add some foreshadowing next, just don't get cute.

Thesis Statement (it is the key, everything from being interesting to getting a good score flow from this)

- Is an argument, a position that you are taking. It must be explicit, obvious and in your reader's face. This is no place for subtlety!
- Again, it must answer the question (prompt), all parts of the question. If there are three parts to the prompt, there must be three corresponding parts to the thesis.
- It must be focused on the evidence, either the prior knowledge you are bringing to the essay or the documents offered, if any or both.
- Must be persuasive and positive.
- Be able to stand alone without the reader having seen the prompt (that's true of the whole essay too!)
- If your thesis involves “best” or “most” of something, then you **MUST** address the other things a little to prove yours is the best or the most.
- Is a statement with which your reader might disagree.

Tips

- Read the prompt several times. Use the “How to Read a Prompt” strategies.
- Translate the verbs. Determine exactly what you are being asked to do.
- Plan your essay first. Sound obvious, but many students paint themselves into a corner by writing a thesis that they can't defend. Use either a graphic organizer or an outline.

- As you are writing the essay, keep checking to see if you are answering the question and supporting your thesis.
- Just because you say something in your essay does not make it true. Defend your statements with evidence. Think like a lawyer at trial.
- An essay with a strong conclusion, weak body, and strong summary is better than an essay with a weak introduction, enormous amount of information in the body, and weak summary.
- Make sure your facts are relevant rather than related. An example: You are trying to explain how to write an essay and start using facts on the manufacture of paper. Now paper *is* related to an essay (you use it to write on) but it is not relevant to how to write an essay. Get it?

Avoid

- Unnecessarily flowery language or jargon (use concise language and get to the point)
- Irrelevant facts. They should all directly relate to the points you make.
- Strong and highly opinionated statements without adequate factual support.
- Dumping huge amounts of information rather than reasoning historically.
- Using first or second person, ever! I, we, us, our, ours, you, your, yours
- Using *always, all, only, never, nothing, or none* unless you prove that in your essay. (Not easy.)
- Digressing into areas not requested in the prompt just because you know something about that other subject.

Decoding the verbs

- **Analyze.** Determine their component parts; examine their nature and relationship.
- **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.
- **Compare.** Examine for the purpose of noting similarities and differences.
- **Contrast.** Examine in order to show dissimilarities or points of difference.
- **Describe.** Give an account of; tell about; give a word picture of.
- **Discuss.** Talk over; write about; consider or examine by argument or from various points of view; debate; present different sides of.
- **Explain.** Make clear or plain; make clear the causes or reasons for; make known in detail; tell the meaning of.
- **Identify.** Cite specific events and phenomena, and show a connection.
- **To what extent.** The range over which something extends; scope; the point, degree or limit to which something extends; magnitude.

DBQ's?

- More later, but it's all about analyzing the documents using the APPARTS acronym and then grouping them as needed to defend your thesis.