

U.S. History Essay Writing Guidelines and Tips

The AP U.S. History Exam is 3 hours and 15 minutes long and includes both a 100-minute multiple-choice / short-answer section (Part I) and a 95-minute free-response section (Part II). Each section is divided into two parts, as shown in the table below. Student performance on these four parts will be compiled and weighted to determine an AP Exam score. The majority of the score comes from writing... ☺ This document outlines some basics to approaching and conquering the LE (Long Essay) and DBQ (Document Based Question).

Section	Question Type	Number of Questions	Timing	Percentage of Total Exam Score
I	Part A: Multiple-choice questions	55 questions	55 minutes	40%
	Part B: Short-answer questions	4 questions	50 minutes	20%
	BREAK			
II	Part A: Document-based question	1 question	55 minutes	25%
	Part B: Long essay question	1 question (chosen from a pair)	35 minutes	15%

College Board Historical Thinking Skills... these are the skills you will employ when writing your essays

Historical Argumentation: Historical thinking involves the ability to define and frame a question about the past and to address that question by constructing an argument. A plausible and persuasive argument requires a clear, comprehensive and analytical thesis, supported by relevant historical evidence—not simply evidence that supports a preferred or preconceived position. Additionally, argumentation involves the capacity to describe, analyze and evaluate the arguments of others in light of available evidence.

Use of Relevant Historical Evidence: Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, describe and evaluate evidence about the past from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, archaeological artifacts, oral traditions and other primary sources), with respect to content, authorship, purpose, format and audience. It involves the capacity to extract useful information, make supportable inferences and draw appropriate conclusions from historical evidence while also understanding such evidence in its context, recognizing its limitations and assessing the points of view that it reflects.



Your essay prompts will be one of the Big Four types, although other skills will be required for successful responses.

Historical Causation: Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, analyze and evaluate multiple cause-and-effect relationships in a historical context, distinguishing between the long-term and proximate.

Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time: Historical thinking involves the ability to recognize, analyze and evaluate the dynamics of historical continuity and change over periods of time of varying lengths, as well as relating these patterns to larger historical processes or themes.

Periodization: Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, evaluate and construct models of historical periodization that historians use to categorize events into discrete blocks and to identify turning points, recognizing that the choice of specific dates favors one narrative, region or group over another narrative, region or group; therefore, changing the periodization can change a historical narrative. Moreover, the particular circumstances and contexts in which individual historians work and write shape their interpretations and modeling of past events.

Compare and Contrast: Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, compare and evaluate multiple historical developments within one society, one or more developments across or between different societies, and in various chronological and geographical contexts. It also involves the ability to identify, compare and evaluate multiple perspectives on a given historical experience.

Contextualization: Historical thinking involves the ability to connect historical developments to specific circumstances in time and place, and to broader regional, national or global processes.

Interpretation: Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, evaluate and create diverse interpretations of the past — as revealed through primary and secondary historical sources — through analysis of evidence, reasoning, contexts, points of view and frames of reference.

Synthesis: Historical thinking involves the ability to arrive at meaningful and persuasive understandings of the past by applying all the other historical thinking skills, by drawing appropriately on ideas from different fields of inquiry or disciplines and by creatively fusing disparate, relevant (and perhaps contradictory) evidence from primary sources and secondary works. Additionally, synthesis may involve applying insights about the past to other historical contexts or circumstances, including the present.

The Thesis Statement – What are you defending?

Your thesis is not only your answer or stand on a question, it is your entire introductory paragraph which includes your answer/stand, analysis of an opposing viewpoint, context, and organizational categories/themes. Your introduction will typically be between 2 and 5 sentences, and it should clearly communicate your answer/stand and what you will be expounding upon in your body paragraphs.

The Thesis Formula:

X. However, A, B, and C. Therefore, Y. or Although X, Y because ABC.

'X' represents the strongest point against your argument. We call this the counter-argument.

'A, B, and C' represent the three strongest points for your argument. We call these your organization categories.

'Y' represents the position you will be taking – in other words, your stand on the prompt.

For example, if you were addressing the prompt, "Evaluate the extent to which westward migration in the later 19th century contributed to maintaining continuity as well as fostering change in the United States," your thesis might include the following:

Y: led to dramatic changes

ABC: geographically, economically, and politically

X: maintained continuity culturally

Weak Thesis: Although westward migration maintained continuity, it fostered change to a greater extent because of changes in politics, economics, and geography.

Strong Thesis: Although westward migration in the later 19th century propagated the spirit of manifest destiny and white dominance, the movement westward fostered change to a greater extent than it maintained continuity. Change came economically with new technology, resources, and labor, politically with new, western political organizations and agendas, and geographically with dramatic changes to the environment.

Overkill Thesis: Although westward migration in the later 19th century maintained continuity in that it propagated the spirit of manifest destiny and white dominance by enclosing the territories between east and west as well as implementing the Reservation system, the movement westward fostered change to a greater extent than it maintained continuity. Change came economically as new technology, resources, and labor expanded production and opportunity, politically as farmers faced new problems and formed new organizations which influenced state and federal government, and geographically as new states were added and the environment was altered in many areas with new farming and ranching techniques such as long drives and irrigation systems.

Formulas for the BIG FOUR

The formula is essentially the same, but there are different ways to use it depending on what type of question you are answering.

1. Historical Causation:

What are the major causes or consequences of "event" and what were the most important causes or consequences of "event"?

X = least important cause or consequence, with an explanation why

A, B, C = most important causes / consequences, explanations why, broken up into organizational categories

Y = your assertion statement

2. Continuity and Change over Time:

What are the major patterns of continuity or change over the time period and was there more continuity or change over that time period?

X = continuity or change, your counter-argument

A, B, C = continuity or change during the specified time period, broken up into organizational categories

Y = your assertion statement

3. Compare and Contrast:

What similarities and differences are there between the two things, are there more similarities or differences, and why, account for those similarities or differences?

X = more similar or different, your counter-argument

A, B, C = similarities or differences between the two things, broken up into organizational categories

Y = your assertion statement

4. Periodization | (or Take a Position):

Evaluate whether something was a turning point or a major marking period in history, noting what things were like before and after that period.

X = counter argument, why something was or was not a turning point

A, B, C = argument, why something was a turning point broken up into organizational categories

Y = your assertion statement

Body Paragraphs – What are you saying?

Each body paragraph will focus on a category or theme and contain your exposition (defending your thesis) with specific, historical evidence relevant to your topic. Your goal is to have at least three – five specific pieces of evidence for each category or theme. If you are including document analysis, remember you still need outside evidence independent from the documents.

One last thing about your body paragraphs... end each one with “Close the Loop!”

Closing the loop means to explain *how* or *why* your evidence supports your thesis... always connect back to your thesis!

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 1’ blah, blah, blah.” “Document 1 says this, document 2 says this . . . etc.” Don’t do this!

Instead, you should show the reader that you understand the documents and use them effectively within the argument of your paper. **DO NOT quote the documents.** In order to get full credit (3 points) for document usage on the DBQ, you must be **HIPP*** and you must use **ALL or ALL BUT ONE document**. Document usage in the DBQ will include (at least H + one of the other levels of analysis must be employed):

***H: Historical Context + I: Intended Audience or P: Purpose or P: Point of View**

Suppose you had a document that was excerpt from the Clayton Antitrust Act. Your **HIPP** may look something like this:

H: Historical Context – Progressive Era, President Wilson signed, Act of Congress to limit monopolies

I: Intended Audience – The United States of America (adding new laws) and businesses

P: Purpose - help the government break up trusts/monopolies, fix the problems of the earlier Sherman Anti-Trust Act

P: Point of View – It is in the nation’s best interest to support competition and fair business practices, therefore government needs the power to force trusts to bust up

YOU DO NOT NEED TO HAVE ALL FOUR COMPONENTS... JUST H + ONE OF IPP

What would it look like in an essay? If you had a paragraph addressing ways the federal government implemented progressive reform in the early 1900s, you could include the document like this: “The historical context of the Clayton Antitrust Act was passed under Wilson’s administration when progressives were desperately seeking help in enforcing anti-trust legislation under a relatively inefficient Sherman Antitrust Act. The purpose was to give some enforcement power over anti- trust legislation to the federal government.”

An Opportunity for Synthesis – Where Does It Go?

There are several ways of getting the Synthesis Point in the LE or the DBQ. For the DBQ it can involve the following:

1. Extending or modifying the thesis or argument,
2. Recognizing and accounting for contradictory evidence in crafting a coherent argument, or
3. Connecting the topic to other historical periods, geographical areas, contexts, or circumstances.

For the LE it can involve the following:

1. Extending or modifying the thesis or argument,
2. Employing an additional category or analysis beyond that called for in the prompt, or
3. Connecting the topic to other historical periods, geographical areas, contexts, or circumstances.

Type of Essay	Synthesis Type	Where Does It Go?	Example
DBQ	1	After the Opening Paragraph	X paragraph, pointing out the counter-example to your thesis
LE	1	After the Opening Paragraph	X paragraph, pointing out the counter-example to your thesis
DBQ	2	Anywhere in the Essay	Combining (rectifying) contradictory evidence to support your argument
LE	2	Last Body Paragraph	Additional paragraph expanding the categories of analysis
DBQ	3	In the Conclusion Paragraph	Conclusion paragraph, reaching back or forward, or beyond the given
LE	3	In the Conclusion Paragraph	Conclusion paragraph, reaching back or forward, or beyond the given

Following the thesis formula will help you incorporate synthesis into your introduction, and if you include an X paragraph... the explanation will further enable you to expand on opposing views. You will be required in class to incorporate your synthesis (Other Context) in your concluding paragraph, but there are other places you could incorporate it additionally.

Conclusion – How much should you say?

Your concluding paragraph should NOT simply restate your thesis. You want to conclude with higher level analysis; however your conclusion does not need to be extensive. For your essays in this class, your conclusions will have three requirements.

Conclusion Formula: Therefore, Y + BC. BC is similar/different to OC, because E.

First: Restating your thesis with broad context... **Therefore, Y + BC.** (one sentence)

BC = Broad Context... what is the *big picture* within the era you are writing about... (identify one of the major historical themes – BAGPIPE)

Second: Synthesis... or *Other Context* (similar in kind but in a different time)... One sentence connecting and comparing, then

OC = Other Context... what other time period experienced a similar or different big picture/theme?

Third: Explanation... One sentence explaining *how* your theme/topic is similar or different than that same theme/topic in a different era.

E = explanation (at least one strong piece of evidence to support your comparison)

Forms of Analysis and the Learning Objectives – BAGPIPE (memorize this acronym)

BAGPIPE(S) are calling you—The content learning objectives for the APUSH course and exam are organized under seven themes, which are topics of historical inquiry to explore throughout the APUSH course. These themes will help you focus and understand major historical issues and developments, recognize broad trends and processes that have emerged over centuries in what has become the United States. The themes are



Belief Systems:

Ideas, Ideologies, Culture

- Ideas
- Religion and Philosophy
- Art and Literature
- Cultural Values
- Science
- Morality and Moral Values

America in the World: Global Context

- Competition for Resources
- Foreign Policy and Diplomacy
- Expansionism and Imperialism
- Global Conflicts (World Wars)
- Military and Economic

Geography & Environment:

Physical and Human

- Climate, Environment, and Geography
- Natural Resources
- Exchanges: plants, disease, animals

Peopling: Movement & Migrations

- Movement to, from, within the U.S.
- Nativism
- Immigrant groups impact on Society

Identity: Gender, Class, Racial, Ethnic Identities

- Gender
- Class
- Racial and Ethnic Identities
- National and Regional Identities
- Nationalism and Patriotism
- Assimilation

Politics and Power

- Role of State in Society
- Political Process
- Role of Political Parties
- Struggles over / for Freedom
- Federalism
- Liberty and Rights
- Citizenship
- Authority and Power

Economy: Work, Exchange, Trade, Technology

- Agriculture and Manufacturing
- Commerce and Trade
- Technology and Innovations
- Labor Systems
- Transportation
- Land Distribution

How will you be graded?

Long Essay (LE) RUBRIC

<p>Thesis: Introductory Paragraph Must use thesis formula! X. However, A, B, and C. Therefore, Y. or Although X, Y because ABC. <i>Don't forget to ATEP!</i></p>	◇
<p>States a thesis that directly addresses ALL parts of the question. The thesis must DO MORE than restate the question, it must have complex analysis including opposing viewpoint or evaluation of significance [depending on prompt]</p>	
<p>Support for Argument: Body Paragraphs Explain Your Evidence + Close the Loop! <i>Stay within parameters!</i></p>	◇
<p>Supports the stated thesis (or makes a relevant argument) using specific evidence from relevant era (at least 3 specific pieces of evidence per paragraph) and Clearly and consistently states how the evidence supports the thesis or argument, and establishing clear linkages (close the loop... connect back to your thesis!)</p>	First Point Must Be Earned Before Second Point Possible ◇
<p>Application of Targeted Skill: Body Paragraphs Apply the Skill with Evidence!</p>	
<p>Change Over Time Describes historical continuity and change and Clearly and thoroughly analyzes at least 3 specific examples that illustrate both continuity and change</p>	◇
<p>Comparison Describes similarities and differences among historical developments and Clearly and specifically analyzes at least 3 specific reasons for both similarities and differences or, [depending on prompt], and evaluates the significance of the historical developments</p>	First Point Must Be Earned Before Second Point Possible ◇
<p>Causation Describes causes and/or effects of historical development and Clearly and thoroughly analyzes at least 3 specific examples that illustrate cause and effect of the historical development</p>	◇
<p>Periodization Describes the ways in which the historical development was different from or similar to other historical eras and Clearly and thoroughly analyzes the extent to which the historical development was different from and similar to other historical eras that preceded and/or followed, using at least 3 specific examples to illustrate the analysis</p>	
<p>Contextualization & Synthesis: Concluding Paragraph Must use conclusion formula! Therefore, Y + BC. BC is similar/different to OC, because E.</p>	◇
<p>Accurately and explicitly connects historical phenomena relevant to the argument to BROADER historical events and/or processes. and Connects the topic of the question to OTHER historical periods, geographical areas, contexts, or circumstances within United States history.</p>	First Point Must Be Earned Before Second Point Possible ◇

Grade Conversion: 7 = 100 ; 6 = 95; 5 =90; 4 = 80 ; 3 = 70 ; 2 = 60; 1 = 50

TOTAL: _____

Document Based Question (DBQ) RUBRIC

Thesis: Introductory Paragraph								
Must use thesis formula! X. However, A, B, and C. Therefore, Y. or Although X, Y because ABC. <i>Don't forget to ATFP!</i>								
States a thesis that directly addresses ALL parts of the question. The thesis must DO MORE than restate the question, it must have complex analysis including opposing viewpoint or evaluation of significance [depending on prompt]								◇
Document Analysis & Support for Argument: Body Paragraphs								
Analyze Documents & Use Them To Defend Your Thesis! Cite Docs! Close the Loop! Stay within parameters!								
								◇
	Doc. A	Doc. B	Doc. C	Doc. D	Doc. E	Doc. F	Doc. G	or
a. Offers plausible analysis in support of the stated thesis or relevant argument								◇◇
b. Includes extended HIPP analysis (H = LOCAL context in addition to one of IPP) (not found in source)								or
1 Point: At least 4 documents used effectively in category a. 2 Points: 4-5 documents used effectively in both categories. 3 Points: At least 6 documents used effectively in both categories.								◇◇◇
Analysis of Outside Information: Body Paragraphs								
Additional evidence to defend thesis NOT found in the documents! Stay within parameters!								
Offers plausible analysis of at least 3 historical examples per paragraph that go beyond/outside the documents in support of the stated thesis or relevant argument; evidence is beyond outside information in HIPP analysis and is inside parameters , incorporation of evidence successfully addresses argument using relevant historical thinking skill								◇
Contextualization & Synthesis: Concluding Paragraph								
Must use conclusion formula! Therefore, Y + BC. BC is similar/different to OC, because E.								
Accurately and explicitly connects historical phenomena (BAGPIPE) relevant to the argument to BROADER historical events and/or processes (within parameters of prompt) and Connects the topic of the question to OTHER historical periods, geographical areas, contexts, or circumstances within United States history. (outside parameters of prompt)								◇ First Point Must Be Earned Before Second Point Possible ◇

Grade Conversion: 7 = 100 ; 6 = 95; 5 =90; 4 = 80 ; 3 = 70 ; 2 = 60; 1 = 50

TOTAL: _____