### How to Write an AP World History DBQ

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### How to Write an Effective Thesis

Your thesis is the most important part of your essay.  For that reason we will begin by focusing just on that skill.  For every essay that we do, the thesis is worth one point by itself and can also give you points in the expanded core.  More importantly it gives your reader their first impression of your essay. An effective thesis statement satisfies your reader's natural desire to know –usually early in the essay – what the central point or idea will be and how you are likely to go about presenting it.  
  
It is not always easy in the conditions in which you will be writing your essays (60 minutes timed) to write your best theses.  It is recommended at times to leave your thesis until the end and come back to it.  However if you can get your thesis out from the beginning, it does help to organize your essay and make your arguments more coherent.  
  
Your thesis statement should be in your introductory paragraph, though at times it can stand-alone.  In some cases your thesis will be only one sentence, though at times it will be two or more.  In any case an effective thesis must do the following:  
•    Fully addresses the question asked – You should go back to your days in elementary schools where they taught you how to write in complete sentences – this set of skills should be used when writing your thesis.  Make sure that you actually answer the question and all parts of the question fully.  
•    Takes a position with regard to the question asked – do not straddle the fence or respond vaguely without taking a stance.  At the same time do not give unasked for opinions or go too far a field in your response.  
•    Provides organizational categories that will be used in the essay – that is present a roadmap of sorts for the rest of your essay.  The question usually will have the categories in there to help you, but if not it is up to you to divide your answer and therefore essay into categories.  
  
Question:  Compare and contrast women’s roles in Han China and Rome.  
1.    Women's roles in China and Rome had both similarities and differences. – Does not take a position or provide organizational categories.  
2.    Women’s roles in China and Rome were generally similar though Roman women were better off.  – Does not provide organizational categories and is rather vague on position.  
3.    As everywhere in the classical world, women in both Rome and China were considered inferior and subordinate to men, but the Roman women's retention of property rights and comparative sexual freedom gradually enabled them to claim a larger share of the public arena than their Chinese sisters. – Good thesis: fully addresses, takes a position, and provides organizational categories.  
  
While the APWH exam does not specifically grade you on writing, it does have an impact on your expanded scoring.  When writing your introduction you may choose to follow the pattern of writing a few sentences to introduce your topic and engage the reader and conclude with a thesis statement (as shown below in Question 1).  On the other hand you might choose to begin your introduction with your thesis itself and add supporting sentences (as shown below in Question 2).  
  
Question:  How did feudalism and manorialism stabilize both the political and economic life of Europe following the fall of Charlemagne’s empire?  
  
After the downfall of Charlemagne’s empire, bands of rogues and barbarians, including the Vikings, invaded freely and did as they pleased with anyone and anything they found.  There were many peasants and other people left open to attack.  The feudal system and its economic partner, manorialism, were developed to help this situation.  Following the fall of Charlemagne’s empire feudalism stabilized Europe’s chaotic period by providing military protection and some law and order.  At the same time manorialism allowed areas to be self-sufficient and led to a fairly stable economy.  
  
Question: To what extent did the Enlightenment express optimistic ideas in 18th C Europe?    
The 18th C Enlightenment in Europe was marked by its optimistic philosophy and positive ideas.  Naturally not everything was optimistic, but Enlightenment ideas were backed by a sense of simple logic and optimistic attitude.  Such philosophers as Locke, Rousseau and Voltaire promoted the positive ideas of social and political equality, which set the groundwork for revolutionary new prospects. However the literature did give the optimism its limits by setting forth the truth of society. Essentially the enlightenment in Europe was a time of general optimism, limited by certain human factors.

**How to Analyze Point of View (POV) Effectively**

When studying historical sources you need to be aware of documents’ sources and their authors’ points of view.  The Document Based Question (DBQ) rubric requires you to analyze point of view in the documents (anywhere from 2 to all of the documents).  Awareness of the documents’ sources and their authors’ points of view requires demonstration of the analytical skills of understanding context, point of view and frame of reference.  Pay attention to both internal evidence (the content and tone of each document in relation to the others) and external evidence (identification of the author, purpose or intended audience, and the date when each document was written).  Below are some guidelines of how to do this.  Keep in mind:  you only need to provide a single analysis of the document’s point of view.  Below you will find a myriad of ways to do so; you will not need to use them all on each document, just one.  
  
**1.    Read the documents very carefully.**  In the source line you should be given most if not all of the documents’ attribution, that is, information about the document: What is the document (name or kind)?  Who wrote it? What was their occupation, or some other identifying characteristic? When was it written or compiled? Where? Why? Etc.    
  
**2.    Now--this is the hard part--you need to answer the question:  Why was THIS person producing THIS piece of information at THIS time or in this manner? Where is the author coming from?**Determine how the information given to you in the attribution, and other information you have deduced from the document and perhaps even other documents or outside information, could affect the point of view. Ask yourself, what would have to change to make the person say something different?   There are several methods and acronyms to help you do this.  The one I will use is called SOAPSTONE.

### *S - Who is the Speaker/Source?*

•    Who is saying this?    
•    Who is the person who produced this piece?   
•    What is his or her background?  

Generally trying to find what makes that person the most different from you is a useful approach, unless there is something about them that is familiar to you and then you can use that. You can use these acronyms or variations on them to help you remember

H – Home - country of origin, national or ethnic identity

O – Occupation or profession   
G – Gender  
W – Worldview – values reflecting religious/philosophical, or other ideals   
A – Age  
R – Real Knowledge – that is what are the limitations of the speaker – what could they know or not know  
T – Theoretical Ideals - political [conservative, liberal, radical, pacifist, fascist, etc.], economic [mercantilist, capitalist, feudal, socialist, communist, etc.], or other social / intellectual values   
S – Social Status, including class, caste, wealth and education

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#### **O - What is the Occasion?  (Sometimes close to Purpose)**

•    When was this said – that is under what circumstances?    
•    What is the time and place of the piece; the current situation?   
•    What else (some historical event or period) was going on at that time that might have had an influence on the author?   
•    What is the context that might have encouraged the writing to happen?   
•    Is there another document that was produced before this that the author might be thinking of when writing this?    
•    Why was it written (or drawn or photographed)?

#### **A - What is the Intended Audience?**

•    To whom is this piece directed? The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group; it may be a certain person or a certain people.   
•    How does this affect how it is written?     
•    Was it written as a private record?  Was it written to be read/heard by others and if so whom?  Is it an official document for a ruler to read?  Is it a commissioned painting or photograph?   
•    Are they responding to arguments or concerns that are not clearly stated?  What position is that and why?  
•    Helpful in analyzing the audience would be to look at what presumptions and preconceptions do we bring to this text and how might this point a difference in values or ideas of those writing it versus those reading it?   Does this affect our understanding?  How do you know this – what about the text makes you think this?  Therefore who would understand it differently than you and why?

#### **P - What is the Purpose?**

•    Why did they say this?  
•    For what purpose was the document produced? What were their reasons, motives or goals?    
•    What is at stake for the author in this text? What in the document tells you this? What does this tell you about the author?  You need to connect some motivation on the part of the person creating the text with the document itself.  This is one of the harder ones to do correctly and the one most often mistakenly cited.

#### **S - What is the Subject? – NOT for POV itself, but to support POV claims or to help answer the question.**

•    What is being said?  What are the general topics, content, and ideas contained in the text (summarized)?     
•    What do you learn that helps you answer the question?    
•    What is missing or unexplained and why would that be the case?  (This really helps when considering the additional document).    
•    Compared to other texts with similar topics or backgrounds, what makes this text different or similar?    
•    Does other evidence support the source? Does other evidence contest the source?   
•    What does the document tell us without actually telling us?  Try to distinguish between interpretation and fact.  

#### **TONE – What is the tone of the document? (Will overlap with Speaker)**

•    How is this being said?    
•    What vocabulary (especially but not only adjectives) does it use?  How does this convey the intent, the point of view of the author (anger, disdain, admiration, etc.)?    
•    What is the reason for them to adopt this tone?  Are they trying to make a case and if so how does it affect their presentation? Are they successful with their strategy?  

Consider the SWEET AND SOUR approach.  Is the speaker or message:

S – Sad or wistful?

W – Worried or panic stricken?

E – Exasperated, outraged or disgusted

E – Excited or guilty / ashamed?

T – Tolerant, sympathetic or unsympathetic?

A – Arrogant, condescending or insensitive?

N – Negative, defensive or judgmental?

D – Deferential or respectful?

S – Sarcastic or humorous?

O – Obsessed, fanatical or just committed?

U – Uncertain or knowledgeable?

R – Ruthless, cruel or antagonistic?

#### **Other Hints for Students**

1.    Identify unusual or loaded words, phrases in the text.  
2.    List standard or expected alternatives that would carry the same meaning.  
3.    What are the differences between the alternative and original words (social, cultural)?   
4.    Ask why didn’t the source use alternative words?  
  
Again, don’t assume just because it is written by a historian that there is no point of view.  Take this excerpt from a textbook World History: The Human Experience:  
  
“The Byzantine Empire came to a pitiful end at the hands of the savage Turks.”   
  
It is the use of terms such as “pitiful” and “savage” that indicates to us the point of view of the author.  Reading carefully will make us more aware of this.  
   
**3.    Once you have determined the point of view (every document will have one), you need to express it appropriately.  Simply** repeating the attribution will not get you any points for POV; nor will claiming bias without justification. Stating “the author is biased because he is \_\_\_\_\_” is not sufficient for a good POV statement.    
  
You essentially need to say, the author might write \_\_\_\_\_ /use \_\_\_\_tone/etc.  because \_\_\_\_\_\_.    

Consider your POV statement as a triangle sentence whose three parts are:  
  
                SOAPSTONE

         Text            Why – or rather what connects them?  
  
Avoid using the word bias, since it is often misused and misinterpreted.  Avoid trying to cast aspersions on the source.  All sources can tell you something, no matter what you think about the author.  This kind of POV attempt (This information is biased/wrong because the author is \_\_\_\_\_) rarely gets the POV point.

#### **Ideal POV Statements** Source:  Isocrates, Greek philosopher; description of Artaxerxes II, a Persian king who gained control over Greek city-states in A.D. 387. He is a despot to whose course we sail to accuse each other.  We call him the Great King, as though we were subject prisoners of war, and if we engage in war with each other, it is on him that our hopes are set, though he would destroy both sides without compunction. POV - Speaker:  As a Greek, Isocrates would have ill-will towards his conquerors and would thus be inclined to describe him harshly with such terms as “despot” or “subject prisoners of war” and “without compunction.”

Source:  Emperor Qianlong, Qing Emperor of China, addressing the British sovereign.  
You, O King, from afar have yearned after the blessings of our civilization, and in your eagerness to come into touch with our converting influence have sent an Embassy.  Your Ambassador has put forward requests which completely fail to recognize the Throne’s principle to ‘treat strangers from afar with indulgence,’ and to exercise a pacifying control over barbarian tribes the world over. Nevertheless, I do not forget the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world. I have therefore commanded my minister to enlighten your Ambassador on the subject.  
  
POV - Tone:  Qianlong’s belief that Chinese civilization was superior to all others is indicated in his use of phrases such as “the blessings of our civilization,” “our converting influence,” “barbarian tribes” etc.  
  
POV - Audience:  When addressing what in his mind was an inferior culture, Qianlong condescends:  “the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world.”

Source:   Marx and Engel’s Communist Manifesto in 1848   
The bourgeoisie has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations.  It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superior,’ and has left remaining no other nexus [link] between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment.’  It has drowned the most heavenly of ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm in the icy water of egotistical calculation.  In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.”   
  
POV - Purpose:  Marx and Engel are trying to inspire a revolution and therefore are trying to arouse negative feelings about the bourgeoisie and capitalism in general by describing them with such words as “pitiless,” “egotistical” and “exploitation.”  
**Rare Cases**  
The following cases rarely occur in DBQs, but many students rush to assume them first.  Pause and seriously consider before you question these.  
•    **Veracity** - In very few cases you would be correct to question the truthfulness of the document.  If you do you will still need to include it in your answer somehow and tell what you can learn from it.  
•    **Reliability** - More often you might want to examine the reliability of the source: is what they are saying verifiable?  Is all that they are saying verifiable? Was the source in a position to know that information?  For instance a soldier might know the details of the campaigns in which they took part, but that does not make them a reliable source for all military campaigns. Is it an opinion or a fact? An author whose tone is overtly not neutral [that is strongly conveys their cultural biases] should lead us to question their credibility.  At the same time, they could still be a credible source while an author who is neutral or objective could not be credible.  
•    **No Source Given**- when no primary source is given for a document, you should question your ability to analyze the point of view as no source is given.

#### **Unusual Sources**

**Maps**  
•    What projection is used?  What does this do the size and shape of the countries or states being shown?  What is at the center of the map?  Does the culture/map maker place themselves at the center (literally of the world)?  What is the map’s orientation?  Is the direction at the top significant, (as in the west when for years east was at the top because that was where the Holy Land was)?   
•    Can you tell anything about the culture making the map from the title, scale/units, legend, grid, etc? (e.g. a map of religions in Africa from the late 1800s - shows Christians, "Mohammedans" and Others)  
•    How was the information for the map collected?  Does it reflect anything about the cultural, power or historical context of the map?  
•    What is the map intended for, what is it supposed to communicate?  
   
**Statistics / Charts**  
•    Where did the data come from for these figures?  Who collected it? For what purpose?  
•    How was the data collected?  The manner that the initial collection was done is crucial in understanding the information you are given as it could reflect cultural, economic, political or historical contexts that could affect the data.  
•    Who published the data?  When? How was the information used once it was collected?  How did it affect things? Do not negate a source just because it was collected a long time ago (or recently) or likewise do not negate or accept it just because it is from the government, but do question the means and motives.  
Photograph / Painting / Political Cartoon  
•    Who created the image? Why?  For what audience? Who commissioned (is paying for) the painting, photograph or cartoon? How is this image being used?  Is it for private viewing, in which publication, etc.?  
•    What is being shown?  What is their relationship with the author (photographer, cartoonist, etc.)?  Are they aware that they are being included in the image? If so, why are they willing to be in this image?  
•    What decisions were made in creating this image? How is the image/subject positioned/staged?  Why did they choose the setting (background, location etc.)?  
•    Why have they chosen to depict the items they way they have (consider shape, form, dress, especially for political cartoons)?  What visual imagery is being used that we might not understand?  Might someone living in that day and age more accurately interpret it?  What is not being shown in the image?  
•    How was the image created?  What equipment was used that might have constrained or limited the image (e.g. flash photography?  Absolute stillness or posing? Other sketches of shots taken?) If other sketches or shots existed why was this one chosen and not the others?  What could we learn from what was not shown or chosen?  
•    What is the title of the image?  In what context was it presented? Were any captions included? What can we learn from the image?

**Advertisement**  
•    What is the ad trying to do – buy a product for the first time or switch products?  
•    Which group is the advertisement trying to reach?  Where was it published?  
•    What strategies are used to sell the product?  Reasoning?  Emotion? Famous people? Commands? Price cuts? How does it attract your attention?    
•    What cultural trends are reflected (women’s role, ethnic bias, class, childhood)?

**Pieces of literature/Songs /Editorials**  
•    Who wrote it?  In what format?  Where was it published? By whom? When?  
•    What is it talking about? What does it tell us about the times?  
•    What genre does it fit into?  What vocabulary or imagery is being used?  Is anything repeated?  Is there any pattern? Is it indicative of the times?  
•    How does the piece end?  What is the final message or image?  
  
**Final Cautions (POV No-Nos):**  
Don’t just repeat information from the attribution and assume that you have identified POV.  It must be information that is not given to you specifically in the attribution.  “According to the British colonial governor” is not POV. Saying “He is unreliable because he is British” is both insufficient and untrue.  
  
Don’t assume that people from the same place, ethnicity, gender, etc. have the same POV.  Likewise, do not list several documents whose authors share some characteristics and try to get POV points for all of them (e.g. “Documents 3, 6 and 10 are all from women and therefore would know firsthand what women’s roles are like”).  You need to address each document/author specifically as each will have a different perspective (the upper class does not always know about the lower classes’ roles).  
  
Don’t equate time or distance with unreliability (“Bentley is not reliable because he's writing 1000 years after the events happened.”)  Time and distance can provide or affect objectivity, but it doesn’t affect reliability or credibility.   
  
Even when the facts are undeniable (some statistics and pictures), the conclusions drawn or the data selected can reflect a bias or POV based on who paid for the research or their purpose in doing the research or what is not being discussed.  
  
Do not say:  “This document is biased.”  It is a pet peeve of most readers.  Instead try “The author’s perspective is influenced by . . . “

**Analysis in AP World History**

Analysis is a necessary skill for all three APWH essays (and life), especially when analyzing: point of view, grouping of documents, the process of change over time and/or continuity, and reasons for a similarity or difference identified in a direct comparison.  It is also a way of getting expanded core points (e.g. an analytical thesis) and is even sometimes required in the thesis or to support the thesis.

### What is analysis?

According to the College Board: “Analyze:  determine their component parts; examine their nature and relationship.”  
  
Which is further distinguished from:  
•    “Assess/Evaluate:  judge the value or character of something; appraise; weigh the positive and negative points; 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: write about; consider or examine by argument or from various points of view; debate; present the different sides of  
•    Explain:  make clear or plain; make clear the causes or reasons for; make known in detail; tell the meaning of”  
  
Analysis (Based on Bloom's Taxonomy) refers to the ability to break down material into its component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. This may include:  
•    the identification of parts or components,   
•    examination of the relationship between parts,   
•    recognition of hidden meanings and   
•    detection of the organizational principles or patterns involved."  
  
So when doing a historical analysis what is being done is breaking down the item being analyzed into its parts which generally include:  
•    historical actors - events, processes, institutions, ideas, etc. (e.g. examination of multiple causation which looks at cause and effect relationships)  
•    evidence (e.g. determining the significance and reliability of various perspectives like when point of view is analyzed)  
•    interpretations of what happened (e.g. comparing and contrasting changing versions of developments or theories)  
•    underlying structures (e.g. determining how all the processes, institutions, ideas, events, actors, motives, evidence, interpretations)  
•    overall process of change and continuity (e.g. connecting different regions and eras)

#### **DBQ Rubric calls for analysis of Point Of View of documents and thesis.**

DBQ Question from the Course Description Guide:   “Based on the following documents, analyze the opportunities and barriers that nationalist movements posed concerning women’s rights.”

So for the thesis break it down.  First identify:  
•    Opportunities: including increased public participation, roles in the nationalist party leadership, and even military actions; and  
•    Barriers:  nationalist male opposition to any power-sharing with women, and the ongoing problem of women bearing a special burden in the representation of traditional culture  
Then determine multiple causes for these opportunities (changing attitudes of the imperial forces, increasing access to Western education, growing frustration with colony status, etc.) and barriers (cultural biases, chauvinism, misogyny, etc.)  and why different women had different perspectives (political situation in their respective countries, geopolitical and class differences among the women, and cultural differences in their societies’ views of women’s participation in the public sphere).  
  
For point of view, follow the triangle of SOAPSTONE, Text and What connects the two.

**Final Tips for Writing a DBQ**

* The purpose of the DBQ (Document Based Question) is not to test your knowledge of the subject, but rather to evaluate your ability to practice the historian's craft. You will be required to work with the documents and use them to answer a question.
* Writing the DBQ is an acquired skill, one that takes practice. You should not get discouraged if you do not "get it" right away. The goal is to acquire the skill by May.
* Remember that there is actually no right or wrong answer. Your answer is YOUR interpretation of the content of the documents. As long as your answer is logical and your interpretation is supported by the content of the document you are correct.

#### **The following is your guide to writing a successful DBQ.**

1. Read carefully the question prompt and the historical background. Underline the tasks demanded and the terms which are unique to the question.
2. Read the documents carefully - summarize and/or underline as needed.
3. You use all of the documents in fashioning your response, but do not simply cite the documents in "laundry list" fashion. You should strive to IMPOSE order on the documents.
4. Your essay should be an ANALYSIS of the documents and their content.  You are demonstrating analysis if you are doing the following:
   1. The essay contains a thesis which answers the question and provides a roadmap (groupings).
   2. The documents are used as evidence to support your thesis.
   3. Frequent reference is made to the terms of the question
   4. Be certain that your answer is always focused directly on the question. Do not drift afield.
5. Be certain that you analyze the point of view (POV) for all documents.

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#### **LITERARY CONCERNS**

1.    The essay has an adequate introduction in which the time frame is noted.  
2.    Proper essay style is used.  
3.    Grammar and spelling are adequate (do not misspell words that are supplied in the documents).  
4.    You have not referred to yourself in the essay and you have not told the readers what they are "going to learn".  
5.    The documents have been used in a manner which makes their use readily apparent to the reader that is referring to the author or title of the document, it is best to cite the number parenthetically).  
6.    Quotations are limited to a phrase which is placed within the context of your answer. DO NOT quote full sentences!  
7.    ALL PARTS OF THE QUESTION have been answered.  
8.    A conclusion exists which summarizes the evidence, restates the thesis and indicates a direction for further study or occurrences.  
9.    Base all of your comments on the documents, NOT on outside information. Outside information may be used to enhance understanding but it must not be the basis of your argument.