

**WORKSHEET TO HELP STUDENTS WRITE ANSWERS TO  
DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

**Directions:** Follow the steps in the order in which they appear. This guide should help you to dissect the question, to organize your thoughts, and to analyze the documents so that you can begin to write your essay.

**Step 1: Reading the General Directions.** Read the general directions on the test very carefully each time you practice writing a DBQ. By the time of the AP exam in May you should know the directions so well that this step will be unnecessary.

**Step 2: Reading the Document Based Question.** Read the Document Based Question very carefully and answer the following

A. What is the time frame of the essay question? \_\_\_\_\_

B. What, if any, geographic areas are involved? (write N/A if not applicable to this question) \_\_\_\_\_

C. What “era(s)” in U.S. History are covered by this question? \_\_\_\_\_

D. Underline the operative word(s) (analyze, assess the validity, evaluate to what extent, evaluate the relative importance of etc.) found in the question. Then explain, in your own words, what this operative word(s) wants you to do. (These words must become part of your working vocabulary and you must understand what they are asking you to do. You can find these words on a previously distributed handout entitled “Important Words Found in Essay Questions.”)

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E. Underline the words which comprise the core of the question.

F. Which history specific terms, if any, may require **explicit** or **implicit** definitions? List and define them below:

G. Now, in your own words, explain exactly what this question is asking you to do. Begin with the words: “**This question wants me to . . .**”

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**Step 3: Writing a Preliminary Thesis Statement.** While you should not write your final thesis statement until after you have read and analyzed all the documents, you should know enough about this topic from what you have studied in your course to write a very preliminary thesis statement that addresses all parts of the question. It is not necessary to write this statement in complete sentences. It may simply be a compilation of ideas and thoughts, but it should serve as a road map to what will follow in your essay.

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**Step 4: Organizing Your Essay.** Based on what the question is asking you to write about and the ideas you have assembled while writing your preliminary thesis statement, draw a diagram below of how you will organize your essay.

**Step 5: Outside Information.** As the general directions have indicated, you are required to integrate **substantial, relevant outside information** into your essay. Define each of the previous bolded terms:

**substantial:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**relevant:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**outside information:** \_\_\_\_\_

In the spaces below (and without yet looking at any of the documents) list any information about the DBQ topic that comes to mind.

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**Step 6: Reading and Analyzing the Documents:** Read and analyze each document looking for the most important points. Note the author, the date, and any clear bias for each document. Circle or underline key words and phrases. Now, take notes on each document in the spaces provided below. Be sure to include the main point of each document as it relates to the question and **indicate how each document relates to your organizational structure.** As you read each document decide why the members of the ETS Test Development Committee chose to incorporate the document in the question.

Document A	Document B
Document C	Document D
Document E	Document F
Document G	Document H
Document I (if needed)	Document J (if needed)

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**Step 7: Writing the Final Thesis Statement:** Using the ideas from your preliminary thesis statement and what you have read in the documents, write a final thesis statement of 2-3 sentences which relates back to what the question is asking you to do. Remember that your thesis statement should act as a road map for your essay and tell the reader exactly what you are going to prove. The best student writers take a middle of the road approach to a question and realize that in history everything is not black and white. Most topics contain shades of gray.

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**Step 8: Outlining Your Essay.** Now you will outline the paragraphs in your essay to prove your thesis. Never integrate the documents into the essay in the order in which they appear in the question. Refer back to Step 4 to see exactly how you will organize the essay.

**Paragraph 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Paragraph 2:** You may wish to set the stage in this paragraph and provide some background information that could count as outside information.

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**Paragraph 3:** List the topic of the paragraph, the outside information you will use, and the name and the letter of the documents you will include.

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**Paragraph 4:** List the topic of the paragraph, the outside information you will use, and the name and the letter of the documents you will include.

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**Paragraph 5:** List the topic of the paragraph, the outside information you will use, and the name and the letter of the documents you will include.

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**Paragraph 6:** List the topic of the paragraph, the outside information you will use, and the name and the letter of the documents you will include.

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**Paragraph 7:** List the topic of the paragraph, the outside information you will use, and the name and the letter of the documents you will include.

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**Paragraph 8:** List the topic of the paragraph, the outside information you will use, and the name and the letter of the documents you will include.

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Use additional sheets of paper, if necessary, if you have more paragraphs.

**Concluding Paragraph:** Do not introduce new information into your conclusion. Do not contradict your thesis. Make sure that your conclusion summarizes the information in the thesis paragraph, but uses different words. Should you wish, this would be a good time to link what you know about this topic to some future event. If you were writing a DBQ about foreign policy during the Early National Period, you could end your essay by saying that the ideas in Washington's Farewell Address were not only followed by the first five presidents, but were followed by most American presidents until the U.S. joined the N.A.T.O. alliance in 1949.

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Now you may begin to write. DBQ answers are typically 3-6 sides of a page long. Do not refer to documents by letter in your essay. In fact you do not need to cite the documents at all unless you wish to do this. Your DBQ should read smoothly, just like a regular essay. Never quote more than a few words from a document as you write the essay.