

Writing Reference Sheet

Guide to Long Response and DBQs for History

Don't Want Your Vomit

Essays are not information dumps, they are designed to test your mastery of the major themes of history through a specific lens. You will not get good scores for essays that merely demonstrate that you know the information. The highest scores go to essays that show that you are capable of using your knowledge to analyze historical themes. Since there are many ways of analyzing history not all essays are the same!

Step 1: Read the Question

You'd be surprised how many students would rather flex their memorization of facts than actually answer the question. This often occurs when students don't take the time to read essay questions carefully. Read the question as many times as necessary so you can identify the following components.

I. Question Type

There are four major question types (prompts) that you will be presented with. Each require different skills revolving around historical analysis, with many skills crossing over between question types.

1. **Historical Causation** (cause-and-effect): Requires you to identify, analyze, and evaluate multiple cause-and-effect relationships in a historical context. This often also requires that you distinguish between long-term and short-term effects.
2. **Continuity and Change**: Requires you to recognize, analyze, and evaluate the continuity (consistency) and change (dynamics) of a time period. Over a period of time how much did things remain the same? How much did they change? The best answers explain WHY things did or did not change and they relate these patterns to larger historical processes or themes.
3. **Compare and Contrast**: Requires you to describe, compare, and evaluate a theme between two subjects. This can be in any of the following forms: different periods in one society, different societies in one period, different periods in different societies, or even different perspectives of one event.
4. **Periodization**: These essentially focus on historiography and how different time periods have shaped the way history is studied, recorded, and taught. The strongest responses also discuss how these periods affect the larger story of history.

II. Time Period and Region

The easiest thing to identify is what the subject of your essay is going to be. What region(s) are you focusing on and what time period(s)? Most prompts explicitly tell you the region and dates, but some may be broad and require you to determine what region or time period fits the description.

Compare and contrast the effects that rivers had on the development of any two ancient river valley civilizations.

While this question does not give you any exact subject, it gives plenty of indicators of the time period and the potential regions that you will be focusing on. Highlight or underline key words or phrases or make a note besides your paper.

III. Objective(s)

What objectives are applicable to this question? Many questions can be open ended and give you the freedom to determine your own focal objectives. Still, most questions will be specific about which ones they want you to focus on.

The thematic objectives of world history are:

1. Interaction Between Humans and the Environment
2. Development and Interaction of Cultures
3. State Building, Expansion, and Conflict
4. Creation, Expansion, and Interaction of Economic Systems
5. Development and Transformation of Social Structures

Step 2: Formulate a Thesis

A thesis statement is the focal argument that you wish to prove in your paper. Thesis statements are usually a sentence in length and located in the middle or near the end of the introductory portion of an essay or paper. Any crafted thesis must contain:

1. A subject
2. A claim
3. Supporting arguments (reasons)
 - a. Must have sufficient evidence to be valid
4. Must relate back to the question

I. Flex

The best way to start building your thesis is to write down everything you know in short form. This is the first part of planning. You will essentially be writing down a short hand list of potential evidences that you will be able to

use to support your thesis throughout the essay. This is the only place where it is appropriate to simply 'flex' your memorization skills.

II. Synthesis

Look at all of the information you have written down and begin to synthesize an appropriate response. You might come across multiple potential responses to different questions depending on how much you know about a given topic. These responses don't necessarily have to be written as a thesis until you select the one that you feel you will have the easiest time building on through your analysis and supporting evidence.

III. Thesis

Once you've selected the response you prefer, it's time to create your thesis statement. Here are two simple thesis formulas:

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

Variables:

X – A strong counterargument

Y – Your main argument or response

A, B, C – Three supporting arguments

Thesis Practice Prompts

1. Compare and contrast the effects that rivers had on the development of any two ancient river valley civilizations.
2. In the period before 600 BC, the adoption of agriculture had significant social, economic, and demographic effects. Develop an argument that evaluates how the adoption of agriculture in this time period affected the development of human societies.
3. Compare and contrast the effects of **inter-regional trading systems** on TWO of the following regions during the period 8000 BC – 600 AD.

Mesopotamia - India - China - Egypt - Classical Mediterranean World