**Steps to Success on the DBQ**

Some quick notes on writing GOOD historical essays:

* **In no circumstance should your essay have fluff in it**, this is not an English class. They have different requirements and different expectations for their essays. In History class you are expected to write a history essay, in English class you are expected to write an English essay, they are two different tasks, skills, and assignments.
* **Do not** use contractions. This detracts from the sophistication of the analysis.
* **Do not** use rhetorical questions. Your job is to answer questions, not pose them.
* Avoid general statements at the beginning of sentences; for example: this, they, them, he, they. **Identify** what or who you are discussion, as it makes your essay more clear and sophisticated.
* In reference to the United States: DO NOT SAY, “our country” or “we” (in talking about Americans). Say instead, “The United States,” “America,” or “Americans” where appropriate.
* **DO NOT USE PRONOUNS**
* **EXPLAIN EVERYTHING!**

PLANNING YOUR ESSAY

**DO NOT LOOK AT THE DOCUMENTS YET!!!**

1. Focus on the Prompt

* Read the prompt carefully.
* Make sure that you understand the **entire question**. Identify all parts of the prompt.
* What are your time period restraints?
* Are there specific points that you’re being asked to address?
* What is the verb in the prompt? (*Knowing the verb is critical to understanding the required task. See handout “What does it mean to analyze?”)*
* Look for words that need to be defined. Think carefully about any terms with which you are unfamiliar. Don’t ignore these; instead, try to figure out what they mean. For instance, if you see the term “social fabric,” do not write about cotton.
* Begin to think about how you might structure your essay. If the prompt suggests a structure for your essay, it might be a good idea to use this structure.

1. **DO NOT LOOK AT THE DOCUMENTS YET!**

* Remember that this is in many ways a “document supported question,” rather than a “document based question.”
* This essay is driven by outside information, NOT THE DOCUMENTS. If you base your response sole on the documents, your score will suffer – by 50% or more!

1. Brainstorm a list of relevant outside information

* To focus your efforts at incorporating outside information, ask yourself “How would I answer this essay if there were no documents?”
* Remember, you can add information to this list/outline as you write your essay.
* You do not have to use all of the information on your list, but if you proceed without a list, you will surely forget to include important people, events, and ideas.

1. Think about the structure of your essay. Keep these suggestions in mind as you plan.

* Remember, if the prompt suggests a structure, use it.
* Think about how you would respond to the prompt if you had no documents. Doing this will ensure that your essay is driven by outside information and not the documents.
* If the prompt lends itself to a chart, plug your outside information into the chart, and later add the documents to the chart.

Doing this will dramatically improve the structure of your essay.

* Your essay must begin with an introductory paragraph – the most important part of the essay.
* You must formulate a thesis that goes beyond merely paraphrasing, or worse, recopying the prompt. Remember that the most important question in the study of history is “Why?” A sophisticated thesis suggests an answer to this question.

**YOU STILL HAVEN’T LOOKED AT THE DOCUMENTS YET…NOW YOU CAN LOOK AT THEM.**

1. Read & Analyze the documents.

* Read the documents.
* Pay attention to the sourcing information.
* Who is the author? What is the origin of the document? **USE HIPP TO ANALYZE AND INCORPORATE YOUR DOCS**.
* As you read & analyze the documents, determine where on the chart/outline you might support your argument.
* Remember, you must use **all but one** of the documents.
* If you are confused, or can’t figure out a document, don’t use it. Incorrect use of documents will hurt your score.
* Remember, the College Board intends for the documents to be taken at face value. (*Don’t read too much into them, the documents are not designed to trick you*.) Documents are almost sure to conflicting accounts of a historical event. Some might even contradict themselves. The College Board is testing your ability to recognize these contradictions. High scoring essays will attempt to resolve these controversies.

**USING THE DOCUMENTS**:

* The average DBQ from the College Board will usually include **7** documents. Remember, you must use all but one. Documents are to be thoughtfully woven into the fabric of your essay, in support of the outside information you have used.
* Never laundry list the documents. That is, you should not simply go through the documents saying a little about each one.
* To avoid this, and for several other reasons, **NEVER, NOT EVER EVER, NOT A SINGLE TIME**, begin a sentence with, “Document A says,” or “In Doc. B, it talks about”…neither of these documents says anything.
* Reference the document after the sentence with “(DOC A)” or “(Document A)” or simply “(A)”.
* Documents are always presented in chronological order.

**TO ANALYZE**

APUSH writing prompts will frequently require you to “analyze”.

**What does it mean to *analyze*?** [**Analyze**: to study (something) closely and carefully: to learn the nature and **relationship of the parts** of (something) by a close and careful examination]

* Compare and contrast
* Account for change over time
* Determine cause and effect
* Account for success and failure
* Account for success and failure
* Determine most/least effective actions and why
* Most significant causes of…/multiple causation
* Connect events to outcomes
* Connect beliefs to actions
* Political, social, and economic reasons/effects…
* Determine the reasons / outcomes / successes … of an individual’s or a group’s responses to the actions of others
* Place and account for individual or group actions on the liberal / conservative spectrum
* Determine effectiveness of leadership
* Establish the relationship between goals and actions
* Determine the extent to which