

# Let's All Learn How to Write a DBQ

## What is a Document-Based Question (DBQ)?

As the name implies, this question is based on documents that cover one topic, usually in or around a particular time period. Your job is to read the question carefully so that you understand what is being asked, jot down what you already know about the topic, and then work through the documents.

As you read through the documents, determine how they relate to each other, what changes can be seen over time, and how the author's background may have influenced the contents of the document. For example, a DBQ may ask you to analyze a set of documents about trading practices before and during the Age of Exploration. The documents may include a map of trade routes, a letter from a merchant to his ruler at home, or some codified laws regarding particular trade agreements.

As you are learning to construct DBQ questions, they are composed of two sections. In Part A, documents are provided for you to read, analyze, and then answer questions about each one. In Part B, you are provided with a specific task that must be addressed in an essay response. The essay response should be organized into three sections: the introduction, body, and conclusion. Your introduction must have a clear thesis statement or argument.

# What is a DBQ? – Briefly

incase you did not get it on the 1<sup>st</sup> slide

- DBQ stands for document based question.
- A DBQ is an essay that you will create using the documents in the DBQ and your own knowledge.
- The documents in a DBQ might be a picture, newspaper article, photograph, political cartoon, charts, writings from history etc.
- The documents are usually Primary source documents which let you to get closer to the topic by letting you examine history like a historian.
- Your job will be to examine who or what the document is about, when and where it takes place and how the information that is being presented can be used to create an essay that answers your task.

# Key DBQ Terms

- **Analyze**: determine their component parts; examine their nature and relationship
- **Assess/evaluate**: judge the value or character of something; appraise; evaluate 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**: talk over; 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

# Why do I have to Write a DBQ?

- Writing a DBQ is like the work of real historians.
- Instead of reading a textbook or listening to other people tell you what to think, you get to decide what you think.
- Another reason is that you live in New York State. Every student in New York State must take exams in history that requires them to write DBQ's to earn a score high enough to pass the exams and graduate.

You must take and pass the following tests:

- Eighth Grade Social Studies Assessment
- Tenth Grade Global Regents.
- Eleventh Grade U.S. History Regents.
- You **must** pass both of the regents to graduate H.S.

# How Do I Analyze the Documents?

1. Who is Speaking?
2. What is the Date?
3. What is the Explicit (clearly defined) Meaning?
4. What is the Implicit (implied or what it might mean) Meaning?
5. Is it a Primary or Secondary source of information?



# How do I Write a DBQ?

1. Read the directions page. Understand the historical context and the task.
2. Analyze and answer the scaffolded questions for each of the documents
3. Create a box outline of the documents deciding which document will be used for each of the tasks. Example:

- Describe how New Yorkers and others worked for women's rights

Describe how New Yorkers worked for women's rights.	1, 3, 5
Describe how others worked for women's rights.	2, 3, 4, 6

# How do I Write a DBQ?

4. Determine how many paragraphs are needed in the essay.

5. You need one paragraph for the introduction, one for every task you must write about and a conclusion

- Describe how New Yorkers and others worked for women's rights

Describe how New Yorkers worked for women's rights.	1, 3, 5
Describe how others worked for women's rights.	2, 3, 4, 6

**Introduction**

+

**Body  
Paragraph**

**Body  
Paragraph**

+

**Conclusion**

# Creating Your Introduction



In order to create an introduction to your essay you must include three basic pieces to the introduction.

1. You must explain who or what you are writing about and when or where it took place. This information comes from the historical context and your own knowledge.
2. You must create a thesis statement; an opinion about the task you are writing about.
3. Decide on an interesting question to open your essay and grab the readers attention.



# How Do I Develop a Thesis?

All document-based essays must have a thesis. A thesis is a statement of opinion about a topic. It is what you will write about and prove in your essay. You must have a thesis in your introduction to the essay.

To create a thesis you must use the task (or tasks) and tell the reader of the essay what you will be proving.

Rewording the task is often an easy way to create a thesis statement because the task is what you are being asked to prove when you write the DBQ.

# Support Your Thesis With Evidence in the Body Paragraphs!

You have to prove your thesis by using evidence from the documents and relevant (connected to the topic) outside information.

Outside information is any information about the topic of your essay that is not contained in the documents.

# What does a Thesis Look Like?

## What Does A Thesis Look Like?

Here are some examples of DBQ-style questions and solid thesis statements that answer them. Each thesis presents a clear opinion. Each one can be backed up with evidence. Also, notice that each one has three parts. You should follow this format in constructing a thesis statement.

**QUESTION:** Why did people migrate to the English colonies in the period 1607-1750?  
**THESIS:** Between 1607 and 1750, people migrated to the English colonies for economic opportunity, religious freedom and because of slavery.

**QUESTION:** What caused Southern states to secede from the Union in 1861?  
**THESIS:** Southern states seceded from the Union in 1861 because of slavery, economic differences and the presidential election of 1860.

**QUESTION:** Discuss the impact of the transcontinental railroad on life in the 1800's.  
**THESIS:** In the 1800's, the transcontinental railroad increased western settlement, caused hardship for Native Americans and gave eastern factories a market for their goods.

# Let's Give it A Try...

## Give It A Try...

The DBQ will always be about some part of American history, but let's practice writing thesis statements about more familiar topics. Imagine that each of the examples below is an actual DBQ. For each one, write a thesis statement.

QUESTION: What are the qualities of the best show on TV today?

THESIS:

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QUESTION: How can this school be improved?

THESIS:

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QUESTION: Discuss the impact of homework on the life of an adolescent.

THESIS:

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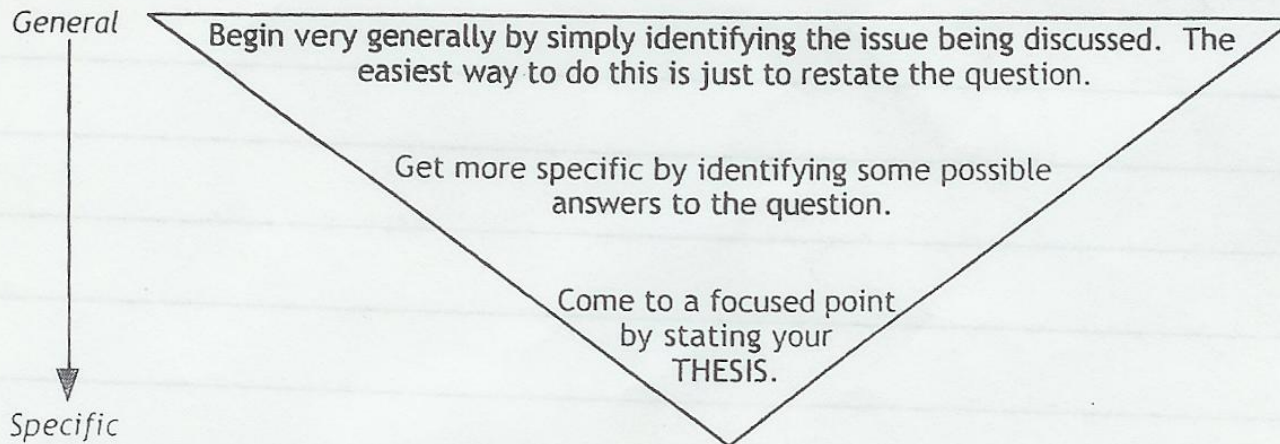


# So, Where Does The Thesis Go?

## So, Where Does The Thesis Go?

Simple question, simple answer... THE THESIS GOES AT THE END OF THE INTRODUCTION.

If your reader needs to ask, "Where is the thesis?" or "What is the thesis?" then you have more work to do. The thesis should be completely clear and obvious to anybody who reads your essay. Your reader should also know just where to find your thesis: at the end of the introductory paragraph. The most basic approach to writing a clear introduction for a DBQ essay involves three simple steps. Think of it as an upside down triangle... you start out very generally, then get more and more specific until you come to a single, sharp point. That sharp point is your thesis.



## Intro + Thesis = Good

# Creating an Introduction with a thesis statement!

Now, take a look at the two introductory paragraphs below. Imagine that the students who wrote them were answering one of the questions from the last page. The question...

“How can this school be improved?”

Which of the following is a well written introductory paragraph that ends in a focused thesis statement? Once you have chosen intro A or intro B, underline the thesis.

A

Schools can always be improved. Some people say that schools need to improve classes. Other people argue that schools need better classrooms. However, the evidence clearly shows that this school needs better food, smarter teachers and longer weekends.

B

Some schools need to be improved while others do not. Certain people think our school needs to be better. Other people think that our school is just fine the way it is. Either way, each person has to decide for herself whether or not this school can be improved.

OK, Now It's Your Turn...

Choose one of the remaining questions from the last page. Write an introduction that concludes with your thesis statement from the last page. Underline the thesis.



# Creating Your Essay: Body Paragraphs



Each of the body paragraphs is made up of three parts.

1. A topic sentence which is based on the task that the paragraph will cover.
2. Three pieces of evidence about the task that the paragraph covers. One of the pieces of evidence should be outside information.
3. A transition sentence at the end that leads to the task that the next paragraph will discuss.

# Creating Your Essay: The Conclusion



The conclusion is made up of three parts.

1. Always start with the words “In conclusion,”
2. Restate the main idea or thesis that you created and used in your introduction.
3. Summarize and restate the main ideas from your body paragraphs.



# In conclusion,

1. Read the directions page. Understand the historical context and the task.
2. Analyze and answer the scaffolded questions for each of the documents
3. Create a box outline of the documents deciding which document will be used for each of the tasks.
4. Determine how many paragraphs are needed in the essay.
5. Create an introduction that contains a thesis statement.
6. Include at least one body paragraph for each of the tasks.
7. Create a conclusion that restates the main idea of the thesis and summarizes the main ideas of the body paragraphs.

