

Writing in AP U.S. History

Updated for 2017

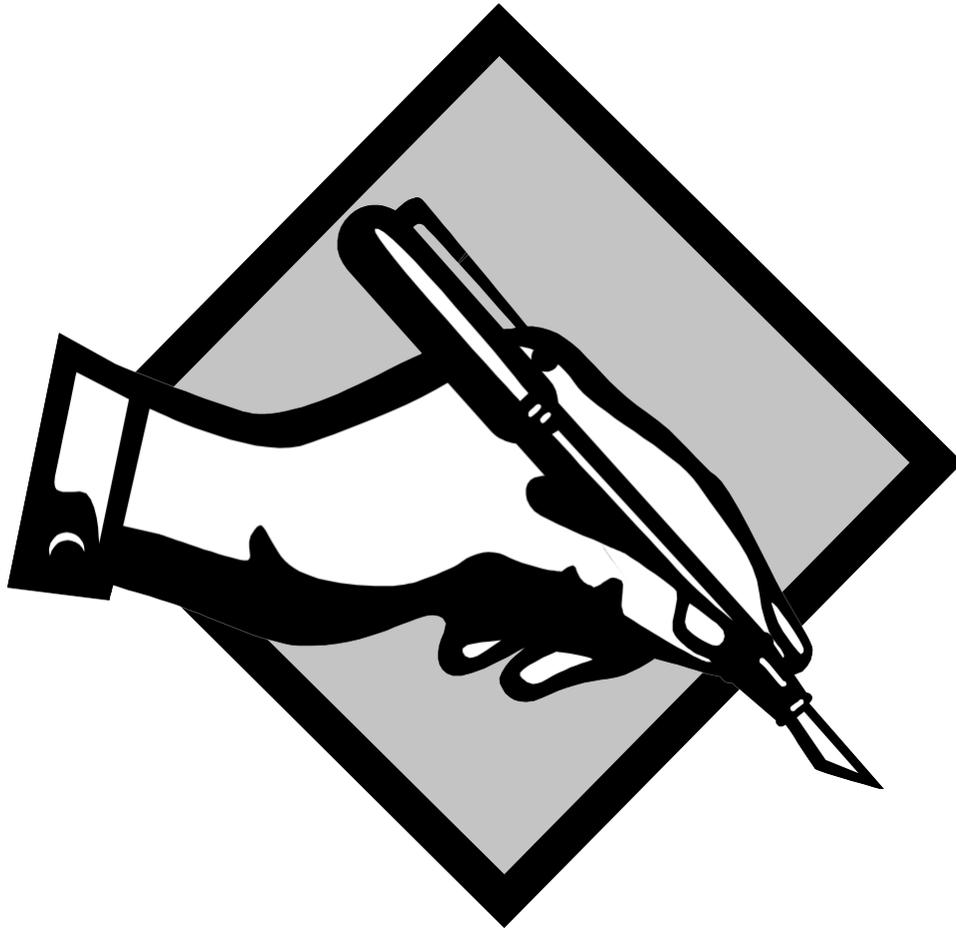
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U.S. History Essay Writing / Exam Information

Exam Overview

The AP U.S. History Exam is 3 hours and 15 minutes long and includes both a 95-minute multiple-choice and short-answer section (Section I) and a 100-minute free-response section (Section II). Each section is divided into two parts, as shown in the table below. Student performance on these four parts will be compiled and weighted to determine an AP Exam score.

Section	Question Type	Number of Questions	Timing	Percentage of Total Exam Score
I	Part A: Multiple-choice questions	55 questions	55 minutes	40%
	Part B: Short-answer questions	3 questions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Required Question 1: periods 3–8• Required Question 2: periods 3–8• Choose between<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Question 3: periods 1–5OR• Question 4: periods 6–9	40 minutes	20%
II	Part A: Document-based question	1 question: periods 3–8	60 minutes (includes a 15-minute reading period)	25%
	Part B: Long essay question	1 question, chosen from three options on the same theme: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• periods 1–3• periods 4–6• periods 7–9	40 minutes	15%

Exam Components

Multiple-Choice Questions

Section I, Part A of the AP U.S. History Exam consists of 55 multiple-choice questions that are organized into sets of between two to five questions each. The questions in each set ask students to respond to a primary or secondary source, such as written texts, images, charts, graphs, or maps, reflecting the types of material that historians use in studying the past. Multiple-choice questions assess students' ability to reason about this source material in tandem with their knowledge of content required by the course. The possible answers for a multiple-choice question reflect the level of detail present in the required historical developments found in the concept outline for the course. While a set may focus on one particular period of U.S. history, the individual questions within that set may ask students to make connections to thematically linked developments in other periods.

Short-Answer Questions

Section I, Part B of the AP U.S. History Exam consists of four short-answer questions. Students are required to answer the first and second questions and then answer either the third or the fourth question.

- The first question primarily assesses the practice of analyzing secondary sources, asking students to respond in writing to a historian's argument. This question addresses content from periods 3–8 of the course.
- The second question primarily assesses either the skill of causation or comparison, and ask students to respond in writing to a primary source (written text) or to visual sources such as images, charts, or maps. This question also addresses content from periods 3–8 of the course.
- Students choose to answer either the third or the fourth short-answer questions, which deal with periods 1–5 or 6–9, respectively. These questions ask students to respond in writing to general propositions about U.S. history, and they primarily assess the same skill, either causation or comparison: neither of them will assess the same skill as the second short-answer question.

Each short-answer question asks students to describe examples of historical evidence relevant to the source or question; these examples can be drawn from the concept outline or from other examples explored in depth during classroom instruction.

Short-Answer Questions	Primary Practice or Skill Assessed	Source Type	Periods Assessed
Students are required to answer short-answer question 1 AND short-answer question 2			
1	Analyzing Secondary Sources	Secondary source	Periods 3–8
2	Comparison or Causation	Primary source text or visual source	Periods 3–8
Students select short-answer question 3 OR short-answer question 4			
3	Comparison or Causation	No stimulus	Period 1–5
4	(Different skill from short-answer question 2)		Periods 6–9

Document-Based Question

Section II, Part A of the AP Exam consists of the document-based question—an essay question that measures students’ ability to develop and support an argument using historical source material as evidence. The question focuses on topics from periods 3–8 of the course. The seven documents included in the document-based question may include charts, graphs, cartoons, and pictures, as well as written materials of varying length. These are chosen to illustrate interactions and complexities about the historical topic that is the subject of the question. In their responses, students should develop an argument about the question and utilize the documents to support this argument. Students should also explain elements of the authorship of the documents that affect their historical significance, such as point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience. The document-based question also requires students to relate the documents to a historical period or theme and, thus, to focus on major periods and issues. For this reason, other knowledge about the topic being assessed, beyond the specific focus of the documents, is important and must be incorporated into students’ essays to earn the highest scores.

Long Essay Question

Section II, Part B of the AP Exam consists of a choice among three long essay questions about major topics from different time spans of the course.

- Students choose one of the three long essay questions, which deal with periods 1–3, periods 4–6, and periods 7–9 of the course, respectively.
- The three question options all address the same theme and assess the same reasoning skill (contextualization, causation, comparison, continuity and change over time).

In order to receive the highest scores, students must develop an argument and support it with an analysis of specific, relevant historical evidence of their choosing. Long essay questions ask about large-scale topics specifically mentioned in the concept outline, but they are framed to allow students to provide in-depth discussion of specific examples drawn from the concept outline or from classroom instruction.

The Big Three Archetypes

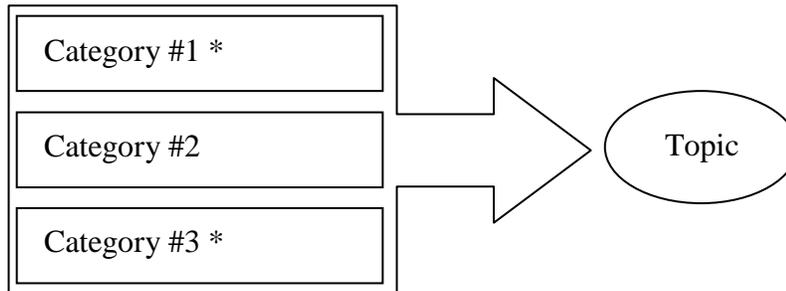
1. Historical Causation (Cause or Effect): CE

Prompt: Evaluate the relative importance of causes/effects which . . .

Step One: Organize the causes/effects around three Themes or Categories (connect to the Learning Objectives).

Step Two: Rank or prioritize the categorized causes/effects in order, determine the two major causes (*) and the one minor cause.

Step Three: Within the body of your essay, you must address why these were the causes/effects of the topic under investigation.



Sample Essay Prompts:

Evaluate the political reactions of Americans to the end of Reconstruction (1877).

Explain how intellectual and religious movements impacted the development of colonial North America from 1607 to 1776.

Evaluate the relative importance of causes which led to the opposition of slavery in the United States from 1776 to 1856.

NOTE: You will ONLY be asked to write on either cause or effect, NOT both.

2. Historical Continuity and Change Over Time: CCOT

Prompt: Evaluate the extent of change/continuities of . . .

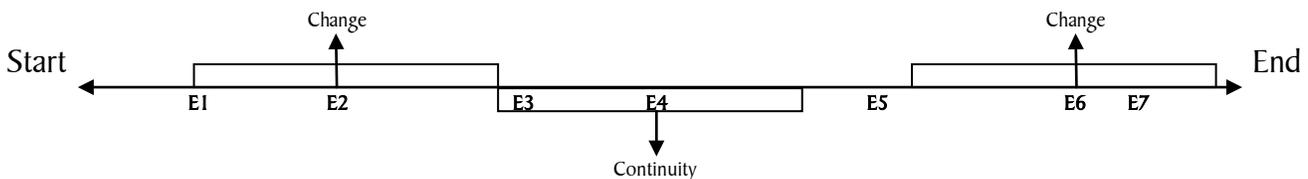
Step One: Label start and stop dates on timeline.

Step Two: Identify significant events (5-7) on the timeline, related to the topic and address all aspects of the date range.

Step Three: Determine whether there was MORE continuity or change within the period.

Step Four: Select three of the most significant events. Make sure you maintain the 2/1 ratio (e.g., if you are arguing there were more continuities, then you need 2 examples of that, for 1 change, etc.). Make sure you address the beginning and end of the date range.

Step Five: Within the body of your essay, you must address why there were continuities and changes.



Sample Essay Prompts:

Evaluate the extent to which the goals of Reconstruction (1865 – 1877) regarding African Americans were achieved by 1900.

Evaluate the extent of political and economic change with Conservative goals from the 1950s through the 1980s.

Evaluate the extent to which American foreign policy contributed to maintaining continuity as well as fostered change with regard to United States involvement in world affairs from 1796 to 1823.

NOTE: You will ONLY be asked to write on either change or continuity, NOT both.

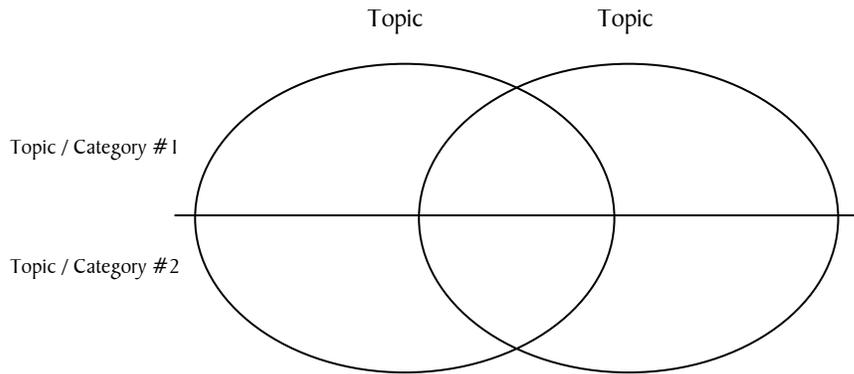
3. Historical Comparison (Compare and Contrast): CC

Prompt: Evaluate the extent of similarities/differences between _____ and _____ . . .

Step One: Bisect your Venn diagram in half and organize the similarities and differences around two Themes or Categories (Connect to the Learning Objectives).

Step Two: Determine whether there are more similarities or differences between the two concepts of the topic.

Step Three: Within the body of your essay, you must address why there are similarities and differences.



Sample Essay Prompts:

Evaluate the extent of similarities of domestic and foreign policy goals of conservatives in the 1950's with conservatives in the 1980's.

Compare and contrast reactions of Americans to immigration in the 1840s -1850s with immigration in the 1910s -1920s.

Compare and contrast goals and strategies of African American leaders in the 1890s-1920s with the goals and strategies of African American leaders in the 1950s-1960s.

NOTE: You will ONLY be asked to write on either similarities or differences, NOT both.

Demonstrating the Skill of Developing a COMPLEX Argument: the "X" Statement

One point on the LEQ and the DBQ rubric is demonstrating the skill of developing a COMPLEX argument. This will be accomplished by developing an "X" statement and incorporating that statement into one of the body paragraphs.

CAUSATION: the "X" statement for a causation essay will come in the form of explaining either causes/effects by incorporating multiple causes/effects; by ranking them and showing multiple variables which brought about those causes/effects the student will be adding complexity for the topic under investigation.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: the "X" statement for a CCOT essay will come in the form of a counter-example, students will be asked to discuss either continuities or changes, the "X" statement will add complexity to the essay by adding either continuity or change and arguing which had more significance for the topic under investigation.

COMPARISON: the "X" statement for a comparison essay will come in the form of a counter-example, students will be asked to discuss either similarities or changes, the "X" statement will add complexity to the essay by adding either similarities or differences and arguing which were more common for the topic under investigation.

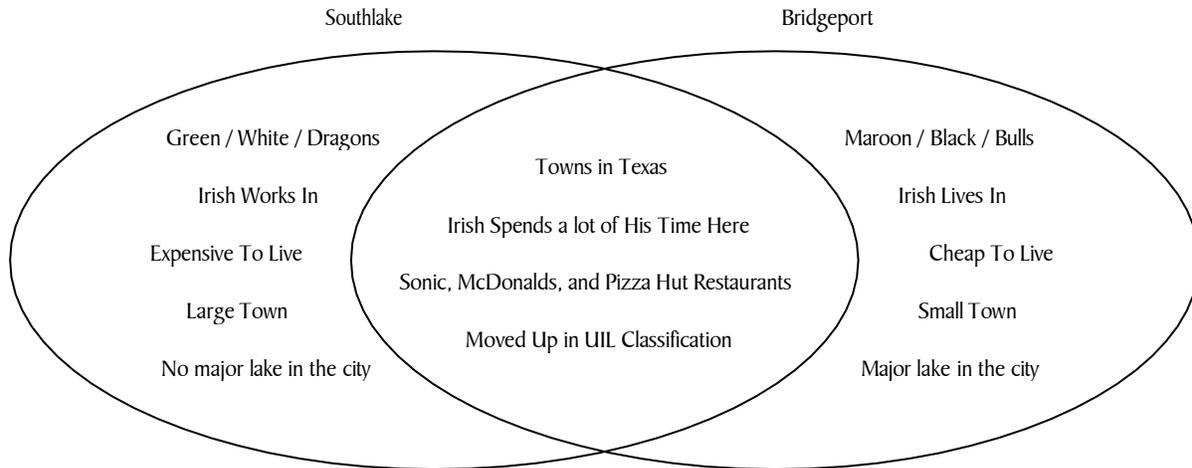
The Thesis Statement (3 solid sentences) – What Is It?

The Thesis Formula: X. However, A and B. Therefore, Y. **NOTE:** These are not necessarily standalone sentences, they are *concepts*. 'X' represents the strongest point against your argument. We call this the counter-argument (it does not have to be a counter-argument, it can qualify as well). 'A and B' represent the two strongest points for your argument. We call these your organization categories. 'Y' represents the position you will be taking – in other words, your stand on the prompt.

NOTE: INCLUDE MODIFYING ADVERB in your assertion with regard to the prompt.

Let's take a look at a basic prompt, a simple way to set up the essay, and a sample of a thesis statement. In a compare / contrast essay your argument is whether there are more similarities or more difference between the two things under investigation.

Prompt: Evaluate the extent of similarities between the towns of Southlake and Bridgeport.



Thesis Statement: Southlake and Bridgeport are both towns in Texas that have similar eating restaurants and will face the similar challenges of moving up in UIL classifications this year. However, the locations and size of each city vary greatly, they have different mascots and school colors, and Irish spends different parts of his day in different capacities within each town. Therefore, despite some common features, Southlake and Bridgeport are incredibly different cities. (thesis)

Levels of Specificity / Developing a Summary Statement – How Much Do I Say?

How much specificity to include in the Summary Statement should be a balancing act, on the one hand, you don't want to be too general (Level Three Generalization), but on the other hand you don't want to be too specific (Level One Specification). Let them know where you are going, but don't give away all your information. We want the reader to keep reading! We will call the right amount of specificity **Level Two Specificity**.

Consider the following prompt:

Evaluate the relative importance of causes which led to an American Revolution.

Level Three Thesis (not enough): The economic factors were considered very harsh by the Americans. However, the political and social conditions causes more anger and frustration. Therefore, while economic factors were important, political and social factors were significantly more important in bringing about the American Revolution. (thesis)

Level Two Thesis (just right): The taxes which were implemented following the French and Indian War were viewed by Americans as harsh and unfair leading to anger and frustration. However, it was the denial of basic political rights along with a beefed up presence in enforcing policies which had long been ignored which gave rise to a new sentiment within the American conscience. Therefore, while economic factors like taxes were important, political and social factors were significantly more important in bringing about the American Revolution. (thesis)

Level One Thesis (too much): The Stamp Act, Tea Act, and Intolerable Acts were very harsh on the Americans which led to great anger and frustration. However, "no taxation without representation," the Admiralty Courts, enforcement of the Navigation Act to counter piracy and smuggling, the Quartering Act, and the Boston Massacre, were important factors which caused more stress on the Americans. Therefore, while economic factors were important, political and social factors were significantly more important in bringing about the American Revolution. (thesis)

Putting It All Together – What Are the X, A, B, and Y’s?

Historical Causation:

Identifies the causes / effects, the reasons for those causes / effects, and determines which was greater.

X = least important cause or consequence, why OR explain an effect (required for Argument Development)

A & B = most important causes / consequences, why, organized by categories

Y = your assertion statement

Continuity and Change over Time:

Identifies the historical continuities and changes, the reasons for continuities and changes, and determines which was greater.

X = continuity or change, your counter-argument (required for Argument Development)

A & B = continuity or change during the specified time period, organized around the events

Y = your assertion statement

Compare and Contrast:

Identifies similarities and differences, the reasons for similarities and differences, and determines whether there are more similarities or differences.

X = similar or different, your counter-argument (required for Argument Development)

A & B = similarities or differences between the two things, why, organized by categories

Y = your assertion statement

How to USE the Documents in the DBQ?

The most unsophisticated way to reference a document in a DBQ essay is to do the following, “According to ‘Document 1’ blah, blah, blah.” “Document 1 says this, document 2 says this . . . etc.” Instead, you should show the reader that you understand the documents and more importantly you understand the content of the document and employed it properly within the argument of your paper.

DO NOT quote the documents. In order to get full credit (2 points) for document usage on the DBQ, you must be **HIPP** and you must use ALL of the documents. Document usage in the DBQ will include (at least one of the levels of analysis must be employed):

H: historical context; I: intended audience; P: purpose; P: point of view.

It would look like: “The Clayton Antitrust Act was passed under Wilson’s administration when progressives were desperately seeking help in enforcing anti-trust legislation under a relatively inefficient Sherman Antitrust Act. The purpose was to give some enforcement power over anti-trust legislation to the federal government, even though the actual usage of the law was used against labor unions. (doc 1)”

How to Bring in Outside Information in the DBQ?

Evidence BEYOND the Documents equals one point on the DBQ rubric. The example must be different from the evidence used to earn other points on the rubric. The point is not awarded for merely a phrase or reference. **Responses need to reference an additional piece of specific evidence and explain how that evidence supports or qualifies the argument.** This is not simply name-dropping; you cannot just rattle off a list of proper nouns expecting to receive OI credit. You also cannot give context to a document and expect to get OI credit; this is a much larger element. This is bringing in something, not found in the documents, which is used to help support your overall argument. It does NOT have to be a separate paragraph; it can be used to support either your X or A/B (preferred) paragraphs, but needs to be a substantial contribution to the overall argument.

Substantial contribution = 3 solid sentences, which add to the main point you are making.

As with other parts of the DBQ, you will also reference this at the end of the usage in a parenthetical reference. (outside information)

The **required references in the DBQ essay** are as follows: (contextualization), (thesis), (documents), and (outside information).

Contextualization (Broader Context) – the Opening & Closing Paragraph (3 solid sentences)

Pre-Contextualization (OPENING PARAGRAPH)

This is to set the stage of the essay. It should include information that came BEFORE the essay topic, a good rule of thumb would be about 20 years prior to the event. It should be immediately relevant to the essay topic. It is not just random events, dates, facts, etc., it is information that establishes the relative historical context of the essay. Pre-contextualization of the essay comes in the opening paragraph (along with the thesis) and should NOT be a separate paragraph. It is the first 3 solid sentences of the opening paragraph.

How to understand pre-context:

"Previously on . . ." – many TV shows give you a glimpse into what were on the previous shows, to help give you context to the current show you will be watching. You should NOT say "previously on . . ." instead this is a way of helping you understand what it is that you need to convey to the reader.

Post-Contextualization (CLOSING PARAGRAPH)

This is to continue the thought of the essay. It should include information that came AFTER the essay topic, a good rule of thumb would be about 20 years following the event. It should be immediately relevant to the essay topic. It is not just random events, dates, facts, etc., it is information that continues the relative historical context of the essay. Post-contextualization of the essay comes in the closing paragraph. It is the ONLY thing that occurs in your conclusion, It is also 3 solid sentences.

How to understand post-context:

"Next time on . . ." – many TV shows give you a glimpse into what will happen on the next show. In the history essay this is to demonstrate that you understand the historical significance of the event and recognize that issues, problems, etc. simply don't end with the conclusion of the event. You should NOT say "next time on . . ." instead this is a way of helping you understand what it is that you need to convey to the reader.

Grade Scale for Essay Scores

DBQ: 7 = 100 – 94 | 6 = 93 – 87 | 5 = 86 – 80 | 4 = 79 – 73 | 3 = 72 – 66 | 2 = 65 – 60 | 1 = 59 – 50
LEQ: 6 = 100 – 90 | 5 = 89 – 80 | 4 = 79 – 70 | 3 = 69 – 60 | 2 = 59 – 50 | 1 = 49 – 40

Forms of Analysis and the Learning Objectives – BAGPIPE (The Themes)

Belief Systems: Culture and Society

- Ideas
- Religion and Philosophy
- Art and Literature
- Cultural Values
- Science
- Morality and Moral Values

America in the World: Global Context

- Competition for Resources
- Foreign Policy and Diplomacy
- Expansionism and Imperialism
- Global Conflicts (World Wars)
- Military and Economic

Geography & Environment: Physical and Human

- Climate, Environment, and Geography
- Natural Resources
- Exchanges: plants, disease, animals

Peopling: Migration and Settlement

- Movement to, from, within the U.S.
- Nativism
- Immigrant groups impact on Society

Identify: Gender, Class, Racial, Ethnic Identities

- Gender
- Class
- Racial and Ethnic Identities
- National and Regional Identities
- Nationalism and Patriotism
- Assimilation

Politics and Power

- Role of State in Society
- Political Process
- Role of Political Parties
- Struggles over / for Freedom
- Federalism
- Liberty and Rights
- Citizenship
- Authority and Power

Economy: Work, Exchange, Trade, Technology

- Agriculture and Manufacturing
- Commerce and Trade
- Technology and Innovations
- Labor Systems
- Transportation
- Land Distribution