**The DBQ: A Step-by-Step Guide**

The purpose of the Document Based Question is not to test your knowledge of the subject, but rather to evaluate your ability to practice the historian's craft – using primary sources to prove a point. You will be required to work with the documents and use them to answer a question.

Remember that there is actually no right or wrong answer. Your answer is YOUR interpretation of the content of the documents. As long as your answer is logical and your interpretation is supported by the content of the document you will score well.

The following is your guide to writing a successful DBQ.

**Step 1 – Understanding the Question**

* Read the prompt and historical background carefully. Underline/highlight the verbs in the prompt. What is the prompt requiring you to do?
* Here are some common prompt verbs:
  + - Analyze
    - Assess
    - Evaluate
    - Compare/Contrast
    - Describe
    - Discuss
    - Explain
    - Identify
    - To what extent
* Make sure to pay attention to the time period given and any specific people, places, or events, listed in the prompt so that you stay on task.
* Basically, you must remember to **ANSWER THE PROMPT!!!**

**Step 2 – Understanding the Documents**

* Read the documents slowly and carefully. You have 10 minutes of reading and preparation time for a reason!
* Pay attention to the source, time period referenced, and subject of each of the documents. Constantly refer back to the question and begin thinking about how this document could answer the prompt.
* Begin thinking about grouping the documents. Make notes beside the documents as you go when you begin to see similarities or connections among them. You will eventually need 3 solid groups, and 4 for an expanded core point. You will need to use ALL documents in your essay.
* Once you have a good understanding of the task at hand and you comprehend documents pretty well, it’s time to work on writing the essay

**Step 3 – Writing the Thesis**

* A thesis is NOT a rewording or restating of the prompt – you will not get credit for this in the basic core points and will be unable to move to the expanded core points.
* Think of your thesis as a mini-outline to your paper. It should include:
  + - A limited, specific topic – a specific reference to the prompt
    - An attitude – taking a stand
    - An indication of direction – at least 3 topics you’re going to cover in your essay
* Here is a great example thesis:

"Nazi policies during the Holocaust robbed millions of people of their dignity and livelihood by forcing them to adhere to ethnic-specific laws, move to ghettos, and eventually die in concentration camps.”

* Limited topic – Nazi policies during the Holocaust
* Attitude – robbed millions of people of their dignity and livelihood
* Indication of direction – 1. forcing them to adhere to ethnic-specific laws

2. move to ghettos

3. eventually die in concentration camps

* It’s best not to jump into the essay until you have a solid thesis to guide your way!

**Step 4 – Grouping the Documents**

* Form 3 groups of documents to support your 3 thesis topics.
* Each group must contain at least 2 documents. You can only count a document once in a group, although you may use it as often as you like.
* Basic core scoring requires only 3 groups but if you create a 4th, you can earn an expanded core point.
* Here are some good examples of ways to group documents
  + - By source – plays, letters, journals, speeches, poems, etc.
    - By author – women, men, politicians, peasants, foreigners etc.
    - By time period – 15th century, Renaissance, WWII era, etc.
    - By subject matter – political, social, religious, ethnic, children, in-favor of or against something, etc.
    - Remember PERMS: Political, Economic, Religious, Military, Social
* The documents don’t have to be saying the same thing to be grouped together. For example, you may read 2 documents that are speeches from 19th century politicians that are expressing totally different viewpoints but if the topic you’ve chosen to discuss in your thesis is about 19th century political views, you can use both documents in that same group.

**Step 5 – Analyzing POV**

* POV tells **WHY** the person or source is saying something. Another way to think of POV is the motivation or perspective of the document. You must have 2 examples.
* Ways to Analyze POV:

**Author POV**

Because this person is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (journalist, upper class, poet, soldier, etc.), s/he is likely to think \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (in pro-imperialistic terms, negatively about the upper class, etc.) and is writing this document to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Basis for your argument goes here

*Because Robespierre was a radical Jacobin, this led him to believe that terror could accomplish great things and he is speaking to persuade France that terror can be virtuous in order to justify his actions (document 2).*

*Because Charles Canning is a British businessman writing in late 19th century Hong Kong, he is likely to meet with opposition from its Chinese residents and he is likely to be critical of the people he meets there as the British and Chinese relationship has been shattered by the Opium Wars and the British domination of Hong Kong was not well-received on the part of the Chinese citizens there.*

**Source POV**

Since this document is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (diary entry, government document, scholarly work, etc.), it is likely to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (not be entirely true, reflect current social views, be critical of the government, promote fanaticism, etc.) because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Basis for your argument goes here

*Since this excerpt (document 5) is from the diary of a government official, it is likely to express deeply-personal beliefs because it includes someone’s private thoughts and may not have originally been written to be printed for the masses. Because of this, the ideas presented should not be taken to represent the government’s official view of the situation.*

*Since document 6 appears in a government medical journal, its goal is to inform the public of the dangers of small pox because the colonial government hopes to stop the spread of the disease as quickly as possible to ensure it does not disrupt production and trade.*

**Step 6 – Figuring out What’s Missing**

* You will need to provide the reader with a suggestion for an additional document.
* You will be suggesting 1 different type of document that would be good to include with the other documents AND explain why it is needed.
* Reasons: Documents may lack women’s or men’s perspectives, there may be no elderly writers, the artistic community such as poets and painters may have no voice, or there may be no documents from a certain time period or place
* You can also suggest visuals such as graphs/charts/maps/photographs/paintings etc. as well.
* Important: Your additional document needs to serve a purpose. Don’t just suggest a document simply because you don’t see it among the others. It needs to fill a hole!
* Example: *A document that would be helpful to include would be a woman’s perspective on voting rights since these documents are all from men. Women fought for many years and across many cultures for suffrage and excluding their experience results in incomplete coverage of voting rights issues. Especially helpful would be an excerpt from an essay of an educated woman or one actively involved in the women’s suffrage cause to give credibility to her thoughts and actions.*

**Step 7 – Writing the Essay**

* Think of the DBQ as nothing more than a glorified 5 paragraph essay
* Here is a visual representation of a good DBQ:

1.

Thesis (at end of intro)

2.

3.

4.

5.

1. Introduction Paragraph – a few sentences to introduce your topic; start broad then narrow to the thesis; if you are pressed for time, a strong thesis sentence can serve as the full introduction

2-4. At least 3 body paragraphs – can easily be aligned with 3 groups; need a topic sentence. You must

refer to the documents “individually and specifically” to get credit for using them – this means you must refer to the documents one at a time, provide at least 2-3 sentences of analysis for each, and connect the documents directly to your thesis to get credit for using them. Within one of these paragraphs or at the end of all 3 of them, you need to suggest the additional document.

5. Conclusion – only if there’s time! Start narrow and then broaden. If you can’t add anything

new, don’t waste time restating the intro. Or, this might be another good place to suggest an additional document.

**REMEMBER YOUR CORE TO EXPAND YOUR SCORE!**

Solid Thesis + All Documents (Used as Evidence) + 3 Groups + 2 POVs + 1 additional document = Basic Core

Extra Group(s), POVs in most or all, Outside Info, Suggesting more additional documents = Expanded Core