

## AP U.S. History

### DBQ (& Free Response) WRITING TIPS

#### Response Strategy:

1. Read the question thoroughly! Do not move on until you fully understand it.
2. Identify the task by circling the main words AND the time period. (For example: assess the validity, compare and contrast, evaluate relative importance, analyze the significance, etc.)
3. Pay special attention to **economic, political, social** issues that need to be included. AND, is there *change over time*?
4. Make a list (outline) of **outside information** (as if you were writing a standard essay).
5. Examine the documents, underlining any key words, facts or phrases that you may use later in the essay.  
AVMS can help BUT do not spend more than 15-20 minutes analyzing DOCS. (Leave *at least* 30 minutes to write)
6. Construct a thesis that is well-developed and clear. Make sure that it addresses the question AND identifies your “take” on the question. If the thesis is a mystery to the writer, it will be a mystery to the reader!
7. Write your response.

#### Some Key Points to Remember:

1. **ANSWER THE QUESTION!** Construct a solid introductory paragraph with your thesis and an “essay map.”
2. Make your life easier by constructing a thesis that can reasonably include most/ all of the documents AND outside support. (even if you don’t really believe your thesis). It is better to be “practical” than “right.”
3. **REMEMBER** - This is a **DOCUMENT BASED QUESTION**. *Use as many documents as you can* as long as they fit your thesis.
4. If you have limited outside information, use what you have (specific and general) but rely more heavily on document analysis.
5. *Don’t* explain documents -- that is not your task.! AP readers have a list and a summary for each document.  
**Use documents to reinforce your main points and outside information.**
6. *Don’t over quote* or rewrite large portions of documents. IF you use a quote, make sure that it is very relevant and try to limit quotations to 1 sentence or less. **Paraphrase** when possible.
7. **Reference author’s you are citing (e.g. ...“In the letter by Abraham Lincoln”)**
8. Use **parenthetical references**. Cite every document used, e.g., (Doc. A), (Doc. F)
9. **Group two or more documents at least one time**. You may use them as complimentary examples, OR you may show that they are conflicting sources.
10. While conclusions are not heavily weighted, it is better to have one than to not have one. In fact, if done well, it can be that final positive influence on the reader’s grade for your essay!
11. **It’s better to be general and right than specific and wrong!** DO NOT guess about information you are providing. False facts or mistaken facts will lower your score. If you know the information but cannot refer to it specifically, it is OK to refer to it generally IF you don’t have more specific information to provide.
12. For **FREE-RESPONSE**: Choose the questions that you are most familiar with and that you can provide the most supporting evidence for. Pay special attention to task on free-response as they will want you to analyze, compare and contrast, evaluate, etc. Most likely they will also look specifically for political and/or social, and/or economic developments in at least one essay. Be sure to organize your essay to accommodate this requirement.  
**SUPPORT - SUPPORT -SUPPORT!!**