

# Steps for Writing an A.P. U.S. History Timed Essay

- 1. Carefully read and analyze the question**
  - Highlight key terms (e.g. assess, explain).
  - Identify and plan to answer all parts of the essay prompt.
- 2. Develop a Tentative Thesis/Position**
  - This is the argument your paper will make and support.
  - Make sure your thesis addresses all parts of the question, is well developed, and supported by several main points.
- 3. Brainstorm & Categorize**
  - List every relevant issue, historical term, name, event, etc. from the time period that might apply to your essay.
  - Create categories (or use the categories suggested by the prompt) to help organize your ideas.
  - Always complete steps 1-3 before looking at the documents (for DBQs).
- 4. Read the Documents (for Document Based Questions)\***
  - Read each document.
  - Look for the main idea of each document as it relates to your thesis.
  - Examine each document for connections or links to outside information.
  - Consider the questions that are a part of APPARTS, SOAPSTone, AAAAA.
  - Ignore any documents that you don't understand or know how to use.
- 5. Revise Your Thesis, Categories and Outline, as Necessary**
  - Incorporate the main points from the documents and the outside information suggested by the documents into your outline.
  - Revise your thesis, if necessary, and consider creating a complex type of thesis statement by using a key word such as "although," "despite," "however," etc.
  - Make sure that each main point is well supported with appropriate analysis and multiple examples.
- 6. Write the Essay (see handout on the "Basic History Essay Structure")**
  - Intro: HOTT (Hook, Overview, Thesis, preview of Themes)
  - Body: TEST (Topic sentence, Evidence & Analysis, Summary, Transition)
  - End: STOP (Summarize, Restate thesis, Omit new info, add Perspective)
- 7. Proofread**
  - Use any extra time to reread your essay.
  - Make corrections that are neat and easy to read and understand.
  - If you remember new information write a new paragraph, circle it, and draw an arrow to indicate where the new paragraph should be inserted into the essay.

*\* For non-DBQ essays, step four is eliminated and steps three and five are combined*

# Basic History Essay Structure

## Is your introductory paragraph HOTT?

**Hook**—This is the first sentence. It should interest the reader and is a chance to show off, but be reasonable. Do not spend too much time on this.

**Overview**—Similar to the hook. This sentence sets the stage for your thesis. This can also be a restatement of the question.

**Thesis**—The position you will argue and support. This is definitely the most important sentence in your essay. It should be clear but not short. Well developed thesis statements often include key words such as “although” and may stretch two or even three sentences in length.

**Themes/Topics**—This sentence or group of sentences introduces the reader to the main points that will support your thesis and will be fully developed in your essay. It is best to keep these in the same order throughout your essay.

## Do the body paragraphs TEST what you know?

**Topic Sentence**—This is the theme that will be developed and supported in a paragraph.

**Evidence and Analysis**—Evidence is the specific information and factual details that will support your theme. Analysis is the explanation of *how* and *why* your evidence (from the documents and outside information) support your thesis. These two elements are the heart of any essay.

**Summary Statement**—This sentence will remind the reader of the relevant sub-points made in this paragraph.

**Transition**—This sentence finishes off the paragraph and introduces the theme of the next paragraph.

## Do you STOP in your conclusion?

**Summarize the Themes/Main Points**—This sentence or group of sentences should remind the reader of the main points that were made. Do not include new information.

**Thesis Restatement**—This sentence should remind the reader of your answer to the question. Restate the thesis in different words than before.

**Omit Any New Information**—The only exceptions would be to make a conceptual point that is more general than your main points, or to mention the aftermath or result of something.

**Perspective**—Finish your essay with a sentence that unifies the essay and/or puts it in historical perspective. Leave a good impression with the reader.

# A.P U.S. History Essay Tips

## Things to Do:

- Adhere to the steps to writing a good essay and its basic structure (see other handouts).
- Deal honestly with counter evidence and arguments in either the appropriate body paragraph or in a separate. Never create “straw man” arguments.
- Start off with an essay with your strongest argument/evidence. Bury the weakest point(s) in the middle of the essay. Try to finish strong.
- Remain objective. Do not inject your personal opinion, but take a position on the prompt.

## Using Primary Source Documents in an Essay:

- Identify the main point of each document and relate it to your thesis/argument.
- Use the documents to remind you of other outside information to incorporate in the essay.
- Do not paraphrase or summarize a document. Never allow the focus of a paragraph or an essay to shift from the prompt and your thesis to the documents.
- Try to use the main ideas and outside information suggested by as many documents as possible, however, never use a document you don't understand or are unsure of.
- Refrain from quoting a document as it wastes precious time and most readers consider it a sign of a desperate student.
- Do not explicitly refer to a document (e.g. “As it says in Document A...”)

## Mistakes to Avoid:

- Generalizations and unsupported statements. Be precise and support your assertions.
- Equivocation. (Take a reasonable position, don't try to argue both sides of a question)
- Use of the first or second person voice (e.g. “I,” “you,” “we,” “us,” “y'all,” etc.).
- Absolutes (e.g. “never,” “always,” “completely,” “perfectly,” etc.)
- Vague verbs (e.g. “felt,” “thought,” “said”, etc.).
- Contractions (e.g. “don't,” “won't,” “couldn't,” “should've,” etc.).
- Slang, figures of speech, or colloquialisms (e.g. like, lost his shirt, spilt milk, etc.).

# Generic A.P. U.S. History Essay Rubric

## The 8-9 Essay (Superior):

- Contains a strong, well developed thesis that demonstrates an understanding of the complexity of the issue
- Supports the thesis with an effective analysis of all parts of the question, though some imbalance is acceptable
- Effectively uses a substantial number of documents (DBQ)
- Supports the thesis with substantial and relevant outside information
- Is clearly organized and well-written
- May contain minor errors

## The 5-7 Essay (Competent):

- Contains a clear thesis which addresses the question
- Has some limited analysis, more descriptive than analytical; may address only part of the question in depth
- Uses some documents effectively (DBQ)
- Supports thesis with some relevant outside information
- Shows evidence of acceptable organization and writing; language errors do not interfere with comprehension of the essay
- May contain errors that do not seriously detract from the quality of the essay

## The 2-4 Essay (Flawed)

- Contains a limited, confused, and/or poorly developed thesis
- Deals with the question in a simplistic, superficial manner
- Merely paraphrases, quotes, or briefly cites the documents (DBQ)
- Contains little outside information, or information that is generally inaccurate or irrelevant
- May be poorly organized and/or written
- May contain major errors

## The 0-1 Essay (Poor)

- Lacks a thesis, or simply restates the question
- Exhibits inadequate or incorrect understanding of the question
- Contains little or no understanding of the documents or ignores them completely (DBQ)
- Is so poorly organized or written that it inhibits understanding
- May contain substantial factual errors

## The “—” Essay (Unacceptable)

- Blank or completely off task

# Key Essay Terms

**Analyze:** to break into parts and explain the parts

**Assess:** to weigh the evidence and make a judgment

**Categorize:** Place items under headings that are given to you or you create

**Cause/Effect:** the beginning; the result

**Chronological:** events put in the order they happened

**Clarify:** to make clear

**Compare:** show how two things are alike

**Contrast:** show how two things are different

**Describe:** to tell how something looks or how it happened; present a picture

**Discuss:** to tell about the main points and important details

**Define:** to give the meaning

**Diagram:** to make a drawing of something and label its parts

**Distinguish:** to tell how something is different from others similar to it

**Enumerate:** to make a list

**Evaluate:** to give your opinion of what is important; discuss its good and bad points; discuss its strengths and weaknesses

**Explain:** to give facts that make clear

**Extent:** how much, to what degree

**Fact:** something that can be proven to be true

**Identify:** to name and explain

**Illustrate:** to give examples

**Infer:** to draw a conclusion based on fact

**Interpret:** to offer an explanation

**Justify:** to give reasons and evidence to support your thinking

**Opinion:** belief based on what a person thinks or feels

**Prove:** use facts to show something is true

**Question:** to ask

**Reflect:** to think about

**Relate:** to show how things are alike or connected

**Sequence:** to put in correct order

**State:** to give the main points or reasons

**Summarize:** to briefly cover the main points

**Synthesize:** to combine parts or pieces of an idea, situation or event

**Trace:** to tell about the progress or growth

**Validity:** how accurate something is

# The Ten Types of History Essay Questions

## 1. Change Over Time

- “The period from 1783 to 1815 was a period of evolution to economic maturity for the infant United States.” Assess the validity of this view.
- “Between 1790 and 1870 the economic growth of the United States was significantly stimulated by governmental aid.” Assess the validity of this statement.

## 2. Cause and Effect

- Why did the United States enter the First World War?
- What caused the Civil War?

## 3. Compare and Contrast

- Compare and contrast Jacksonian Democracy and Jeffersonian Democracy.
- Compare and contrast three colonies—Virginia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts

## 4. Define and Identify

- Discuss Jacksonian Democracy

## 5. Statement, React To It

- “Presidents are rarely successful in both foreign and domestic policy.” Assess the validity of this statement.
- “Slavery was the sole cause of the Civil War.” Evaluate this statement.

## 6. Evaluation

- Pick any three of the following and evaluate their effectiveness as political leaders.
  - George Washington
  - John C. Calhoun
  - Thomas Jefferson
  - Henry Clay
  - John Quincy Adams
  - Daniel Webster
- Was colonial society democratic?

## 7. A Statement From a Particular Viewpoint

- Defend British policies during the period from 1763 to 1776.
- According to radical historians, what have been the foreign policy objectives of the United States in the twentieth century?

## 8. Given Framework

- “The powers of the President grew because of war and foreign crises.” Evaluate this statement.
- “The United States displayed all the typical characteristics of a new nation during the early republic, 1789-1823.” Assess the validity of this view.

## 9. Problem-Solution

- “What causes of the Civil War were resolved by the Civil War and Reconstruction?”
- The Progressive movement solved problems that arose from Industrialization.” Discuss this statement.

## 10. Answer and Include

- Analyze the relative importance of three of the following as contributing to the Civil Rights movement.
  - Aunnar Mydral, *An American Dilemma*
  - The desegregation of the armed forces
  - *Brown v. Board of Education*
  - African American demographic shifts
- Identify and analyze the issues separating the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War as illustrated by three of the following.
  - NATO and the Warsaw Pact
  - The Korean War
  - The Berlin Wall
  - The nuclear arms race

# The Rules of Argument in Historical Writing

1. Always state your argument quickly and concisely, as early as possible in your paper.
2. When you make an assertion essential to your case, provide some examples as evidence.
3. Always give the fairest possible treatment to those against whom you may be arguing.
4. Always admit weaknesses in your argument and acknowledge those facts that opponents might raise against your position.
5. Stay on the subject throughout your essay so your argument is not submerged in meaningless detail.

## A Writer's Checklist

- Is this subject worth arguing about?
- Have I gathered enough evidence to make an argument?
- Do I represent the views of my opponents in a way they would consider fair?
- Have I developed my argument logically?
- Is my use of evidence accurate?
- Have I tried to prove too much?