

DBQ/FRQ Essay Writing Guide

How the Exam Works.

The APUSH exam consists of two parts. Part 1 is the 80 question multiple choice section in which you have 55 minutes to complete. Part 2 consists of writing a total of three essays. The first essay is called the document-based question (DBQ) because you are given 9-13 documents which should be used to answer the essay prompt. The next two essays are the free-response questions (FRQ). You will be given four essay prompts to read. Two prompts are from pre-civil war era and the other two are from post-civil war era. Test takers are expected to write one essay from each set for a total of two essays. Timing for part 2 of the exam is as follows:

15 minutes - Mandatory reading for Document-Based Question (DBQ) and free-response questions.

115 minute - Essay writing. Which should be utilized in the fashion below.

- 45 minutes - Essay writing for the DBQ
- 35 minutes - Writing free-response to one of the questions in part A
- 35 minutes - Writing free-response to one of the questions to part B

It is important to note that the DBQ is worth more than each of the FRQs, so more time should be spent on that essay. The essays are scored on a scale of 1 to 9. One being poor and 9 being great. These are the characteristics that each essay should have:

The 8-9 essay:

- Contains a well-developed thesis that clearly addresses the nature of the question
- Presents an effective analysis of both sides of the item in question; treatment may be uneven (the better essays try to devote about equal coverage to both sides)
- Supports thesis with substantial and relevant information
- Is clearly organized and well written
- May contain minor errors
- In a DBQ question, a substantial number of documents are used
- In a DBQ question, significant outside information is also included in the response

The 5-7 essay:

- Contains a thesis which addresses the topic of the question (limited development)
- Has limited analysis and exhibits limited understanding of complexity
- Is mostly descriptive
- Deals with only one aspect of the question in some depth or deals with both aspects in a more general way
- Supports thesis with some information
- Shows evidence of acceptable organization and writing; language errors do not interfere with comprehension
- May contain factual errors that do not seriously detract from the quality or argument of the essay
- In a DBQ question, some documents are used effectively
- In a DBQ question, supports thesis with some outside information

The 2-4 essay:

- Presents a limited, confused and/or poorly developed thesis
- Contains little or no analysis and is mostly descriptive
- Deals with one aspect of the question in a general way or both aspect in a superficial way; simplistic explanation
- Has minimal or irrelevant supporting information
- Confusing organization and writing; organization and language errors interfere with comprehension
- May contain major factual or interpretive errors
- In a DBQ question, quotes or briefly cites documents
- In a DBQ question, contains little outside information, or information that is generally comprehension

The 0-1 essay:

- Contains no thesis, or a thesis which does not address the question
- Exhibits inadequate or inaccurate understanding of the question (analysis is absent)
- Contains no supporting information, or only irrelevant information
- Is so poorly organized or written that it inhibits understanding
- May simply paraphrase or restate the question
- Contains numerous errors, both major and minor
- In a DBQ question, exhibits little or no understanding of documents, or ignores them completely
- In a DBQ question, offers inappropriate or no outside information

Now that you know exactly what to expect during the exam lets cover how to write a very effective APUSH exam essay. I like to teach the essay writing in such a fashion that we break down each paragraph into smaller section and ultimately, give you a sentence by sentence guide on how to write the essay. Remember, all complex tasks are simply a series of simpler tasks. In reality, writing a very good APUSH essay is not difficult at all when you break it down. Being prepared and knowing what to expect on the exam is critical to doing well. So let's get started.

The Five Paragraph Essay

When writing both the FRQs and DBQ you will be utilizing an essay writing style called the five paragraph essay. It is a very common academic essay style (so you might as well learn to write a good essay early!). The five paragraph essay consists of 5 paragraphs of 5-6 sentences each. Each sentence carries out a specific goal. In total your essay will consist of about 25-30 sentences. That shouldn't be too hard. The five paragraphs are as follows:

1. Introductory
2. Body
3. Body
4. Body
5. Conclusion

The next step in this guide we will show you exactly how to write the 5 paragraph essays, step by step, with emphasis on the DBQ/FRQs.

Standard AP US History Essay Template

Here is the template we will be using to explain how to write a very good APUSH essay.

Introductory Paragraph (4 sentences)

1. General Statement that relates to the question.
2. Establish basis for analysis.
3. Roadmap sentence (3 **subtopics**)
4. *Clear* thesis statement

Body Paragraph (5 sentences)

1. Topic Sentence (**subtopic 1** from Intro)
2. Evidence 1 with significance/explanation
3. Analysis (relate to thesis)
4. Evidence 2 with significance/explanation
5. Analysis (relate to thesis)

Body Paragraph (5 sentences)

1. Topic Sentence (**subtopic 2** from Intro)
2. Evidence 1 with significance/explanation
3. Analysis (relate to thesis)
4. Evidence 2 with significance/explanation
5. Expand (relate to thesis)

Body Paragraph (5 sentences)

1. Topic Sentence (**subtopic 3** from Intro)
2. Evidence 1 with significance/explanation
3. Expand (relate to thesis)
4. Evidence 2 with significance/explanation
5. Expand (relate to thesis)

Conclusion Paragraph (4 sentences)

1. Remind how thesis was proven
2. Round Off

The Introductory Paragraph

Sample Question: To what extent did the Civil War constitute a revolution in American society?

1. General Statement. Briefly introduce the reader to the subject.

- (Example: “The Civil War, occurring between the years 1861 and 1865, was the most devastating conflict in American history.”)

2. Establish your basis for analysis: Using the topic from the question and what you wrote in your general statement, why is this topic worth discussing?

- Example: “In many ways, the conflict forever altered the way Americans viewed their government and their nation.”

3. Provide **roadmap sentences** that establishes three major sub-topics you plan to discuss.

- Example: "Constitutionally, the war established the supremacy of the federal government over the states. Politically, the war established the supremacy of the Republican Party in national politics for much of the next fifty years. And socially, the war saw significant gains in African American rights."

Writing tip: Remember, the AP US History exam is designed to teach students the social, political, economic and foreign relations history of the US. As such, the AP readers will expect you know to demonstrate this knowledge in your essay. The above example sentence uses two political based arguments (argument one relating to the constitution and argument two relating to political party politics). The final argument is relating to the social aspects of the Civil War. As the writer of the essay, you could also use an economic argument to discuss the social impacts of the civil war. Keep this in mind when writing your essays.

4. Finish paragraph with a **clear thesis statement** that establishes the purpose of the essay.

- Example: "Therefore, the Civil War did, in fact, represent a revolution in American society."

The following body paragraph is written with the standard format in mind:

The Civil War resulted in a constitutional revolution in several ways (**General Statement**). First, the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery (**Topic Sentence 1**), ended an institution in America that had lasted well over two centuries (**significance/explanation**). Such a monumental change in the Constitution is certainly grounds for considering this amendment revolutionary (**relates to thesis**). Moreover, two more amendments were passed within a few years of the Civil War. The 14th and 15th Amendments gave African Americans citizenship and the right to vote, (**Topic Sentence 2**) rights that had never been given to Blacks throughout the U.S. These two amendments were certainly revolutionary, as African Americans now enjoyed rights that up until this time had been largely denied (**significance/relate to thesis**). Furthermore, although the Constitution did not specifically declare that the federal government had gained more power over the states, the fact that the Union won the war and forced the South to accept these amendments ultimately proved that nullification issues would no longer plague the U.S. as they had earlier in the 19th century. (**Topic Sentence 3**) Ultimately, this forever altered the way the federal government and the states would interact. (**relates to thesis**). Therefore, the civil war did in fact represent a revolution in American Society. (**thesis**)

Body Paragraph 1

1. Topic Sentence (**evidence 1** from Intro)

- Example: "The 13th amendment to the constitution radically changed America's social structure."

2. Evidence 1 with significance/explanation

- Example: "Prior to the passage of the 13th amendment, slavery was a common practice in the Americas."

3. Analysis (relate to thesis)

Example: "Slavery first began in the colonial days of early America as cheap human labor was in high demand due to America's extensive reliance on agriculture. As a result, slavery became a common practice and quickly became part of the normal social structure. There were the commoners, plantation owners and then there were the slaves. When the 13th amendment abolished the practice of slavery, it had a profound impact on African Americans as a people."

4. Evidence 2 with significance/explanation

- Example: "Former slaves would now be able to live free and enjoy new freedom"

5. Analysis (relate to thesis)

- Example: "The most significant aspect of the amendment was that it allowed America, as a nation to move closer to the founding father's ideals that all men are created equal."

The following body paragraph is written with the standard format in mind:

The 13th amendment to the constitution radically changed America's social structure and moved the nation closer to the ideals of the founding fathers. (**Topic Sentence**) Prior to the passage of the 13th amendment, slavery was a common practice in the Americas. (**evidence 1**) Slavery first began in the colonial days of early America as cheap human labor was in high demand due to America's extensive reliance on agriculture. As a result, slavery became a common practice and quickly became part of the normal social structure. There were the commoners, plantation owners and then there were the slaves. When the 13th amendment abolished the practice of slavery, it had a profound impact on African Americans as a people. (**analysis**) Former slaves would now be able to live free and enjoy new freedom. (**Evidence 2**) The most significant aspect of the amendment was that it allowed America, as a nation to move closer to the founding father's ideals that all men are created equal. The phrase was no longer just an ideal but it was now a reality for millions of former slaves. (**Analysis**)

Body Paragraph 2

1. Topic Sentence (**evidence 2** from Intro)

- Example: "The 14th and 15th amendments greatly expanded African American Civil Liberties following the passage of the 13th amendment."

2. Evidence 1 with significance/explanation

- Example: "The 14th amendment granted citizenship to all former slaves which had been denied since the United States was formed. With the granting of citizenship slaves were now entitled to constitutional rights just like any other america. "

3. Analysis (relate to thesis)

- Example: "The 14th amendment also overruled the Dred Scot V. Sanford supreme court case which ruled that slaves were not US citizens. The fact that the 14th amendment granted constitutional rights to former slaves was revolutionary in itself."

4. Evidence 2 with significance/explanation

- Example: "Just like the 14th amendment, the 15th amendment further granted African American Civil Rights by greatly expanding the right to vote. "

5. Expand (relate to thesis)

- Example: "The 14th and 15th amendments greatly changed the social structure in America."

The following paragraph is written with the standard format in mind:

"The 14th and 15th amendments greatly expanded African American Civil Liberties following the passage of the 13th amendment. (**Evidence 2**) The 14th amendment granted citizenship to all former slaves which had been denied since the United States was formed. With the granting of citizenship slaves were now entitled to constitutional rights just like any other america. (**Evidence 1 with significance/explanation**) The 14th amendment also overruled the Dred Scot V. Sanford supreme court case which ruled that slaves were not US citizens. The fact that the 14th amendment granted constitutional rights to former slaves was revolutionary in itself. (**Analysis**) Just like the 14th amendment, the 15th amendment further granted African American Civil Rights by greatly expanding the right to vote. (**Evidence 2 with Significance/explanation**) The 14th and 15th amendments greatly changed the social structure in America. (**Relates to thesis**)

Body Paragraph 3

1. Topic Sentence (**evidence 3** from Intro)

- Example: "Prior to the Civil War, slavery and nullification issues plagued American politics."

2. Evidence 1 with significance/explanation

- Example: "During Andrew Jackson's presidency, South Carolina nullified the tariffs of 1828 and 1832. These tariffs were designed to protect domestic Northern factory workers against foreign competition ."

3. Analysis (relate to thesis)

- Example: " This crisis caused significant controversy between federal and state powers. It ultimately helped to fuel the debate on state's rights, a central debate that eventually lead to the American Civil War.

4. Evidence 2 with significance/explanation

- Example: "Slavery was another issue that plagued American politics with the North being abolitionist and the South supporting slavery. The Southern economy was primarily focused around plantation agriculture and the North was heavily industrialized. This characteristic split the nation in two.

5. Expand (relate to thesis)

- Example: "After the American Civil War, the victorious Northern Union Army forced the Southern Confederacy into accepting the emancipation of all slaves and forcing the South to rejoin the United States of America.

The following paragraph is written with the standard format in mind:

Prior to the Civil War, slavery and nullification issues plagued American politics. (**Topic Sentence**) During Andrew Jackson's presidency, South Carolina nullified the tariffs of 1828 and 1832. These tariffs were designed to protect domestic Northern factory workers against foreign competition. (**Evidence 1**) This crisis caused significant controversy between federal and state powers. (**Explanation**) It ultimately helped to fuel the debate on state's rights, a central debate that eventually lead to the American Civil War. (**Significance**) Slavery was another issue that plagued American politics with the North being abolitionist and the South supporting slavery. (**Evidence 2**) The Southern economy was primarily focused around plantation agriculture and the North was heavily industrialized. (**Explanation**) This characteristic split the nation in two. (**Significance**) After the American Civil War, the victorious Northern Union Army forced the Southern Confederacy into accepting the emancipation of all slaves and forcing the South to rejoin the United States of America. (**Relate to thesis**)

Conclusion

1. Remind how thesis was proven

- Example: "The American Civil War is easily recognized as one of the most devastating events in American History. The amount of changes that America experienced as a result of the Civil War were revolutionary. These changes include such actions as: the emancipation of slaves, the introduction of the 14th and 15th amendments as well as the resolution of the nullification issue. The 13th amendment, signed into law during the American Civil war emancipated all slaves. Shortly after the 13th amendment was sign into law the 14th and 15th amendments were signed which granted civil rights to many former slaves. The nullification issue was also resolved by the North prevailing victorious over the Confederate South."

2. Round Off

- Example: "The American Revolution could easily be classified as revolution in American society and politics."

The following paragraph is written with the standard format in mind:

"The American Civil War is easily recognized as one of the most devastating events in American History. The amount of changes that America experienced as a result of the Civil War were revolutionary. These changes include such actions as: the emancipation of slaves, the introduction of the 14th and 15th amendments as well as the resolution of the nullification issue. The 13th amendment, signed into law during the American Civil war emancipated all slaves. Shortly after the 13th amendment was sign into law the 14th and 15th amendments were signed which granted civil rights to many former slaves. The nullification issue was also resolved by the North prevailing victorious over the Confederate South. The American Revolution could easily be classified as revolution in American society and politics."

How your Essay will be Graded

We all know that the essay will be graded on a 1-9 scale but what specific things are the ap graders looking for? This information is important because all ap graders are briefed into what specific events or information a quality essay should contain. In other words, the ap graders are looking for specific events in your essay. The AP graders are provided with the following information before they grade an essay. All information is specifically related to the essay question:

1. A timeline of relevant historical events
2. A list of possible outside information (ie. historical events)
3. For the DBQ: An explanation of what the document means, possible document inferences and possible outside events for the document.
4. A fact sheet of important information
5. A list of relevant vocabulary.
6. The 0-9 score rubric.

Now that you know what the person who will be grading your essay is specifically looking for this will be very helpful when writing your essay.

1. When writing your essay make sure to use relevant APUSH vocabulary.

2. When told to use outside information that does not mean to use outside information from your personal life but rather to use historical events that relate to the question.
3. For the DBQ, make sure to use 75% of the documents.
4. For the DBQ, cite your documents correctly (ie. (Doc A))
5. Use the essay template above as it provides an effective framework to present your thesis and provide an analysis of that thesis. It also provides the necessary framework to make your essay well organized.
6. Practice your writing. Don't handwrite the essay because the ap grader won't be used to your handwriting.
7. When you make an error, place a single line through it and write the new sentence/word above the crossed out word.
8. Make sure to circle to appropriate essay number at the top of your essay prompt.
9. Answer the ENTIRE question.
10. Before taking the real APUSH Exam, practice writing an ap style essay. Use the below essay questions to write your essay then read the sample essays.