Writing a Document-Based-Question Essay

The first of the three essays on the AP World History test is the document-based question (DBQ). This essay asks you to be a historian: it will ask a specific question, provide a bit of historical background, and then present a number of related documents. Essentially, you are the historian who will take these sources and draw conclusions based on your skills of historical analysis. The DBQ evaluates historical understanding at its purest: the task is not to remember facts, but to organize information in an analytical manner.

Many students panic once they see the DBQ because they do not know much about the topic—the question and the documents often cover something well outside of the mainstream of their class. The test writers do this on purpose, as outside knowledge is not needed for the DBQ. You may bring in outside information if you wish, but there is no need to mention facts other than those found in the documents provided.

The other two essays on the exam will evaluate your knowledge of history, but the DBQ evaluates your proficiency with historical material. Consequently, writing the DBQ is a skill that can be learned much like any other skill.

**DIRECTIONS**

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Documents 1-???. The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.

The question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents.

Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses all of the documents.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account the sources of the documents and analyzes the authors’ points of view.
- Identifies and explains the need for at least one additional type of document.
# RUBRIC

## BASIC CORE

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| 1. Has acceptable thesis.  
*Did you answer the question in a way that you can use the documents to support that answer?* |   | 1 |
| 2. Understands the basic meaning of the documents (may misinterpret one).  
*Were all of the documents used in the essay?* |   | 1 |
| 3. Supports thesis with appropriate evidence from all or all but one document.  
*Provide supporting details and examples from the documents* |   | 2 |
| 4. Analyzes point of view in at least two documents  
*For a minimum of two documents (but preferably more), you will discuss the point of view (POV) of the author, such as his background, occupation, time period, religion, etc.* |   | 1 |
| 5. Analyzes the documents by grouping them in at least two, but preferably three ways.  
*In at least two (preferably three or more) groups (minimum two documents to make a “group”), how will you answer the question? All documents need to be found in at least one group, but can be used in more than one.* |   | 1 |
| 6. Identifies and explains the need for one type of appropriate additional document or source  
*Ask yourself, “Whose voice or opinion is missing?” and explain why that document or source is needed. Should be placed in group where it would fit.* |   | 1 |

**SUBTOTAL:** 7

## EXPANDED CORE

*A student must earn all 7 points in the basic core area before earning points in the expanded core area*

**Examples:**
- Has a clear, analytical, and comprehensive thesis.
- Shows careful and insightful analysis of the documents.
- Uses documents persuasively as evidence.
- Analyzes point of view in most or all documents
- Analyzed the documents in additional ways—groups, comparisons, syntheses
- Brings in relevant “outside” historical context.
- Explains why additional types of documents or sources are needed.

**SUBTOTAL:** 2

**TOTAL:** 9
**STEPS TO TAKE**

**Step 1: Process the Question**

**Directions:**

The following question is based on the accompanying Documents 1-6. The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.

This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses all or all but one of the documents.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the authors’ points of view.

You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

**Prompt:**

Based on the following documents, analyze the responses to the spread of Buddhism in China. What additional kind of document(s) would you need to evaluate the extent of Buddhism’s appeal in China?

**Historical Background:**

Buddhism, founded in India in the sixth century B.C.E., was brought to China by the first century C.E., gradually winning converts following the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E. Buddhist influence continued to expand for several centuries. Between 220 C.E. and 570 C.E., China experienced a period of political instability and disunity. After 570 C.E., the imperial structure was restored.

- Read the question and the historical background carefully. Ask yourself, “What is it they are asking me to accomplish?” Be sure to note whether the question has several parts. Does it ask you to analyze, compare/contrast, identify change over time, etc.?
- Identify the parameters of the question (time period, social classes, political and economic but not social causes, etc.).
- Identify the other key terms in the question.
- Do not panic if you know little or nothing about the topic of the question. This question tests your ability to read, analyze, synthesize, and communicate those skills effectively in writing. Sure, knowing something about the topic is a great help, but it is not essential to writing a solid DBQ.
**Step 2: Read the Documents**

**Document 1**

*Source: According to Buddhist tradition, “The Four Noble Truths,” the first sermon preached by the Buddha (563 B.C.E.-483 B.C.E.), India, fifth century B.C.E.*

The First Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow.

The Second Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow; it arises from craving, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure — the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for continued life, and the craving for power.

The Third Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that craving, so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Way that Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow.

**Document 2**

*Source: Zhi Dun, Chinese scholar, author, and confidant of Chinese aristocrats and high officials during the period when northern China was invaded by central Asian steppe nomads, circa 350 C.E.*

Whosoever in China, in this era of sensual pleasures, serves the Buddha and correctly observes the commandments, who recites the Buddhist Scriptures, and who furthermore makes a vow to be reborn without ever abandoning his sincere intention, will at the end of his life, when his soul passes away, be miraculously transported thither. He will behold the Buddha and be enlightened in his spirit, and then he will enter Nirvana. *

*Nirvana: the extinction of desire and individual consciousness

**Document 3**

*Source: Anonymous Chinese scholar; “The Disposition of Error,” China, circa 500 C.E.*

Question: If Buddhism is the greatest and most venerable of ways, why did the great sages of the past and Confucius not practice it? In the Confucian Classics no one mentions it. Why, then, do you love the Way of the Buddha and rejoice in outlandish arts? Can the writings of the Buddha exceed the Classics and commentaries and beautify the accomplishments of the sages?

Answer: All written works need not necessarily be the words of Confucius. To compare the sages to the Buddha would be like comparing a white deer to a unicorn, or a swallow to a phoenix. The records and teachings of the Confucian classics do not contain everything. Even if the Buddha is not mentioned in them, what occasion is there for suspicion?
Document 4

Source: Han Yu, leading Confucian scholar and official at the Tang imperial court, “Memorial on Buddhism,” 819 C.E.

Your servant begs leave to say that Buddhism is no more than a cult of the barbarian peoples spread to China. It did not exist here in ancient times.

Now I hear that Your Majesty has ordered the community of monks to go to greet the finger bone of the Buddha [a relic brought to China from India], and that Your Majesty will ascend a tower to watch the procession as this relic is brought into the palace. If these practices are not stopped, and this relic of the Buddha is allowed to be carried from one temple to another, there will be those in the crowd who will cut off their arms and mutilate their flesh in offering to the Buddha.

Now the Buddha was a man of the barbarians who did not speak Chinese and who wore clothes of a different fashion. The Buddha’s sayings contain nothing about our ancient kings and the Buddha’s manner of dress did not conform to our laws; he understood neither the duties that bind sovereign and subject, nor the affections of father and son. If the Buddha were still alive today and came to our court, Your Majesty might condescend to receive him, but he would then be escorted to the borders of the nation, dismissed, and not allowed to delude the masses. How then, when he has long been dead, could the Buddha’s rotten bones, the foul and unlucky remains of his body, be rightly admitted to the palace? Confucius said: “Respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance!” Your servant is deeply ashamed and begs that this bone from the Buddha be given to the proper authorities to be cast into fire and water, that this evil be rooted out, and later generations spared this delusion.

Document 5

Source: Zong Mi, a leading Buddhist scholar, favored by the Tang imperial household, essay, “On the Nature of Man,” early ninth century C.E.

Confucius, Laozi and the Buddha were perfect sages. They established their teachings according to the demands of the age and the needs of various beings. They differ in their approaches in that they encourage the perfection of good deeds, punish wicked ones, and reward good ones; all three teachings lead to the creation of an orderly society and for this they must be observed with respect.
Document 6

Source: Tang Emperor Wu, Edict on Buddhism, 845 C.E.

We have heard that the Buddha was never spoken of before the Han dynasty; from then on the religion of idols gradually came to prominence. So in this latter age Buddhism has transmitted its strange ways and has spread like a luxuriant vine until it has poisoned the customs of our nation. Buddhism has spread to all the nine provinces of China; each day finds its monks and followers growing more numerous and its temples more lofty. Buddhism wears out the people’s strength, pilfers their wealth, causes people to abandon their lords and parents for the company of teachers, and severs man and wife with its monastic decrees. In destroying law and injuring humankind indeed nothing surpasses this doctrine!

Having thoroughly examined all earlier reports and consulted public opinion on all sides, there no longer remains the slightest doubt in Our mind that this evil should be eradicated.

Step 3: Analyze the Documents

For each document, read and consider how it connects to the question asked. Working the documents may be accomplished by analyzing each document through the acronym APPARTS (to be discussed in more detail tomorrow):

Author - Who created the source? What is their point of view, standpoint or bias?
Place and Time - Where and when was the source produced?
Prior Knowledge - What do you already know that would further your understanding of this sources?
Audience - For whom was the source created? Does this affect the reliability of the source?
Reason - Why was this source produced at the time it was produced?
The Main Idea - What is the source trying to convey?
Significance - Why is this source important? How does it fit your framework or connect to the question?

Doing APPARTS for each document will not just help you understand what the document is about, but provide you with further information to help you do your groups, POV, and to see what type of document might be missing to be used for the additional document.
### Step 4: Build the Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Number(s)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;What is one way to divide <em>some</em> of the documents?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;What is a second way to divide <em>some</em> of the documents?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;What is a third way to divide <em>some</em> of the documents?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POV 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Discuss <em>when</em> you use the document. What can you use from the document’s APPARTS?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POV 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Discuss <em>when</em> you use the document. What can you use from the document’s APPARTS?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Document(s)</strong>&lt;br&gt;What?&lt;br&gt;Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Document Checklist</strong>&lt;br&gt;Have you used all documents?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Step 5: Provide Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Document Number(s)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td>Defend and support Buddhism in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>4, 6</td>
<td>Scrutinize Buddhism and discourage its spread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>Neither encourage nor discourage Buddhism’s spread, but provide a third perspective on how it should be dealt with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POV 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Taken straight from sacred texts, so reflective of belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POV 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Author (Zhi Dun) is upper class and does not reflect the lower classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POV 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Author is anonymous, so difficult to place bias, but as a scholar likely reflects the upper class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POV 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Author (Han Yu) is in the imperial court and reflects state policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POV 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Author (Zong Mi) is Buddhist, so may have inherent bias to defend Buddhism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POV 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Author (Emperor Wu)’s opinion would be important given his position as emperor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Document(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Graph showing number of converts to Buddhism to see whether the fears of Group 2 were warranted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Checklist</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4, 5, 6</td>
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Step 6: Write the Essay

Paragraph 1

As Buddhism spread from India to China beginning in the first century C.E., it was met with mixed results. Many Chinese accepted Buddhism and defended its policies while others scrutinized Buddhism’s absence from past texts and used it as a scapegoat for political and social problems. However, others remained indifferent, wishing to meld the aspects of belief systems in China to create a unique Chinese culture.

What do you notice about the first paragraph?
1. Thesis is two sentences (the first sentence does not count as a thesis statement as it is too vague by itself).
2. Thesis answers the question (responses to the spread of Buddhism in China).
3. Question is answered by using the groups that will come in the essay (accept/defend, scrutinize, indifferent).
Paragraph 2
The defense and support of the spread of Buddhism in China during the first century C.E. can be seen in Documents 2 and 3. Document 2 speaks of the many joys of joining the Buddhist religion. HOWEVER, THE AUTHOR, ZHO DAN, IS OF THE UPPER CLASS OF CHINA AND AS SUCH, HIS TESTIMONY DOES NOT TELL HOW LOWER CLASSES FELT. YET, IN A TIME WHEN ASIAN STEPPE NOMADS WERE INVADING NORTHERN CHINA, ZHI DUN COULD HAVE EASILY TARGETED BUDDHISM AS A MEANS OF FOREIGN CORRUPTION, BUT HE DOES NOT. Document 3 counters the scrutiny of anti-Buddhism with logic. HOWEVER, SINCE THE AUTHOR IS ANONYMOUS, HIS BIAS IN THIS DOCUMENT IS DIFFICULT TO PINPOINT, YET HIS ROLE AS A SCHOLAR CERTAINLY Dictates A SLIGHT UPPER CLASS BIAS, AS IN DOCUMENT 2. (evidence from document ; POINT OF VIEW)

Paragraph 3
There were some who discouraged the spread of Buddhism in first century C.E. China, as seen in Documents 4 and 6. Document 4 ridicules Buddhism as “a cult of barbarian peoples,” citing Confucian sayings as the truth amongst Buddhist lies. HAN YU’S POSITION IN THE IMPERIAL COURT CERTAINLY MAKES HIS IDEAS A STANDARD IN THE STATE, YET THE EMPEROR ACTS OTHERWISE AND THE PEASANTS MIGHT NOT SHARE THE SAME OPINION. Document 6 presents Buddhism as the cause for numerous problems in Chinese society. SINCE THE AUTHOR IS EMPEROR WU HIMSELF, IT IS LIKELY THAT HIS OPINIONS CARRIED A LOT OF WEIGHT IN HIS NATION, YET MANY TIMES CITIZENS WILL ADOPT PROHIBITED ACTS MERELY IN AN ATTEMPT TO REBEL. An additional document that shows the actual numbers of converts to Buddhism during this time, preferably in a graph, would be useful in determining whether or not the worries of Han Yu and Emperor Wu were grounded. (evidence from document ; POINT OF VIEW; additional document)

Paragraph 4
Documents 1 and 5 neither discourage nor encourage Buddhism’s spread in China, but attempt to make a compromise. Document 1 is directly from Buddhist tradition, laying down the basic principles to attain a happy and enlightened life. SINCE THE DOCUMENT IS TAKEN STRAIGHT FROM SACRED TEXTS, IT IS LIKELY THAT OTHER BUDDHISTS SHARED THESE SAME BELIEFS. Document 5 attempts to create a compromise among the conflicts of belief system in China. ALTHOUGH ZONG MI’S INTENTIONS MAY SEEM UNBIASED, HE IS HIMSELF A BUDDHIST SCHOLAR, SO HIS IDEALS MIGHT SIMPLY BE AN ATTEMPT TO DEFEND BUDDHISM. (evidence from document ; POINT OF VIEW)

Paragraph 5
The spread of Buddhism in China during the first century was met with many different responses. Conflicts such as this that arose in China due to foreign ideals were the main reason for China isolationist policies later in its history.
More essays do not get point of view (POV) than any other basic core point. So be warned: POV is an important and difficult task. It will separate the mediocre essays from those that do very well. As with any of the other basic core qualities, if an essay does not contain point of view, the highest score it can earn is 6. Your goal is to earn a 7 or above.

Your essay will need to mention aspects of POV for at least two documents in order to receive the basic core point for POV.

So what is point of view? Essentially, POV is the analysis of why a certain person composed the material for the document. What is the author’s (or the document's) “angle”? Comments in your essay that delve into the motivations for the documents often count as POV. In addition, comments relating to the reliability of a source relate to that source’s POV.

You cannot just say that an author is biased or prejudiced to receive the point for point of view. You must state why or indicate an impact or desired effect of the document. Also, POV is not necessarily negative (as the word “bias” implies), as it can just be an explanation for the document and/or the author.

Ask these questions in order to earn the core point for POV:

1. Does the occupation of the author give the document more or less reliability? For example, government officials may overstate or exaggerate information for political, state, or personal reasons.
2. Does the class, religion, national background, or gender of the author influence what is mentioned in the document?
3. Does the type of document influence the content of what is said? A journal entry or private letter might be more candid about a topic than a public address that is meant to be persuasive. A political cartoon by definition is exaggerated and meant to convey a certain message, whereas a photograph may accurately represent what was in front of the camera for a shot, but could be staged and framed to only capture a certain perspective.
4. Does the timing of the document influence the message? Recollections and memoirs written long after an event may not have the same reliability as first-hand materials done immediately afterward.
5. Does the intended audience skew the message of a source? If a document is meant to be read by a king, it has a different POV than one written for a revolutionary.
6. Describing the tone of the document can also count for POV--if the document is sarcastic, triumphant, arrogant, etc.
7. If the document is a chart, graph, map, etc., POV can still be addressed. Who made the document? Why was the document made? How was the information collected?

Merely attributing the document's source by repeating the source material from the document is not enough to earn the POV point. The source material, however, gives you clues as to what you could say relating to POV.
**TIPS**

**Does your thesis answer the question?**
- The thesis should not be more than two sentences.
- The thesis should answer the question using your groups.
- The thesis cannot be split and must be located in either the introductory paragraph or the conclusion (however, it is not recommended to wait until the end).
- The thesis statement cannot be counted for credit in any other category.

**Did you create your groups?**
- Here are a few key points about grouping:
  - Have at least THREE groups. Yes, the generic rubric says “two or three ways,” but the determination of whether the standard is two or three is set each year at the reading. If you always have at least three groups, you will meet the standard every year. Creating and supporting more than five groups will be too time consuming, and you will have a hard time finishing the essay, so stick to three groups or maybe four, but no more.
  - Each group needs at least TWO documents.
  - You can use a document in more than one group.
  - Use all the documents. Although the generic scoring guide says “all or all but one” like the three-group rule discussed above, if you use all the documents, you will always meet this standard wherever it is set each year.
  - Though there are no irrelevant or misleading documents, sometimes you might find one document that does not seem to fit their otherwise wonderful grouping plan. It is okay to include such a document in an intro or conclusion. This will count toward the requirement of addressing, understanding, and supporting your thesis. However, you must interweave that document artfully in an introduction or conclusion to show that you understand the meaning of the document and that it supports your thesis. Of course, it is best to use the document in a group, but it is not advisable to leave it out if you are unable to fit it into a group.
  - Grouping the documents effectively allows you to form a thesis easily.
    - Consider the relationship between the groups. Can you connect them as causes and effects? Can you organize them as comparisons and contrasts? Can you see positive and negative aspects to them? Is one group more important than the other groups? A sentence that only lists your groups will not be enough to earn a thesis point. Figuring out a supportable relationship between the documents will help you create an acceptable thesis.
  - Begin a new paragraph for each group.
    - Each body paragraph should be tied to a group. Use your thesis as a map for putting the essay together. Use words from your thesis in each body paragraph topic sentence. It is not necessary to list the documents that you will be using in the paragraph in this topic sentence. You will not be awarded any points for the list. Use the evidence you have identified in each document to support your thesis.
Did you use and cite all the documents?
- You should cite each document every time you use it. Putting a (Doc. 1) or a (1), for example, after each usage is fine. However, when possible you should mention the author or name of the document (if applicable).
- The bare minimum for each document should be two sentences: what it says and how it fits into the group.
- Direct quotes from the documents should be limited. Paraphrase the documents into your own words to show your understanding of them.

Did you do POV?
- This point is earned as you demonstrate that you understand how a person’s background, situation, purpose, audience, or life experience affects what he or she says and how he or she says it. It is like your parent might have said to you if you repeated something that you heard someone else say ...“Consider the source.”
  - Think about how you say hello to your friends versus how you say hello to your grandmother. Think about how someone who is running for political office might articulate something in public speech in a different manner than he or she might say it in a private conversation. Why is that?
  - For POV, think about how a person’s gender, occupation, social class, religion, ethnicity, education, nationality, or a dozen other factors influence what he or she says or how he or she says it. Then you must explain how that factor affects the document. This task requires you to consider the document’s context and frame of reference beginning with your careful reading of the document and the document source information.
- If able, you should include a POV for each document.
  - Although the generic scoring guide only requires two document references for basic core points, every document is selected by the test makers to have a point of view—the more great POV statements you can create, the more likely you are to earn expanded core points. Further, attempting only two points of view is never a good idea, as you might not reach an acceptable level with your two attempts and, therefore, will be ineligible for any expanded core points despite the quality of the rest of your essay.
- Your POV statements should come as you begin to address a document or right after you finish using the document—never as a list at the end of the essay.

Examples:
- Unacceptable: Baltasar Rusow, a Lutheran pastor, was naturally upset by the celebration of a Saints Day.
- Acceptable: Baltasar Rusow, a Lutheran pastor, was naturally upset by the celebration of a Saints Day BECAUSE Lutheran doctrine prohibited the veneration of saints.
Did you include an additional document?

- At the end of each body paragraph, ask for an additional document and explain why you need it. Although the basic core rubric only requires one, you should ask for an additional document and explain why you need it at the end of each group. This habit ensures that you do not forget to ask or that you run out of time and increases the likelihood that you will earn this point with an acceptable request.

- You must ask for a document that is:
  - Possible: A letter from God, or a TV broadcast from the 1258 C.E. Mongol conquest of Baghdad are not feasible documents and will not count.
  - Relevant: In a DBQ about the factors that shaped the modern Olympics, a Taoist scripture about the benefits of exercise is too much of a stretch. The document must be relevant to the point of your essay.
  - Not already supplied: If you already have a document from a fourth-century Christian monk discussing illuminated manuscripts, do not ask for an additional monk’s ideas to confirm the statements in the original document. That will not count.
  - Specific: You will not earn this point with a statement such as “I would like to have a document from a woman to know how women felt about this topic.” Be specific in the type of document you want and why you want it. This request for an additional document must be specific in the type of document you want, who you want this document from and how it will help you answer the prompt’s question more effectively.

- Your additional document(s) should fit into the group where it would provide for additional information—never as a list at the end of the essay.

- Examples:
  - Unacceptable: There should be a document by a peasant.
  - Acceptable: There should be a document by a peasant BECAUSE all of the documents in the group were written by aristocrats, thus preventing the perspective of an average person living in that city.

Remember that AP World History essays are asset-graded, meaning you only get points for what is right and do not lose points for what is not