

Writing a Document-Based-Question Essay

The first of the two essays on the AP World History test is the document-based question (DBQ). This essay asks you to be an historian: it will ask a specific question about a topic that you should be at least somewhat familiar with 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 solely to remember facts, but to organize information in an analytical manner. You will have 60 minutes to write the essay.

RUBRIC

	Points
<p>A. <u>Thesis</u>—Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis/claim that establishes a line of reasoning</p> <p>To earn this point, the thesis must make a claim that responds to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt. The thesis must consist of one or more sentences located in one place, either in the introduction or the conclusion.</p>	1
<p>B. <u>Contextualization</u>—Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt</p> <p>To earn this point, the response must relate the topic of the prompt to broader historical events, developments, or processes that occur before, during, or continue after the time frame of the question. This point is not awarded for merely a phrase or reference.</p>	1
<p>C. <u>Evidence: From the Documents</u>—Supports an argument in response to the prompt using all seven documents</p> <p>To earn one point, the response must accurately describe — rather than simply quote — the content from at least three of the documents.</p> <p>To earn two points, the response must accurately describe — rather than simply quote — the content from all seven documents. In addition, the response must use the content of the documents to support an argument in response to the prompt.</p>	(1) 2
<p>D. <u>Evidence: Beyond the Documents</u>—Uses at least one additional piece of specific historical evidence (beyond that found in the documents) relevant to an argument about the prompt</p> <p>To earn this point, the response must describe the evidence and must use more than a phrase or reference. This additional piece of evidence must be different from the evidence used to earn the point for contextualization.</p>	1

<p>E. <u>Analysis and Reasoning: Sourcing</u>—For at least <i>three</i> documents, explains how or why the document’s point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience is relevant to an argument</p> <p>Situates the argument by explaining the broader historical events, developments, or processes immediately relevant to the question. This requires an explanation, consisting of multiple sentences or a full paragraph.</p>	1
<p>F. <u>Analysis and Reasoning: Synthesis</u>—Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt, using evidence to corroborate, qualify, or modify an argument that addresses the question</p> <p>A response may demonstrate a complex understanding in a variety of ways, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining nuance of an issue by analyzing multiple variables • Explaining both similarity and difference, or explaining both continuity and change, or explaining multiple causes, or explaining both cause and effect • <u>Explaining relevant and insightful connections within and across periods</u> • Confirming the validity of an argument by corroborating multiple perspectives across themes • Qualifying or modifying an argument by considering diverse or alternative views or evidence <p>This understanding must be part of the argument, not merely a phrase or reference.</p>	1
Total:	7

STEPS TO TAKE

Step 1: Know Your Task

To know make sure that you include all parts of the essay and that you are properly sourcing the documents, you should remember and use these following acronyms: SOCrATEs and HIPP

- SOCrATEs will help you remember to fulfill all the requirements of the essay
 - S = Synthesis
 - O = Outside evidence
 - Cr = Contextualization
 - A = Analyze documents
 - T = Thesis
 - Es = Evidence from documents
- HIPP will help you understand the documents and be able to do sourcing on them
 - H = Historical Context
 - I = Intended Audience
 - P = Purpose
 - P = Point of View

Step 2: Process the Question

Directions:

The following question is based on the accompanying Documents 1-7. The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.

In your response you should do the following:

- Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis/claim that establishes a line of reasoning.
- Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.
- Supports an argument in response to the prompt using all seven documents.
- Uses at least one additional piece of the specific historical evidence (beyond that found in the documents) relevant to an argument about the prompt.
- For at least three documents, explains how or why the document's point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience is relevant to an argument.
- Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt, using evidence to corroborate, qualify, or modify an argument that addresses the question.

Prompt:

Using the documents provided and your knowledge of world history, analyze the responses to the spread of Buddhism in China.

- Read the question 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.

Step 3: 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: 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.

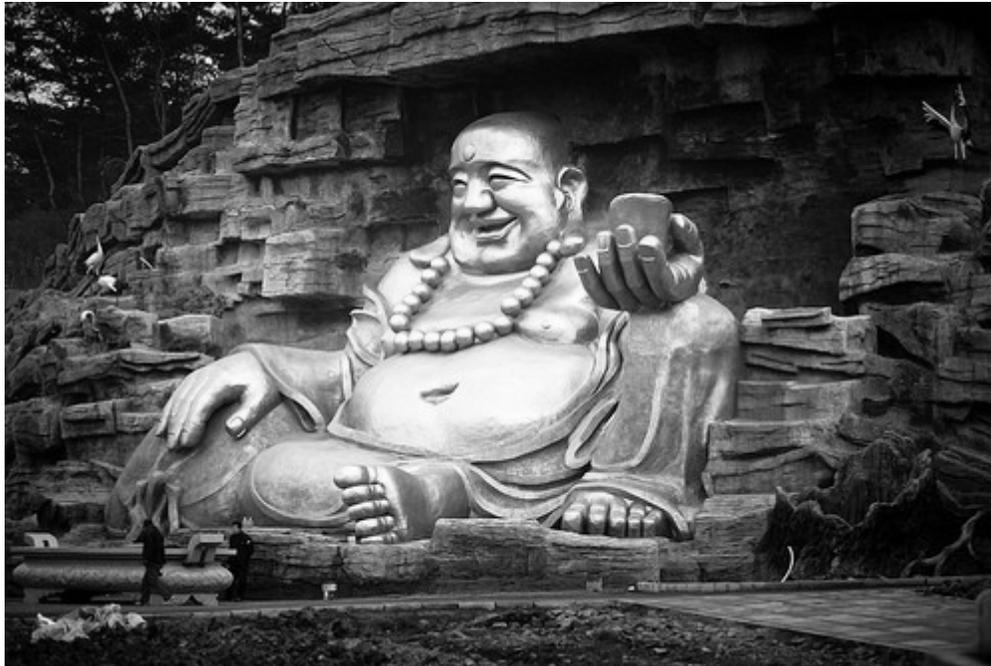
Document 6

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 7

Source: 10th c. statue of Budai, commonly known as the "Laughing Buddha"



Step 4: 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 HIPP (to be discussed in more detail tomorrow):

Historical Context – What was going on during this time and why does it matter?

Intended Audience – For whom was the source created and why does it matter?

Purpose – Why was this source produced at the time it was produced and why does it matter?

Point of view – Who created the source? What is their occupation, gender, status, etc? Why does that matter?

Step 5: Build the Framework

	Document Number(s)	Comments
Group 1 What is one way to divide <i>some</i> of the documents?		
Group 2 What is a second way to divide <i>some</i> of the documents?		
Group 3 What is a third way to divide <i>some</i> of the documents?		
Source Discuss <i>when</i> you use the document. What can you use from the document's HIPP?		
Context Where does this topic fit within larger historical events?		
Evidence Beyond What is something else that can further support or extend the argument?		
Synthesis How can the argument be extended by connecting it to something else?		
Document Checklist Have you used all documents?		

Step 6: Provide Evidence

	Document Number(s)	Comments
Group 1	2, 3	Defend and support Buddhism in China.
Group 2	4, 5	Criticize Buddhism and discourage its spread.
Group 3	1, 6, 7	Neither encourage nor discourage Buddhism's spread, but provide a third compromising perspective on how it should be dealt with.
Source 1	1	Taken straight from sacred texts, so reflective of belief.
Source 2	2	Author (Zhi Dun) does not criticize this incoming religion, even during a time of nomadic invasions.
Source 3	3	Author is anonymous, possibly to protect himself from retribution.
Source 4	4	Author (Han Yu) is in the imperial court and reflects state policy.
Source 5	5	Author (Emperor Wu)'s opinion would be important given his position as emperor.
Source 6	6	Author (Zong Mi) is Buddhist, so may have inherent bias to defend Buddhism.
Source 7	7	Statue of "Laughing Buddha", who was previously a Chinese deity.
Context		Buddhism came to China by merchants, during a time of political instability and disunity during and after the fall of the Han Dynasty.
Evidence Beyond		Mahayana Buddhism had bodhisattvas, such as the statue in Doc 7, which combined existing gods into Buddhism.
Synthesis		Chinese fear of foreign influence is similar to Japan during the Tokugawa Shogunate when they isolated themselves.
Document Checklist	1, 2, 3 4, 5, 6, 7	

Step 7: Write the Essay

Paragraph 1

Buddhism, founded in India in the sixth century B.C.E., was brought to China by the first century C.E primarily through merchants. It gradually won converts following the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E as China began to experience a period of political instability and disunity. During this time, many Chinese began to question traditional philosophies such as Confucianism, which furthered Buddhism's popularity. However, as Buddhism gained strength in China it was met with mixed results. MANY CHINESE ACCEPTED BUDDHISM AND DEFENDED ITS POLICIES, SOME CRITICIZED IT BECAUSE OF ITS ABSENCE IN PAST TEXTS, WHILE OTHERS COMPROMISED, WISHING TO MELD THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF BELIEF SYSTEMS IN CHINA TO CREATE A NEW UNIQUE CHINESE CULTURE.

(contextualization ; THESIS)

What do you notice about the first paragraph?

1. Started with Contextualization, because it “sets the stage” for the essay by provided the circumstances in which this takes place.
2. Thesis is one sentence (the “However...” sentence does not count as a thesis statement as it is too vague by itself).
3. Thesis answers the question (responses to the spread of Buddhism in China).
4. Question is answered by using the groups that will come in the essay (accept/defend, criticize, compromise).

Paragraph 2

The defense and support of the spread of Buddhism in China can be seen in Documents 2 and 3. Zhi Dun spoke of the many joys of joining the Buddhist religion, stating that those Chinese who become Buddhist would be rewarded by entering Nirvana upon death. (Doc 2). In “The Disposition of Error”, the author countered the scrutiny of anti-Buddhism with logic. He stated that while Buddhism may not have been found in Confucian texts, not everything can be found in them, so it was okay to accept the new religion (Doc 3). SINCE THE AUTHOR WAS ANONYMOUS, ONE COULD SAY THAT HIS WORDS REPRESENTED TRUE THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS BECAUSE SAYING SOMETHING THE EMPEROR WOULD NOT AGREE WITH COULD RESULT IN PUNISHMENT, BUT ANONYMITY COULD PROTECT HIM.

(evidence from document ; SOURCING)

Paragraph 3

There were some who criticized the spread of Buddhism due to it not appearing in traditional Confucian texts, as seen in Documents 4 and 5. In his “Memorial on Buddhism”, Han Yu ridiculed Buddhism as “a cult of barbarian peoples,” citing Confucian sayings as the truth amongst Buddhist lies. He said that if Buddha were alive then, the Emperor would have exiled him from China (Doc 4). Emperor Wu presented Buddhism as the cause for numerous problems in Chinese society. He referred to it as an “evil” that had never existed before the Han Dynasty but is now hurting China (Doc 5). SINCE THE AUTHOR WAS EMPEROR WU HIMSELF, IT IS LIKELY THAT HIS OPINIONS CARRIED A LOT OF WEIGHT IN HIS NATION. HE ISSUED THIS EDICT TO DISCOURAGE PEOPLE FROM BECOMING BUDDHIST, SCARING THEM WITH A THREAT OF PUNISHMENT IF THEY DID NOT FOLLOW HIM.

(evidence from document ; SOURCING)

Paragraph 4

Documents 1, 6, and 7 neither discouraged nor encouraged Buddhism's spread in China, but attempted to make a compromise. The "Four Noble Truths" were directly from Buddhist tradition, laying down the basic principles to attain a happy and enlightened life. Due to China's history more with philosophies than traditional religions, Buddhist principles were easier to grasp without rejecting other ideas (Doc 1). In Zong Mi's "On the Nature of Man", he attempted to create a compromise among the conflicts of belief systems in China. He noted that Confucius, Laozi and Buddha all had similar teachings and goals (Doc 6). ALTHOUGH ZONG MI'S INTENTIONS MAY SEEM UNBIASED, HE WAS HIMSELF A BUDDHIST SCHOLAR, SO HE MAY HAVE BEEN MERELY SAYING WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS NECESSARY TO SHOW THAT BUDDHISM BELONGED IN CHINA BECAUSE THAT WAS IN HIS BEST INTERESTS. Buddhist ideas were embraced by many in China, but with existing deities finding a place in Buddhism, such as the statues of the one known as the "Laughing Buddha." (Doc 7). In Mahayana Buddhism, they believe that there are a number of extraordinary monks who have also achieved enlightenment, with those people being called bodhisattvas. To help with the spread of Buddhism into new areas such as China, gods they may have already had were proclaimed to be "bodhisattvas", which meant that people could believe in both the new religion and not have to completely abandon their old one.

(evidence from document ; SOURCING; *evidence beyond*)

Paragraph 5

The spread of Buddhism in China during the first centuries C.E. was met with many different responses. Conflicts such as this that arose due to foreign ideas were the main reason for China's isolationist policies later in its history. **Those policies were similar to what Japan did during the Tokugawa period following increasing foreign intervention from China and Christian missionaries. Fearful of their traditional culture being either corrupted or completely replaced, the shogun called for a complete isolation of Japan from all foreign influence, a policy that was brutally enforced and lasted for over 200 years.**

(*synthesis*)

SOURCING

More essays do not get Sourcing than any other point. So be warned: Sourcing is an important and difficult task. It will separate the mediocre essays from those that do very well.

Your essay will need to mention aspects of Sourcing for at least three documents in order to receive the point. You can do more than three, but will not receive any extra points. However, you may want to do five just to have a "backup" in case one is wrong.

So what is Sourcing? Essentially, it is the analysis of why a certain person composed the material for the document. What is the author's (or the document's) "angle" or perspective? Comments in your essay that delve into the motivations for the documents often count as Sourcing.

You cannot just say that an author is biased or prejudiced to receive the point. You must state why or indicate an impact or desired effect of the document. Also, Sourcing 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 point for Sourcing:

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 source than one written for a revolutionary.
6. Describing the tone of the document can also count--if the document is sarcastic, triumphant, arrogant, etc.
7. If the document is a chart, graph, map, etc., Sourcing can still be addressed. Who made the document? Why was the document made? How was the information collected?

Merely repeating the source material (who wrote it, what their profession was, etc.) from the document is not enough to earn the point. The original material, however, gives you clues as to what you could say relating to Sourcing.

TIPS

Did you include your contextualization?

- This should situate the thesis argument, or parts of the event to broader events, development or processes.
- It must connect the topic to overarching historical events.
- It is best situated into your introduction to “set the stage” for the rest of your essay, so you can differentiate it from other points (there is no “double dipping” of points in the scoring).
- Note: You only need 1 example

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).

Did you create your groups?

- Here are a few key points about grouping:
 - Have at least TWO groups. Your groups can be “put in conversation with each” other where one corroborates the topic and the other contradicts it.
 - Each group needs at least TWO documents.
 - Use all the documents.
- 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. In that sentence also list which documents (by number) you will be provided evidence from. 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) after each usage is recommended. However, when possible you should mention the author or name of the document (if applicable) in the sentence where you are using it as evidence.
- The ideal 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 sourcing?

- 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.”
- Your sourcing statements should come 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.*
- Note: You need 3 examples

Did you include evidence outside the documents?

- You must provide an additional example or evidence of a cause or effect of your document, beyond that which you use for Contextualization or Sourcing or Synthesis (again, no “double dipping”).
- It must be explained in a way that further supports or extends the argument.
- Make sure that your additional evidence cannot be found, in any way, in any existing documents provided.
- Note: You only need 1 example

Did you include synthesis?

- You must extend the argument by considering another one of the following and how it compares to the situation in your essay:
 - Geographic area (same time)
 - Historical era
 - Situation
- Your connection must be relevant, plausible, and explained beyond a mere mention
- Your synthesis would be best placed as a conclusion, to differentiate it from your additional evidence
- Note: You need only 1 example

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