**How to Write a DBQ Essay**

**This packet will be your guide to writing successful DBQ essays for social studies. Keep this in your binder ALL YEAR (it will also probably be helpful in high school).**

**Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**What is a DBQ?**

DBQ stands for Document Based Question. It is a type of essay that provides you with documents to serve as sources of information for your writing. Each DBQ you take will look very similar. There are certain things that are always given to you:

* Historical Context: This is a paragraph that tells you some background information about the topic of the essay. This will help you write your introduction.
* Task: This is the actual question that you are attempting to answer in the essay. This will help you write your THESIS, or last sentence of your introduction.
* Documents and Scaffolding Questions: There will typically be 5-7 documents that will be used to help you write your essay. Each document will also have 1-3 questions that you must answer before writing the essay. These questions will help get you thinking about how to shape your essay.

**Writing a DBQ: A step by step guide**

**Step 1:** Read the Historical Context and write the first sentence of your essay.

This step will let you know what the essay is about and give you ideas for writing your introduction. Let’s look at the historical context (overview) for this essay together.

**Historical Context:** For the 300 years between 1500 and 1800, European nations trades for slaves, gold, and ivory along the west coast of Africa, but they did not go deeply into the continent. In the 1800s this changed as European explorers pushed their way into the interior of western and central Africa. By the 1880s Africa was under full assault as European nations competed with one another for control of the continent.

Sometimes, the most difficult sentence to write in an essay is the first one. The historical context will help you do this. From that paragraph, we need to find the **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, and WHERE** of this essay.

**WHO-**

**WHAT-**

**WHEN-**

**WHERE-**

Now, we need to combine those 4 pieces of information into one “Historical context statement.” Give it a try below. Write one sentence that states all 4: Who, what, when, and where.

Historical Context Statement: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Remember this sentence, because it will be the first sentence of your essay!



**Step 2:** Read the task and write your thesis.

This step is one of the most important in writing a DBQ. Your thesis is the last sentence of your introduction, and it is the most important sentence in the entire essay. To write a thesis, you have to know what task you are being asked to complete. Let’s look at the task together.

**Task:** Based on the documents and your learning, write an essay that explains the primary force(s) behind European imperialism in Africa.

Now that you know what you have to do, you are ready to write your **thesis statement**. This is your **1-sentence** answer to the task question. In other words, you need to answer all parts of the question in 1 sentence so that I know basically what you will say in your essay. Give it a try below.

Thesis Statement: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Remember this sentence, because it will be the LAST sentence of your introduction! You now have the first and last sentences of your introduction. That, however, is NOT an entire introduction. You still need the sentences that come in the middle and get you from your historical context to your thesis. There is not one correct way to do this, but many. We will come back to this step later.

**Step 3:** Read the documents and answer the scaffolding questions.

This step will take some time, but it is important because this is where you will get most of your information for the essay. As you read and examine each document, you must do 3 things:

1. Answer the scaffolding question(s)
2. Highlight or star any important outside information you have on this topic (this information is not found in the document, but may come from notes, articles, or videos we have watched)
3. Label each document based on which topic you think it would fit best with. For this essay, it would make sense to put an “N” for nationalism “C” for cultural or an “E” for economic next to each document.

**Step 4**: Outline your essay

Before you can begin writing your essay, you should always create an outline. You do not need to follow the format of the outline below, but you should have an outline containing all of the same parts. In your body paragraphs, you should use 4 out of the 6 documents total. That would equal out to 2 documents for each of the body paragraphs (or 1 per topic).

**Body Paragraph 3**

**Topic:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Outside Info:**

**Document #s:**

**Body Paragraph 2**

**Topic:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Outside Info:**

**Document #s:**

**Body Paragraph 1**

**Topic:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Outside Info:**

**Document #s:**

**Intro**

**Historical Context Sentence:**

**Thesis:**

**Conclusion**

**Restated Thesis:**

**Step 5: Write the essay**

# Introductions

Start by writing your historical context sentence. This is the first sentence of your introduction. Now, you need 2-3 sentences to get to your thesis. A good idea is to set up the examples that you plan to talk about in your essay. These should be in your outline, so you don’t have to think them up from scratch. For this essay, it might be good to have one explain European interest in Africa before the 19th century and other explaining what imperialism is and why European interest in Africa stitched to imperialism.

The last sentence of your introduction should be your thesis. Remember, your thesis is ALWAYS only **1-SENTENCE**. If your thesis is more than one sentence, then it is wrong! It should answer all parts of the task question within that one sentence.

# Body Paragraphs

You should have at least one body paragraph for each part of the task question. For this essay, you will probably either have 3 body paragraphs (one for nationalism, economic, and cultural factors) or 6 paragraphs (1 for each document). Your body paragraphs will consist mostly of information from the documents. However, you will also need outside information (that is why we put it on the outline).

Each body paragraph should start with a topic sentence. Think of a topic sentence as half of your thesis. Instead of addressing all aspects of the task, your topic sentence addresses one aspect of the task. In this essay, that would mean that one paragraph explains how nationalism led to imperialism, another explaining how economic factors lead to imperialism, and finally how cultural beliefs led to imperialism.

After your topic sentence you will get into the substance of your essay. I recommend using what I like to call the “rule of 4s.” The rule of 4s means that you should have 4 sentences any time that you use a document and 4 sentences when you bring in an example of outside information. This works out to 4 sentences about a document, 4 sentences about a second document, and 4 sentences of outside information. The outside information can be done in two ways. It can be 4 sentences paired up with the discussion of one of the document topics OR it can be a stand-alone topic that was not in a document.

You must also remember to use transition sentences when changing topics. This means writing a sentence like: “Another reasons European Imperialism spread in Africa was…” Any time you change topics, ALWAYS use a transition sentence. You should also be sure to not end abruptly. Have a sentence at the end to wrap-up the big topic of the whole paragraph.

Your body paragraph will be structured something like this:

* Topic sentence
* 4 sentences of document information
* Transition sentence
* 4 sentences of outside information
* A sentence to wrap-up the paragraph

# Conclusions

Conclusions should be easy because you don’t have to say anything new. Basically you start by just restating your thesis in different words. Next, summarize each of the topics you discussed. A good way to do this is to write one sentence for each document that you used. Finally, wrap-up the entire essay with one good concluding sentence that explains the significance of this topic. Make sure your last sentence isn’t cheesy. Read it to yourself… if it sounds lame, it probably is lame.

7.

# Peer Editing Directions

**Directions:** With a partner, read over each others’ essays on the computer. As you read, look for several things:

1. Using the highlight function, highlight the THESIS STATEMENT in

**GREEN**.

1. In the body paragraphs, highlight the TOPIC SENTENCES in **GREEN**.
2. In the body paragraphs, highlight any information that comes specifically from any of the DOCUMENTS in **RED**
3. In the body paragraphs, highlight any OUTSIDE INFORMATION in

**YELLOW**

1. In the conclusion, underline the RESTATED THESIS STATEMENT in **GREEN**.
2. In the conclusion, highlight the SUMMARY of each document or argument in **RED**.

Using the comment function under the “Review” tab, provide comments, suggestions, or feedback throughout the essay.

# Social Studies DBQ Rubric

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Areas to Improve** | **Comments** |
| **\_\_\_/5** | **Introduction:**   * Clear thesis * Historical context given * Appropriate length – 3-5 sentences |  |
| **\_\_\_/20** | **Document Support:**   * Who, what, where, why, when * Consistent use of document support – quotes, details * Includes Analysis of documents * Supports thesis more than describes documents * Includes at least 3/4 documents + 1 * Appropriate length – 8-10 sentences |  |
| **\_\_\_/10** | **Organization/Mechanics:**   * Includes transitions (Another reason…) * Clear topic sentences * Logically organized to answer question * Demonstrates conventions of language   (spelling, grammar, language, avoid “I” voice -no I, you, us, our, me or we)   * Avoids use of slang language. |  |
| **\_\_\_/10** | **Outside Information:**   * Includes 2 examples of outside information * Outside information is richly supportive * 3-5 sentences per example * Outside information is relevant to topic and accurate |  |
| **\_\_\_/5** | **Conclusion:**   * Conclusion re-states thesis with no new information * Summarizes main ideas * Uses proper writing mechanics   (Don’t talk about the essay (ie. “This essay was about…” or “As you can see…”))   * Appropriate length – 3-5 sentences |  |
| **\_\_\_/5** | **Scaffolding Questions:**   * Answers all questions * Answers written in complete sentences * Re-state questions |  |
| **\_\_\_/5** | **Outline:**   * Complete-includes doc #s and outside information * Demonstrates clear plan for writing essays |  |

**Total: \_\_\_\_\_/60 Grade: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_**