

The Document-Based Essay

A Brief Overview of the Document-Based Essay

The purpose of writing a document-based essay is for you to study the document(s) provided by your professor to discover and communicate a significant point about history. This type of writing parallels the writing in professional, scholarly history books: the writing is thesis-driven and evidence-based. It seeks to prove a point.

The document-based essay is like other academic writing in history in that it shows how the topic under discussion relates to the time period of your focus. You should, therefore, keep your focus on the documents' historical context (rather than on contemporary America) and seek to answer this question: Why did this topic matter to people at that time?

Audience

Your primary audience is your professor and perhaps your classmates. However, you should write with an academic audience in mind that is knowledgeable about history, but not necessarily a specialist in the documents you are analyzing.

Writing Process Tips

Read the entire assignment sheet carefully! If the assignment asks you a question relating to one or more documents, do the following before beginning to write:

- Read the assigned document(s) carefully. Get a sense of what each document says, and what their purpose and audience seem to be.
- Read the question on the assignment sheet carefully. Get a clear sense of what your professor wants you to do with the document(s).
- Re-read the document(s) in light of the assignment sheet. If your task is to write about more than one document, concentrate on how the assignment guides you to think about the relationship among the documents.
- Try creating a compare/contrast chart before crafting a thesis, if you are writing about multiple documents. On a piece of paper, draw a column for each document. Describe each document in its own column, then take stock of how the documents compare. Such a chart can help you to produce a thesis that deals directly with the contents of the documents rather than your assumptions about the documents.

Keep in mind that your answer to the assignment's question is your thesis. It usually appears in the first paragraph of the essay. Be sure to include all points that you will make in your paper in your first paragraph. A reader should be able to outline the rest of your paper just from the thesis.

It can be helpful (or even necessary) to outline in order to get things in chronological order, as doing so will help you to prevent errors in argument. Most importantly, one idea should flow from another with smooth transitions of thought.

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Historians typically write about their topics in chronological order.

How To Write A Document Based Essay

Lingsheng Yao



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Document-Based Assessment Activities Marc Pioch, Jodene Smith, 2020-03-02 Today's students need to know how to evaluate sources and use evidence to support their conclusions This K 12 resource for teachers provides instructional support as well as a variety of learning opportunities for students Through the activities in this book students will ask and answer compelling questions analyze primary sources approach learning through an inquiry lens and hone their historical thinking skills The lessons teach skills and strategies for analyzing historical documents partnered with document based assessments Graphic organizer templates help students structure their analyses This resource written by Marc Pioch and Jodene Smith prepares students for standardized tests and engages students with inquiry The scaffolded approach to teaching analysis skills can be applied across grades K 12

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