

TIPS FOR THESIS STATEMENTS AND ESSAYS

Thesis Statement: The thesis statement condenses your arguments to a nutshell and appears in the opening paragraph, but it is not written until AFTER you have planned your overall response. (Planning process shown in table below.)

A good thesis statement—

- Fully addresses all parts of the prompt, while acknowledging the complexity of the issue.
- Clearly takes a side—makes a declarative statement that one thing was more important, more persuasive, etc. than another. Since the verb in the prompt is often something like “assess” or “evaluate,” the thesis statement should show which side the writer takes.
- Suggests a “table of contents” or road map for the essay—shows what elements enter into consideration.
- Begins an essay that is proven by abundant and persuasive facts and evidence.

In a DBQ essay, the student writes a well-organized response to target a specific prompt, analyzing pertinent documents in order to support his/her thesis. The steps described here will guide the process of handling the documents. (For Advanced Placement US History the response must include BOTH outside information AND information from the documents. On US History AP exams, one of the essays that must be written under timed conditions is the DBQ.)

DBQ Do and Don't

| Steps | Do | Don't |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Analyze the prompt and divide it into its components. A graphic organizer helps with this step. | Fully address the prompt. It is better to address all parts of the prompt, even if you must do some in a way that is less complete, than to spend all your time on just one of two parts or 3 of 4 parts. | Neglect part of the prompt because you spent too much time on the part you know more about. |
| 2. Plan to prove your point. It is best to begin by planning the overall structure BEFORE even looking at the documents. | Organize your thoughts before writing the thesis statement. What are the logical points your essay needs to include? | Write a “laundry list” that simply summarizes each document. |

| Steps | Do | Don't |
|--|--|---|
| 3. Check the documents to see how you can use them as tools. | Strive to use all the documents; but be sure you accurately understand their main ideas. | Take quotes or ideas out of context to use them in a manner other than the author intended. |
| 4. Ask yourself when writing every paragraph: "How does this help to prove my thesis?" | Analyze to prove the position asserted in the thesis statement. Analysis is not the same thing as description or narrative. Merely making a series of true statements is not analysis. Key to analysis—is the essay answering the "So what?" question? | Use 1st- or 2 nd -person pronouns "I think the Supreme Court has the authority to use judicial review because..." "Have you ever wondered how the Supreme Court got the authority to overturn federal laws?" |
| 5. Manage time wisely; writing long quotes will eat up thinking time. | Use relevant facts, evidence, proof. A well-chosen brief phrase in quotations and worked into your own sentence is powerful. | Use lengthy quotes. Pad the paper in an attempt to conceal a lack of analysis. |
| 6. Give credit to sources. | Cite sources using the author's name and/or document title. | Write "According to Document B,..." |
| 7. Think as you write! | Let logic and analysis drive the essay. | Let documents drive the essay. |