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Teachers,

Here's what I use to introduce the DBQ to my students. Since the 2004 DBQ (Buddhism in China) is during the Foundations Unit, I use it early in the 1st semester to teach good document analysis skills. This lesson is divided into several sections:

- I. The Question, p. 1
What is the question asking? Getting students to actually *read*, *understand*, and *focus on* the question is the first hurdle. The biggest and costliest mistake students make is that their essay is not focused squarely on the question.
- II. The Background Behind the Question, p. 2
The DBQ does not require previous knowledge of the question. Since the question can be on any topic from any period and any region, there is usually a brief "Historical Background" paragraph giving students some relevant information to help their recall and provide some structure for their essay.
- III. Reading & Analyzing Documents, p. 3-12
This is really the "meat" of this assignment. My advice for organizing one's notes on each document is courtesy of Bill Zeigler.
- IV. Pulling It All Together, p 13-15
How do I organize and analyze the documents, and how do I structure my essay? This is really the fun part of the lesson. Students will see how & where their notes on the documents will help them organize and write their essay.
- V. The Thesis p. 16-18
My view/philosophy on "How to write a good thesis," with help from Bard Keeler.
- VI. The "Missing Voice" p. 19
Thanks to Barth Derryberry for the "Missing Voice" title.
- VII. Suggested Generic DBQ Structure, p. 20
I don't really think there is one particular "best" way to structure a DBQ. I include this just because many of my students say it helps them focus while they're writing.

When I use this lesson in class, I spend a full class day (58 min/class) on the document analysis (p. 1-12) and a second day for the rest of this handout. Then on the third day, I give them the whole hour to write an actual DBQ on (you guessed it) this same exact question. They should be thoroughly familiar with the documents that they then have little to no excuse for not writing a great essay. Obviously that doesn't always happen, but it encourages good writing habits from the very beginning of the year, rather than spending months breaking them of bad habits.

Hope this helps,

Bill

The Essays

General Advice for All Essays

Remember the overall structure of the APWH Exam? On the day of the national exam, you'll have just finished 70 Multiple Choice questions in 55 minutes. You'll then have a 5-10 minutes break before starting the Essay section. Below is a table summarizing how the Essay Section fits into the overall exam.

Section	Multiple Choice	Free Response (Essay)		
Weight	50%	50%		
		16.67%	16.67%	16.67%
# of Questions	70	DBQ Document Based Question	CCOT Continuity and Change Over Time	Comparative (Compare and Contrast)
Time Allowed	55 minutes	10 minute mandatory reading period, then 120 self-budgeted minutes to write all 3 essays.		
Suggested Pace	~ 45 seconds per question	40 minutes	40 minutes	40 minutes

Mandatory Reading Period

When the Essay section begins, you'll receive a green booklet containing all three essays questions: the DBQ; the CCOT; and the Comparative. You have 10 minutes to read all the questions, including the documents for the DBQ, take notes, and plan your essays. You are NOT allowed to actually begin writing during these 10 minutes.

One of the biggest mistakes students make when they take the APWH Exam is not using the 10-minute mandatory reading period to plan and outline their essay writing. Think of these 10 minutes as an opportunity to "write a rough draft" of each essay. Obviously you can't write three entire drafts in 10 minutes, but you *can* write a rough outline (draft) of what you want to include in your essays. As the next two hours unfold, you can then look back over your notes and outline to make sure you write as good an essay as possible. You do not have to write the DBQ first, but can write the essays in any order. Also note that while the exam proctor *may* remind you that "you have x minutes remaining," you can spend as much or as little time as you want on each essay, so you'll need to be self-disciplined in order to write three high-quality essays in the time allowed.

Core Scoring

Next, realize that APWH essays are graded according to a rubric. The rubric for each type of essay is slightly different, but all three essays' rubrics require the essay to satisfy 5-6 "Core" characteristics. If, and only if, *all* of these "Core" characteristics are satisfied, then the essay is eligible for "Expanded Core" (extra credit) points. The "Expanded Core" categories are basically just the same as the Core categories, but require a higher quality of performance. The Rubrics are structured this way to encourage students to write well-rounded essays. On a practical level this means it is crucial to know what the "Core" characteristics are so that one can satisfy all the "Core" requirements, as well as then possibly earning "Expanded Core" points. The "Core" characteristics are worth 7 points, while the Expanded Core is worth 2 additional points. Thus, the maximum possible score for each essay is 9.

Asset Model

One last thing to note is that the scoring of the essays is done on a so-called asset model. That is, the scorers want to give you every point that you deserve and are looking for every opportunity to do so. What this means, practically speaking, is that they will read over your errors rather than remove points. So, be daring and do everything that is required and more. Do not let fear of errors hold you back to a timid standard on the AP World History essays. Study the rubrics in this section so that you know what is scored on each essay.

The DBQ (Document Based Question)

Purpose of the DBQ

The purpose of the DBQ is to test students' ability to *do* what professional historians actually do: use and interpret historical documents to make conclusions based on those documents. It is NOT a test of students' prior knowledge (you're not expected to know anything about the topic before the exam) but rather a test of students' *skills* to perform a variety of analytical tasks. Why is this important to realize? When you first read a DBQ question, you will most likely have absolutely no idea about the topic. Relax! That's normal. *No one* is supposed to know anything about the topic. That's what makes a DBQ a "level playing field." No one has any advantage over anyone else.

The DBQ "Core" Rubric

	Official Description	Points	Plain English Description
1	Has an acceptable Thesis	1	Thesis
2	Addresses all of the documents and demonstrates understanding of all or all but one.	1	Meaning of Documents
3	Supports thesis with appropriate evidence from all or all but one document.	2	Evidence
	Supports thesis with appropriate evidence from all but two documents.	1	
4	Analyzes the context of at least two documents.	1	Context
5	Analyzes documents by grouping them in two or three ways, depending on the question.	1	Grouping
6	Identifies and explains the need for one type of appropriate additional document or source.	1	Additional Document

Up to two "Expanded Core" (extra credit) points can be earned for doing any of these "Core" tasks exceptionally well, but remember that ALL seven of the "Core" points must be earned before an essay is eligible for "Expanded Core" credit.

Although the DBQ Rubric lists six "Core" characteristics, that does not mean that students should necessarily write the essay in the order of these characteristics. The Rubric is meant as a guide for essay Readers to *score* the essay, not as an outline for students in how to *write* the essay.

Section I: The Question:

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?

- 1. What is the question asking you to do? (What's the verb in the question? Restate the verb in your own words.)

- 2. O.K., now what is the object of the verb? (Analyze what? where? when?) Make sure you focus your essay so that it answers ALL of these key characteristics.

What? (the topic) _____

Where? (the place) _____

When? (the time) _____

Section II: The Background Behind the Question

Historical Background

The Historical Background is presented in most (but not all) DBQs in order to “jog the memory” of students. Unfortunately too many students don’t realize that the HB paragraph is there to help them and all too often ignore it or don’t realize that it contains valuable information.

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

1. Try to summarize the Historical Background (HB) paragraph above. *What kind of information* does it give you?

2. Are there any hints in the HB paragraph that will influence how you read, interpret, and categorize the documents? Based on the information in the HB, how are you going to read the documents any *differently* than you would if you hadn’t read the HB? After all, the writers went to some effort to give this HB information. What use will you make of it?

Section III: Reading and Analyzing Documents

Document Characteristics

What notes should one take as one reads the documents? Much of that depends on the question being asked, but there are several common characteristics in each document that one should look for because any of these characteristics can influence how a document should be interpreted and analyzed. The acronym “SOAPSTONE” is often useful as a guide for these characteristics.

Subject	What is the main topic of this document?
Occasion	When was this document produced? Was it created for a particular event or occasion, or even during an era when other similar documents were produced?
Audience	Who was this document’s intended audience? Was the document written to be read privately by a specific person (who?), a public announcement, or an official proclamation?
Purpose	Why was this document produced? What was the purpose or motivation of the writer/author of the document, based on what limited information you have about them? What effect did the author hope this document would have? What did the author want the reader(s) of this document to <i>do</i> ?
Speaker	Who was the Speaker of this document? Was it an official person representing a government, or an informal, anonymous individual? Usually a document’s author and speaker are the same individual, but occasionally they may actually be different. (e.g. a speech may be written by a speech writer, but spoken by a government official)
Tone	Is there any apparent tone or “voice” in this document that would influence one’s interpretation? Is it filled with any apparent emotion? (e.g. sarcasm, exuberance, anger, disdain, admiration, etc.) Underline any unusual vocabulary in the document that serves as a clue to this interpretation.

As you read each document, write a brief note above and to the left¹ of each document re: these characteristics.² Do worry if you can’t detect answers for every “SOAPSTONE” category. No single document will have complete answers for *all* these categories, just do the best you can.

Additional Document

After you read a document, you’ll notice that some of the SOAPSTONE characteristics you looked for above were answerable, but others weren’t. Below and to the left of each document write down a type of document that would complete the missing information not contained in the given document. Sometimes it is helpful to think of the Additional Document as a “Missing Voice.” Who would be a good type of person (not already heard from) to create a document that would help answer this question, and what

¹ If students are trained to write their comments on each document in a uniform manner they will find it much easier to organize their paragraphs. (“What’s my topic sentence for next paragraph? [Look at notes written *to the right* of each document.] Need to include the POV from a document? [Refer to your notes written *below* each document.] etc.”)

² Adopted from Bill Zeigler’s “Hot Topics in AP World History” presentation at the 2006 AP Annual Conference, July 15, 2006.

information would that person likely have? You don't have to name a specific, actual document, but you must do two things with this Additional Document:

1. Describe the *kind of document* that would give more information, or the *kind of information* you'd like to see in an additional document.
2. A short explanation of *how* that information *would help a historian answer the question* more completely. (You can't just write, "...because it would answer the question more fully.")

Here's a chart to help you visualize how the Additional Document rubric category works.

<p>“It would help to have a document from a [type of source] that deals with [subject matter] so that historians could better [use information to <i>do</i> what?].”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>“It would help to have a [kind of] document showing [description of what kind of information/evidence desired] so that historians could [describe what conclusion you'd like to be able to draw from this evidence].”</p>		
Missing Voice / Additional Document	Type of information/ evidence	How would this document would help answer the question more completely? How would an historian <i>use</i> this document?

Grouping

When you're finished reading all the documents, look back over your SOAPSTONE notes written above each document on the left side. Do you notice any characteristics that *more than one document share*? Rewrite these commonly shared characteristics above and to the right of each document. You'll use this information to plan and structure your paragraphs in a few minutes when you begin to write.

Context

The purpose of the DBQ is to test students' ability to *do* what professional historians actually do. Well, what do professional historians do? One essential task is to interpret historical documents. History is not *just* facts, a large part is also *interpretation* of facts. This is one area that makes history both fun and controversial, because different historians interpret identical documents differently.³

³ Your essay will *never* be graded according to whether the reader *agrees or disagrees* with your interpretation of the documents. As long as you “Construct and evaluate arguments using evidence to make plausible arguments” (Habit of Mind #1) your interpretation is perfectly acceptable. It is of course possible to misinterpret documents, which does carry a penalty for Rubric category #2, but as long as you include all the documents somewhere in your essay

So as you read and interpret each document, what clues are there that any particular document means anything *other* than the literal words on the paper? Are there any reasons why although a document says “x” it should be interpreted as meaning something more, less, or different? All the intangible circumstances surrounding a document that influence how one should interpret that document comprise what is called the “Context.”

If this concept seems vague or meaningless to you, imagine that two people tell you *exactly the same words*. Would you interpret and respond to each person identically, or would you take each person’s identity into account when you weigh whether to take their words seriously? For instance:

Document 1

“If you park your car there, you’ll get in trouble,” says your six-year-old sister.

Document 2

“If you park your car there, you’ll get in trouble,” says the police officer.

You’d interpret these two statements *very* differently, wouldn’t you? Obviously the identity of the source makes a huge difference in how seriously one interprets the document. Note, however, that one should not come to the conclusion that Document 1 is “wrong” while Document 2 is “right.” (Can you think of any circumstances that might make your sister be correct? Just because she’s six doesn’t mean she’s *automatically* wrong, it just means that you’d probably want some more information re: the context of your sister’s comments before you render judgement on her words. After all, she might have just heard your parent say, “If that car isn’t moved your older sibling will be punished!”)

Context is far more subtle than simply labeling documents as “right” or “wrong.” You have to be *very specific* in deciding *to what degree* a document should be interpreted *a certain way*. Ultimately, you should be able to place each document on a spectrum of the document’s “trustworthiness.”

Limitations	Value
----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- -----	----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- -----
What characteristics limit/reduce the value of this document?	What characteristics strengthen/enhance the value of this document?

So, how does one interpret a document’s context? The most common ways are listed below. (Some of them are the same SOAPSTONE characteristics you’ve already done!)

1. Who produced this document? Is this author have any special knowledge about the topic? How credible is this author? Discuss the author’s gender, age, ethnicity, social status, religion, level of education, intellectual or political philosophy, etc. (You won’t know all this information, but give as much detail as possible.)
2. When was this document produced? Can it be connected with a significant historical event or era? (Think back to the Historical Background information.)

and misinterpret no more than one document, you’ll earn full credit for your interpretation as long as you can make a plausible case for your interpretation.

3. Who was the intended audience? Was the document written to be read by a specific person (who?) a public announcement, or an official proclamation?
4. Why was this document produced? What was the purpose or motivation of the author of the document, based on what limited information you have about them? What effect did the author hope this document would have? What did the author want the document reader to *do*?
5. Is there any apparent tone or “voice” in this document that would influence one’s interpretation? Is it filled with any apparent emotion? (e.g. sarcasm, exuberance, anger, disdain, admiration, etc.) Underline any unusual vocabulary in the document that serves as a clue to this interpretation.

As you read each document, write your Context notes below and to the right of each document. When you’ve completed all these tasks, your notes on the DBQ will be organized something like the sample below.

SOAPSTONE

Grouping

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • life, desire, = sorrow • only spiritual solution to earthly problems • earliest of documents • purpose: spiritual enlightenment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachings reflected by Zhi Dun (Doc #2) • Inspired followers like Zong Mi for centuries, (Doc #5) • Is cause of all other documents’ reactions |
|--|--|

Document 1

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

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.

Additional Document

Context

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many people agreed with/followed? • Did political rulers support/resist? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddha was born a privileged prince • Prophesied to be revolutionary figure • Spent his life searching for enlightenment, couldn’t find enlightenment/peace in privilege or asceticism |
|---|--|

OK, now it’s your chance to read the actual documents and take your notes.

SOAPSTONE**Grouping****Document #1**

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

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.

Additional Document**Context**

SOAPSTONE**Grouping****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 CE.

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

Additional Document**Context**

SOAPSTONE

Grouping

Document #3

Source: Anonymous Chinese scholar, "The Disposition of Error," China, circa 500 CE.

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?

Question: Now of happiness there is none greater than the continuation of one's line, of unfilial conduct there is none worse than childlessness. The monks forsake wives and children, reject property and wealth. Some do not marry all their lives.

Answer: Wives, children, and property are the luxuries of the world, but simple living and inaction are the wonders of the Way. The monk practices the Way and substitutes that for worldly pleasures. He accumulates goodness and wisdom in exchange for the joys of having a wife and children.

Additional Document**Context**

SOAPSTONE

Grouping

Document #4

Source: Han Yu, leading Confucian scholar and official at the Tang imperial court, "Memorial on Buddhism," 819 CE.

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.

Additional Document**Context**

SOAPSTONE**Grouping****Document #5**

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

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.

Additional Document**Context**

SOAPSTONE

Grouping

Document #6

Source: Tang Emperor Wu, Edict on Buddhism, 845 CE.

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!

Now if even one man fails to work the fields, someone must go hungry; if one woman does not tend her silkworms, someone will go cold. At present there are an inestimable number of monks and nuns in the empire, all of them waiting for the farmers to feed them and the silkworms to clothe them while the Buddhist public temples and private chapels have reached boundless numbers, sufficient to outshine the imperial palace itself.

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.

Additional Document

Context

Section IV: Pulling It All Together

Now that you've analyzed all the documents individually, it's time to start the fun part of comparing the documents to each other. There are a bezzillion ways to do this, but here are some of the most common.

- Chronological - Sort the documents in historical order.

Date	Doc #	SOAPSTone Characteristics		Notice any trends or patterns? (e.g. changes over time, documents that agree with or contradict each other?) ⁴
		1	3	
		2	4	
		1	3	
		2	4	
		1	3	
		2	4	
		1	3	
		2	4	
		1	3	
		2	4	
		1	3	
		2	4	

Remember the Historical Background information? (p. 2) Do you see any relationship between the characteristics you listed in the table above and the timeline described in the Historical Background section?

⁴ Use your notes on the Historical Background paragraph (p. 2) to help with this chronological categorization.

- Look back over your notes on the documents (p. 7-12). Make a list of all the SOAPStone characteristics that are shared by more than one document or author. Note: Documents can belong in more than one group/category. (because documents have more than one characteristic!)

Caution: Do NOT summarize the documents. Your reader already knows what the documents “say.” Your job is to interpret the evidence in the documents in order to answer the question.

Wrong “Doc #4 is strongly anti-Buddhist.”
 or
 “Doc #5 says that all the religions are equal.”

Right “Han Yu’s vehement rejection of Buddhism reflects the resurgence of Confucianism after imperial order was restored. (Doc #4)”
 or
 “Because Zong Mi is afraid the emperor will discriminate against Buddhism, he is eager to tolerate all religions,. (Doc #5)

Organizing the Evidence		
This characteristic ...	is shared by these doc’s/authors ⁵ ...	as shown by this specific word(s) from the document (cite the evidence).

⁵ There must be at least 2 documents that share each characteristic, but each group could include more than the 3 rows reflected in this table. Any characteristic that is present in only 1 document is inadmissible because it is not a characteristic that is shared by a “group” of documents as required by the rubric.

- Now, look at your characteristics list on the previous page. You may not realize it, but you’ve just outlined the body paragraphs for your essay. Simply change the titles on the columns and you’ll see how.
 - The topic sentence is the characteristic in the left column.
 - The sentences in the rest of the paragraph sentences that analyze the documents/authors are listed in the middle column
 - The precise words that you’ve listed in the right column are the specific evidence that supports your paragraph’s topic.

So take another look at the table on the previous page, this time with different titles for each column.

Organizing My Essay		
Paragraph subject (Topic Sentence)	Doc’s/authors to include in this paragraph	Specific points to make, with notes on what word(s) from the document to use.

Section V: The Thesis

OK, so now you've spent considerable time reading, sifting, and analyzing these documents. Can you still remember why you did all this work? Oh yeah, it was in order to ANSWER THE QUESTION!

Based on the following documents, analyze the responses to the spread of Buddhism in China.

- Your task is to write an essay that answers this question, drawing on all the documents you've read and analysis you've already done. The hardest part is actually coming up with a good thesis statement. Look back on your notes in the "Organizing the Evidence" table (p. 14)
 - How do you interpret the evidence reflected in the documents?
 - What do the characteristics that you've detected in the documents add up to?

It is vitally important that you write your thesis *after* you've examined the evidence in the documents. Perhaps the greatest mistake you can make is to choose a thesis in a knee-jerk manner when you first read the question, because then as you read the documents you will tend to selectively favor *only* the evidence that supports your thesis and ignore any evidence that contradicts your thesis. The DBQ is designed to test your ability to interpret *all* relevant evidence and develop a thesis that reflects that evidence. To write your thesis before examining *all* of the evidence is to fail the DBQ before you even start. This is a fundamental error. Superior students will construct. Even professional historians struggle to maintain the objectivity when examining the complexities of all relevant evidence.⁶

The whole purpose of the DBQ is to test your ability to do what historians actually do: Develop arguments that are supported by interpret evidence objectively to develop

⁶ If you want to see an example of a wannabe-historian who refuses to acknowledge evidence that contradicts his own interpretation, see PBS' 1421 DVD that examines Gavin Menzies' theory that the Chinese admiral Zheng He discovered the Americas approximately 75 years before Columbus. When I show the dvd, my students squeal with delight as Menzies concocts all sorts of Rube Goldberg-like interpretations of evidence that support his conclusions rather than accept the much more convincing evidence that no such event occurred. (in this writer's opinion)

Here's a guide to the most common mistakes students make when attempting to write a thesis.

	Mistake	Example	How to Fix It
1 Thesis	No Thesis		Pre-writing organization. Read the question, then plan/outline your response <u>before</u> you begin to write.
	Thesis not related to the question	<i>Most Chinese are Buddhists ...</i> <i>China has over a billion people today ...</i> <i>Buddhists like to meditate ...</i>	<u>Read the question.</u> Make sure every sentence in your essay is relevant to the <u>topic</u> , <u>time</u> , and <u>place</u> that the question asks. Topic = ? Time = ? Place = ? Note what the verb in the question asks you to <i>do</i> . Analyze ≠ Describe ≠ Justify ≠ Trace.
	Thesis repeats or just paraphrases the question	<i>There were many responses to the spread of Buddhism in China.</i>	Try to “argue” your thesis. Could you take an “opposite” position? If not, then the thesis doesn’t really <i>say</i> anything. The thesis must “take a stand.” Avoid the “thesis killer” words ⁷ (very, many, things, a lot/lots, stuff, ways, really, etc.).
	Thesis is too vague	<i>Buddhism had a large impact on China.</i>	Remember all those SAT vocabulary words you’ve been learning in English class? Here’s your chance to use ‘em!

⁷ I have a rule in my classroom, “Any thesis that contains these words is automatically vetoed.” Possibly the hardest skill to learn is the ability to form a sophisticated, complex thesis. One strategy I’ve learned (from Geri McCarthy of Barrington, RI) is to require students to begin their thesis with either “While”, “Although”, or “Despite/In spite of.” These words strongly encourage students to formulate a mature thesis that helps structure the rest of their essay. Once students can consistently write a competent thesis sentence, then I concentrate on having them develop an essay preview/outline of later paragraphs. The result should be a thesis paragraph that is several sentences long (the paragraph should NOT just be a single sentence).

OK, now pull together everything you've done: your reading & understanding of the documents; their content; author's characteristics; etc. Write your thesis statement. (1-2 sentences)

My Thesis

The rest of the Thesis Paragraph

Now summarize the main points that you'll use to support your thesis. (The second part of the Thesis Paragraph should preview the topic sentences of your later paragraphs.) This takes some time and a lot of practice to do well, but if you can learn to plan your thesis and outline your essay, it will make the actual writing TONS easier. By the time your reader finishes the Thesis Paragraph, s/he should know WHAT your thesis is, and have an idea of what evidence you will use to prove it.

Main Point / Body Paragraph #1 _____

Main Point / Body Paragraph #2 _____

Main Point / Body Paragraph #3 _____

Main Point / Body Paragraph #4 (if needed) _____

Now you have your thesis paragraph!

Section VI: The “Missing Voice”

There’s just one more step. (Phew!) By now, you know the documents well. You’ve analyzed their perspective on the question several ways. The problem is that there are only a handful of documents. They can’t possibly represent EVERY conceivable perspective or relevant piece of evidence.

Are there any perspectives/pieces of evidence that are relevant to the question that AREN’T already represented in the documents? Can you think of any kinds of documents that would help you answer the question more completely? (Is there a “missing voice” that isn’t in the given documents?) You can add this at virtually any point in your essay. It’s most common to add it at the end of the essay, or at the end of the thesis paragraph. Great writers find a way to weave it into every paragraph in their essay, but that’s something you can work on throughout the year.

“It would help to have a document from a [type of source] that deals with [subject matter] so that historians could better [use information to *do* what?].”

or

“It would help to have a [kind of document] showing [description of what kind of information/evidence desired] so that historians could [describe what conclusion you’d like to be able to draw from this evidence].”

Missing Voice / Additional Document	Type of information/ evidence	How would this document would help answer the question more completely? How would an historian <i>use</i> this document?

Congratulations!! I know this has been TON of work, but you now have all the pieces fully developed, analyzed, sorted, cross-referenced, etc, that you can actually begin to write the essay itself. ☺

Section VII: Suggested Generic DBQ Structure

Thesis Paragraph

- Background/Context (Optional. “Where does this question fall in the larger context of history?”)
- Thesis Statement
- “Road Map” (outline of later categories of document Groupings/Analysis)
- Additional Document (Optional)

Body Paragraph #1 (1st Group of Analyzed Doc’s)

- Topic Sentence (what characteristic do these doc’s share, and how does that support the thesis? See tables on p. ???)
- Evidence Doc #1 (what text from doc #1 supports the thesis or this paragraph’s topic?)
Analysis of doc #1 (see the “SOAPStone” notes that you took on each document)
- Evidence Doc #2 (what text from doc #2 supports the thesis or this paragraph’s topic?)
Analysis of doc #2
- Evidence Doc #3 (what text from doc #3 supports the thesis or this paragraph’s topic?)
Analysis of doc #3
- How these doc’s relate/compare to each other. (The fullest understanding of any individual document emerges only when that document is viewed within the wider context of ALL the documents.)
- Additional Doc (be sure to describe what evidence this document should contain and how/why this evidence would be useful in better answering the question)
- Conclusion

Additional Body Paragraphs as needed

- Check to make sure that all doc’s are included, with explicit discussion of specific Evidence and POV analysis from each doc.

Conclusion

- Include Additional Doc (if not included previously)
- Restatement/Summarization of Thesis

Writing Tip: Avoid any sentence in your essay that begins, “Doc #__ says ‘...’” This is merely summarizing the document. Your teacher/reader already knows that information better than you do. Your job is to *interpret* the information in the doc’s to *make an argument* or *draw a conclusion*.