

Writing for AP[®] World History

So far in this handbook, you have been given guidance on critical reading, note-taking, Historical Reasoning Processes, and Historical Thinking Skills. We now turn to what many students feel is the most challenging portion of the AP[®] World History exam: writing. The components of the free-response questions (writing) portion of the exam are three short-answer questions (SAQs), one document-based question (DBQ), and one long essay question (LEQ).

There are three key elements to successful writing on AP[®] World History exams: 1) know the format of the exam questions and grading rubrics, 2) use time wisely for both planning and writing, and 3) remain calm enough that you remember what you studied. With that in mind, here are some guidelines for writing AP[®] World History responses and essays.

General Rules for AP[®] History Writing:

- Before you take the exam, check out the most recently released questions, scoring guidelines, and sample student responses at AP[®] Central. You can also search online for previous years' questions and practice quizzes. Then practice taking the exam several times.
- Don't panic. Read through all of the prompts slowly. Focus on the instructions. (Remember RTFQ).
- Determine how you will address the prompt and establish your central points. Don't write the first thing that comes into your head. Reread the prompt to make sure you understand what it is asking.
- Model your response on the prompt by using the language of the prompt in your answer. If the prompt asks you to "describe," "explain," or "evaluate," be sure that is what you do AND, whenever possible, include those terms in your response.
- Plan your response with an outline or short list of central points to guide your answer. If there are documents, plug them into your outline.

- For both the DBQ and the LEQ, include a clear thesis statement in the introductory paragraph and tie back to it in a brief conclusion. The SAQs don't require this.
- If you have additional time at the end, reread your work and make edits to any ideas or sentences that are unclear.

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

The short-answer response description and chart below from the College Board provides a good deal of information that should help you to answer the first group of questions you will encounter on the exam. You will be asked to address three of the four short-answer questions, so be sure to **answer only the appropriate three** since you will earn no additional points for addressing all four. Of the four questions, numbers 1 AND 2 are required, and you can choose between questions 3 OR 4. You'll have forty minutes to complete this section of the exam. That means you have approximately 13–14 minutes to read, plan for, and answer each of the three questions. Finally, based on the rubric, you DO NOT need a thesis statement, nor should you write multiple paragraphs for an answer. Your answer should be a concise response that fully answers all parts of the question using complete sentences.

The AP[®] World History course is structured around themes and concepts in nine different units from approximately 1200 to the present. Understanding them is helpful because different units are addressed in the writing sections. The nine units are broken down as follows:

Units	Chronological Period*
• Unit 1: The Global Tapestry	c. 1200 to
• Unit 2: Networks of Exchange	c. 1450
• Unit 3: Land-Based Empires	c. 1450 to
• Unit 4: Transoceanic Interconnections	c. 1750
• Unit 5: Revolutions	c. 1750 to
• Unit 6: Consequences of Industrialization	c. 1900
• Unit 7: Global Conflict	c. 1900 to
• Unit 8: Cold War and Decolonization	the present
• Unit 9: Globalization	

**Events, processes, and developments are not constrained by the given dates and may begin before, or continue after, the approximate dates assigned to each unit.*

Within each unit, key concepts organize and prioritize historical developments. Themes allow students to make connections and identify patterns and trends over time.¹⁴

¹⁴ AP[®] World History Modern Course and Exam Description, Effective Fall 2019 (New York: College Board, 2019), 18. apcentral.collegeboard.org.

Section I of the exam consists of “Part A,” the multiple-choice questions and “Part B,” the short-answer questions. The description below is taken from the College Board AP® World History Course and Exam Description:¹⁵

The second part of Section I of the AP Exam also includes three required short-answer questions.

- Short-answer question 1 is required and includes a secondary source stimulus. The topic of the question will include historical developments or processes between the years 1200 and 2001.
- Short-answer question 2 is required and includes a primary source stimulus. The topic of the question will include historical developments or processes between the years 1200 and 2001.
- Students may select short-answer question 3 or 4, neither of which includes a stimulus. Short-answer question 3 will focus on historical developments or processes between the years 1200 and 1750. Short-answer question 4 will focus on historical developments or processes between the years 1750 and 2001.
- All four historical periods are represented among the four short-answer questions.

Each SAQ asks students to describe examples of historical evidence relevant to the source or question; these examples can be drawn from the concept outline or from other examples explored in depth during classroom instruction.

In general, all SAQs will have three parts each listed as (a), (b), and (c). The directions suggest that you write the letter of the part you are answering next to the response. In a few sentences, you should fully answer that portion and then do the same for the other sections.

To dissect the SAQ section even further based on a recently released exam, here is a breakdown of each question’s wording and the skill each question assesses:

SAQ 1) The students were instructed to read an excerpt and then **identify** an example of cultural exchange, **identify** one development mentioned in the excerpt that changed cross-regional exchanges, and **explain** one cross-cultural exchange that would challenge the assertion made in the last sentence. This item expected analysis, and students were required to answer.

SAQ 2) The student looked at a chart and then were instructed to **identify** one way the data showed differences, **identify** one similarity that might account for low life expectations, and **explain** one way in which longer life

¹⁵ AP® World History Modern Course and Exam Description, Effective Fall 2019 (New York: College Board, 2019), 197. apcentral.collegeboard.org.

expectancies led to problems. This item expected a demonstration of compare and contrast, and students were required to answer.

SAQ 3) There were no documents (stimuli) associated with this question. The students were asked to **identify** one way subsistence patterns continued over time, **identify** one way the Neolithic Revolution altered subsistence patterns, and **explain** one way in which subsistence patterns changed political or social structures. This item required analysis of continuity and change over time. Students could choose to answer either this question or SAQ 4.

SAQ 4) There were no documents (stimuli) associated with this question. The students were asked to **identify** one economic change, **explain** one continuity of traditional elites, and **explain** one way new elites led to new ideologies. Students could choose to answer either this question or SAQ 3.

Sample Question for SAQ 4:

Answer (a), (b), and (c).¹⁶

- a) Identify ONE economic change in the period 1750–1900 that led to the formation of new elites.
- b) Explain ONE way that, despite economic change, traditional elites remained powerful in the period 1750–1900.
- c) Explain ONE way in which the formation of new elites in the period 1750–1900 led to the emergence of new ideologies.

Sample Responses that would earn credit:

- ONE point for identifying one economic change in the period 1750–1900 that led to the formation of new elites. *Examples might include how industrialization led to new elites, how capitalism led to the formation of a middle class in industrial societies, or how European colonial expansion in Africa and Asia led to the formation of new elites in Europe and the colonial societies.*
- ONE point for explaining one way that, despite economic change, traditional elites remained powerful in the period 1750–1900. *A sample answer might include that aristocrats maintained power through existing wealth; that many traditional elites remained powerful in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because they used their wealth to engage or invest in industrial capitalism; or that native elites in colonial territories often remained powerful by making agreements with European powers to retain their positions, privileges, and wealth.*
- ONE point for explaining one way in which the formation of new elites in the period 1750–1900 led to the emergence of new ideologies. *A sample answer might include information that Socialism emerged as a reaction against the perceived excesses of the capitalist industrial class; that nationalism and*

¹⁶“World History Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary,” SAQ 4, AP[®] Central, College Board, 2019, apcentral.collegeboard.org.

Social Darwinism emerged to promote military and imperial expansion favored by the new industrial elites; or that feminism emerged to advocate for allowing women to gain access to the new jobs, educational opportunities, and expanding political rights available to men in industrial societies.

Practice: You will find practice short-answer questions in various forms throughout *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart*. Use the tips above when answering those questions.

THE ESSAY QUESTIONS

Section II of the AP[®] World History exam consists of two parts: the document-based question (DBQ) and the long essay question (LEQ). Both types of responses share characteristics found in all effective history essays. These include the following:

- writing a clear *thesis* statement
- “setting the scene” or providing *historical context*
- organizing your response into several *separate paragraphs* with topic sentences that advance the thesis argument
- using *evidence* to support the argument
- employing *historical reasoning* to frame or structure an argument
- *analyzing* the subject based on the specific question asked
- providing a brief *conclusion* that ties back to the thesis

The following sections introduce the DBQ and the LEQ.

Document-Based Question

The DBQ is the portion of the AP[®] World History exam that makes many students the most nervous. However, once you understand the basic nature of the DBQ, most of your anxiety will disappear. You’ll see that the DBQ is just another essay question—but one with clues that can either help or hinder you, depending on your knowledge of history and your examination of the evidence. The DBQ includes a question that could be asked and answered even if you didn’t have any of the documents provided. However, the DBQ expects you to incorporate most, if not all, of the documents. That’s why careful reading and planning are so important.

The description below is taken from the College Board AP[®] World History Course and Exam Description:¹⁷

¹⁷ AP[®] World History Modern Course and Exam Description, Effective Fall 2019 (New York: College Board, 2019), 197. apcentral.collegeboard.org.

The document-based question presents students with seven documents offering various perspectives on a historical development or process. The question requires students to do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis or claim that establishes a line of reasoning.
- Describe a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.
- Use the provided documents to support an argument in response to the prompt.
- Use historical evidence beyond the documents relevant to an argument about the prompt.
- For at least three documents, explain how or why the document's point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience is relevant to an argument.
- Demonstrate 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.

The topic of the document-based question will include historical developments or processes between the years 1450 and 2001.

Practice: To practice the DBQ, please see the DBQs that conclude each Part.

Long Essay Question

The LEQ is the final activity of the AP[®] World History exam and is the most traditional of the writing sections. The questions address major topics, cover specifically defined periods, and require students to use only their historical knowledge to address the prompt. There are no documents. For this section, you will have a choice among several different questions, but you need to answer **ONLY** one LEQ. The questions cover different periods, but all measure the same theme and historical reasoning skill.

The following description is taken from the College Board AP[®] World History Course and Exam Description:¹⁸

The long essay question requires students to do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis or claim that establishes a line of reasoning.
- Describe a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.
- Support an argument in response to the prompt using specific and relevant examples of evidence.
- Demonstrate 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.

¹⁸ AP[®] World History Modern Course and Exam Description, Effective Fall 2019 (New York: College Board, 2019), 198. apcentral.collegeboard.org.

Students must select one of the three long essay questions. Each question focuses on the same reasoning process, but historical developments and processes in different time periods. The first option focuses primarily on historical developments or processes between 1200 and 1750, the second primarily on historical developments or processes between 1450 and 1900, and the third primarily on historical developments or processes between 1750 and 2001.

In order to receive the highest scores, students must develop an argument and support it with an analysis of specific, relevant historical evidence of their choosing. LEQs ask about large-scale topics specifically mentioned in the concept outline, but they are framed to allow students to provide in-depth discussion of specific examples drawn from the concept outline or from classroom instruction.

Included below is an LEQ and student response from a released AP[®] World History exam. See AP[®] Central online for the complete free-response section and scoring guidelines.

Sample LEQ Prompt:¹⁹

In the period after 1900, the role of the state in the economy varied, with many states adopting policies to control or manage their economies. Develop an argument that evaluates the extent to which one or more states controlled their economies in this time period.

Sample Student Responses to the above LEQ: Please note that the entire essay, with topic and transitional sentences, is not included here. However, here is the portion of the student response that earned credit for the section, along with some brief feedback.

- Example of an acceptable thesis: “The twentieth century included several examples of states controlling their economies, the most famous being that of the Soviet Union, which used Marxist ideology to justify its nationalization of industry and introduction of centralized economic planning.” *Responds to the prompt with an evaluative claim that establishes a line of reasoning.*
- Example of acceptable contextualization: “As shown by the experiences of the 1800s, unregulated capitalism could lead to periodic economic crises and create persistent social problems having to do with poverty, crime, and urban sprawl. Many economists and politicians came to believe that some form of government economic regulation was needed to manage or prevent such problems.” *Relates broader events and developments to the topic.*
- Example of acceptable use of evidence to support an argument: “Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward is one of the best examples of communist states controlling their economies.” *Includes a specific historical example relevant to the prompt.*

¹⁹ “AP[®] World History Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary,” LEQ 4, AP[®] Central, College Board, 2019, apcentral.collegeboard.org.

- Acceptable use of historical reasoning: Responses earn 1 point by using a historical reasoning skill to frame or structure an argument about the extent to which one or more states controlled their economies in the period after 1900. To earn this point, the response must demonstrate the use of historical reasoning to frame or structure an argument, although the reasoning might be uneven, imbalanced, or inconsistent. Examples of using historical reasoning might include:
 - explaining the role of ideologies and economic theories, such as Marxism, neoliberalism, or Keynesian economics, in informing states' economic policies in the twentieth century
 - explaining the role of new technologies, such as mass media or the Internet, on states' ability to control or direct their economies
 - explaining the role of economic cycles in increasing or lowering the appeal of ideas and policies of government economic regulations
 - explaining the role of wars and wartime resource mobilization on governments' ability and/or willingness to regulate the national economy