

## AP SKILLS WORKSHOP

*Ways of the World*, Robert Strayer

A significant skill in APWH is the ability to create a historical argument based on a CLAIM and SUPPORTED by EVIDENCE. Before you can create your own historical claims, it's helpful to get comfortable finding the claims in other people's arguments. Once you can easily identify the claim, the next step is to evaluate the effectiveness of the claim: does it set up an argument or state the obvious? Is it too broad, or focused?

### UNDERSTANDING CLAIMS

So, what is a CLAIM, and how is it used to help build a historical argument? A claim is the argument's main idea. It is the idea that gets developed into the thesis of the essay.

Claim: the main idea of an argument

Historians formulate claims by applying reasoning skills to historical information, for instance by making COMPARISON, thinking about CAUSES AND EFFECTS, or tracing CHANGES and CONTINUITIES across time. An effective claim takes a stance on an issue.

**Example: "The most enduring legacies of ancient civilizations lay in their religious or cultural traditions" (Strayer 6).**

This claim is effective for three reasons:

1. Statement is EVALUATIVE-it makes a judgement.

Reasoning: Good claims do not simply state obvious facts or give a list of causes or factors; it has to take a stance. For instance, "Cause A is *more important* than Cause B" is a good claim. "Cause A and Cause B are both important" is not, because it does not take a stance on the relative importance of the two causes. In this case, the authors are telling the reader that they will be proving that religious and cultural traditions became the MOST important legacy.

2. Claim is SPECIFIC.

Reasoning: It is not claiming that ancient civilizations have a never-ending list of enduring legacies. It narrows in on the impact of the religious and cultural traditions of ancient civilizations, making for a manageable argument.

3. Claim is a statement that can be supported by specific evidence; it is HISTORICALLY DEFENSIBLE

Reasoning: From reading this claim, the reader can anticipate that the authors will draw on specifics to demonstrate the "enduring legacies" of civilizations before 1200.

## CLAIMS ON THE APWH EXAM

Why do you need to learn how to identify and create claims? As a historian in training, you will be expected to write your own historical arguments. On the AP exam you will need to use a claim to build an effective essay.

Your claims MUST:

- Address the prompt by “answering” it in your own words.
- Provide a road map for your essay by providing unity to the evidence you will include.
- Set up your argument by being provable with a strong line of reasoning.
- Be strong and succinct, and in direct response to the prompt while also being broad enough to unify the information you will include in the essay.

To do this well, you should read historians’ claims. Then, you need to practice writing your own.

In addition to creating your own claims, you will be expected to describe and explain the claims of others. This is fairly simple once you have written enough claims yourself. This is usually tested on the Short Answer Question (SAQ) portion of the exam.

Other times you may encounter claims in the MC section. In either case, you will need to refer to an excerpt from a historian and have to choose the answer that best represents the historian’s claim.

Knowing how to work with claims is part of the ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT portion of the course, which is the foundation of the Document Based Question (DBQ) and the Long Essay Question (LEQ), which account for **40%** of your score on the exam. Both of these essays require that you make a strong claim (stated in thesis) and summon evidence to support it in order to get full credit.