

## Document Based Essays

A document based essay is a writing task in which you analyze significant evidence (usually primary sources) to reach an informed position and then present that information in a persuasive, logical, and accurate essay using both the documents **and** your outside knowledge. Think of this type of essay as a research paper but that the research has already been completed for you.

The procedure for writing a DBE is as follows:

1. **Read the prompt carefully.** Underline key terms and dates.
2. **Take notes.** Brainstorm for background and outside knowledge you already know about the subject. *Write down everything you can think of – don't worry about relevance at this point. Do not look at the documents until you have done this. Once you look at the documents you tend to remember only what the documents say.* Brainstorm a potential thesis statement.
3. **Read and analyze the documents.** What is the document about? What time period was the document written? Who is the author? What is the author's point of view (Person X believes Y because Z.)? Remember, when analyzing documents you must remember to be HIPP. Look for similarities and differences in the documents. Can they be categorized, e.g. as political, economic, or social?
4. **Develop the thesis.** Use the thesis formula discussed in class: "X. However due to A, B, and C, Y" where "A, B, and C" represent the three strongest points for your argument (and tells the reader how you have grouped the documents), "Y" represents the position you will be taking, in other words, your stance on the prompt, and "X" represents an alternative point of view. Make sure the thesis addresses all aspects of the prompt.
5. **Write the essay.** The essay should follow the basic essay guidelines discussed in class.
  - a. The introduction should establish the time context of the essay, should establish a historical context, and must include a properly formulated thesis.
  - b. The thesis statement will determine the number, order, and nature of the body paragraphs. Each should provide relevant factual details that support either the X or Y statement of the thesis.
  - c. Most of your document references will be within the body paragraphs. Use the author/creator's name AND/OR title of the document when referring to the document and put the document letter in parentheses at the end of the statement.
    - i. For example: The gospel of wealth popularized by Andrew Carnegie in "Wealth" and Russell Conwell in "Acres of

Diamonds" made the accumulation of wealth not only respectable, but also a moral duty (Documents A and D).

- ii. Whenever you know something about the author of a document, or the context of the document itself, it's a good idea to state what you know briefly when referencing the document. For example: The gospel of wealth popularized by Andrew Carnegie, who made his fortune in steel, made the accumulation of wealth not only respectable, but also a moral duty (Document A).
- d. You must use ALL or ALL BUT ONE of the documents.
- e. DO NOT QUOTE DIRECTLY FROM THE DOCUMENT. Do not state what the document says but explain the significance of the document or what the document proves.
- f. DO NOT let the documents drive your essay. Your outside information (the incorporation of facts, specifically proper nouns, not mentioned in the documents) should guide the essay and the documents should only SUPPORT what you know. The documents themselves should not be the "A, B, and C" points of the thesis; rather, the documents should support (act as the evidence that proves the point) the "A, B, and C" points of the thesis statement.
- g. Use present tense when writing about what the documents say and past tense for the rest of the essay.
- h. DO NOT USE PERSONAL/POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS.
- i. The conclusion should summarize as well as synthesize. Restate the thesis. Identify the factor/point that was most influential/important and explain why, OR compare and contrast the short-term versus the long-term consequences of the Y statement being true, OR connect the topic of the question to other historical periods, geographical areas, contexts, or circumstances ("similar in kind but different in time").