

APUSH CONTEXTUALIZATION, SYNTHESIS, AND ARGUMENTATION

Contextualization (Setting the Stage; Broader picture)

Contextualization situates the argument by explaining the broader historical events, developments, or processes immediately relevant to the question. It should be addressed first in the introductory paragraph of a historical essay.

Below is a prompt with a sample introductory paragraph: The underlined portion is the Contextualization followed by the Thesis.

Explain the causes of the independence movement from the end of the French and Indian War until the end of the American Revolution.

Driven by mercantilism, France and Great Britain claimed and settled North American lands to exploit the resources. In their pursuits of a favorable balance of trade, the two European powers established fortifications to secure their respective colonial claims. Eventually, they clashed over territorial disputes escalating into a global war. Beginning on the North American continent and spreading to Europe and around the globe, the French and Indian War culminated with a British victory and acquisition of French lands from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River. With an enlarged empire and a burdensome war debt, Great Britain asserted its mercantilist power over its American colonies. However, American colonists responded to Britain's policies as an attack on their rights as Englishmen and as a disruption to their regional markets and commerce. With each Parliamentary act, the American patriot cause increasingly clamored for proper recognition and, ultimately, separation.

The student chose to address the political (POL) and economic (WXT) aspects of their position.

For each of the two themes (organizational categories) chosen to substantiate and provide effective analysis, students must step back and explain what is going on in the country (or world) that could justify the issues/events/figures/developments (the facts).

Contextualization for the POL paragraph

"The British victory following the French and Indian War and its culminating Treaty of Paris (1763) heightened British nationalism and position on the world stage. Increasingly confident, the British Empire attempted to secure their expanded territorial claims to avoid future potential wars by taking an authoritarian position over its American colonies and throughout the world."

The student can then argue this position with Proclamation of 1763, Stamp Act, Declaratory Act, Quartering Act, Coercive Acts, Sons of Liberty, Letters from a Farmer, Olive Branch Petition, Second Continental Congress, and Declaration of Independence.

Contextualization for the WXT paragraph

"Given Britain's stronger global position after the French and Indian War, the empire reinforced its commitment to mercantilist policies. Besides paying off the massive war debt, Parliament sought to use the colonies as a source of revenue and to ensure colonial raw materials fed the mother country's growing industries."

The student can then argue this position using the Sugar Act, the Townshend Acts, the Tea Act, colonial merchants, colonial regional economies, smuggling, direct and indirect taxes.

Synthesis (Digesting learned information into a new and insightful way; inferring relationship among sources; extending the thesis/argument)

There are 2 ways students can provide synthesis according to the APUSH rubric:

Synthesis using a course theme that is not the focus of the essay:

SAMPLE 1

A sample social theme not explicitly addressed in the above thesis

CONTEXTUALIZATION: "The colonies developed a unique American way of life centered on equal opportunity after decades of salutary neglect. As the British Empire encouraged strict adherence to its imperial authority, the colonists viewed Parliament's actions as disruptive to its American lifestyle and essentially subjugated."

The student can then argue this position using variety of Western Europe immigrants, fluid social hierarchy vs rigid European society, American identity, regionalism, colonists as second-class subjects, patriots vs loyalists, English nationalism vs American pride.

SAMPLE 2

A sample paragraph using culture as a theme not explicitly addressed in the above thesis:

The Enlightenment ideals from in Europe spread among American patriots like wildfire. A brief pamphlet written in the vernacular, Thomas Paine's Common Sense used rational arguments to criticize the geographical distance and size between England and America, perpetual European wars, and England's unfamiliarity with the vast American regions and culture. This use of reason explained the necessity for American independence. As the understanding of the patriots' cause spread from elites to the masses, the struggle for independence became a fight for liberal ideals.

Synthesis using a development in a different historical period, situation, era, or geographical area:

The American independence movement of the 18th century proclaimed a righteous call to separate from the overbearing and authoritarian mother country. As the new nation developed, it attempted to foster the ideals of republicanism. However, less than a century later, a similar call for independence rang loudly within the nation. The Southern states, with its unique agrarian lifestyle, felt threatened by the growing influence and power of the industrial Northern states. The South felt underrepresented and subjugated as more Northern states gained control and influence in the federal government. Eventually, the South would echo the same sentiments the founding patriots did against Great Britain.

Argumentation (Recognizing and accounting for historical complexity by explicitly illustrating relationships among historical evidence such as contradiction, corroboration, and/or qualification.)

Argumentation illustrated through Contradiction based on the above prompt and thesis:

Although the American patriots may have reasoned and justified their dissent of England's enforcement of mercantilist policies, Parliament and King George III believed they acted in good faith within the established political and economic structure. Drawn into an unnecessary global conflict, Great Britain incurred significant debt defending its American colonies during the French and Indian War, which many argue American colonists instigated with their westward expansion. In order to avoid increasing conflicts and war debt, Parliament felt it necessary to prevent colonial western expansion with the Proclamation of 1763. Despite this, colonists agitated natives in the Ohio River Valley leading to Pontiac's Rebellion and renewed need of British defense. American colonial tax contributions were minimal in comparison to those paid by English citizens on the mainland, yet benefitted from the strength of Britain's navy and army. Britain oversaw a global empire and the 13 colonies were one of many British claims. British mercantilist policies guaranteed markets for American farmers and merchants. However, by 1776 it seemed the 13 colonies coalesced into a distinct country screaming for independence from the safety (albeit oppressive) of its mother's arms.