

APUSH Writing Guidelines & Historical Thinking Skills

The AP history courses seek to apprentice students to the practice of history by explicitly stressing the development of historical thinking skills while learning historical content. Students must develop historical thinking skills by investigating the past in ways that reflect the discipline of history, most particularly through the **exploration and interpretation** of a rich array of primary sources and secondary texts and through the regular development of **historical argumentation in writing**.

A. THE EXAM!

The AP U.S. History Exam is 3 hours and 15 minutes long and includes both a 100-minute multiple-choice & short-answer section (Part I) and a 95-minute free-response section (Part II). Each section is divided into two parts, as shown in the table below. A majority of your points will come from writing... and understanding these skills is extremely important in ensuring you are prepared for the prompts! Skills are also necessary in interpreting multiple choice questions.

Section	Question Type	Number of Questions	Timing	Percentage of Total Exam Score
I	Part A: Multiple-choice questions	55 questions	55 minutes	40%
	Part B: Short-answer questions	4 questions	50 minutes	20%
	BREAK			
II	Part A: Document-based question	1 question	55 minutes	25%
	Part B: Long essay question	1 question (chosen from a pair)	35 minutes	15%

B. THE SKILLS! This section presents the historical thinking skills that students should develop in all AP history courses.

The **nine** historical thinking skills are grouped into four categories:

1. Analyzing Sources and Evidence,
2. Making Historical Connections,
3. Chronological Reasoning, and
4. Creating and Supporting a Historical Argument.

The first table [page 2 of this document] describes how each skill demonstrates historical thinking from the perspective of a history practitioner. The second table lists the proficiency expectations for each of the nine historical thinking skills. **Every AP Exam question will assess one or more of the skill-based proficiency expectations as well as one or more of the thematic learning objectives.**

Although there are 9 skills, there are only four “big skills” students will directly address in their essays. Other skills are important for *how you write* your essays or *how you analyze* multiple choice prompts and short answer questions.

The BIG Four!

1. **Historical Causation** (Explaining causes and/or evaluating impact of events)
2. **Patterns of Continuity and Change over Time** (Explaining how & why things change or remain the same)
3. **Periodization** (Analyzing turning points and characterizing eras)
4. **Comparison** (Explaining how and why events are similar and/or different)

The next two pages explain the historical thinking skills. Mastering these skills will enable students to write high quality historical essays, as well as interpret and address multiple choice and short answer questions. The APUSH exam requires skill... regurgitating facts is not enough. Remember NOT to simply memorize facts... you must understand the how and why... and you must be able to interpret and explain history on your own.

Skill Category #1 – ANALYZING HISTORICAL SOURCES AND EVIDENCE

PRIMARY SOURCES

Analyzing Evidence: Content and Sourcing

Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, select, and evaluate relevant evidence about the past from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, archaeological artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary sources) and draw conclusions about their relevance to different historical issues. A historical analysis of sources focuses on the interplay between the content of a source and the authorship, point of view, purpose, audience, and format or medium of that source, assessing the usefulness, reliability, and limitations of the source as historical evidence.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Interpretation

Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, and evaluate the different ways historians interpret the past. This includes understanding the various types of questions historians ask, as well as considering how the particular circumstances and contexts in which individual historians work and write shape their interpretations of past events and historical evidence.

Skill Category #2 – MAKING HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS

Comparison

Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, compare, and evaluate multiple perspectives on a given historical event in order to draw conclusions about that event. It also involves the ability to describe, compare, and evaluate multiple historical developments within one society, one or more developments across or between different societies, and in various chronological and geographical contexts.

Contextualization

Historical thinking involves the ability to connect historical events and processes to specific circumstances of time and place as well as broader regional, national, or global processes.

Synthesis

Historical thinking involves the ability to develop understanding of the past by making meaningful and persuasive historical and/or cross-disciplinary connections between a given historical issue and other historical contexts, periods, themes, or disciplines.

Skill Category #3 CHRONOLOGICAL REASONING

Causation

Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, analyze, and evaluate the relationships among historical causes and effects, distinguishing between those that are long term and proximate. Historical thinking also involves the ability to distinguish between causation and correlation, and an awareness of contingency, the way that historical events result from a complex variety of factors that come together in unpredictable ways and often have unanticipated consequences.

Patterns of Continuity and Change over Time

Historical thinking involves the ability to recognize, analyze, and evaluate the dynamics of historical continuity and change over periods of time of varying length, as well as the ability to relate these patterns to larger historical processes or themes.

Periodization

Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, and evaluate different ways that historians divide history into discrete and definable periods. Historians construct and debate different, sometimes competing models of periodization; the choice of specific turning points or starting and ending dates might accord a higher value to one narrative, region, or group than to another.

Skill Category #4 – CREATING AND SUPPORTING AN ARGUMENT

Argumentation

Historical thinking involves the ability to create an argument and support it using relevant historical evidence. Creating a historical argument includes defining and framing a question about the past and then formulating a claim or argument about that question, often in the form of a thesis. A persuasive historical argument requires a precise and defensible thesis or claim, supported by rigorous analysis of relevant and diverse historical evidence. The argument and evidence used should be framed around the application of a specific historical thinking skill (e.g., comparison, causation, patterns of continuity and change over time, or periodization). Furthermore, historical thinking involves the ability to examine multiple pieces of evidence in concert with each other, noting contradictions, corroborations, and other relationships among sources to develop and support an argument.

Argumentation: Using Evidence to Support an Argument

Historical thinking involves the ability to examine multiple pieces of evidence in concert with each other, noting contradictions, corroborations, and other relationships among sources to develop and support an argument.

HISTORICAL THINKING SKILL PROFICIENCY EXPECTATIONS

Students will be able to...

ANALYZE EVIDENCE...

1. Explain the relevance of the author's point of view, author's purpose, audience, format or medium, and/or historical context as well as the interaction among these features, to demonstrate understanding of the significance of a primary source.
2. Evaluate the usefulness, reliability, and/ or limitations of a primary source in answering particular historical questions.

INTERPRET DOCUMENTS...

1. Analyze a historian's argument, explain how the argument has been supported through the analysis of relevant historical evidence, and evaluate the argument's effectiveness.
2. Analyze diverse historical interpretations.

COMPARE & CONTRAST...

1. Compare diverse perspectives represented in primary and secondary sources in order to draw conclusions about one or more historical events.
2. Compare different historical individuals, events, developments, and/ or processes, analyzing both similarities and differences in order to draw historically valid conclusions. Comparisons can be made across different time periods, across different geographical locations, and between different historical events or developments within the same time period and/ or geographical location.

CONTEXTUALIZE...

1. Situate historical events, developments, or processes within the broader regional, national, or global context in which they occurred in order to draw conclusions about their relative significance.

SYNTHESIZE...

1. Make connections between a given historical issue and related developments in a different historical context, geographical area, period, or era, including the present.
2. Make connections between different course themes and/or approaches to history (such as political, economic, social, cultural, or intellectual) for a given historical issue.

ANALYZE CAUSES AND EFFECTS...

1. Explain long and /or short-term causes and/or effects of an historical event, development, or process.
2. Evaluate the relative significance of different causes and/or effects on historical events or processes, distinguishing between causation and correlation and showing an awareness of historical contingency.

ANALYZE PATTERNS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE OVER TIME...

1. Identify patterns of continuity and change over time and explain the significance of such patterns.
2. Explain how patterns of continuity and change over time relate to larger historical processes or themes.

ANALYZE HISTORICAL PERIODS...

1. Explain ways historical events and processes can be organized into discrete, different, and definable historical periods.
2. Evaluate whether a particular event or date could or could not be a turning point between different, definable historical periods, when considered in terms of particular historical evidence.
3. Analyze different and/or competing models of periodization.

CREATE AND DEFEND AN ARGUMENT...

1. Articulate a defensible claim about the past in the form of a clear and compelling thesis that evaluates the relative importance of multiple factors and recognizes disparate, diverse, or contradictory evidence or perspectives.
2. Develop and support a historical argument, including in a written essay, through a close analysis of relevant and diverse historical evidence, framing the argument and evidence around the application of a specific historical thinking skill (e.g., *comparison, causation, patterns of continuity and change over time, or periodization*).
3. Evaluate evidence to explain its relevance to a claim or thesis, providing clear and consistent links between the evidence and the argument.
4. Relate diverse historical evidence in a cohesive way to illustrate contradiction, corroboration, qualification, and other types of historical relationships in developing an argument.

WRITING GUIDELINES AND TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ESSAYS!

1. **THESIS/CONTEXT... THE INTRODUCTION**

Creating Your Argument...The Thesis Statement – What are you defending?

Your thesis is not only your answer or stand on a question; it is your entire introductory paragraph which includes your answer/stand, analysis of an opposing or alternate viewpoint, context, and organizational categories/themes. Your introduction will typically be between 3 and 5 sentences, and it should clearly communicate your answer/stand and what you will be expounding upon in your body paragraphs.

The Thesis Formula:

BC. Y because A,B,C. or BC. However A, B and C.

'**BC**' represents the broad context of your topic, process, or event. This is "setting the scene" for you essay, and on the DBQ essay there is a separate point on the rubric for contextualization. Your contextualization needs at least one specific piece of evidence that that is not found in the body paragraphs. It also "previews" your later arguments.

'**A, B, C**' represents the two or three strongest points for your argument. We call these your organizational categories.

'**X**' represents the position (thesis) you will be taking – in other words, your stand on the prompt. Your X must be clear and ... *addresses the full prompt!*

For example, if you were addressing the prompt, "Evaluate the extent to which westward migration in the later nineteenth century contributed to maintaining continuity in the United States," your thesis might include the following:

BC: competition over land and resources, continuation of Manifest Destiny

X: maintained continuity in the relationship between the government and American Indians to a great extent

AB: fostered change geographically and economically to a great extent

Weak Thesis: **There was a lot of westward migration in the later nineteenth century. Although westward migration maintained continuity, it fostered change to a greater extent.**

Don't simply restate the prompt... and be sure you have categories and some explanation; i.e. "because..."

Strong Thesis: **Westward migration in the 1800s was motivated by agriculture, mining, and ranching. This desire for land and resources continued the conflict created by competition over resources that was a hallmark of American history from the 1600s onward. Much of the competition for resources in this latter era led to many battles which ultimately ended nomadic Indian culture. Although westward migration in the later 19th century maintained continuity to a great extent as the spirit of manifest destiny and white dominance led to completion of the reservation system which began earlier in the century.**

"Set the scene by describing the context of your context. What is going on at this time? What is a key theme? Connect to something you know about the era and explain the local and broad context. This needs to be several sentences that explain the context, and you must have at least one piece of specific evidence in this portion. When you explain your X, be sure to have categories and address the prompt directly. If the prompt has a qualifier such as "to what extent," be sure you directly address it in your thesis.

Tweaking the Formula for the BIG FOUR Skills

The formula is essentially the same for any type of question, and you can move the variables around. Below you will find some different ways to use it depending on what type of question you are answering. When you analyze a prompt, be sure to identify the skill being tested if it is not indicated in the directions.

Historical Causation:

What are the major causes or consequences of “event” and what were the most important causes or consequences of “event”?

X = your thesis statement regarding the most significant causes or consequences

A, B, C = most important causes / consequences, explanations why, broken up into organizational categories

Continuity and Change over Time:

What are the major patterns of continuity or change over the time period and was there more continuity or change over that time period?

X = your thesis statement regarding more change or more continuity

A, B, C = continuity & change during the specified time period, what there was more/less of, broken up into organizational categories

Compare and Contrast:

What similarities and differences are there between the two things, are there more similarities or differences, and why, account for those similarities or differences?

X = your thesis statement including more of similarities or differences

A, B, C = similarities or differences between the two things, broken up into organizational categories

Periodization | (or Take a Position):

Evaluate whether something was a turning point or a major marking period in history, noting what things were like before and after that period.

X = your thesis statement, includes what happened before, if it was or was not a major turning point (or support, refute, modify), what changed after.

A, B, C = argument, why something was a turning point broken up into organizational categories (or why you support, refute, modify)

2. Writing the BODY PARAGRAPHS

In the LEQ... Each body paragraph will focus on a category or theme and contain your explanation (defending your thesis) with specific, historical evidence and reasons relevant to your topic. Your goal is to have at least two/three pieces in your body paragraphs that are NOT found in your introduction (contextualization or thesis) and NOT found in your conclusion (synthesis). I advise you shoot for three to five just in case you do not get credit for some of your evidence. Remember your evidence needs to remain within the parameters of your prompt.

In the DBQ... If you are including document analysis, remember you still need outside evidence independent from the documents. You must have at least one piece of outside evidence in the DBQ body paragraphs... thoroughly explained in several sentences. I recommend you make your outside evidence its own paragraph. For the DBQ, you will also need to extend your argument and analysis by illustrating contradictions, corroborations, and/or qualifications.

For both... One last thing about your body paragraphs... end each one with “Close the Loop!”

Closing the loop means to explain *how or why* your evidence supports your thesis... always connect back to your thesis!

Closing the loop is a simple thing that makes a huge difference!

How to Reference the Documents in the DBQ Body Paragraphs

Most students fail to earn the document analysis points on the DBQ because they simply string together facts they pull from documents, and say things like “Document 1 describes how tobacco impacted the economy in Virginia...” or they merely quote a phrase and expect this to be their analysis. This is not historical analysis! You simply cite your documents as you would in a research paper. (Doc. 1)

DO NOT quote the documents and DO NOT describe the documents.

You will have seven documents and you must use all of them. Use the CAPPS strategy to analyze the documents ... and then apply your analysis to your essay. Start and connect your own knowledge about the topic, person, or era. How does each document support your thesis? Then choose one of the letters from CAPP to add for all the documents. Then lastly supply one piece of Specific Content and connect it to your argument. THAT is analysis!

C:Context

A:Audience

P:Purpose

P:Point of View

S: Specific Content+

Suppose you had a document that was excerpt from the Clayton Antitrust Act. Your **CAPP** may look something like this:

C:Context– Progressive Era, President Wilson signed, Act of Congress to limit monopolies

A:Audience – The United States of America (adding new laws) and businesses

P: Purpose - help the government break up trusts/monopolies, fix the problems of the earlier Sherman Anti-Trust Act

P: Point of View – It is in the nation’s best interest to support competition and fair business practices, therefore government needs the power to force trusts to bust up

What would it look like in an essay? If you had a paragraph addressing ways the federal government implemented progressive reform in the early 1900s, you could include the document like this: “The historical context of the Clayton Antitrust Act was the Progressive Era in the early 1900s when Wilson’s administration supported progressive legislation as they were desperately seeking help in enforcing anti-trust legislation under a relatively inefficient Sherman Antitrust Act. The purpose was to give some enforcement power over anti-trust legislation to the federal government.” (Now all you need is a piece of specific content with another sentence explanation to tie it all together!)

Writing Your Conclusion – the SYNTHESIS

Conclusion Formula: BC is similar/different from OC.

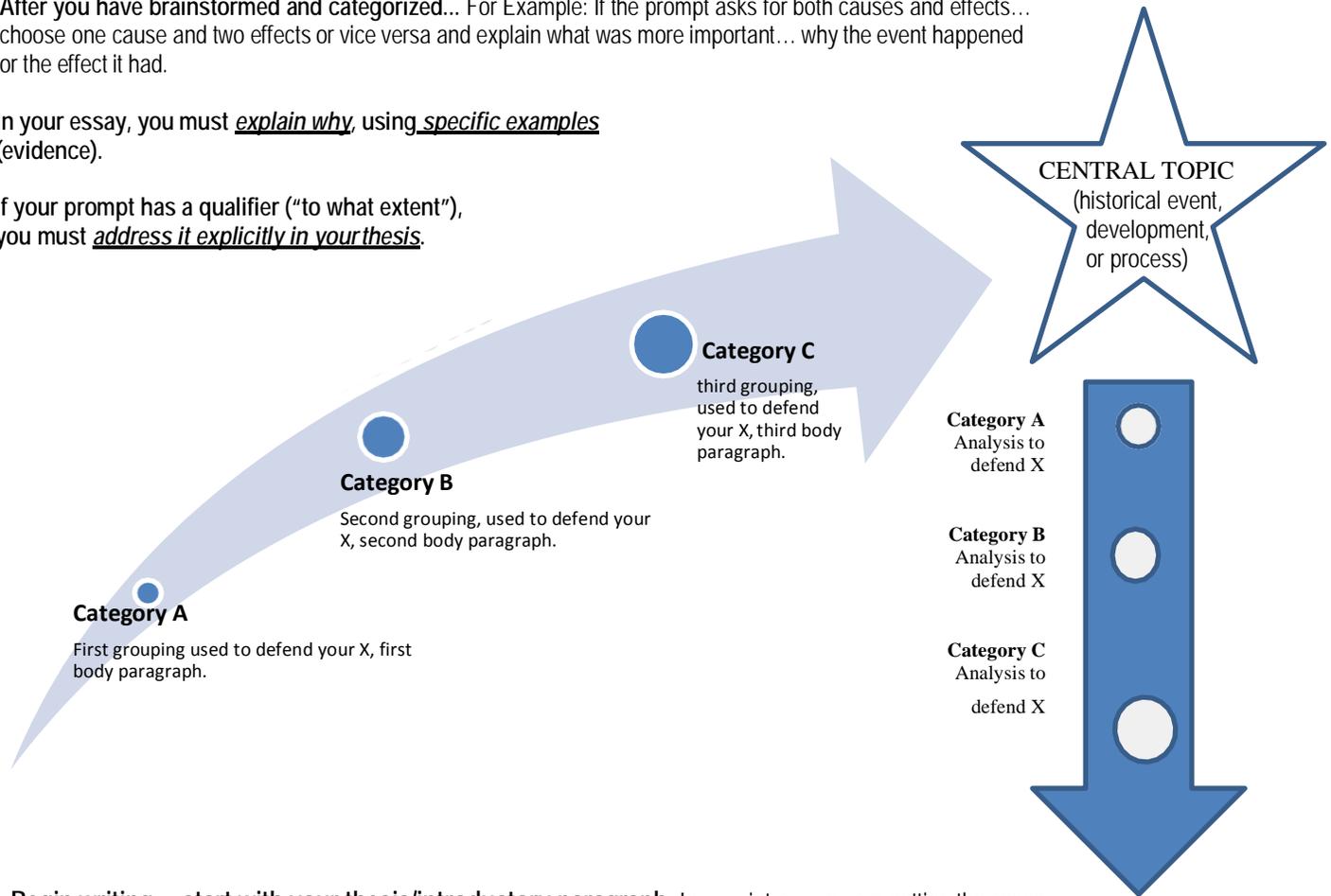
BC = *Broad Context*... one of the big ideas you focused on in your body paragraphs

S = *Synthesis* “_____ is like _____ because_____.” (Has to have a clear parallel and be similar in kind but in a different time or in a different geographical region)

Your synthesis paragraph should be in the concluding paragraph and should NOT simply restate your thesis. **Your synthesis is an extension of your thesis!** Summarize a big idea or broad context from your body paragraphs. If you are comparing to a different era, identify both eras and both big ideas then thoroughly explain, in several sentences, with at least one piece of specific and relevant evidence how or why the two are similar or different.

Planning for your LEQ & DBQ

1. Read the prompt three times. Make sure you understand your purpose, topic, and skill!
2. **Brainstorm...** write down everything you know about the topic/era. *Stay within the prompt!! The only time you can go outside the prompt is the synthesis/conclusion!* After reading the prompt, categorize your evidence using the most logical groups. You need specific evidence to back up your argument as well as strong reasons to defend your thesis. Remember you need evidence, for your contextualization, at least two within the body paragraphs, and at least one in your conclusion from this era. (at least five total)
3. **After you have brainstormed and categorized...** For Example: If the prompt asks for both causes and effects... choose one cause and two effects or vice versa and explain what was more important... why the event happened or the effect it had.
4. In your essay, you must explain why, using specific examples (evidence).
5. If your prompt has a qualifier ("to what extent"), you must address it explicitly in your thesis.



6. **Begin writing... start with your thesis/introductory paragraph.** In your intro... you are setting the scene (contextualization) and then identifying the causes/effects, the reasons for those causes/effects, and your stand on which was more significant.
Thesis Formula: BC. X, because ABC... *make sure you address the fullprompt!*
BC = broad context – what your central topic is about
X = our assertion statement, including a qualifier if applicable
A, B, C = logical groupings, with explanation why or preview.
7. When writing your **body paragraphs**, be sure you have at least 2 pieces of specific, relevant evidence from the era... AND clearly connect to your thesis. You also need reasons/generalizations for all categories. Remember to close the loop! Your purpose is to defend your thesis... not to story tell!
8. Write your conclusion/synthesis. Use the formula! Broad context from your introduction. If you are comparing to a different era, identify both eras and both big ideas then thoroughly explain, in several sentences, with evidence how or why the two are similar or different.
Conclusion Formula: BC is similar/different to S.
BC = *Broad Context*... one of the big ideas you focused on in your introduction.
S = *Synthesis*... (Similar in kind but in a different time or in a different geographical region.)

On Accuracy and Clarity:

There are no penalties for grammatical or spelling errors unless they obscure the successful demonstration of the content knowledge and skills. Keep in mind, however, that you must have accurate information advancing your argument in order to succeed.