

## STATS & FACTS ABOUT THE AP US HISTORY TEST

The timeframe for the DBQ is no longer announced in advance.

The time allotted for the test is 3 hours and 5 minutes.

55 minutes is allowed for the multiple choice section. This portion of the test counts 50%.

The DBQ takes 60 minutes—15 minutes is devoted to reading and analyzing the documents; 45 minutes to actually writing the essay.

For the two additional free response essays, 70 minutes is allotted.

The essay portion of the AP Test constitutes 50% of the total grade.

The first AP test was given in 1956.

Over 1 million students are enrolled in AP courses in high school.

A “3” is considered to be a passing score on the AP Test.

Most colleges award credit to students who receive either a 4 or 5 on an AP test although this is at the discretion of the university.

# How to...

## WRITE A DOCUMENT BASED ESSAY

The Document Based Essay is an important part of the AP US History test. Still, it should be placed in proper perspective. The multiple choice section is worth the same percentage (50%) as the entire free response (50%) portion of the exam. The DBQ is one of three essays that are written during the testing period and students are allotted 60 minutes to complete the document based essay. It is helpful to purchase an AP study guide at your local bookstore at the BEGINNING of the school year. These books provide examples of previous DBQ's and explain in detail what the examiners were looking for in an answer. To write an effective essay, there are several rules you should follow.

**RULE #1: Don't Panic.**

When a student opens the test booklet, there is a natural sense of apprehension. On first glance, the documents can appear intimidating and a natural response is to panic. If you are too nervous, you will not be able to think clearly. Take your time, and look over the material. One of the advantages of doing a document based essay is the fact that much of the material you need to answer the question is provided within the documents themselves.

**RULE #2: READ** the question and **READ** the documents.

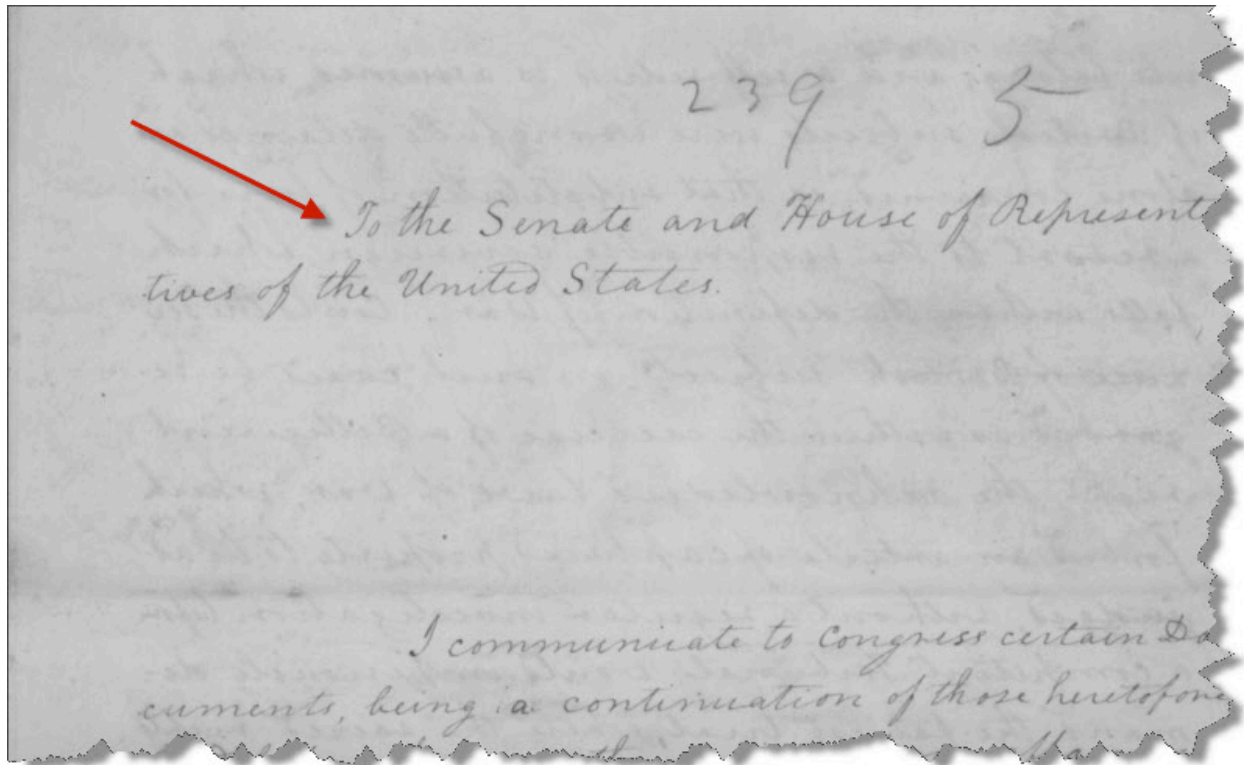
You are given 15 minutes to read and assess the material. It is important that you use this time wisely. Read the question carefully and be sure to answer the question. The test reviewers are skilled teachers who will recognize immediately sophomoric efforts to evade answering the question with unrelated facts and superfluous information.

**RULE #3:** Assess the significance of the documents, take notes and analyze them in reference to the question.

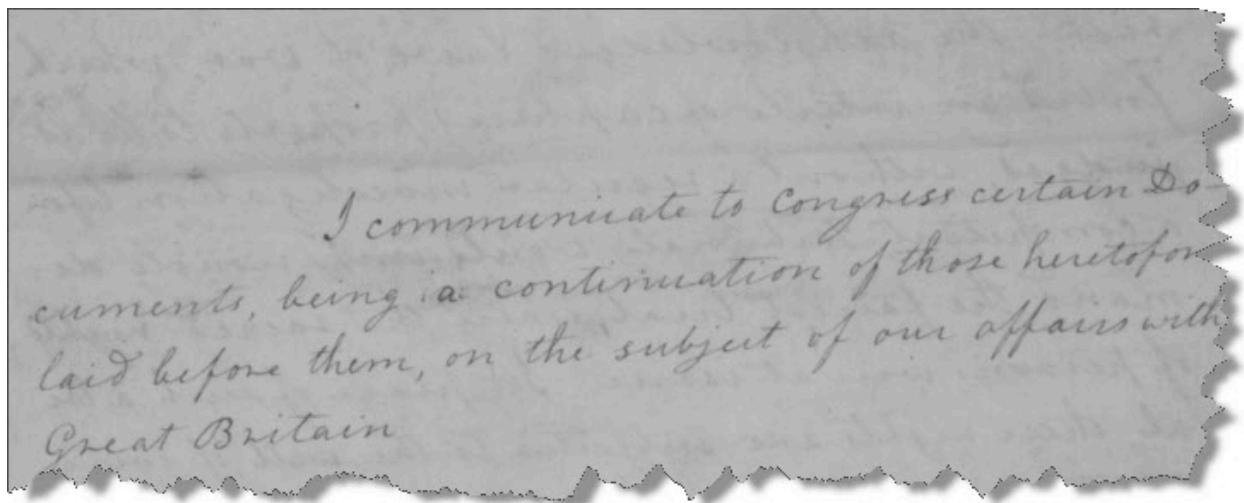
Take notes and write on each of the documents. You are, in essence, preparing an outline for your essay. Be sure to note when the document was written or produced, who wrote it or where did it come from, and

how is it related to the question. Fortunately, all documents are transcribed so you do not have to read the handwriting.

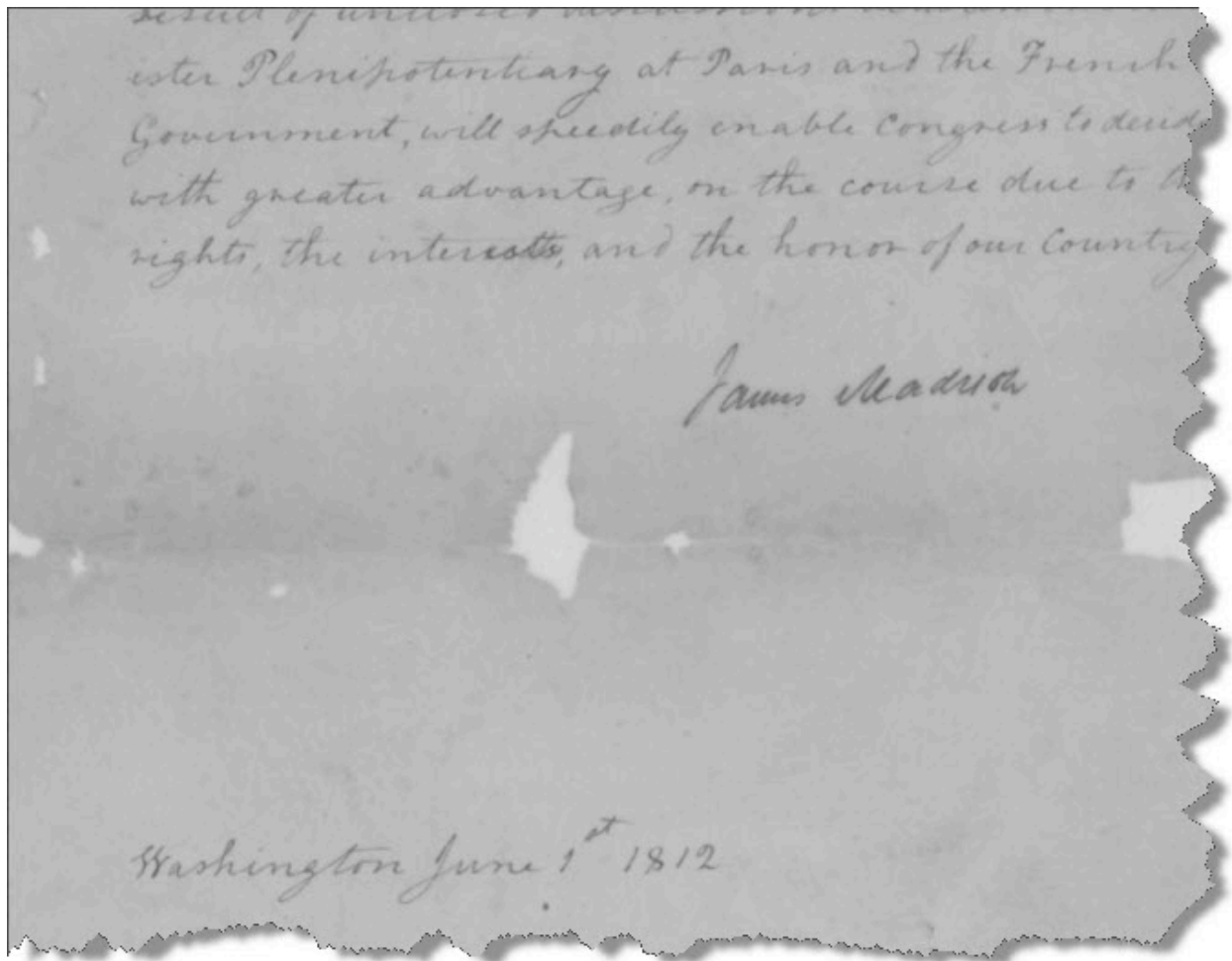
Example:



**Figure 1:** This shows that the document is an official government communiqué to the Senate and the House of Representatives.



**Figure 2:** The letter begins “I communicate to Congress...” which confirms that it is an official document. It deals with the “continuation of those heretofore laid before them, on the subject of our affairs with Great Britain.”



**Figure 3: The letter is written by James Madison on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1812. This clearly shows that it is from the period of Madison's presidency and a prelude to his declaration of war speech.**

**RULE #4:** Bring in outside information to support your essay.

All of the documents are related to the topic and question. They provide you with an enormous amount of information but you should also be able to add to it from your knowledge of the era. Knowing that the document(s) came from the presidency of James Madison and the War of 1812, you could elaborate on the issue of the British impressments of American sailors, their failure to give up western lands, their refusal to fully recognize American independence, etc. You will also be showing the test evaluators that you know your subject and have a good understanding of the period.

**RULE #5:** Write a good 1<sup>st</sup> sentence.

Barbara Tuchman revolutionarized the writing of history. Her dramatic prose captured her readers' imagination and made history into a story rather than a litany of facts and dates. Today, other historians such as Stephen Ambrose, David McCullough, and Bill Brands continue this trend in historical writing and scholarship. Tuchman always started her books at the pivotal moment in a story and then retrogressed to explain how we reached that point in time. The first sentence is critical because it

establishes the tone for the rest of the essay. Understand that the evaluators are only going to spend a short time with your essay—they are reading hundreds of others. Thus, they are looking for clear, concise, and accurate prose.

RULE #6: Avoid factual mistakes.

A minor error of detail will not hurt you but a major factual error will. It will flag the reader that you do not understand the topic. For instance if you said that Lincoln won the election of 1860 with just 42% of the popular vote (when it was really 40%), that would be considered only a slight error, one not of substance since the point is that Lincoln was a minority president with far more people voting against him than for him. If you said in an essay that Eisenhower ordered the first atomic bomb to be dropped over Hiroshima that would be a far more serious error.

RULE #6: Refer to the documents in the essay.

It is important that you use the documents to support your argument. You should see the documents as supporting material just like you would use in preparing a research paper.

RULE #7: Answer the question.

Be sure you know what is being asked in the question. Many students will write long essays and be completely off topic. Remember, the quality of writing and the ability to frame and support a coherent argument are the most critical factors in writing an effective DBQ.