**AP US History DBQ and Free Response Tips**

**1. Answer the question.**If I could only give you one piece of advice for your essay questions, it would be just to answer it. You will probably have this said to you over and over again, and you are probably already tired of hearing it. But the reason people say it so much is because students tend not do it! It doesn’t matter if you have the best-written paper of all time, or include a ton of history facts, if you don’t answer the question; you aren’t going to get all the points. Before you start outlining your answer or reading through documents, make sure you know what the question is really asking you.

**2. Pay attention to the rubric.** The number one priority of a DBQ or FRQ is answering the question. Aside from that, you need to know what the AP test is looking for in your answer. Understanding this rubric gives you a mental checklist to work through as you write your response.

Writing an outline of your essay will result in a better answer. When you just write without planning ahead much, you might get to the last paragraph and realize that you have nothing left to say, or that none of your ideas flow together. If you just do a rough outline of your main points and supporting details, you will write a much more fluid paper that is easy to follow and stays on track.

**3. Understand the documents.**As you read through the documents, don’t waste too much time analyzing every single detail and sentence. Instead of picking out every detail, read the documents for understanding. Highlight or underline important parts. At the end of the document, write a sentence or two explaining the main idea of the document and which side of the argument it supports. This will be handy for outlining your essay and seeing how the documents can be used as evidence.

**4. Group the documents.**This is something you want to do while reading the documents initially, when you are outlining your essay and when actually writing your essay. The test grader is going to be looking for your ability to do this. Most good essays will contain at least three main points, and you want to be sure that you have sources or evidence to support each of those points. For example, you might group documents based on whether they are related to the political, social, or economic side of a question.

**5. Use the documents.**You want to make sure you use a lot of the documents, but don’t force it. You can get the highest score possible by using most of the available evidence. Just use the sources in a way that naturally supports your argument. Don’t simply throw the documents in randomly just to check them off the list.

**6. Don’t “data dump.**” One of the key parts of the rubric is that you need to bring in outside information and evidence to support your answer. However, don’t overload the reader with unnecessary information that doesn’t really fit the context. Just because you know the date of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination does not mean you need to throw that into an essay about the first Great Awakening.

**7. Be specific.**For your free response question choices, choose the topic that is most specific instead of something broad. The broadest topic may seem appealing because you think you know a lot about it, but it can actually be really tough to formulate a good thesis because it is so broad. The specific topic is more likely to create a solid detailed answer. It makes it easier to **answer the question,**which we already know is incredibly important.

**8. Find the right voice. Your voice.**This can be tricky because it is all about finding a balance between too formal and too personal. You don’t want to write like a robot, stating only facts and not expressing any hints of personality, but you also don’t want it to be like a letter to a friend. Avoid “I” and “you” statements. Basically, don’t be afraid to be yourself in your answer; it just needs to be a very well-spoken version of yourself.

**9. Take a stand.**Writing for historical purposes is about making an argument and supporting that argument well. When you are writing, it can be easy to just explain both sides of an argument and nothing else. All that does is show your ability to reword information. The essay section of the test wants to know how well you can synthesize lots of information into one cohesive argument. In order to do that, you have to actually take a side. Don’t be biased or make unreasonable claims. Just use the evidence to support a specific claim that is rooted in facts. Got it?

**AP US History Multiple Choice Tips**

**1. Read the question and answers all the way through.** This is a super basic test-taking tip, but it’s still worth mentioning here. Don’t fall into the trap of reading the question partially and jumping to conclusions, or picking the first question that seems right. There are 55 source-based multiple choice questions and 55 minutes to complete them, so you have a minute per question. This is enough time to carefully read the question and each answer choice, and consider the best option.

**2. Cross out obviously wrong answers.** No matter what, you should know that Theodore Roosevelt did not sign the Declaration of Independence. Immediately cross his name off the list of answer choices. This is beneficial because it brings you one step closer to the right answer, and it tells your brain that you are doing something. It is a good way to build confidence, which is going to help you score much higher.

**3. Use context clues.** If you are unsure of an answer, just try to approach it from a logical perspective. You may not know the exact date of a certain event, but when you put that event in the context of other events that you do know the dates for, it can definitely help you narrow down your choices. When you think of history as a giant puzzle that you are trying to put together, you can use all the pieces you do know to try and figure out the piece that you don’t know.

**4. Use questions to give you answers.** You can learn a lot just from reading the questions. You may not directly get the answer to a question from other questions, but it can certainly give you more information and put you one step closer to the correct answer. You will almost always be able to walk away from the test knowing more than you did before. Also, keep the multiple-choice questions in mind as you write your free response and DBQ essays. You can also just try to think logically about it. Sometimes it works out that if the answer to Question 3 is C, then the answer to Question 6 has to be D.

**5. Take a guess.** Losing points for incorrect answers is a thing of the past so you might as well take a stab at the ones you don’t know. Obviously, you want to take your best guess and use all of the skills and techniques you can to narrow down the possible correct answers. But if you get to the point where you really just don’t know, just give it your best shot. As Wayne Gretzky said, “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.”

**6. Pace yourself.** Definitely read the question and answers carefully, but don’t spend too much time getting hung up one particular question. If you read it, don’t know it, and can’t figure it out, move on. It is much better to finish the test and answer all of the questions that you do know than to get stuck on a question early on and not have time to answer all the latter questions. Like mentioned earlier, you have a minute per question, so use your time wisely.

**7. Answer the right question.** It might seem silly, but when you are answering 55 questions at a time it can be really easy to get mixed up on your answer sheet. Don’t accidentally skip a question and get to the end wondering what you did wrong. Sometimes you just get into a flow and stop paying attention to which bubble you are filling in.

**8. Pay attention to the wording.** Skimming over a question can sometimes cause you to totally misinterpret the said question. Don’t do that. Make sure that you know if the question is asking “Which of the following IS…” or “Which of the following IS NOT…“ That is a huge difference and is going to make for two very different answers. This is such a common and easy mistake to make.

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