# How to Write the DBQ Essay

The **Document-based Question** (DBQ) requires the construction of a coherent essay that integrates interpretation of the supplied documents with a demonstrated knowledge of the historical period in question. Higher scores are earned with essays that successfully incorporate primary evidence from the documents with traditional historical themes and maxims. The student who simply describes the contents of the documents and fails to place them into historical perspective will receive a low score on the DBQ essay.

Simple sequence for writing a DBQ essay:

**1.** Read the question and identify the historical period being discussed.

**2.** Brainstorm a list of relevant issues, historical terms, names, or events that are significant to that period of history. When complete, this list should be examined for logical division into sub-topics.

**3.** Read the supplied documents. In the margin of the documents, make notes that add to or embellish your brainstorm list.

**4.** First Paragraph:

a. Write one clear sentence that states a thesis, what the essay will prove.
b. Specify three or four sub-topics to the thesis. (logical segments or divisions of the overall thesis).
c. You may elaborate on each of these sub-topics with simple defining sentences.

**5.** Second Paragraph:

a. Begin with a sentence that re-introduces one of the sub-topics.
b. Support that topic sentence with outside information from your brainstorm list.
c. Support your outside information with a reference to one or more of the supplied primary sources. Be sure you use and cite the documents properly
d. Write a concluding sentence that relates the paragraph's topic back to the thesis.
e. Write a transitional sentence introducing the next topic.

**6.** Subsequent Paragraphs:

Continue this procedure until you have exhausted your brainstorm list for possible sub-topics. If you have outside information that is not supported by the primary documents, include that information anyway. Accurate student-supplied information will garner points, even without support from the documents; any use of the primary documents not supported with outside information will not garner points and should be avoided.

**7.** A conclusion is not necessary, but it will score you extra points if done properly. If you decide to write a concluding paragraph, be sure that what you write is more than just a restating of the thesis.