

knowledge with students and teachers. The process outlined in this book is not a secret formula and the College Board® will not disqualify your score for using this process. In fact, the creators of the test want you to know how to write better essays. Better essays mean higher scores, and higher scores demonstrate to colleges and universities the value of an Advanced Placement education. Just as it is not a secret formula, this process is also not a magic potion. Just reading this book will not improve your score. Before you can see any real improvement in your score, you must practice—and master—the steps of the MTE writing process. That is precisely the reason why this book includes 100+ exercises, including 30 full-length Document-Based Questions (DBQs).

Let's be clear about one thing before we move ahead: just because writing is the key to a great score, that doesn't let you off the hook when it comes to studying. **Read your textbook!** You must know your history in order to achieve the highest scores on your essays. Content is not the key to the exam, but it still matters.

## Understanding the Process

Considering that I've written a book about how to write strong, high-scoring essays, you might think that my students spend hours each week writing essay after essay. Not so. In fact, many of my students become uneasy when, for the first several months of the school year, they've been asked to write few, if any, full-length essays. During those months, they practice developing strong thesis statements and outlines—but no essays. By winter recess, some of them are actually a bit anxious, fearing that they should have been writing more.

It's not until the second semester rolls around that I ask them to try their hands at a complete essay. When they do, they are pleasantly surprised with the results. This is because, by that time, they have learned the most important lesson for mastering the essay: in order to produce a quality essay, it is essential to perfect the thesis and outline first.

To understand my reasoning, take a look at the AP Long Essay Question rubric. Of the 6 possible points awarded for the LEQ:

**1 point** is available in Part A – Thesis

**1 point** can be earned in Part B – Contextualization (essentially, framing your argument)

**2 points** are possible in Part D – Analysis & Reasoning (the logic & complexity of your argument)

That’s 4 out of 6 points for thesis and argument—all the result of careful prewriting, which is evident in the opening paragraph of your essay. The remaining 2 points are awarded for Evidence Analysis, and although that is certainly best accomplished within the body of the essay, effective evidence analysis results from combining evidence you’ve brainstormed from the outset with the argument you’ve developed in your opening.

Even though the new essay rubrics look very different from those used with the old exam, in fact, these new rubrics award points for exactly the same key characteristics that make any essay great—*thesis*, *organization*, and *evidence*. And just as in the past, two of those three can be established in the opening paragraph, before any specific evidence is introduced.

Readers of AP exam essays consistently point to the thesis as the key feature in determining the quality of an essay. A high-quality thesis does more than simply answer the question; it outlines the argument in terms of how you will present evidence and why that evidence matters. After reading a high-quality thesis, the AP reader will have a fairly reliable idea of where the essay will fall on the rubric, in terms of thesis and organization. This is why my students spend half the year writing only theses and outlines. By February, they are skilled at developing two of the three key characteristics assessed on the LEQ rubric. Since they have completed most of the course content by that time, they have all the necessary evidence to tackle the third characteristic with very little trouble.

Is it possible to begin with a weak thesis and improve the essay within the body paragraphs? Yes, but without a well-organized opening, it is much more difficult to develop your argument. Remember that AP readers are humans, and all humans are subject to their own predispositions. Appeal to those predispositions! Take the time to craft a solid thesis and use it to develop a well-organized and comprehensive essay that your readers will appreciate. Since many of

the AP readers are university professors, it should be no surprise that success on your college essays will rely very heavily on the same key characteristics found in your AP essays.

### **Introduction to the AP Rubrics**

Like many other writing rubrics, the AP rubrics are designed to standardize the scoring process. In other words, they make the essays “more fair.” Their design allows hundreds of trained readers to assess each essay in exactly the same way. That means, no matter who reads your essay, you are likely to achieve the same score. As you might imagine, any rubric that yields this level of consistency is also quite predictable. If you are trained to use the AP rubrics, you can identify the characteristics of a strong essay; and if you can identify the things that make a strong essay, you will find it easier to include those things within your own work.

As mentioned above, the AP rubrics have been redesigned. The new rubrics look very different from those we have used for the past decade or so. As you might expect, teachers who have worked with AP for a while have spent the past three years critiquing these new rubrics. In fact, the College Board® has responded with several tweaks to improve the new rubrics. But don’t worry! Good writing is still good writing, and a well-written thesis essay will still be rewarded on the AP European History exam. While many have argued that all sorts of politics and bureaucratic haggling went into the new rubric structure established by the College Board®, above all the din sits one supreme truth—the AP exam must remain relevant to the demands of higher education if it is to survive. If you remember this one truth, you will have no trouble understanding why any AP essay rubric will ultimately reward the attributes most closely associated with excellent college essays. So, relax about the changes and let’s dive in and learn more about the rubrics.

As discussed earlier, there are two essay questions on the AP European History exam—the Long Essay Question (LEQ) and the Document-Based Question (DBQ). Unlike the old essays, responses to the new questions are scored neither holistically, nor on a core checklist. The new rubrics utilize a hybrid format, but the easiest way

to understand them might be to forget about their format and just look closely at the descriptive text within each rubric category.

### **AP European History LEQ Rubric**

The LEQ rubric is divided into the following four parts: **Thesis**, **Contextualization**, **Evidence**, and **Analysis & Reasoning**. Let's start with the most essential piece of any thesis essay—the thesis.

#### **Thesis (1 point)**

In order to earn the one point assigned in the Thesis section of the rubric, you must create a thesis statement that responds directly to all parts of the question, and you must place that statement within your opening or closing paragraph. That's it! Simply answer the question and write your answer in the first or last paragraph. But, don't forget that an excellent thesis might help you to earn an additional point or two in the fourth part of the rubric—Analysis & Reasoning.

#### **Contextualization (1 point)**

In addition to developing a logical argument that demonstrates a complete understanding of the specific question you've chosen to answer, the College Board® wants you to demonstrate an understanding of the historical context of your argument. If you open your essay with a few statements that describe the historical setting within which your argument is best understood, you will earn this point. We will address several of the best options for accomplishing this goal.

#### **Evidence (2 points)**

The Evidence section of the rubric is the part that rewards you for all those long hours spent memorizing details. If you mention a few specific examples with relevance to the question prompt, you can earn the first of the two points. If you connect that evidence to your thesis, you will get the second point, as well. *Mastering the*

*Essay* devotes an entire unit to evidence and its use within your argument, so these points will be yours, too.

### **Analysis & Reasoning (2 points)**

The College Board® wants students to demonstrate an ability to think like professional historians. To that end, the rubrics seek to reward specific historical argument techniques—*Comparison*, *Causation*, and *Change and Continuity Over Time* (CCOT). Depending on the essay prompt, you must create a response that takes the form of one of these specific argument-types.

Since your thesis tells the reader what you intend to say, and an analytical thesis describes how you will make your argument, your thesis can help you earn the two points in the Analysis & Reasoning section of the rubric (that’s in addition to the one point earned in the Thesis section). To illustrate, let’s look at Causation. You can earn one point for developing and supporting an argument that describes a cause/effect of a historical development/process. The second point is awarded to an argument that explains the reasons for that cause/effect. Any acceptable thesis will develop the argument, and an analytical thesis will list the reasons. So, an *excellent* analytical thesis will include almost everything you need for three of the six total points on the LEQ rubric.

### **AP European History DBQ Rubric**

Like the LEQ rubric, the DBQ rubric is divided into the same four parts—**Thesis**, **Contextualization**, **Evidence**, and **Analysis & Reasoning**.

#### **Thesis (1 point)**

The DBQ thesis is constructed in the same way as that of the LEQ. You earn one point for addressing all parts of the question directly.

### **Contextualization (1 point)**

Just as with the LEQ, the College Board® wants you to demonstrate an understanding of the historical context of your DBQ argument. Include a few statements describing the historical setting for your argument in the opening paragraph, and you will earn this point. More on this in Step 5.

### **Evidence (3 points)**

Since the DBQ is document-based, you are rewarded for your use of the documents. You will earn one point for using the content of at least three documents to address the topic of the question. If you use at least six documents in support of your thesis, you will get a second point.

The third point is awarded for using at least one specific outside example—not a part of or from the documents—to support or qualify your argument. We will spend a good deal of time discussing evidence when we get to the body of the DBQ in Step 5.

### **Analysis & Reasoning (2 points)**

The first of these points is awarded for a critical analysis of the sources in at least three of the documents (this used to be called Point-of-View, or POV). We will address this topic in detail as you progress through the steps of the writing process.

Just like on the LEQ, you can earn the second point of Analysis & Reasoning by demonstrating an ability to think like a professional historian by developing a complex argument utilizing the one of these historical argument techniques— *Comparison*, *Causation*, and *Change and Continuity Over Time* (CCOT).

Although the new rubrics are divided into distinct sections, the characteristics of any particular essay may cross over the borders of these sections. So, in theory, an essay with a clear, analytical thesis