

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 couple of 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 World 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 World 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 World 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 World 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

and a generally persuasive argument, but only one piece of specific evidence in support of each category, may receive the same score as an essay that contains a clear thesis that is less than analytical, but includes a very persuasive analysis of considerable evidence.

In practice, however, the essay with the stronger thesis has an advantage. The thesis is the reader's primary guide to understanding the author's argument. Consequently, on the AP exam, as in many college classes, **the thesis is viewed as a reliable predictor of the overall strength of the argument.** A weak thesis usually indicates a weak argument, whereas a clear, analytical thesis often indicates a strong argument. The reader (whether an AP scorer or college professor) is predisposed to awarding the higher score to the essay with the better thesis. It is for this reason that you should spend a good deal of time honing your thesis-writing skills.