

## Writing a Document Based Essay: A 10-Step Approach

Carefully read the Historical Context and the Task, paying specific attention to exactly what the essay question is asking you to answer.

1. Highlight or underline key words in the question
  - Rewrite the question in your own words
  - If there is more than one question or sub-sections to the initial question, number them, so you are sure to answer all parts of the question.
2. Answer the scaffolding questions under each document. These will guide you to analyze the documents.
3. Create a Brainstorm Chart where you leave room for analysis of the document + outside information. The outside information should directly relate to how the document can be used to answer the question.

	Analysis of Document	Outside Information
Doc. #1		
Doc. #2		
Etc.		

4. Decide which documents you will use, if you are not using all of them. Pair together document that seem to “speak” to each other; ex. pro/con, follow in chronological order to tell a story, etc.
5. Write your thesis paragraph following these guidelines:
  - Take a position
  - Offer an interpretation of the question
  - Offer organizing or controlling ideas which will form the paragraphs of the body
6. Create the body of your essay, organizing each paragraph around an IDEA from your thesis paragraph, not by simply listing the documents. Tie each paragraph back to your thesis. This will keep you from “wandering” away from the question.
7. Make sure you include outside information to demonstrate your knowledge about the topic beyond just what is discussed in the documents.
8. Argue with yourself! Present the other side of the story. This will show that you understand that there are multiple perspectives to consider when answering the essay question.
9. Write a thoughtful conclusion. Do not simply restate the question or your thesis.
10. Proofread your work to avoid turning in an essay with spelling & grammatical mistakes. Consider the completed essay your first draft and then edit it so your ideas flow smoothly.