

DBQ Requirements

The document-based question (DBQ) is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents as well as to demonstrate a grasp of historical content and context. In the DBQ essay, you must

- Have a **thesis** that makes a historically defensible claim and responds to all parts of the question.
- Situate your argument by explaining the broader **historical context**, developments and processes.
- Use **topic sentences** that set out a relevant argument using a historical thinking skill.
- Demonstrate a **complex understanding** of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt by using evidence to corroborate, contradict, show cause and effect, show continuity and change over time, qualify (degree), or modify an argument by considering diverse views of evidence (depending on the prompt).
- **Use the documents** to support your arguments. (You should attempt to use all 7 documents; you may omit one, but that is a risk.)
- Explain the significance of the **author's point of view**, the document's historical situation, audience and/or the purpose of at least three documents.
- Refer to **relevant specific historical evidence beyond that found in the documents**. This evidence must be different from evidence used to earn other points on this rubric. A simple mention of evidence is NOT sufficient; you must explain the evidence in the course of your argument. Explaining how the evidence is similar to or different from given information is a good way to earn this point.

DBQ Pre-Write

Before starting on the historical DBQ, let's review all of the steps in planning and writing the essay.

Time management

- Read and plan 15 minutes
- Write 45 minutes

Dissect the prompt

- What are the task and/or directive words?
- What are the parameters? (Time, place, class, categories, etc.)
- Are there any other key terms in the prompt?

Planning

- As you read the documents, write brief summaries in the margins, look for **patterns, content, contradiction** and **author type**. Patterns are sometimes suggested in the prompt. Look for different points of view on the same topic.
- Plan your categories to match the supporting documents. Remember to be constantly aware of the prompt.
- A document may fit in **more than one category** or it may stand alone.
- In general, this will be a **5-paragraph** essay: Contextualization, Thesis, Argument 1, Argument 2, and Argument 3.

Writing the DBQ

The following prompt and documents will be used as the basis for the examples of each part of the DBQ explained below:

Prompt: Evaluate the extent to which urban centers served as hubs of economic activity between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries.

Document 1

Anonymous, excerpt from a Byzantine text, *The Timarion*, "The Great Fair at Thessalonica," c. 1150.

The Demetria is a festival, ...the most important fair held in Macedonia. Not only do the natives of the country flock together to it in great numbers, but multitudes also come from all lands and of every race - Greeks, ... the Bulgarians, Neapolitans, Spaniards, Portuguese, and French; and, to make a long story short, the shores of the ocean send pilgrims and suppliants to visit the martyr, so widely extended is his fame throughout Europe. ... What I saw there was a number of merchants' booths, set up in parallel rows opposite one another; ... here was every kind of material woven or spun by men or women, all those that come from Boeotia and the Peloponnese, and all that are brought in trading ships from Italy to Greece.

Document 2

Yakut al-Hamawī, a Greek merchant and scholar who lived in the Abbasid Empire, from his book, *Baghdad Under the Abbasids*, c. 1228.

Baghdad was a veritable City of Palaces, not made of stucco and mortar, but of marble. The buildings were usually of several stories. The palaces and mansions were lavishly gilded and decorated....Both sides of the river were for miles fronted by the palaces, kiosks, gardens and parks of the grandees and nobles, marble steps led down to the water's edge, and the scene on the river was animated by thousands of gondolas, decked with little flags, dancing like sunbeams on the water, and carrying the pleasure-seeking Baghdad citizens from one part of the city to the other. Along the wide-stretching quays lay whole fleets at anchor, sea and river craft of all kinds, from the Chinese junk to the old Assyrian raft resting on inflated skins. The mosques of the city were at once vast in size and remarkably beautiful. There were also in Baghdad numerous colleges of learning, hospitals, infirmaries for both sexes, and lunatic asylums.

Document 3

Marco Polo, Venetian traveler, excerpt from *The Book of Ser Marco Polo: The Venetian: Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, c. 1300.

Suzhou (a city in China) is a very great and noble city. The people are Idolaters, subjects of the Great Khan, and have paper money. They possess silk in great quantities, from which they make gold brocade and other stuffs, and they live by their manufactures and trade... and since they were conquered by the Great Khan they use paper-money.

The city is passing great and has a circuit of some 60 miles; it hath merchants of great wealth and an incalculable number of people. ... There are also in this city many great philosophers and leeches, diligent students of nature.

Document 4

Ibn Battuta, Moroccan traveler, and quadi, excerpt from his book, *Rihla: Travels in Asia and Africa*, c. 1354.

We then reached Jerusalem, third in excellence after the two holy shrines of Mecca and Medina and the place whence the Prophet was caught up into heaven. Its walls were destroyed by the illustrious King Saladin and his Successors, for fear lest the Christians should seize it and fortify themselves in it. The sacred mosque is a most beautiful building and is said to be the largest mosque in the world... The greater part is covered with gold so that the eyes of one who gazes on its beauties are dazzled by its brilliance, now glowing like a mass of light, now flashing like lightning. In the center of the Dome is the blessed rock from which the Prophet ascended to heaven...

I travelled next to the country of Hormuz. Hormuz is a town on the coast... It is a large and fine city, with busy markets, as it is the port from which the wares from India and Sind are dispatched to the Iraqs, Firs and Khurasan. ... Water is a valuable commodity in this island. They have wells and artificial reservoirs to collect rainwater at some distance from the town. The inhabitants go there with waterskins, which they fill and carry on their backs to the shore, load them on boats and bring them to the town.

Document 5

Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Spanish conquistador, excerpt from his book: *History of the Conquest of New Spain* describing Tenochtitlan, written in 1576.

So we stood looking about us, for that huge and cursed temple stood so high that from it one could see over everything very well, and we saw the three causeways which led into Mexico, ... we beheld on that great lake a great multitude of canoes, some coming with supplies of food and others returning loaded with cargoes of merchandise...and we saw that from every house of that great city and of all the other cities that were built in the water it was impossible to pass from house to house, except by drawbridges which were made of wood or in canoes; and we saw in those cities Cues [temples] and oratories like towers and fortresses and all gleaming white, and it was a wonderful thing to behold; ...After having examined and considered all that we had seen we turned to look at the great market place and the crowds of people that were in it, some buying and others selling... Some of the soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, and all over Italy, and in Rome, said that so large a market place and so full of people, and so well regulated and arranged, they had never beheld before.

Document 6

Leo Africanus, a Muslim scholar from Morocco living in Italy, excerpt from *The Description of Africa*, written for the Pope Leo X, 1526.

The houses of Timbuktu are huts made of clay-covered wattles with thatched roofs. In the center of the city is a temple built of stone and mortar and in addition there is a large palace, constructed by the same architect, where the king lives. The shops of the artisans, the merchants, and especially weavers of cotton cloth are very numerous. Fabrics are also imported from Europe to Timbuktu, borne by Berber merchants.

...salt is in very short supply because it is carried here from Taghaza, some 500 miles from Timbuktu. I happened to be in this city at a time when a load of salt sold for eighty ducats. The king has a rich treasure of coins and gold ingots.

Only small, poor horses are born in this country. The merchants use them for their voyages and the courtiers to move about the city. But the good horses come from Barbary. They arrive in a caravan and, ten or twelve days later, they are led to the ruler, who takes as many as he likes and pays appropriately for them.

The king ... greatly honors learning. Many hand-written books imported from Barbary are also sold. There is more profit made from this commerce than from all other merchandise.

Document 7

Anonymous Portuguese cartographer, *The Cantino Map*, famous for its early, correct use of latitude, 1502.

