

AP History Disciplinary Practices and Reasoning Skills

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AP United States History

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In order to be successful on AP history exams that are administered each May, after having explored the past in United States History, **each student needs to be competent** in the following areas:

- Ability to interpret a rich array of primary (diaries, ledgers, maps, charts, letters) **and** secondary sources (works published by other than the original participant)
- Extensive readings of their assigned college-level textbook **PLUS** additional independent readings to add breadth and depth
- **Regular practice of historical argumentation in writing** ★
- Working knowledge of each of the disciplinary practices and reasoning skills

EVERY AP EXAM QUESTION WILL ASSESS ONE OR MORE OF THESE PRACTICES AND SKILLS.



1908
Model T

AP History

Disciplinary Practices

Practice 1: Analyzing
Historical Evidence

Practice 2:
Argument
Development



AP HISTORY

“Examples were randomly chosen to help students better understand each part of the AP Disciplinary Practices and Reasoning Skills which are very important for AP success.”

DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

PRACTICE 1:

ANALYZING HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

- **Primary sources** include original documents, photographs, interviews, etc.
- **Secondary sources** present information that has already been processed or interpreted by someone else like textbooks, articles, encyclopedias

Students must **read their assigned college-level textbook** and write their best grammatically correct, complete sentences!



Practice 1: Analyzing Historical Evidence



Students will be assessed on their ability to do the following:

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Describe historically relevant information and/or arguments within a source.

Example: The Declaration of Independence

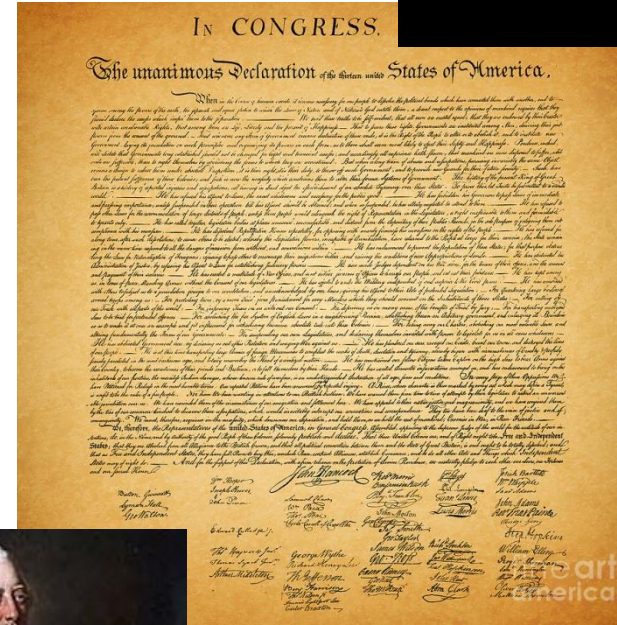
What arguments did Jefferson use to support the need for independence from England?

Which actions of King George III were chosen as being most egregious?

- Explain how a source provides information about the broader historical setting within which it was created.

Example: Which events were cited in the Declaration to prove the need for separation?

What sentiments did Jefferson take from the Age of Enlightenment?



art america

- **Explain how a source's point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience might affect a source's meaning.** Example to promote thinking:

Explain the differences between the Patriot and Tory views about the Declaration in the colonies. Why did the Declaration happen after the Revolution had started?

Immigrants to America in the 1600s, with skill, luck, and determination, could amass unheard of wealth. How would this shape their point of view of England?

Great achievements have been accomplished by those who grew up in poverty. How did Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Carnegie, and Andrew Jackson overcome humble beginnings? When did they find their purpose, change history, and speak to different constituencies? Why did *Poor Richard's Almanac* become so popular in America?

- **Explain the relative historical significance of a source's point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience.**

To the creation of the United States, the Declaration is paramount in purpose of choosing freedom from England, whose historical situation became a rallying cry for the colonials who felt oppressed.

The historical significance of the Declaration is understood when one realizes the risks the signees took in publicly announcing their traitorous intent at a time when a guarantee did not exist that they could gain freedom.

- **Evaluate a source's credibility and/or limitations.**

Did the Declaration's adoption by the Continental Congress automatically free the 13 colonies? What made it credible to one third of the colonists and not to the other two thirds? How were its limitations overcome before October 1781?

To what degree did Parliament think it credible? What were England's limitations?

SECONDARY SOURCES



A secondary source is a document or recording that relates or discusses information originally presented elsewhere. A **secondary source** contrasts with a primary source, which is an original source of the information being discussed; a primary source can be a person with direct knowledge of a situation, or a document created by such a person.

Secondary sources often cite, comment on, or build upon primary sources.

- Describe the claim or argument of a secondary source, as well as the evidence used.

Here, you might describe the reaction to the Declaration as reported in newspapers in London. How did the attitudes over time by members of Parliament contribute to the American Revolution? Quotes of leading statesmen would have been published. Your task would be to identify the evidence which caused people to feel the way they did. Was it sheer ego, a reliance on a powerful navy to defend the British Empire in the 1770s, or something else that kept soldiers being sent to “help” the American colonists.

What evidence did England use to “keep a standing army” in the colonies after the French and Indian War? Was it valid? What was its impact on the general population?

(((The more widely you read history, the better answers you can craft.)))

Students will need to cite evidence “beyond the documents” found on the Document Based Question.

- Describe a pattern or trend in quantitative data in non-text-based sources. Quantitative is defined as “of or relating to **how much** there is of something.” Non-text-based sources would be interviews, impressions, memories.

- **Explain how a historian's claim or argument is supported with evidence.**

Arkansas author, Dee Brown, claimed in his thought-provoking book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, that the U. S. government had conspired over time to deprive the Native Americans of their rights. Especially telling were accounts of the massacres of innocents at Sand Creek, Colorado, and Wounded Knee, South Dakota. The book details the history of Native Americans in the American West in the late nineteenth century. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* was first published in 1970 to generally strong reviews. Published at a time of increasing American Indian activism, the book has never gone out of print. Records of the cavalry units operating in the West were cited with ghastly details of the atrocities.

- **Explain how a historian's context influences the claim or argument.**

Context = “the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed”

Before the publication of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Dee Brown had become well versed in the history of the American frontier. He wrote numerous books on the subject. Brown's works maintained a focus on the American West, but ranged anywhere from western fiction to histories to even children's books. Many of Brown's books revolved around similar Native American topics, including his *Showdown at Little Bighorn* (1964) and *The Fetterman Massacre* (1974). Dee Brown's claims detailed the history of American expansionism from a point of view that is critical of its effects on the Native Americans. Brown described Native Americans' displacement through forced relocations and years of warfare waged by the United States federal government. **His focus was almost exclusively on the history of the West, but he always approached the topic from a perspective that was different from what was traditionally taught or portrayed.**

- **Analyze patterns and trends in quantitative data in non-text-based sources.** Example:
During the Great Depression, in order to increase incomes, the government hired people to conduct oral histories. A large number of former slaves were interviewed which greatly increased knowledge about that ante bellum institution. In the early 1800s, veterans of the American Revolution were interviewed in order to prove their rights to a pension. Soldiers in the War of 1812 were given land grants as payment for their services, which led to additional amounts of information concerning their westward movement in search of land. About the time of the publication of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, increased interest and activism on the part of Native Americans and their supporters led to an increase of awareness of their historic plight. This further led to an awareness to preserve native languages, cultures, and traditional dances which were had not been part of the former text-based sources of historical interpretation.
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of a historical claim or argument.** Example:
Dee Brown's book received acclaim and acceptance because of the details of sheer savage behavior depicted in the records of the U. S. Cavalry during the Indian Wars of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His views changed how American academics viewed Native American issues and brought increased awareness concerning their poor treatment at the hands of U. S. soldiers. The government's dealings are portrayed as a continuing effort to destroy the culture, religion, and way of life of Native American peoples. **Therefore, his argument changed the course of traditional views concerning the Native Americans from savages to real people, especially at Sand Creek, where a hundred elderly, women, and children were walking toward the U. S. soldiers expecting food and supplies but were massacred instead.**

PRACTICE 2: ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT



Developing Your Argument

When you develop your argument, you are **confirming your own position**, building your case. Use empirical evidence—**facts and statistics**—to support your claims. Appeal to your audience’s **rational and logical thinking**. Argue your case from the authority of your **evidence**.

As you develop your ideas, remember that you are presenting them in a fair-minded and rational way, counting on your readers’ intelligence, experience, and insight **to evaluate your argument** and **see your point of view**. The success of your argument depends on your **skill in convincing your readers**—through sound reasoning, persuasion, and evidence—of the strength of your point of view.

Practice 2: Argument Development

You may be surprised to hear that the word “**argument**” does not have to be written anywhere on an exam for it to be an important part of your task. In fact, making an argument—expressing a point of view on a subject and supporting it with evidence—is often the aim of academic writing. **VERY IMPORTANT!** ★

- **Make a historically defensible claim in the form of an evaluative thesis.**



From left: Andrew Carnegie,
Cornelius Vanderbilt,
Samuel Gompers, Jay Gould.

Thesis Examples:

The Gilded Age and resulting greater industrial development set in motion a ravaging of the environment and set the world on track for the latest mass extinction of animals and plants, pollution-related health problems, and record levels of CO2 in the atmosphere.

American military power in the 1960s was used to oppose communism which was contrary to capitalist beliefs. This led to the fiasco in Vietnam without regard to what local citizens wanted or needed after the collapse of French Indochina in the 1950s.

The American Civil War set the South backwards economically for a century while at the same time propelled the North forward into an industrial boom that would create modern American business enterprise.

After years of bitterness, the government of Germany used punitive measures of the Treaty of Versailles as reason to move toward militarism and a need to exert power to right past “wrongs.”

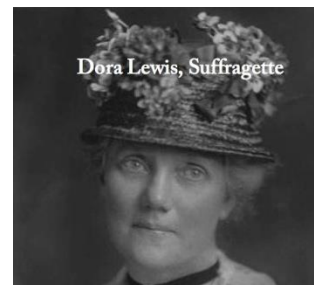
- **Support an argument using specific and relevant evidence.**

Appropriate examples can support the writer's contention that a general statement is true. Not only do they **provide specifics** and **details** in support of a claim, but the vivid description they often include helps to **capture** and **retain** the reader's attention.

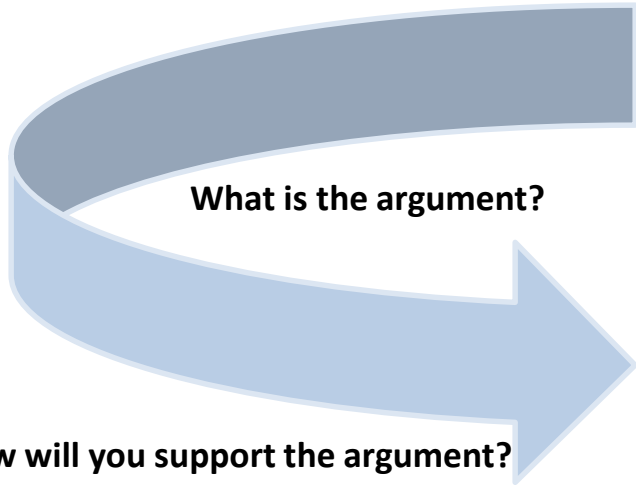
In the following paragraph, the writer includes examples of mistreatment to support the claim that women's right to vote was "hard-won". She also draws a conclusion from the examples in her final sentence.

Women's right to vote is a relatively new and hard-won privilege. The Suffragists, who demonstrated for their cause in front of the White House in 1917, were incarcerated and tortured. For example, the prison guards beat Lucy Burn and left her hanging all night, her hands cuffed to a bar above her head. They also threw Dora Lewis headlong into a cell, smashing her head into an iron bed. For weeks, while imprisoned, these women were fed only worm-infested slop. When one of their leaders, Alice Paul, began a hunger strike in protest of the treatment they were receiving, prison personnel tied her to a chair, forced a tube down her throat, and poured liquid into her until she vomited. She was tortured like this for weeks. These women endured torture on behalf of an entire class of human beings who were denied the right to vote. **Women of today owe this right to the courageous suffragists who preceded them.**

Alice Paul

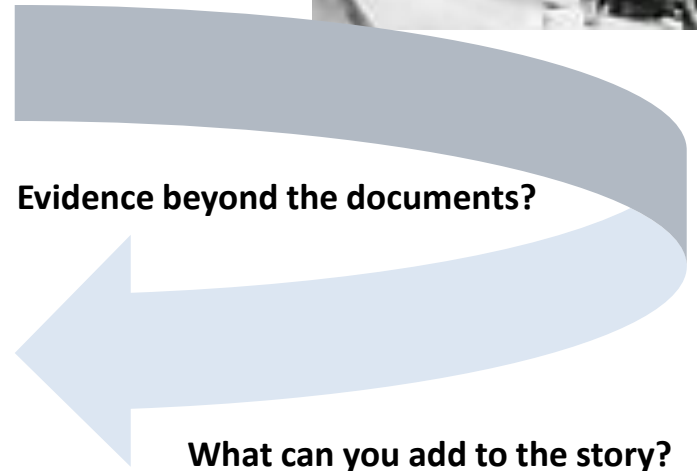


1917 Suffragettes Seeking Votes for Women



What is the argument?

How will you support the argument?



Evidence beyond the documents?

What can you add to the story?



Read more history in order to learn more, do more, be more!



- **Use historical reasoning to explain relationships among pieces of historical evidence.** Basic Example of a Claim Using Reasoning:

What makes up a grasshopper's skeleton?

The skin. We looked and there are no bones. The muscle connects to the skin. In people, muscle connects to the bones. Bones are our skeleton. Therefore, skin is the skeleton of grasshoppers.

When interpreting evidence or studying sources it's important to use objective questions, keep an open mind, and attempt to look at all information in a fair and balanced way.

Consider the following when writing about relationships of historical evidence:

- What am I looking at?
- Where was this found?
- When is my evidence from? Place it into a timeline in your mind. This will help put it in the context of wider history. Think about what happened before and after the date of your evidence.

Remember to always approach your evidence, sources, and even your own opinions with caution. It is very difficult for anyone to be completely objective, as everyone sees the world from their own point of view.



Example: Explain the relationships between the struggle to successfully lay sections of oceanic telegraph cable in the mid-1800s, the Morse Code, a battery, a picture of someone operating a telegraph, and a copy of a telegram delivered to Europe over said cable.

How would you use historical reasoning to make a claim and give evidence?

Claim: Europe and America grew economically and culturally due to greater speed of communication when telegraph cables finally joined the two continents.

Reasoning: The growth and development of modern business structures by the last decade of the nineteenth century was facilitated by opportunity exchanges between Europe and America brought about by faster communication. Before the transatlantic cables were completed, communication remained relatively slow, depending on scheduled ships and crews. Once inventions made it possible to communicate over wire and engineers completed the goal of joining continents, entrepreneurs moved on to more ambitious goals to increase both product development and spread the “I’ve got to have that” mentality of business. When the first attempts failed, engineers did not give up, but continued to work toward their lofty goal. This application of the telegraph in this regard was one step which advanced a new, more prosperous age of modern history. Who knew a system of dots and dashes could place mankind on the path to the next great thing—wireless telegrams!

((Please do not think this sample is the right length for an AP Exam. Just an idea starter!))

Much longer essays should be written for the DBQ and the Long Essay Question.

- **Consider ways how diverse or alternative evidence could be used to qualify or modify an argument. READ the following background information. How could the previous essay starter be extended by knowing the following additional facts about the cables?**

The First Cable

The manufacture of the cable started in early 1857 and was completed in June. Before the end of July it was stowed on the American *Niagara* and the British *Agamemnon* -- both naval vessels lent by their respective governments for the task. They started at Valentia Harbor in Ireland (which was by then connected to the rest of the British Isles) on August 5. For the first few days, everything went well but six days later, due to a mistake made with the brake, which limited the rate of descent, the cable snapped. Just 380 miles had been installed.

The ships were forced to return to port. An extra 700 miles of cable was made for the second attempt which began on June 25, 1858. This time the same two ships met each other in mid-Atlantic where they joined their respective ends. The cable broke almost immediately. Again the two ships made another splice: this time they managed 40 miles before it broke again. The fourth time they had laid 146 miles before the cable was lost yet again. It was clear that this was not going to be easy!

The two ships returned to Ireland but it was decided that, despite the loss of a considerable amount of cable, they still had enough for a further attempt. On July 29 they made their fifth attempt, again starting from the mid point. This time it worked! On August 5, 1858 both ships reached their destinations -- Valentia Harbor in Ireland and Trinity Bay in Newfoundland. The two continents were joined. On August 16, communication was established with the message "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will to men." Unfortunately the engineer in charge, Wildman Whitehouse, started by applying very high voltages rather than the very weak currents that had been tested during the cable laying. Within three weeks the damage inflicted on the cable by the high voltages was becoming apparent and it ceased to work.

The Second Cable

It took several years before another attempt was made. This time a single ship was chartered, the enormous *Great Eastern*, by far the largest ship of its day. She started from Valencia at the end of July 1865 and succeeded in laying 1,200 miles before the cable snapped. Several attempts were made to retrieve the broken end but they all failed.



Transatlantic Cable
(circa 1858)

Third Time Lucky

Again more cable was manufactured for the same company which had raised a further \$2,500,000. Not only did the *Great Eastern* carry cable enough for a complete crossing but extra cable to finish the cable that had been lost the previous year -- if the end could be found.

After so many failed attempts, the final, successful, cable was laid with virtually no problems. On July 27, 1866, the cable was pulled ashore at a tiny fishing village in Newfoundland known by the charming name of Heart's Content. The distance was 1686 nautical miles. The *Great Eastern* had averaged 120 miles a day while laying the cable.

The first message sent on this, finally successful, cable was: "A treaty of peace has been signed between Austria and Prussia." Queen Victoria, then at Osborne, in the Isle of Wight, sent a message to the President of the United States. "The Queen congratulates the President on the successful completion of an undertaking which she hopes may serve as an additional bond of Union between the United States and England."

Continued

This was received in Newfoundland almost immediately but there was still a gap in the link to the mainland of North America and messages from London to New York still took 24 hours because of this gap. However, this did not concern people at the time who were amazed at the rapid news that was now possible.

Almost immediately the *Great Eastern* steamed east to the point that the second cable had reached and after about two weeks of trying, they found and raised the broken end. This was no easy feat as the broken cable was at a depth of 16,000 feet. The broken end was spliced and on September 8 the second completed cable was landed.

Contemporary accounts tell of the fascination of the operators that messages would actually be received hours before they were sent (due to the time zone difference at the two ends of the cable). Due to the time taken for ships to cross the Atlantic, people did not think much about the time difference -- the cable brought this issue home to them with a start.

Almost immediately, the cable opened for business but only the very wealthy could afford it -- the initial rates were a startling \$1 a letter, payable in gold - at a time that a monthly wage for a laborer might be \$20.

As with the overland cables, undersea cables were rapidly deployed. Within 20 years there were 107,000 miles of undersea cables linking all parts of the world. The original two cables ceased to work in 1872 and 1877 but by this time four other cables were in operation. It is interesting to note that even though later cables could carry large numbers of signals at the same time, it was not until the 1960s that the first communication satellites offered a serious alternative to the cable.

- **Consider ways that diverse or alternative evidence could be used to qualify or modify an argument.**

Ideas concerning the topic: Laying Transatlantic Telegraph Cables Promoted Business

You might add topics of additional information to modify your argument. (Fleshing out your AP essay is easier when you **widely read your textbook** PLUS **independent readings!**)

- **Impact of receiving/sending news much faster than before**
- **Specific details of the cost of all the attempts versus what the money could have purchased in the mid 1800s**
- **Stories how the telegraph cable's completion directly affected people's lives**
- **Rate this achievement to the top 10 technological advances of the nineteenth century**
- **You might have researched, then shared the facts on all the human cost if employees died trying to place the cables from Canada to Britain**
- **An examination of actual business deals made between the two continents upon completion of the cable**
- **Explain how the transatlantic cable affected Americans who were wishing to return from Europe on the maiden voyage of the *Titanic***
- **You might offer a statement how the large amount of copper found in the cables and in wirings in large cities might be recovered and recycled at today's higher prices**
- **You might generate a list of all other technologies that took the importance away from the telegraph cables**
- **Any environmental impact of the numerous cables now stretching across many oceans**