

AP European History DBQ & FRQ Essay Tips & Advice

1. Answer the question: This seems like a no-brainer, yet thousands of AP European History test takers forget about this every year. When you address the question, make sure you answer all parts of the question; AP graders evaluate your essays based on a rubric and award a point if you answer all parts of the question.

2. Know the rubric like the back of your hand: This goes in hand with the last tip. By the time the test rolls around, make sure you know that AP graders are looking for these key components: an answer to all parts of the question, a clear thesis, facts to support the thesis presented, use of all documents, and inclusion of point of view/evaluation of document bias. Here are the [2014 Scoring Guidelines](#).

3. Don't be afraid to namedrop/be specific: When it comes to answering the FRQs, be a test taker who can identify and specify names of certain people who had measurable impact in European History. This means use primary examples! For example, if the question asks you how Louis XIV was able to centralize his government, you should specifically talk about intendants, the Fronde Wars, the Edict of Fontainebleau, etc. Write with *confidence* when citing specific events or people.

4. Group, group, group, and did we say group?: When you read and analyze documents, make sure to group your documents into at least three groups in order to receive full credit. You

should group based on the three respective key points you will be discussing in the body of your essay.

5. Practice grouping: Just to hit the nail in the coffin, here are a few starting blocks for how to group documents. Think about how the document works in relation to politics, economics, imperialism, nationalism, humanitarianism, religion, society & culture, intellectual development & advancement. Pretty much every single document the CollegeBoard ever created can fit into one of these buckets.

6. Assess the author's perspective: As you work your way through the documents and group them, keep a few clear questions in mind, “Why is the author writing this? What perspective is he or she coming from? What can I tell from his or her background?” Asking yourself these questions will help you ensure part of your thesis and essay integrates bias and analysis of bias.

7. Read the historical background: The little blurb at the beginning of the document isn't there for no good reason. The historical background section of AP European History is like the freebie slot on a bingo card—it will reveal to you the time period of the document and allow you to gain a little perspective into the point of view of the source.

8. Connect between documents: The difference between scoring a perfect score on your essays and scoring an almost perfect score can often come down to your ability to relate documents with one another. As you outline your essay, you should think about at least two opportunities where you can

connect one document to another. So how do you connect a document? Well one way would be writing something along the lines of, “The fact that X person believes that XYZ is the root of XYZ may be due to the fact that he is Y.” So in this example, I may pull X person from document 1, but use document 4 to support my Y of the reason why he thinks a certain way. When you connect documents, you demonstrate to the grader that you can clearly understand point of views and how different perspectives arise. It also is a way to demonstrate your analytical abilities.

9. Start practicing as early as possible: AP European History isn't quite like AP World History where you can get away with just understanding key trends and patterns. Because the test is much more detailed-oriented, you need to start practicing at least a month and a half prior to your AP European History exam date. Go to AP Central's [homepage for AP European History](#) and select a few essay questions to tackle for the weeks leading up to the exam. Try to tackle two to five a week. Find a proctor like a sibling, parent, or teacher and have them simulate the test for you under timed conditions.

10. Do not blow off the DBQ: In 130 minutes, 50% of your AP European History grade is determined. In case you didn't know the AP European History exam is a 50-50 split between multiple choice and free-response questions. Students often overlook the importance of the DBQ and FRQs. Don't be that student. Did you know if you got 0/80 multiple choice questions right but scored 9s on your FRQs and your DBQ, you would still get a 3 based on the 2009 exam curve? It's crazy, but it's true.

11. Print out your writing: Writing a coherent essay is a difficult task. In order to do this successfully on the AP European History test you want to make sure that you have spent a few minutes in the very beginning of the test to properly plan out an outline for your essay. You may have heard this advice hundreds of times from teachers but the reason why teachers give it is because it really does help. Ultimately, if you go into your essay without a plan your essay will read without a sense of flow and continuation. One of the things you are assessed on is your ability to create a cohesive argument.

12. Organizing with chronological order: One way that you can order some essays is by using chronological order. When you frame your argument around chronological order, you want to look for transition points and use those as an opportunity to start a new paragraph.

13. Compare and contrast: Sometimes on the AP European History test you'll be asked to compare and contrast. In this case a lot of students simply compare but they do not contrast. Make sure that you allocate at least one paragraph for each component.

14. Refine your thesis: Crafting the van Gogh of thesis statements can be difficult when under a time crunch. But don't worry the good thing is that if you create a general thesis statement to work off of, you can go back and refine your thesis statement at the very end. Don't be afraid to come up with the general idea and go with that; then at the end of the paper, revise your original thesis around the main arguments that you've made throughout.

AP European History Multiple Choice Review Tips

1. Read continuously: Here's the thing about AP European History—it's incredibly detailed-oriented. That means it's not quite like some other AP tests where you can just cram two nights before and get a 5. In order to really understand connections in European History, you need to keep up with your reading throughout the school year. This not only applies to help you in the multiple choice section, but also in the essay portion to understand what time period the prompts are coming from. Vault's Modern European History should be like your bible when it comes to reading about AP European History.

2. Identify and hone in on your greatest weaknesses: When you start practicing multiple choice for AP European History, you'll quickly realize that there are certain time periods and things you know like the back of your hand, and others that are just very hazy to you. After you have had a practice session with [AP European History multiple-choice questions](#), write down the areas where you struggled and review those sections of your class notes. Make flashcards and review 15-20 every night before you go to bed.

3. Supplement your learning with video lectures: While YouTube can be a distractor at times; it can also be great to learn things on the fly! Crash Course has some great videos [here](#) pertaining to AP European History. Use them to affirm what you know about certain time periods and to bolster what you already know; then, practice again.

4. Hank's History Hour: Going along the lines of alternative ways to learn AP European History, you can also learn a great deal from [Hank's History Hour](#), which is a podcast on different topics in history. This is a great way to actually go to sleep since you can listen to the podcast while you dose off. Did you know when you go to sleep you remember what you heard last the best when you wake up?

5. Answer every question: If you're crunched on time and still have several AP European History multiple-choice questions to answer, make a solid attempt at answering each and every one of them. With no guessing penalty, you literally have nothing to lose.

6. Create flashcards along the way: After you have gotten a multiple choice question wrong, create a flashcard with the key term and the definition of that term. Think about potential mnemonics or heuristics you can use to help yourself remember the term more easily. One way is to think about an outrageous image and to associate that image with the term related to AP European History.

7. Use the Process of Elimination: When it comes to tackling AP European History questions, the process of elimination can come in handy if you can eliminate just one answer choice or even two, your odds of getting the question right significantly improve. Remember there is no guessing penalty so you really have nothing to lose.

8. Don't overthink things: When it comes to answering easy questions, typically the shortest response is also the right

response. Easy questions typically have easy answers. Try not to choose strangely worded answer responses for easy questions. Most importantly, don't overthink things.

9. All questions are the same weight: When it comes to the AP European History test, all multiple-choice questions are weighted equally. That means that you want to make sure that you take your time in the very beginning so that you don't get easy questions wrong.

10. Use common sense: Often times with multiple-choice questions, contextual cues are given that signal the time period that the question is testing you on. Look out for these sorts of clues. Understanding and recognizing when a clue is given is fundamental to helping you understand what concepts you're being tested on.

11. Take advantage of chronology: When it comes to answering the multiple-choice questions, the questions are actually grouped in sets of 4-7 questions each. Practice recognizing when you're at the start and end of a group. This will allow you to mentally think about the different time periods that are being tested while also staying alert throughout the duration of the test.

12. Understand the progression of question difficulty: The AP European History test is outlined so that the easiest questions are presented to you at the very beginning of the test. However, as you navigate through the test you'll realize that the questions get harder and harder. Use this to your advantage. Stay aware of how much time you're spending in

different sections of the multiple-choice section. While you want to make sure that you allocate enough time at the very end for answer difficult questions, you really want to make sure that you knock the first 60 questions out of the ballpark.

13. Study themes appropriately: Generally speaking, the AP European History test dedicates 20 to 30% of the multiple-choice section to testing cultural or intellectual subject areas. The remaining 80% are split relatively evenly between economic and political factors, as well as overall social issues.

14. Use your writing utensil: As you work through the multiple-choice section of the AP European history test, physically circle and underline certain aspects of answer choices that you know for fact are wrong. Get in this habit so that when you go back to review your answer choices, you can quickly see why you thought that particular answer choice was wrong in the first place. This is a technique that you can use for more than just the AP European History test.

15. Circle EXCEPT: EXCEPT questions can often throw students off so make sure that you get in the habit of physically circling every time you see the word EXCEPT.

16. Go with your gut: You know what I'm talking about... when you're at the end of your test and you go back to that one question that nagged you and you think that you need to change your answer. Don't. More often than not your gut was right. There's a reason why you chose that answer so go with your instinct.

17. Use checkmarks: If you feel confident about your answer to a particular multiple-choice question, make a small checkmark next to that question number. The reason why you want to do this is that when you go back to review your answer choices, you'll be able to quickly recognize which questions you need to spend more time taking a second look at. Also, making this checkmark gives you momentum moving forward throughout the multiple-choice section. If you feel good about an answer, that little bit of positive reinforcement will help keep you alert as you move through the multiple choice questions.

Overall How to [Study for AP European History](#) Tips

1. Do not read your book for straight facts and figures: The way middle schools teach history set up high school students for failure when it comes to tackling challenging history courses. Rather than memorize facts from your book like you've done since middle school, create a framework and general understanding of the core themes from your reading. Believe it or not, knowing the type of bread that XYZ leader liked is not important. A lot of history books go excessively in depth in regards to the nitty gritty. Learn to selectively read the important bits of information and practice summarizing the key points of your reading by outlining 3-5 key takeaways in your notes on your readings. If you cannot connect the dots, then you will simply craft essays with random "name drops" and "date drops"; as a result, your AP score will reflect your inability to create a cohesive argument.

2. Try out the SQ3R method: This is a popular studying technique that can be applied for more than just AP European History. Francis Robinson originally created it in a 1946 book called *Effective Study*.

3. S (Survey): Preview what you are about to read. Look at the beginning of the chapter and look at the end. Look at the main headings of each subsection of the chapter. Read the discussion questions often found at the end of sections. Think about how this section relates to a larger part of history; think about how this may connect to something you've previously learned.

4. Q (Question): Think about questions to keep in mind as you prepare to read. One way to do this is by re-framing the headers of subsections and to pose them as questions. Ask questions such as, “Why is this important?”, “What does this reveal to me about the overall time period?”, etc.

5. Read (R): Now you can begin to read. After surveying and questioning, you can now read the chapter keeping the prep work you’ve done in mind. Doing S and Q beforehand helps keep you engaged and active. Make sure you use your pencil to guide yourself as you read. If you can write in your book, circle and underline key things. Active reading helps the content stick with you.

6. Recall (R): At the end of each major section, take a minute or two to recall the key things that you just read about. Review the bolded key terms, and answer the main questions you posed to yourself earlier. Use your own words to describe what you just read. Think about it like you are telling your best friend about what you read about today. Saying things out loud can help you remember things more easily.

7. Review (R): You can either do this with a friend or by yourself. After you’ve done SQRR, you want to top everything off with review. Look at the notes you’ve taken along the way and test yourself on the key bits of information from your reading. The key to the SQ3R method is creating a system of processing information and making that information stick. By reviewing several times at random points of the day, you’ll help move the information you’ve learned from your short-term memory to your long-term memory.

8. Connect, connect, connect: In case we haven't mentioned it enough, AP European History is all about connecting the dots. Whether you're just doing your nightly reading or reviewing for your test, it's helpful and essential that you recognize how events and people in history are interrelated. History is the study of how people interact with one another. One technique to make sure you are connecting the dots is to write key events or terms on flashcards; then at the end of your reading or review session, categorize your flashcards into 5-7 different categories. You may end up doing this by time period, by a significant overarching event, etc. A good way to think about this is you have 5-7 drawers, and a bunch of random things lying around in your room. Each thing represents some event or important person in history and you want to fit all the things into one drawer in order to make your room clean again. If the clean room analogy doesn't work for you, try to think of a way to get in the categorizing mindset yourself and [let us know about it!](#)

9. Create a cheat sheet: While unfortunately you won't be able to use your cheat sheet on the actual test, you can use a cheat sheet to help simplify your reviewing process as the AP European History test gets closer. Create a cheat sheet that is flexible and can be added on to—then as the year progresses and you do more and more readings, add to your cheat sheet. Before you know it, you'll have a handy and hopefully concise reference guide that you can turn to in those last few weeks before the test.

Tips Submitted by AP European History Teachers

- 1. Keep referring back to the question:** While writing the essay portion, especially the DBQ, remember to keep referring back to the question and make sure that you have not gone off on a tangent. When students drop the ball on an essay it is usually because they do not answer the question. Thanks for the tip from Ms. N at South High School in MI.
- 2. Review your vocab:** Complete the vocabulary at the beginning of each section of your preferred AP European History prep book. If you do not know the meaning of the terminology in a question you will not be able to answer the question correctly. Thanks for the tip from Ms. O at Northville High in MI.
- 3. Do lots of point-of-view statements:** You don't want to suffer on your DBQ because you only had two acceptable POV's. Do 4 or 5 or 6. And be sure to say how reliable a source is ABOUT WHAT based on their background, audience or purpose. Thanks for the tip from Steve!
- 4. Complete readings as they are assigned:** Chunking material is the best way to learn and then to synthesize material. Look at the primary sources and secondary sources to support textual readings. Think in thematic terms. Thanks for the tip from Ms. J at Trinity High in PA.
- 5. Supplement your in-class learning with videos:** Tom Richey has put together a comprehensive YouTube playlist just

for AP European History students. You can check it out at [here](#). He also has a great website you can check out [here](#).

6. Provide context in your DBQ: When trying to write a point of view statement for the DBQ you must include three things: First, state who the author really is. Second, what did he actually say. Third, why is said it.