

Frequent DBQ Mistakes

Teachers:

This document has two purposes in mind. It can be a tool to show your students what the most common errors are in writing a DBQ, and it can also be used as a time saver while grading.

In my experience, most of the comments I make on my students' essays are the same handful of comments caused by the same handful of errors. As I write my comments in the margins for the umpteenth time I've often thought it would be nice to have a "stamp" that would say, "This essay suffers from common mistakes #2, #5, & #6." Rather than reinvent the wheel with each and every paper, I thought, "What if students had a list of the most common mistakes? Then I could just write a comment that says, "Mistakes #3 & #7, along with encouraging comments on the essay's good qualities..

I DON'T want to suggest that we should treat students or their essays in an impersonal, "assembly line" mentality. I strive to write customized comments on every essay, but hopefully this tool might both help the quality of your students' writing, and reduce the time you spend grading.

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Frequent DBQ Mistakes

Question: Based on the following documents, analyze the responses to the spread of Buddhism in China. What additional kind of document(s) would you need to evaluate the extent of Buddhism’s appeal in China?

Historical Background: Buddhism, founded in India in the sixth century B.C.E., was brought to China by the first century C.E., gradually winning converts following the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E. Buddhist influence continued to expand for several centuries. Between 220 C.E. and 570 C.E. China experienced a period of political instability and disunity. After 570 C.E., the imperial structure was restored.

Category	Mistake		How to Fix It
Pre-Writing Organization	PWO	Not reading the question to know EXACTLY what it is asking.	<p>Essays are difficult to do, especially under pressure in limited time. Taking 5+ minutes to organize your thoughts helps in several ways: 1) It will focus your thesis directly on the question, rather than some tangent; 2) Your essay will be a 2nd draft, while your pre-writing notes act as a mental “1st draft”; 3) You can think of specific examples to support your thesis/argument.</p> <p>Read the question several times. What is it asking? What words seem important in guiding how you organize your response? Are there any categories that lend themselves to organizing your response? Plan More, Write Less</p>
Historical Background	HB	Ignoring or not using the historical background information.	<p>The HB info is designed to HELP YOU! You don’t know what the DBQ will ask, right? You’re thinking to yourself, “How can they possibly expect me to remember everything I’ve learned all year?” Well, the HB info is there to refresh your memory, to give you clues as to how to structure your essay, what information is important, and place the question in the larger context of all you’ve learned.</p> <p>With this specific DBQ question, the HB information practically outlines a chronological structure for you: 1) Buddhism gradually wins converts following the collapse of the Han dynasty; 2) Buddhist influence continues to expand during the period of political instability and disunity; 3) Imperial structure is restored in 570 C.E.</p> <p>Can you anticipate likely comparisons or contrasts? (e.g. “Contrast the Chinese responses to Buddhism during the period of political instability and disunity to the responses after imperial structure was restored..” “How did the political status of China affect Chinese attitudes toward Buddhism?)</p>

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Category	Mistake	Example	How to Fix It
1 Thesis	1A	No Thesis	Pre-writing organization. Read the question, then plan/outline your response <u>before</u> you begin to write.
	1B	Thesis not related to the question	<p><i>Most Chinese are Buddhists. China has over a billion people today. Buddhists like to meditate ...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the language of the question: <u>verbs</u>, <u>adjectives</u>, and <u>time frame</u>.¹ (Analyze ≠ Describe ≠ Justify ≠ Trace.) • If the question asks only about <u>economic</u> issues, make sure you confine your response to purely economics. • If it asks about 1450-1750, don't write about 1375 or 1800.
	1C	Thesis just repeats or paraphrases the question	<p><i>There were many responses to the spread of Buddhism in China.</i></p> <p>Try to “argue” your thesis. Could you take an “opposite” position? If not, then the thesis doesn't really <i>say</i> anything.</p>
	1D	Thesis is too vague	<p><i>Buddhism had a large impact on China.</i></p> <p>Avoid the “thesis killer” words² (many, very, things, a lot, big, large, huge, etc.).</p>
	1E	Thesis paragraph is thesis only, no “preview/road map” of the rest of the essay	<p>While having a thesis helps define your essay, the rest of the thesis paragraph helps organize the rest of the essay, categorizing the evidence that later paragraphs will more completely develop. Here's an example:</p> <p><i>Chinese peasants responded positively toward Buddha's message, but aristocrats and those with a vested interest in the status quo rejected Buddhism. During politically uncertain times, nirvana was seen as 'enough' to satisfy converts, while after political stability was restored, Buddhist converts came under increasing pressure to defend and justify their faith.</i></p>

¹ See Sherry Watkins' “Writing Prompts” for a great table explaining the verb in many essay prompts.

² I have a rule in my classroom, “Any thesis that contains the words ‘very,’ ‘many,’ or ‘things’ is automatically vetoed.” Possibly the hardest skill to learn is the ability to form a sophisticated, complex thesis. One tactic I've learned (from Geri McCarthy of Barrington, RI) is to require students to begin their thesis with either “While”, “Although”, or “Despite/In spite of.” These words strongly encourage students to formulate a mature thesis that helps structure the rest of their essay. Once students can consistently write competent thesis sentences, then I concentrate on having them develop an essay “road map” (outline) of later paragraphs. The result should be a thesis paragraph that is several sentences long (the paragraph should NOT just be a single sentence).

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Category	Mistake		Example	How to Fix It
2 Meaning of Doc's	2A	Document(s) not referenced or used at all in the essay	Essay never mentions a document, explicitly or implicitly.	Pre-writing organization. As you outline your essay, note which doc's support each paragraph topic. If you still don't use a doc, add a topic to include the unused doc.
	2B	Misinterpretation of document	<i>The Anonymous Chinese Scholar (Doc #3) is clearly attacking Buddhism. The questions are hostile and meant to drive people away from Buddhism.</i>	Practice, practice, practice. Read documents of all sorts: text, photographs, maps, political cartoons, charts & graphs, etc. Note: This is not a fatal error. You CAN misinterpret 1 document and still earn this point.
	2C	Documents used inappropriately	<i>Doc #2 says ...</i>	Don't bring any sentence with the word "document." In fact, don't even use the word "document" in your essay. Simply

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3 Evidence	3A	No specific evidence used from documents		Pre-writing organization should include a brief outline of each paragraph, including topic sentences. Once you know what each paragraph will discuss, note which doc's contain information relevant to that paragraph.
	3B	Evidence used from documents unrelated to the thesis.		Probably caused by lack of clear thesis and/or lack of pre-writing organization.
	3C	Excessive quoting or paraphrasing of documents	<i>As Zhi Dun says in Doc #2, "[followed by <u>3 lines</u> of text]"</i>	Try to use only a few words at most from a document. Keep in mind, your teacher/reader knows the documents better than you do. What can 3 lines of quoting the doc <i>do</i> ? (It can start to seem like you're just trying to pad your essay to make it <i>look</i> longer.)
	3D	Summarizing documents (aka "Plot Summary")	<i>Doc #1 says ...blah blah blah Doc #2 says ...blah blah blah Doc #3 says ...blah blah blah Doc #4 says ...blah blah blah</i>	Virtually any paragraph/sentence that begins, "Doc # says ..." is guilty of <u>summarizing</u> documents rather than <u>using evidence to support the thesis</u> . Even worse is when the 1 st paragraph begins, "Doc #1 says ...," followed by the 2 nd paragraph, "Doc #2 says ..." This is what teachers/readers call a "laundry list" essay. It's merely a straight summation of each individual document. (Which is precisely what the directions say NOT to do!)

Category	Mistake		Example	How to Fix It
4 Context, Source Analysis (POV³)	4A	No context/ POV given		POV is really a very sophisticated skill. Don't despair, you CAN do this, but it will take work. (see below)
	4B	Attribution only	<i>Zhi Dun (Doc #2) is biased because he is a scholar and confidant of aristocrats and high officials.</i> These words are quoted directly from the document. Merely repeating the words already printed in the document doesn't count.	<p style="text-align: center;">All this is summarized in the SOAPStone acronym.</p> <p>Some good questions to ask in order to analyze POV are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) WHO produced it? Discuss the author's gender, age, ethnicity, social status, religion, intellectual or political beliefs, etc. 2) WHEN was it produced? Can it be connected with a significant historical event? 3) Who was the intended audience? Was the document written privately, written to be read or heard by others (who?), an official document for a ruler to read, commissioned painting, etc. 4) WHY? What was the motivation of the writer/producer of the document, based on what you can surmise about them?
	4C	Quoting or paraphrasing documents	<i>Doc #1 says ... [blah blah blah]</i> <i>Doc #2 says ... Doc #3 says ... Doc #4 says ...</i>	<p>When you put all these together, you get the POV, why THIS person would be producing THIS piece of information at THIS time. Then you can evaluate how much you "trust" the information in the document, or what you think was really going on.</p> <p>Note: It is useful to consider the tone/vocabulary of the document, just as you would in analyzing a piece of literature. It will sometimes convey the intent, the point of view of the author (anger, disdain, admiration, satire, etc.).⁴</p>

³ Special Note: Occasionally students attempt to 'Group Analyze POV' by saying that 3 doc's all share a particular POV. While this statement earns credit for "Analyze by Grouping," it does not "double dip" to earn POV credit as well. Both point #4 (POV) and #5 (Grouping) require analysis, but there is a subtle and important difference between the two types of analyses. POV applies to the author/audience behind a single document, while Analysis by Grouping applies to a specific characteristic shared by multiple documents.

⁴ These POV methods and comments are from Ane Lintvedt's AP World History Electronic Discussion Group message, 4/28/2004.

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Category	Mistake	Example	How to Fix It	
5 Content Analysis (aka ‘Grouping’)	5A	No groups exist	Pre-writing planning and organization.	
	5B	Groups implied only by essay structure, not explicitly stated	1 st part of essay discusses the positives, the 2 nd part the negatives.	This does show at least a little organization, so it’s better than nothing, but be more explicit and sophisticated..
	5C	Grouping only of whole documents, not specific characteristics of the documents	<i>Doc’s 1, 3, & 6 all belong in one group.</i>	Be more specific! Name the specific <u>characteristic</u> that is shared by the documents. (e.g. “ <i>Supporters of Buddhism like the Anonymous Chinese scholar and Zong Mi ignored or at least de-emphasized Buddhism’s non-Chinese origins, (Doc’s 3, & 5) even as they had to defend Buddhism from attacks by supporters of ‘native’ Chinese Confucianism. (Doc’s 4, 6)</i> ”
	5D	“Group” includes only 1 document		<u>Each paragraph must refer to at least 2 documents.</u>
<p>What IS Content Analysis? (And how is it different from ‘Grouping’?)</p> <p>Content Analysis requires students to look for some CHARACTERISTIC that multiple documents share, then create a group under the title of that characteristic. DON’T group <u>whole</u> documents, analyze characteristics OF documents. (That’s why one document can belong to more than one group.)</p> <p>Here’s a good exercise to practice this: Organize the doc’s into at least 3 groups, BUT (here’s the tricky part) ONE of the docs must belong in ALL the groups. That way one has to analyze doc #x, and see that it really has several different characteristics: Characteristic #1 makes it belong in Group A; Characteristic #2 makes it belong in Group B, etc. THAT’S real content analysis!</p> <p>So what’s the difference between Context Analysis (POV) and Content Analysis (Grouping)? Context Analysis (POV) focuses on the intangible The difference is scale. POV focuses/analyzes “within the box” (1 doc), while Content Analysis analyzes “across the boxes” (seeing characteristics or trends in several docs that aren’t apparent in any one single document).</p>				

Category	Mistake		Example	How to Fix It
6 Additional Document	6A	No additional document requested.		Earning the Additional Document point is so easy, failing to earn this rubric point should be a crime. All it takes is one sentence to describe the additional document, and a second sentence to describe how an historian would use it to more fully answer the question.
	6B	No reason/justification stated for the additional document.	<i>It would be good to have a document from a peasant.</i>	Describe what the missing document might be and <u>how</u> an historian might <u>use</u> it. (<u>Why</u> would it be good to hear from a peasant? How do you think a peasant might have thought about these issues <u>differently</u> from any of the given documents? What questions would an historian be able to answer with a peasant's perspective that aren't possible to answer now?) <i>It would be nice to see a document from a Buddhist peasant during the time of political instability, in order to see how their motive in choosing Buddhism over more traditional Confucianism compares with Han Yu's (Doc #4) and Emperor Wu's (Doc 6) motives."</i>

Frequent CCOT Mistakes

Teachers:

This document has two purposes in mind. It can be a tool to show your students what the most common errors are in writing a Change Over Time Essay, and it can also be used as a time saver while grading.

In my experience, most of the comments I make on my students' essays are the same handful of comments caused by the same handful of errors. As I write my comments in the margins for the umpteenth time I've often thought it would be nice to have a "stamp" that would say, "This essay suffers from common mistakes #2, #5, & #6." Rather than reinvent the wheel with each and every paper, I thought, "What if students had a list of the most common mistakes? Then I could just write a comment that says, "Mistakes #3 & #7.

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Sample CCOT Question: Analyze the social and economic transformations that occurred in the Atlantic world as a result of new contacts among Western Europe, Africa, and the Americas from 1492 to 1750.

Category	Mistake	Example	How to Fix It
1 Thesis	1A	No Thesis	Pre-writing organization. Read the question, then plan/outline your response <u>before</u> you begin to write.
	1B	Thesis not related to the question	<i>Europe dominated the Americas through military technology and political absolutism.</i> Focus on the language of the question: <u>verbs</u> , <u>adjectives</u> , and <u>time frame</u> . Analyze ≠ Describe ≠ Justify ≠ Trace. If the question asks about <u>economic</u> issues, make sure you confine your response to economics. If it asks about 1450-1750, don't write about 1800.
	1C	Thesis repeats or just paraphrases the question	<i>There were many transformations in the Atlantic world as a result of new contacts among Western Europe, Africa, & the Americas between 1492-1750.</i> “Many” is a virtually meaningless qualifier. Be more specific! Try to “argue” your thesis. Could you take an “opposite” position? If not, then the thesis doesn't really <i>say</i> anything. Avoid the “thesis killer” words ¹ (many, very, a lot, big, large, huge).
	1D	Thesis is too vague	<i>Columbus' discovery of the New World had a huge impact on the future.</i> <i>As Europe came to economically dominate trans-Atlantic trade, their influence over social customs also expanded.</i>
	1E	Thesis paragraph is thesis only, no “preview/road map” of the rest of the essay	While having a thesis helps define your essay, the <i>rest</i> of the thesis paragraph helps organize the rest of the essay, categorizing the evidence that later paragraphs will more completely develop.

¹ I have a rule in my classroom, “Any thesis that contains the words ‘very,’ ‘many,’ or ‘things’ is automatically vetoed.” Possibly the hardest skill to learn is the ability to form a sophisticated, complex thesis. One trick I’ve learned (from Geri McCarthy of Barrington, RI) is to require students to begin their thesis with either “While”, “Although”, or “Despite/In spite of.” These words strongly encourage students to formulate a mature thesis that helps structure the rest of their essay. Once students can consistently formulate a competent thesis sentence, then I concentrate on having them develop an essay preview/outline of later paragraphs. The result should be a thesis paragraph that is several sentences long (the paragraph should NOT just be a single sentence).

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Category	Mistake		Example	How to Fix It
2 Parts of the Question	2A	Body paragraphs unrelated to thesis		Pre-writing organization. Read the question carefully, then take several minutes to make a detailed plan of what your essay will say. List the main topics each paragraph will cover, as well as reminders as to what specific evidence to reference.
	2B	Essay deals with only 1 “part” of the question	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Geographic</i></p> Body paragraphs that deal exclusively with W. Europe, but ignore Africa & Americas. <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Topical</i></p> Body paragraphs that deal only with social transformations, no economic transformations.	

Category	Mistake	Example	How to Fix It	
3 Evidence	3A	No/few specific examples	There is no “quick fix” for this. Citing specific evidence is the most memorization-like task students are asked to do. (You can’t fake this!) Concentrate throughout the year on the APWH Themes and Periodization. Review Activities like <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Name the Top 10 Gender Role Events in World History” • “Name the Top 10 Turning Point Events, 600-1450 C.E.” can help as well. 	
	3B	Evidence given unrelated to question or thesis.	Pre-writing organization. Read the question carefully, then take several minutes to make a detailed plan of what your essay will say. List the main topics each paragraph will cover, as well as reminders as to what specific evidence to reference.	
	3C	Evidence unbalanced (relevant to only part of the question)		
	3D	Evidence is little more than stereotypes or gross over-generalizations.	<p><u>Geographic</u>: Essays that treat the U.S. as synonymous with N. America</p> <p><u>Chronological</u>: Essays that treat 600-1450 as a single “block” of time, w/ no variation.</p>	Be more specific. Would you like someone from another continent to lump “all North Americans” together? Then show the same respect and specificity toward other regions of the world. Memorize the Acorn Book’s “world regions” map. ² Students need to know the specific locations of “South Asia, East Africa,” etc.
	3E	Evidence is not organized	Examples given out of chronological order, or out of categorical organization.	Pre-Writing Organization.

² 2006-07 AP World History Course Description, p. 8-9.

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4 Explains Change Over Time using Global Context	4A	Simply wrong assumptions about world status.	<i>Africa didn't have any contacts with Europe before 1492.</i>	There's no simple fix for this.
	4B	No connection to Global context.		Pre-writing planning & organization.
	4C	No change over time, only "then and now" examples	<i>This is how it was at the beginning. ...Then at the end it was like this.</i>	Use "Transition Verbs/Words": develop, progress, grow, transform, mature, etc. Instead of "still pictures" describing the "before" and "after," try to describe a "motion picture" that describes <i>how</i> "before" <i>developed into</i> "after." Change is a <i>process</i> as much as an <i>event</i> .

Category	Mistake		Example	How to Fix It
5 Analyze Change & Continuity	5A	No analysis		Analysis is a difficult skill to learn (and teach!). Bloom's Taxonomy defines analysis as "the ability to break down material into its component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. This may include the identification of parts or components, examination of the relationship between parts, recognition of hidden meanings and detection of the organizational principles or patterns involved."
	5B	"Analysis" is really just a good description.		

Frequent Comparative Essay Mistakes

1

Question: Compare how rulers in any TWO of the following ancient societies used culture (e.g. law, language, literature, religion, & art) to help unify their political power.

Shang & Zhou China

Vedic India

Mesopotamia

Egypt

Category	Mistake	Example	How to Fix It
1 Thesis	1A	No Thesis	Pre-writing organization. Read the question, then plan/outline your response <u>before</u> you begin to write.
	1B	Thesis not related to the question	<i>Modern China's govern--ment shares much in common with its ancient predecessor.</i> Focus on the language of the question: <u>verbs</u> , <u>adjectives</u> , and <u>time frame</u> . Analyze ≠ Describe ≠ Justify ≠ Trace. If the question asks about <u>economic</u> issues, make sure you confine your response to economics. If it asks about 1450-1750, don't write about 1375 or 1800.
	1C	Thesis repeats or just paraphrases the question	<i>There were many similarities between ancient Mesopotamia and India.</i> “Many” is a virtually meaningless qualifier. Be more specific! Try to “argue” your thesis. Could you take an “opposite” position? If not, then the thesis doesn't really <i>say</i> anything.
	1D	Thesis is too vague	<i>Ancient India's and Egypt's government were both similar and different.</i> Avoid the “thesis killer” words ¹ (very, many, things, a lot, big, large, huge, etc.). Remember all those SAT vocabulary words you've been learning in English class? Here's your chance to use 'em!

Category	Mistake	How to Fix It
2 Parts of the Question	2A	Body paragraphs unrelated to question or thesis
	2B	Paragraphs unbalanced, don't answer all parts of the question

¹ I have a rule in my classroom, “Any thesis that contains the words ‘very,’ ‘many,’ ‘things,’ ‘lots,’ or ‘stuff’ is automatically vetoed.” Possibly the hardest skill to learn is the ability to form a sophisticated, complex thesis. One trick I've learned (from Geri McCarthy of Barrington, RI) is to require students to begin their thesis with either “While”, “Although”, or “Despite/In spite of.” These words strongly encourage students to formulate a mature thesis that helps structure the rest of their essay. Once students can consistently formulate a competent thesis sentence, then I concentrate on having them develop an essay preview/outline of later paragraphs. The result should be a thesis paragraph that is several sentences long (the paragraph should NOT just be a single sentence).

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3 Evidence	3A	No specific evidence	<i>There were many things that the Egyptians did to politically unify their empire.</i>	Name those “many things” or your teacher will write “There are many reasons why this essay didn’t receive a higher score.”
	3B	Evidence given unrelated to question/thesis.		Pr-writing planning and organization. Think of the essay question as a courtroom trial. “Egypt and Mesopotamia are accused of being similar.” Pretend that you are the prosecuting/defense attorney and have to show <i>evidence</i> to convince a jury that that statement is true/false. History is part fact, part interpretation. It is entirely possible that another student is using the SAME examples you’re using, but interpreting them as evidence toward a contradictory conclusion. Have you made an honest attempt to “convince” your reader of your interpretation of history?
	3C	Evidence imbalanced vis a vis all parts of the question	<i>Egypt, Egypt, Egypt.</i> (Nothing about Mesopotamia) or <i>Politics, Politics, Politics,</i> (nothing about religion) or <i>Similarity, Similarity, Similarity</i> (nothing about differences)	Make sure to check over your outline and see what the weak spots are.
	3D	Insufficient quantity of Evidence		“Rule of 3.” ² Give three examples of each category.

² This illustrates an important teaching point. This rubric is designed to spell out the bare minimum that students must do to get a point when the national exam is graded. In the classroom, teachers should aim higher. Ideally, students should do every part of this rubric to every question or document they ever read. That is part of the teacher’s responsibility in training students in the historian’s craft. So how many POV’s, Content Analyses, etc. should students aim for? College Board Consultant Bard Keeler’s advice is the “Rule of 3.” No matter what the category, give three examples. 3 POV’s, 3 Content Analyses, 3 pieces of evidence, 3 similarities & 3 differences (for Compare & Contrast essays) 3 Changes & 3 Continuities (for the COT essay) etc. This “Rule of 3” not only helps students earn full credit for Evidence, but also requires students to Address all Parts of the Question (Point #2).

Category	Mistake	Example	How to Fix It																	
4 Direct Comparisons	4A No comparisons at all.		<p>Did you structure your essay according to the “Geographic Lump” or the “Categorical Split”?³ If you used the “Lump,” then you probably forgot to <i>directly</i> compare each characteristic in the second region/ paragraph back to the same characteristic in the first region/paragraph.</p> <p>It could be a simple fix, like <i>Egypt had one pharoah, while Mesopotamia had several competing kings.</i> (Substitute a comma for the period, and add “while.”)</p>																	
	4B Parallel construction, (comparison implied, not explicit)	<p><i>Egypt had one pharoah. Mesopotamia had several competing kings.</i></p> <p>Or</p> <p><i>“This happened here. That happened there.”</i> (So what? Where’s the direct comparison?)</p>	<p>It could also require a more complex solution, like restructuring your entire essay along the lines of the “Categorical Split” so as to encourage more direct comparisons.</p> <p><i>Common comparison/contrast “Cue” Words</i></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>also</td> <td>as well</td> <td>both</td> <td>shared</td> </tr> <tr> <td>in addition</td> <td>like</td> <td>similarly</td> <td>too</td> </tr> <tr> <td>however</td> <td>on the other hand</td> <td>conversely</td> <td>unlike</td> <td>differently</td> </tr> <tr> <td>disagree</td> <td>in opposition to</td> <td>either</td> <td>while</td> <td>in contrast</td> </tr> </table>	also	as well	both	shared	in addition	like	similarly	too	however	on the other hand	conversely	unlike	differently	disagree	in opposition to	either	while
also	as well	both	shared																	
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disagree	in opposition to	either	while	in contrast																

Category	Mistake	How to Fix It
5 Analysis	5A No analysis	<p>Think of history as a giant jigsaw puzzle, except that this jigsaw puzzle’s pieces are all the same shape, so you can put them together in any way you like and make any “big picture” you want.</p> <p>The individual pieces are historical “facts.” The <i>way</i> you put them together is your <i>interpretation</i> of the facts.</p>
	5B Analysis not detailed enough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which pieces of history do you think are the most important or significant? • Why does your interpretation reflect the complexities of reality better than any other interpretation? • What other reasonable ways might someone else put together the pieces?

³ See C&C Essay Organization Structures Table on page 5

Comparative Essay Organizational Structures

Most students have been writing Compare and Contrast essays for several years, but often don't understand how to structure/organize their essay. Ellen Bell, an AP World History Consultant from Houston, TX has analyzed the overall structure of common Compare and Contrast essays. Her notes below (with my *italicized comments*) can help virtually every aspect of students' writing.

Geographic "Lump"	Similarities and Differences	Categorical "Split"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis • Body paragraph 1—region 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Economic Social⁴ • Body paragraph 2—region 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Economic Social <p>Note: When writing body paragraph 2 you MUST make comparisons and contrasts back to information in body paragraph 1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis • Body paragraph 1—similarities between regions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Economic Social • Body paragraph 2—differences between regions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Economic Social <p>Note: There may not be similarities and differences in all three categories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis <u>Paragraph</u> (chooses 3 categories: e.g. political, economic, and social) • Body paragraph 1 <u>Political</u> (similarities AND differences between BOTH regions) • Body paragraph 2 <u>Economic</u> (similarities AND differences between BOTH regions) • Body paragraph 3 <u>Social</u> (similarities AND differences in BOTH regions)
<p><i>This is the most common (and usually least effective) structure students use. While it CAN work effectively, all too often students forget or fail to make <u>direct comparisons</u> between the regions. (Most comparisons are implied, at best.) Frequently, students are so eager to begin writing they fail to adequately develop their thesis. Also, there's nothing in the overall structure that inherently encourages analysis.</i></p>	<p><i>Students are more likely to initially feel comfortable listing similarities and differences, so this structure might be less intimidating than the Categorical Split.</i></p> <p><i>Good analysis though is more likely to come if/when students proceed to the next level of categorization (political, economic, social, etc).</i></p>	<p><i>Effective pre-writing is vitally important. The Categorical Split structure requires students to spend considerable time planning their thesis and organization. Because the thesis contains categories, it is usually more sophisticated and often automatically helps structure later paragraphs. It may even be good enough for "extra credit" (Expanded Core). Students are more likely to include <u>analysis</u> and numerous direct comparisons. In short, there's nothing like a strong thesis to help everything else.</i></p>

⁴ The "political, economic, and social" categories are illustrative only. Obviously, if the question called for religious, cultural, and technological evidence then those categories would apply.