Dos and Don'ts of the AP* Exams

Early Preparation

To do well on the national AP* world history exam you will have to take personal responsibility for your own review and early preparation. Begin your preparation weeks before the exam. Do this preparation on your own time outside of your AP* world history classroom. There are many aids available to assist you in this preparation, for example:

- The College Board provides an excellent testing resource in the form of general advice Web site for students taking the Advanced Placement World History Examination. You can access the Web site at:

  http://collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html

- Many professionally developed preparation handbooks are available through any competent bookstore and are usually priced around ten dollars.

- Your teacher might provide you with a study guide for the AP* world history exam, especially if that teacher has been teaching the course for many years.

- Your own notes taken during the course of the year are a valuable resource. Old tests and essays can tell you where your weaknesses are located and where you need to concentrate your study.

- Search the Web for teacher Web sites with self-testing practice quizzes.

You should begin your review for the AP* world history exam several weeks before the actual date, usually about early March. Pace your study so you do not overly burden yourself. Take some of the released exams that are available from the College Board or the simulated exams available from the preparation handbooks. Some preparation handbooks contain several versions so you can test yourself two or three times with different exams. Focus on areas where you detect a weakness in your knowledge such as colonial era or industrialization. Many teachers have posted diagnostic tests on school or personal Web sites for their students that you can take and to uncover your weaknesses. Do a search in your favorite search engine to locate these Web sites.

Students who have disabilities that might impact the exam should contact their teacher, counselor, or campus AP* coordinator to determine if modifications are appropriate. These modifications must be documented and established long before the exam date.

A particularly rich resource for students would be the College Board's 2001 Released Exam for World History. This is the actual exam given in 2001 and you can practice with it. It also contains valuable information of all sorts. It is avail-
able at the College Board Web site for AP* world history at: apcentral.collegeboard.com. A new practice exam will be released in the spring of 2007 that can also help you. It will be the multiple-choice and essay questions given students in the spring of 2006. You will also find essay questions, both document based and free response, from the past several years posted on the AP* Central site along with grading rubrics and samples of student essays.

**Format of the National Advanced Placement* Exam in World History**

As the test date approaches, your school will make arrangements for you to pay the appropriate fees, file the appropriate forms, and arrive at the established location of the exam on the day indicated. It is wise to arrive at least a quarter to a half hour earlier than the time set by the testing authority so that you are settled in before preparations for the exam begin. The world history exam is usually given in the morning.

Make sure you had a good breakfast before the exam, but avoid anything excessively heavy. You are permitted to bring a bottle of water with you to the exam at most exam sites.

Bring with you to the exam some photo identification such as a driver's license, a school ID card, etc. You will have to identify yourself as you check in. Bring your social security number and your school code. Your school code is available from your counselor.

Bring several sharpened #2 pencils and at least a couple of new, tested, dark ink pens. Dark blue or black pens are the best to use. It is not wise to write your essays in pencil. Also avoid colored inks. At the national exam, the readers are reading your composition in a large area under lighting that makes light pencil or bright colored ink less easy to read. Place no artificial impediments in front of your reader like a composition that is difficult to read.

Do not bring highlight pens or colored markers or colored ink pens. A proctor will instruct you to put them away. You will not be allowed to take any other materials like correction fluid, dictionaries, books, and extra paper into the testing area, so do not bring them.

Personal laptop computers will not be allowed except for those who have received prior permission due to established special needs. Portable CDs or any recording device will not be allowed in the testing area. It is unwise to bring cellular phones, as they will be viewed with suspicion. Beepers, blackberries, or personal digital assistants (PDAs) are also banned for test security reasons.

It is advisable to bring a watch to check your own time. If the testing area has several wall clocks, you could become confused. Time yourself and avoid depending upon the proctor. You do not want to arrive at the end of the multiple-choice or essay section and discover the allotted time will end five minutes before you expected. Do not bring a watch that beeps or has an alarm. If you disrupt the examination session with noise or other distractions, you might be invited to leave.

The exam is three hours and five minutes long and is broken down into the multiple-choice section, given first, and the essay section. A short break of per-
haps ten minutes usually is given between the two sections. Do not talk to your fellow students about the exam or the multiple-choice questions you have just taken and most especially do not talk to any AP* world history teachers in the area as that would be a breach of security that could invalidate your school's scores for everyone.

You will be required to sign a protocol in which you pledge not to discuss the multiple-choice questions at any time. Do not post any questions you remember on a personal Web site. Students who have done so in the past have had their score invalidated and faced legal consequences. Do not discuss the essay questions with your teacher for at least 48 hours following the exam.

Section I of the AP* World History Examination - the Multiple-Choice Questions

The 70-question, multiple-choice section must be completed within 55 minutes and counts as half of your score. The questions will test both your analytic skills and your abilities at recall. The multiple-choice section will be comprehensive for the entire year. You will have to be familiar with the entire scope of world history to do well on this section. There is no replacement for good, hard study for this portion of the exam. What your teacher has given you in class has laid a foundation for the test, but you will be responsible for fleshing out the details in your mind. You will have to prepare yourself outside of class time on your own.

Section II of the AP* World History Examination - the Free Response (Essay) Questions

In Section II of the AP* world history exam you will be required to write three essays, one document-based question (DBQ) essay and two shorter free-response essays. There is no choice concerning the DBQ, but a certain amount of choice will be allowed with the two shorter essays.

Following a short break after the multiple-choice section, you will begin the free-response section of the exam lasting for 130 minutes. This block of time will be for you to divide as you wish except for a 15-minute preparation period at the beginning when you will be allowed to open the essay test booklet, but not the answer booklet. During this preparation period, you can examine all of the essay questions, the documents for the DBQ, and formulate your initial response to the DBQ. Do not open the answer booklet. You can take notes in ample spaces among the documents in the DBQ booklet. It is advisable to devote much of this time to brainstorming for outside facts useful with the DBQ, extract facts from the documents that you think you can use, and write a rough outline of the essay response along with a proposed thesis statement. Most students tackle the DBQ first, but once you are allowed into the answer booklet you can really write your essays in any order you wish.

After the 15-minute preparation period, you will be advised that you have 50 minutes to answer the DBQ. You may use your time as you wish, but you are strongly advised to follow the recommendations of the College Board. Their advice is based upon the proven results of hundreds of thousands of students over many years. Your proctor will advise you when to begin the essays. Watch your time carefully and pace yourself, even if the proctor is writing times on a
display board of some kind. Do not open your answer booklet early or you will commit a serious security breach.

In the second portion of the essay section, you will be allowed a choice between two alternative questions in Part B and two alternative questions in Part C. Spend no more than 40 minutes on each part of this portion of the essay section. In each grouping, select the question with which you feel most comfortable. Remember that in both the DBQ and the free-response essays you must demonstrate a significant knowledge of world history, and this is accomplished by using outside facts in substantial amounts. One of the worst errors frequently committed by students sitting for the exam is to depend entirely upon the documents for their facts for the DBQ essay.

You may expect that the DBQ and the free-response essay taken together will be comprehensive for the entire span of world history. Even with choices, you will have to respond with essays that cover the whole time frame of world history.

The proctor of the exam should give you fair warning of the approaching end of the essay section. Do not attempt to work beyond the time allotted or you will commit a serious security breach that may invalidate your examination. During both the multiple-choice section and the essay section of the exam, neither give nor receive communication with any other student in the testing area. Recent national cheating scandals have made officials particularly sensitive to potential security breaches. You do not wish to attract attention with questionable behavior. Disruptive behavior will probably result in your expulsion from the testing site.

**Evaluation of Your Free-Response Essays**

After being returned to the offices of the Educational Testing Service which handles the evaluation of the AP* exams for the College Board, your essays will be blind-coded and sent to the designated evaluation site in early June where several hundred college instructors and high school teachers gather to read the essays. Essays are not really graded, but are actually ranked in comparison against each other. The "readers" are highly experienced individuals drawn from a wide variety of teaching environments. These readers are given intensive training in ranking your essays against the thousands of others they will see. Many of the readers are themselves experienced Advanced Placement* world history teachers. A significant portion of the readers are college and university history instructors. Multiple checks and balances are employed to make certain every essay produced by every student is given a fair and equitable evaluation. A different reader will evaluate each of your essays.

**General Information on Essay Writing**

It is important to realize that your essay is evaluated at the college level, but it is also considered a rough draft. Errors in spelling and punctuation will not detract from your performance rating unless they interfere with the reader's understanding of your essay. Be legible with your handwriting. Your essay will have to reach college level writing, so consider the following standards:
Does the essay contain a thesis statement that clearly addresses and deals with the question? [thesis statement defined below]

Do arguments within the essay support the thesis and lead toward a viable conclusion?

In the case of document-based questions, are substantial numbers of the documents used appropriately and in a way that clearly supports the position of the thesis?

Is outside information used appropriately and in sufficient quantity to support the position of the thesis?

Does the essay analyze rather than describe as it attempts to prove the position of the thesis? [analysis defined below]

Does the essay end with a clear restatement of the thesis in a way that affirms what the writer was attempting to prove?

Understanding Your Audience: There are many styles of writing. What you have learned in your English courses will probably not fit the essay questions presented in Advanced Placement world history. You need to understand that the audience and purpose are different. Neither your English nor your AP* world history teacher is wrong. For AP* world history the best comparison is to consider that you are like a lawyer presenting a case before a jury. You must muster a set of arguments that support your position (the thesis statement). You must draw your arguments from the evidence available, document-based facts, and/or outside information. You must convince a jury that your position is correct; the jury is your reader at the national exam. You are engaged in an activity that is more like a debate than creative literature. Flowery statements and fanciful language do not fit well into the purpose and audience for which your arguments are intended.

Outline Your Answer: At the beginning of both the document-based question and the two short free-response essays, it is a good practice to outline your answer by breaking the question down into its primary parts and jotting down ideas that you can discuss relating to each of the issues of the question. After that, list the outside facts that you can use to support those positions and finally, comb the documents for facts to use with your outside facts. This kind of prior organization will definitely lead to better evaluations for your essays. You are allotted 15 minutes for this purpose with the DBQ and five minutes each for the shorter free-response essays.

Thesis Statement: For many students this is one of the most important and least understood parts of a good essay. A thesis statement comes at the beginning of your essay in a short introductory paragraph where you basically tell the reader the position you will attempt to prove.

In order to create a good thesis statement, you must understand exactly what the question is asking you to do and then craft your thesis to address each of the major issues presented by the question. In this situation, a simple repetition of the question will not be considered a good thesis statement. You have to create a thesis that tackles the issues of the question and states what you plan to prove regarding those issues. A good introductory paragraph and thesis state-
ment will also suggest briefly how you plan to prove your position.

When you have finished your introductory paragraph/thesis statement, you basically have a roadmap that points the direction your essay will travel, marks the turning points of your trip, and tells the reader the conclusion you plan to reach. Writing the essay at that point becomes much easier for you to do just connect the points on the map.

Together the thesis statement and the introduction must address the central issues of the question in a clear way. Each paragraph that follows must contain only information used in support of that thesis. Nothing should appear in your essay that is not essential to support that thesis statement. A good essay will end with a strong, short conclusion that restates the thesis.

Definition of Analysis Level Writing

Analysis level writing is also a very difficult concept for many students to grasp. Earlier in your academic career, especially in grade and middle school, you were able to achieve high grades by simply writing down everything you knew about the general topic of the question. If the question concerned the fall of the Roman empire, you wrote down everything you knew about the fall of the Roman empire. The more you knew and wrote down, the higher your grade would be. This is no longer true. A little later in middle school and early high school an essay with a better description would earn the top score, but this is also no longer true. You have now reached a point where you will be expected to write at the level of analysis.

Analysis level writing is simply using substantial amounts of facts to prove positions that support the ideas advanced in your thesis statement. Your essays will be judged on the quality and accuracy of your arguments in support of the position you have taken. Now you must answer more than the "what and when" by moving on to prove the "how and why."

Example of Analysis Level Writing

Analysis is the use of a fact at a higher order than just citation or description. To cite a fact is to prove that you know it. Using a fact with analysis demonstrates that you understand that fact and know how to use it to prove something significant regarding the issues of the question or your thesis statement.

Here is a simple citation of a fact:

"The sinking of the RMS Lusitania in 1915 with the loss of American civilian lives was seen by President Wilson as a violation of American neutral rights. This would be a major event in a chain which drew the United States into World War I on the British side."

Here is that same fact used with analysis:

"By 1915 both Britain and Germany had violated American neutral rights, but President Wilson responded more dramatically to events such as the sinking of the RMS Lusitania because American lives were lost whereas British violations involved only property rights. The death of women and children had a much greater impact on American public opinion than the seizure of a few car-

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goes. The emotional impact of events like the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* would gradually draw the United States into conflict with Germany and an alliance with Britain.'

Notice that in the first example the writer simply cited the fact that the *Lusitania* had been sunk and this drew the U.S. into the First World War. This first writer has faithfully answered the "what and when.'

The second writer has move beyond the "what and when" by explaining why the sinking of the *Lusitania* drew the U.S. into this war and provided the "how and why." Notice that the sample of analysis level writing also contains more facts at a greater depth. The difference between the two samples of writing is what defines analysis level writing.

**Definition of a Document-Based Question (DBQ)**

A document-based question is, in effect, a mini-research paper with the research materials provided. You are expected to exhibit an acceptable knowledge of world history by presenting outside information in your answer and incorporating a substantial number of facts from the documents. In addition to the question, there will be between 6 to 10 short documents in the DBQ booklet. Two or three of those documents may be graphics in the form of political cartoons, charts and graphs, maps, photos, posters, or paintings. The better essays almost always use the graphic documents. The rest of the documents will be short and text based. Your answer must directly address the main issues of the question and propose a thesis or position that you will prove within your essay.

**Definition of a Free-Response Question-Short Essay**

These are standard essay questions much like those you have previously received in social studies classes. You must exhibit an acceptable level of knowledge of world history by presenting facts that support the position you have taken in your thesis statement. You will have to select one question from a group of two possibilities and then a second question from another group of two questions. Together with the DBQ, you can expect these essays to cover the whole span of world history.

**Answer the Entire Question**

It is vital that you examine each question very carefully and are absolutely certain that you are answering every part of the question. The most common error at the national exam is to answer only part of the question while ignoring equally important segments which the student overlooked as they began writing their response. A partial answer will only receive partial credit. An equally common error is for a student test-taker to answer the wrong question. This usually results when the student does not read the question carefully. An example would be the student who, when asked to discuss gender and racial issues of the 1920s, writes down everything they know about diplomatic, political, legislative, and social history of the 1920s. That student will receive a low evaluation because they have not answered the question that was posed.
Length of Essays

Students constantly want to know how long their essays must be in order to obtain a good evaluation. There really is no definitive answer to the question. You must address all the issues of the question with your essay. To make you comfortable, consider that most good DBQs usually run between three to five handwritten pages in length while most short free-response essays run between two and four handwritten pages. That is not a rule written in stone, just a guideline.

A Rapid Checklist of Dos and Don'ts

Pre-Exam Preparation

I Do begin individualized study for national exams several weeks before the exam date.
I Do get a good night's sleep before the exam. Have a good, light breakfast. Arrive early for the exam.
I Do double check your supplies before you leave for the exam site. Make certain you have the necessary pens, pencils, and watch.
I Do not bring backpacks or large bags into the exam site. Leave cellular phones and other electronic equipment at home. Do not bring correction fluid, highlighters, or colored pens or pencils.
I Do bring at least two or three sharpened #2 pencils and two or three dark blue or black pens.
I Do bring a photo ID such as your driver's license. Bring your social security number and school code.

Writing Skills

I Do make a serious effort to write legibly-scratch outs, messy smudges, and difficult-to-read handwriting can hurt your evaluation.
I Do try to keep your essay in an organized appearance-arrows pointing to pieces of text in the margins or across the page are distracting and hard to follow.
I Do not use abbreviations or symbols that are not clearly understood by others.
I Do not use colored pens. Do use only dark blue or black ink.
I Do not use pencil for writing essays-it is harder to read.
I Do not use highlight pens on your essay.
I Do not use flowery statements and fanciful language-keep your arguments as clear and as straightforward as possible.
I Do outline your answer during the preparation period given at the beginning of the essay section.
I Do not add materials to your essay that are not directly in support of your thesis position-unrelated facts or arguments will not help your essay.

Introduction and Thesis Statement

I Do define key terms if they fit and help explain your essay.
I Do break the question down into its key or core issues before formulating your thesis.
Do aim your thesis statement directly at the core issues of the question.

Do not cite documents in the introduction/thesis statement paragraph-save citations for the body of your essay.

Do place your thesis statement at the end of your introductory paragraph.

Document Usage

Do not use a document you do not understand. Don't try to fake it.

Do use as many documents as you can-50 to 75 percent is a good rule of thumb.

Do use the graphic documents such as political cartoons, maps, graphs, and charts. Search the graphic documents for information you can use in your essay.

Do not use the DBQ documents in the order they were printed or refer to them as "In Document A...":

Do cite documents both by title as in "The Wilmot Proviso was an attempt ..." and by the usual form of (Doc. A) at the end of the sentence in which they were used.

Do not quote the documents; instead, synthesize the materials into your own words. The weakest essays tend to use many quotes.

Analysis Skills

Do use facts, document-based and outside, to prove arguments that support your thesis.

Do not express a personal opinion-keep to the facts to prove your points.

Do use substantial amounts of facts to support your thesis position, draw your facts from both outside sources and from the documents.

Do aim every argument and every sentence toward supporting your thesis position.

Do close with a good conclusion that restates your thesis position.