

6. How to Write for Social Studies

There are three kinds of writing tasks you will learn to do in Social Studies. They are all different kinds of “essays”: Thematic, Persuasive, and Document-Based. All three have a similar 3-part structure of introduction, development, and conclusion. Each has a slightly different purpose, however.

- **Thematic** essays analyze their topic.
- **Persuasive** essays judge their topic and try to get the reader to agree with the writer’s opinion.
- **Document-based** essays use historic documents and other sources to try to prove something. Document-based essays are a kind of mini-research paper.

Learning to write essays is very important because it is the way social scientists share their work and their ideas. Learning to write this way also helps you learn to think because your brain will be taught to follow a logical path to its decisions.

Mr. Jones

Like the other lessons in this series, these exercises are intended to help the seventh grader get started on an important scholarly skill. Remember that these exercises are not complete and that you will not be great at this until you have practiced for some months.

What you will learn

- Writing in an “impersonal style”
- Writing introductions and conclusions
- How to be more analytical than descriptive
- How to be logical and convincing
- Responding to the task evenly and in depth

Exercise 1: Transform these into impersonal style

1. "I am going to tell you about Ferdinand Magellan and his attempt to sail around the world."
2. "As you can see, Magellan didn't make it, though some of his crew did actually get back to Europe."
3. "So, if you take the colonists' side, Britain was acting against the law. If you take the British side, though, you would just figure you were following the rules the way they always were."

Writing an Introduction

A strong introduction goes beyond restating the theme.

- Define what the essay will address.
- Outline the path your essay will take.

One strategy you could use is this three-part introduction:

"The first few sentences are borrowed from the theme you are given. The next sentence or two explains the theme further in your own words. This is the hard part, but if you can make yourself do this, you will be sure to understand the topic you are to write about. The last sentence outlines the path the essay is to take."

Exercise 2: Create introductions from these essay topics

1. United States presidents have taken actions that have had a big effect on United States attitude toward other countries. Identify two presidential actions that have had big effects on United States history and for each

- Describe the historical circumstances surrounding the action
- Discuss the impact of the presidential action on United States foreign policy or on American society

2. Technological developments have had both positive and negative effects on the United States economy and on American society. Identify two different technological developments and for each

- Discuss the positive and/or negative effects of the technological development on the United States economy or on American society

3. Throughout United States history, individuals have used writing as a way to focus attention on issues facing the American people. To resolve the issues raised in these writings, actions have been taken by the government, groups, or individuals. Select two pieces of writing that have focused attention on issues facing American society and for each

- Describe the historical circumstances surrounding the issue addressed by the author
- Discuss an action taken by the government or a group or an individual in response to the issue raised by the author

4. The United States Supreme Court has played a major role in United States history. The Court's decisions have had a significant impact on many aspects of American society. Select two Supreme Court cases that have had an impact on American society and for each

- Describe the historical circumstances surrounding the case
- Explain the Supreme Court's decision in the case
- Discuss an impact this decision has had on American society

5. Throughout United States history, many different groups have faced discrimination. The federal and state governments have taken actions that have either protected or limited the rights of these groups in American society. Select two different groups in American society who have faced discrimination and for each

- Describe one specific example of discrimination faced by the group
- Describe one action taken by the federal or state governments related to this example of discrimination
- Discuss how the action taken by the government either protected or limited rights.

Exercise 3: Create conclusions from these mini-essays

Writing a Conclusion

A strong conclusion goes beyond restating the theme or just announcing that you've finished.

- Echo the introduction or the most important point you've made.
- Highlight the most important things you said in a fresh way.
- Don't introduce new material.
- Sometimes include your own perspective on the question.

1.

There are many fairytales that have an evil stepmother. *Hansel and Gretel* and *Snow White* are two such stories. The stepchildren in both stories suffered because of the evil stepmother

In *Hansel and Gretel*, the step children were not getting along with their father's new wife. The step-mother's sister was a witch who lived deep in the forest. She lived in a candy house and attracted children to the house to trap them and devour them. To get rid of the children, the step-mother sent them into the woods on an errand and in a direction she knew would bring them upon her evil sister's house. To avoid getting lost, Hansel left a trail of breadcrumbs. When they got the house, they were trapped by the witch and almost devoured. Hansel saved the day in this manner: the witch asked him to get on a shovel so he could be put in the oven. He pretended to not be smart enough to stay on the shovel and kept falling off. He asked her to show him how to stay on, she demonstrated, and he popped her into the oven and set his sister free.

In *Snow White*, the step-mother was jealous of her Snow White's beauty. The step-mother's mirror had magical properties and told the step-mother who was the current most beautiful woman. She was used to being the one, until the mirror revealed one day that Snow White was the better looking. After chasing Snow White away, the step-mother transformed herself into a gentle old lady. She visited the house where Snow White was taking refuge, offered her a poisoned apple, and put her into a deep sleep until a prince awoke her with a kiss.

In both stories, the heroes (Hansel and Gretel and Snow White) were innocent victims of the step-mother's annoyance or jealousy. The step-mothers in both stories plotted to destroy

the children through magical and gruesome means. By way of contrast, in the Hansel and Gretel story the pair was saved by the cleverness of Hansel. The hero relied on his own wits to save himself and his sister. In Snow White, the heroine was saved by the good will of a stranger who did what needed to be done to break the spell.

[Needs Conclusion...]

2.

There are many fables that use animals as characters to teach a moral lesson. *Grasshopper and the Ant* and *Fox and the Crow* are two such stories. Both explain the right way to act.

The moral of the story of the *Grasshopper and the Ant* is that one should work hard to live well and that only those who do will survive. The story tells of an ant who worked hard all summer to gather food for winter and the grasshopper that just danced and played all summer. When winter came, the grasshopper was starving and freezing and comes to the ant's house for help, but the ant says he should have worked to get ready and slams the door in his face.

In the *Fox and the Crow*, the Crow has some cheese in its mouth that the fox wants. The fox tricks the crow out of the cheese by giving the crow a lot of compliments and asking the crow to sing with her beautiful voice (a joke because crows don't have a pretty song). When the crow opens its mouth, the cheese falls down to the fox below. The moral is to beware of people who give compliments. They might not mean it and really might only want something from you.

The animals in the stories are chosen by the author by their characteristics: ants always seem to be working hard and grasshoppers are singers. Foxes seem clever and crows don't have pretty birdsong. The author did not randomly choose the animals to use in the story. The most likely reason to use animals was to help the listener remember the story and, thus, the moral.

[Needs Conclusion...]

Exercise 4: Rewrite these descriptive passages analytically

1. *Five things about the Iroquois were they built longhouses which were 150 feet long and 20 feet wide and could fit 12 families. Another thing is the women were in charge of household things and planting...*

2. *Technology of Europeans that helped them explore new land: they had a boat called a caravel. It had a shallow hull so it was more maneuverable in shallow water. They also had advanced sails and armor.*

3. *Technological advances that helped Europeans explore the world are the compass, improved ships with lateen sails, trigonometry, algebra, and improved weaponry like cannons, armor, and horses.*

Writing Analytically

You are doing the mental act of “analysis” when you do things like:

- Compare and contrast
- Explain cause and effect relationships
- Organize things into categories

4. *Five important characteristics of the Iroquois culture are: they called themselves the people of the longhouse. The women choose the clan leaders. If the clan leaders don't do their job, the women choose different people.*

5. *Hansel and Gretel went into the woods. They saw a candy house. They started eating the house and the witch came out. She invited them in and trapped them. She almost cooked them!*

6. *The ant worked hard all summer to save up enough food for winter. The grasshopper danced and played and partied all summer. The ant wouldn't give the grasshopper any food and he starved.*

Common Social Studies
Essay and Short Answer
Question Words:

Describe means “to illustrate something in words or tell about it”

Explain means “to make plain or understandable; to give reasons for or causes of; to show the logical development or relationships of”

Compare and contrast means “to express similarities and differences”

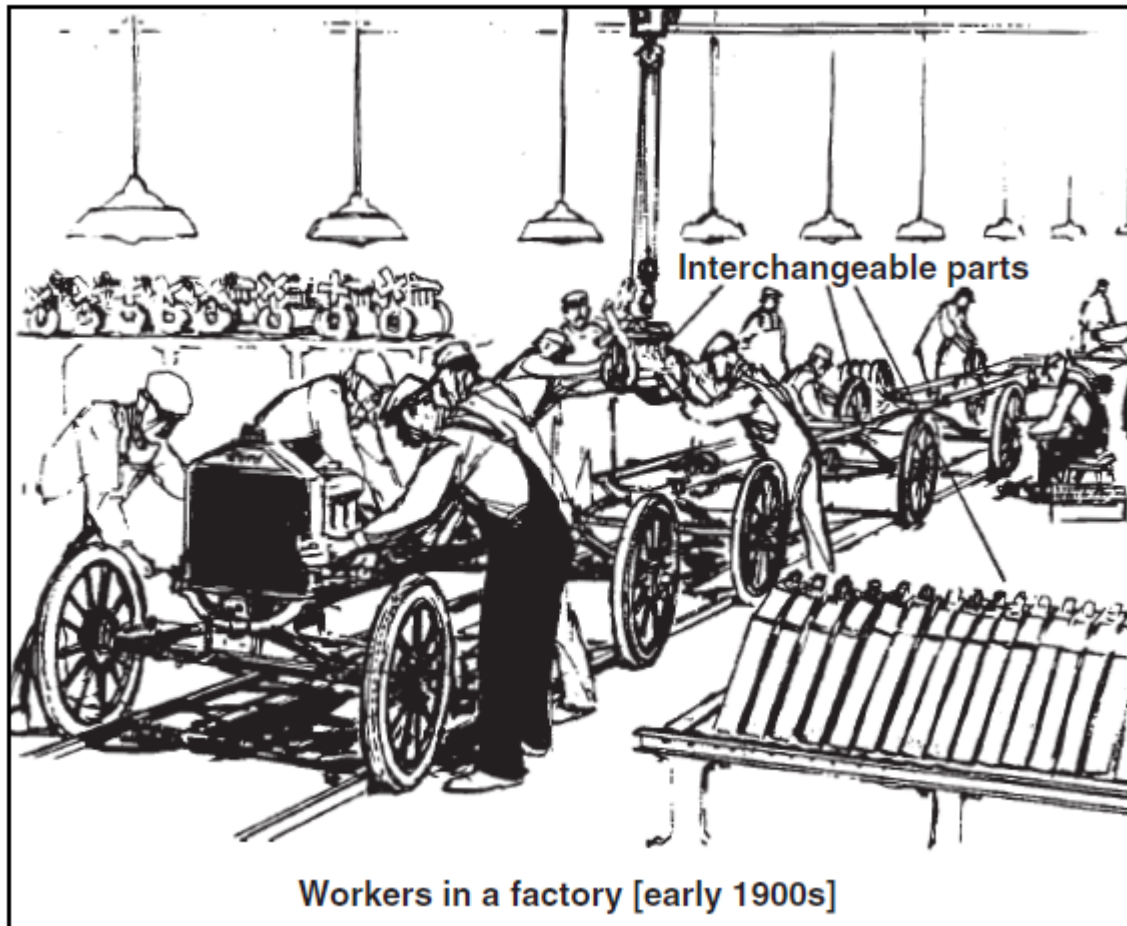
Discuss means “to make observations about something using facts, reasoning, and argument; to present in some detail”

7. Britain wanted to control trade, so it passed laws that controlled colonists' trade. Colonists did not like that at all, especially the taxes. They did not like taxes and thought Britain should not charge them. They rebelled.

8. Cinderella worked all day like a slave. Her step-mother (step-sisters in some versions of the story) treated her terribly. A fairy came to visit her and used magic to help her dress up for the fancy ball. She fell in love with the prince, but had to leave quickly to get home before the magic wore off.

9. France wanted colonies in the new world just like Spain. It sent colonists over to the new world, but could not wring out wealth from the north like Spain did from the south.

Exercise 5: Identify the analytical treatment of each document



1. The men are working on making cars. They make the cars one step at a time. Each man does only one part of the process. They are using interchangeable parts.

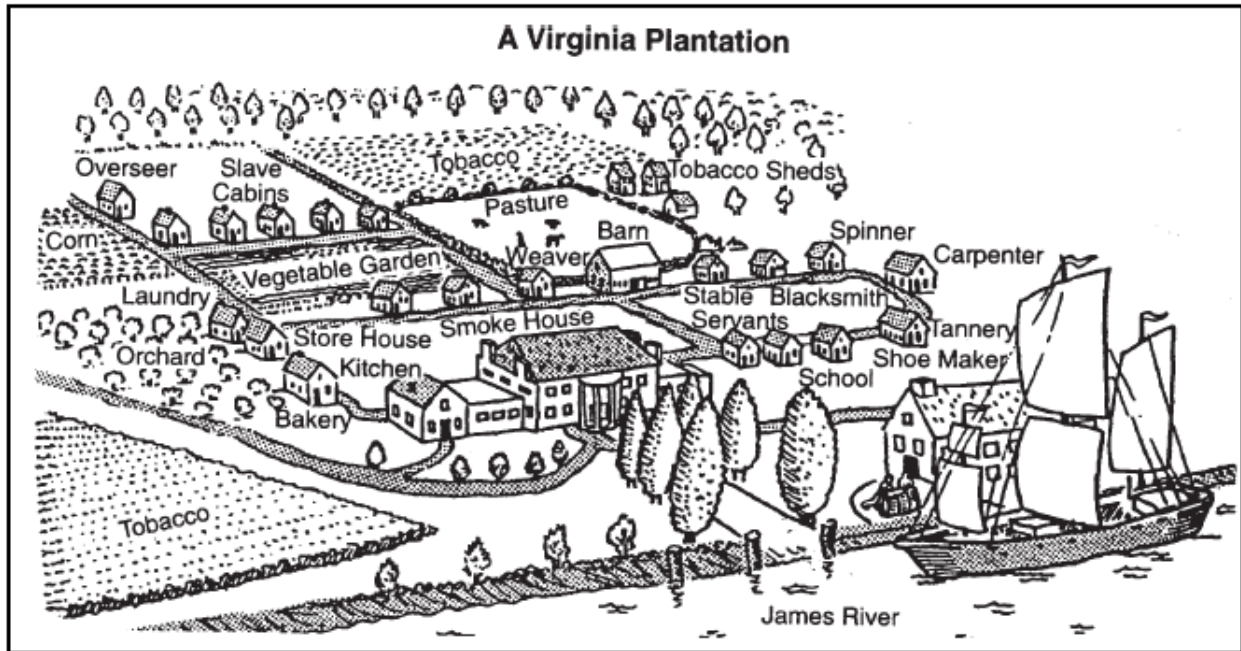
The invention of interchangeable parts makes mass production possible. This is when workers can make a lot of something in short time. This causes the price to go down.

...Meanwhile, Back on the Home Front



2. [] The reason for a lot of arguments in the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s was the Vietnam War. People disagreed on whether it was a good war.

[] The two guys are fighting over the Vietnam war. It happened in the late 1960s and early 1970s.



4. [] The Virginia Plantation was self-sufficient. That means the plantation took care of its own needs. This can be seen by the fact that it has all different shops on it like a bakery and a blacksmith and a school.

[] Part of the reason that the plantations in Virginia were independent was that it was so far to go to get to towns. Another reason was that it was cheaper to do all this stuff for themselves.

3.	
<p>The Declaration of Independence (1776)</p> <p>... We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.—That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, . . .</p>	<p>The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments (1848)</p> <p>... We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, . . .</p>
4. [] The people who wrote these documents believed that everyone should be equal and that people have the right to get rid of a government that does not respect their natural rights.	
[] Both of these documents have the idea that we are all born with certain natural rights and that governments should respect those rights or we can get rid of the government. The Seneca Falls one is different because it specifically mentions women.	

Photograph A



Photograph B



5. [] The two photographs show the transformation many Native American children had to go through during the late 1800s. This was because many well-meaning whites were trying to change them. They wanted them to become more like whites and to abandon their old traditions.

[] In the first picture, the boys look like Indians. In the second picture, the boys look like whites.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT DBQ ESSAYS!

One of the most common errors in writing Document-based essays is to try to summarize each document in a paragraph. To avoid this mistake, plan your essay first. The documents always go with one of the tasks. Associate the documents with each task then treat each task as a separate paragraph.

Browse the documents even before reading them deeply to associate them with a task.

Each task is a paragraph.

Choose the documents to include.

Historical Context: Throughout history, many nations have attempted to change their economic systems with mixed results.

Task: Using information from the documents and your knowledge of global history, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B essay, in which you will be asked to:

- Discuss a way in which two nations have attempted to bring about economic reform over time and describe the economic system that was in place before the change.
- Evaluate the impact of the economic reform in each nation.

Historical Context: The French Revolution (1789-1814), which included Napoleon's reign, is considered a major turning point in world history. This revolution led to major changes in France and other nations and regions of the world.

Task: Using information from the documents and your knowledge of global history, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B essay, in which you will be asked to:

- Discuss the political, economic, **and/or** social causes of the French Revolution.
- Discuss how the French Revolution affected the people of France.
- Discuss one impact the French Revolution had on the world outside France.

Historical Context: Throughout history, different economic systems have influenced specific nations, regions, and peoples. These systems include **mercantilism** during the Middle Ages in Western Europe, **mercantilism** during the Age of Exploration, and **communism** in post-World War II China.

Task: Using the information from the documents and your knowledge of global history, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B essay, in which you will be asked to:

- Choose **two** of the economic systems mentioned in the historical context and for each:
- Describe the characteristics of the economic system.
- Discuss the impact of the economic system on a specific nation or region or a group of people.

Persuasive Writing: The “Hook” Sentence

The hook gets the reader interested. It’s an important part of opening a persuasive essay. Some good openings could be:

- Unusual Detail
- Strong Statement
- Quotation
- Anecdote
- Statistic
- Question
- Exaggeration or outrageous statement

Exercise 6: Create a strong hook sentence for each of these topics

1. Kids should be allowed to wear hats in the classroom.
2. Kids should be allowed to vote.
3. All cars should be banned and everyone should ride bicycles.

Rubrics: Defining the BEST of each essay type

Thematic Essay

- Thoroughly develops all aspects of the task evenly and in depth
- Is more analytical than descriptive (analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Richly supports the theme with many relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme

Document-Based Essay

- Thoroughly develops all aspects of the task evenly and in depth
- Is more analytical than descriptive (analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Incorporates relevant information from at least “half plus one” documents
- Incorporates substantial relevant outside information
- Richly supports the theme with many relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme

Persuasive Essay

- There are at least two strong reasons explained here and they are very convincing in support of the writer’s position.
- Strong, clear, fair rebuttal.
- The amount of detail and depth of explanation show you really know this subject very well.
- This essay is very well organized. The introduction has a good “hook”. The conclusion is strong.

©2010 David Jones. All Rights Reserved.
*Document may be copied and distributed, but
not edited and must retain this notice.*