

The New York State  
Education Department  
Demystifying the Holistic Scoring Process in  
Social Studies:

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Regents Examinations in  
Global History and Geography  
and United States History and  
Government

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University of the  
State of New York  
State Education  
Department

# The Six Primary Scoring Criteria for the Commencement-Level Document Based Question (DBQ)

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The extent to which students

- develop the task
- utilize higher level thinking skills
- use the information provided in the documents
- incorporate relevant outside information in the DBQ essay
- support ideas with facts, examples, and details
- organize and develop a social studies essay

# No one bullet can hold a particular score point hostage

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Therefore issues such as those below cannot be viewed as absolutes:

- the number of documents used,
  - minor errors in the essay,
  - the lack of outside information used in the essay,
  - the copying of some information directly from the documents, or
  - the lack of an introduction and/or conclusion
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# Number of Documents

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Can a paper still be given a score of 5 when clearly the student did not use the minimum number of documents required?

- Yes, because it is only one of the criteria on which you base a score. If fewer than the minimum number of documents are used and all other criteria of a 5 are met, then you may have a 5 paper. However, when fewer than the minimum number of documents are used, you often have other criteria that are not being met, and thus you usually end up with a 2, 3, or 4 paper.
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- An example can be found on the January 2006 United States History and Government DBQ. The level 4B paper uses 4 documents, instead of the minimum number of 5 documents. This can be found online at:  
<http://www.nysedregents.org/USHistoryGov/20060126scoringkey.pdf>
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# Minor Errors

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# Can a paper be given a score of 4 or 5 if it contains a minor error or two?

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- If the paper clearly demonstrates that the student understood the task and meets the criteria for a score of 4 or 5 on the test specific rubric, then, the paper can be given that score.
  - A paper does not have to be “perfect” to reach a score of 4 or 5.
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- An example can be found on the August 2007 United States History and Government DBQ level 4B paper. In this paper, the student states that the McCormick harvesting machine was the first tractor. This can be found online at: <http://www.nysedregents.org/USHistoryGov/20070816scoringkey.pdf>
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# Outside Information

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# How does “outside information” fit into the overall scoring of the essay?

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- The 4<sup>th</sup> bullet must not be overemphasized in the scoring.
  - A response may receive a 3 without outside information.
  - However, a response with outside information is not automatically a 3.
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- The quantity and quality of the outside information, the relevance of the outside information to the topic, and how it has been integrated into the essay should be used when determining the score of a response.
  - Often outside information can improve the overall essay when it is used to make historical connections and show analytical thinking.
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- All papers need to be evaluated based on the rubric. If the paper demonstrates that the student minimally develops the task, is primarily descriptive with weak or isolated information, has a general plan of organization, and includes outside information, the paper is probably more of a 2 than a 3.
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- An example of a level 3 response that uses no outside information can be found on the June 2004 Global History and Geography DBQ, level 3C paper. This can be found online at:  
<http://www.nysedregents.org/GlobalHistoryGeography/20040617scoringkey.pdf>
  - An example of a level 2 response that uses outside information can be found on the June 2005 United States History and Government DBQ, level 2B paper. This can be found online at:  
<http://www.nysedregents.org/USHistoryGov/20050621scoringkey.pdf>
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# Copying Document Information

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How should you rate a DBQ essay when most of the response is copied directly from the documents and little or no original work is provided?

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- A distinction needs to be made between paraphrased or copied information that is used to support a specific idea within the essay (an appropriate social studies skill) and the outright copying of information from the documents in an attempted response to the DBQ.
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- Generally, when most of the information is copied directly from the documents without adding anything, the response will be rated between a 0 and a 2.
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## The revised generic rubrics for the Global and USHG exams address this issue

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- Score of 2: “or consists primarily of relevant information copied from the documents”
  - Score of 1: “or consists primarily of relevant and irrelevant information copied from the documents”
  - Score of 0: “includes only entire documents copied from the test booklet”
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The actual score will depend on three things:

- 1) the degree or extent to which the response has been copied,
  - 2) the selection of what specific content the student chose to copy for inclusion, and
  - 3) how the student integrated the copied material into the response.
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Can a paper still be given a score of 5 or 4 when some information is copied from the documents?

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- An example of a level 4 response where the student selectively copied information from documents as well as included good historical outside information to interpret the documents can be found on the January 2006 United States History and Government DBQ, level 4C paper. This can be found online at:  
<http://www.nysedregents.org/USHistoryGov/20060126scoringkey.pdf>
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# What criteria helps define a score of 5?

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- A 5 paper shows evaluation and/or analysis.
- It requires substantial outside information that is well integrated into the response.
- It contains historically accurate information.
- Document information is used to support the thesis of the response and is interwoven with outside information.
- It is cohesive and thoroughly developed.

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- A 5 is not a 5 just because it is the best response that exists out of all the responses being graded.
  - A well-written response that contains numerous historical inaccuracies or repeats information over and over again is usually not a level 5 paper.
  - The response needs to meet the criteria established by the rubric. On occasion, a particular essay question may have no papers at level 5.
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# What often distinguishes a level 4 paper from a level 3 paper?

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- A 4 paper is both analytic and descriptive.
  - It addresses all aspects of the task but may do so unevenly.
  - It requires outside information that is integrated into the response.
  - It contains historically accurate information.
  - Document information is used to support the thesis of the response and is interwoven with outside information.
  - It is well developed.
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- A 3 paper is more descriptive than analytic.
  - It usually contains some outside information but it may not be well integrated.
  - It contains supporting facts and details, but may also have some minor inaccuracies.
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# What often distinguishes a level 3 paper from a level 2 paper?

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- A level 3 response contains more explanatory statements and specific details than a level 2 response. In a DBQ, the documents are used to support the thesis of the essay.
  - A level 3 response should include outside information, but it may not. However, most solid level 3 papers do include outside information.
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- A level 2 response tends to have broad general statements.
  - Use of supporting information and information from the documents is limited.
  - Note: While a level 2 paper is not required to include outside information, it may contain some.
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# What most often distinguishes a 0 paper from a level 1 paper?

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- If a response is solely comprised of information copied from the documents and the historical context without any information provided by the student or accurately interpreted by the student, then the response is probably a 0.
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- A level 1 paper is **NOT** a paper in which the student simply “attempted” an answer. It must have some appropriate, original information.
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# Generic Scoring Rubrics by Bullet

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- Continuity of Score Points
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# Reminder:

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- The rubrics define a set of scores on a continuum between 0 and 5. A standards-based assessment system measures where the student falls on that continuum.
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# Scoring Related Questions

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# Issues Related to Scaffolding Questions

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How should you rate an open-ended question when the question asks for two reasons and the student writes two answers on the first line and a third answer on the second line, but one of the answers on the first line is incorrect?

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- The general rule of thumb is that a rater cannot go searching for a correct answer. Disregarding incorrect information to get to a correct answer is not acceptable.
  - The order in which correct and incorrect answers appear on the lines matters.
  - The first two answers should be rated, even if they are on the same line.
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# Issues Related to the DBQ Essay Task

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How do you rate an essay where the task asks a student to write about two items in the historical context and the response includes discussion of three items?

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- In this situation, only the first two items that appear in the response can be evaluated. A rater cannot search the response to determine which of the three items the student wrote about were strongest. The rater must use the test specific rubric and must focus on information related to the first two items as they appear within the student response.
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- However, there may be a situation where a student has appropriately applied information about the third item in a discussion on item one or item two. In this case, if the applied information supports the discussion, it should be considered when rating the overall response.
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# Other Related Questions

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# Why do some of the DBQ or Thematic essays use the phrase and/or within the question?

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- SED has been using the phrase and/or on social studies essay questions since 1990.
  - The use of and/or benefits students by broadening the scope of acceptable answers and providing a choice of content within the essay.
  - It allows the rater to accept the broadest range of student answers as directed by the content-specific scoring rubric.
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**EXAMPLE:** Discuss the political, social, and/or economic causes for the Russian Revolution.

By wording the question this way, a teacher can accept a response that discusses any combination of causes. If the task said “and,” the student would have to discuss one correct cause from each category. If the task said “or,” the student would have to focus on one type of cause only and a rater could not give credit for information on a different type of cause.

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How do raters know how many examples a student should provide when responding to a particular DBQ or Thematic essay task?

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- Look for the “**S**”, the plural. This indicates that two or more examples must be provided. However, in the case of a DBQ, a student must also use a minimum number of documents in his/her response and support the essay with as many facts, examples, and details as he/she can. Thus, having more examples usually improves the essay.
  - Collectively, the DBQ documents will always provide multiple examples.
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- If only one cause or impact is asked for, it will usually be phrased "**a**" or "**one**".
  - Example: **a** cause of... or **one** cause of...
  - In general, teachers should teach their students to use as many examples as they can. It adds detail to the essay. It helps show the student's knowledge.
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# Other Scoring Notes

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# A Note About DBQ Scaffolding Questions

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- While there will always be a mix of easy and hard questions in the scaffolding, these questions will not always measure just the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy or the most basic social studies skills.
  - Instructing students that their answers can **always** be taken **directly** from the document can, in many instances, be counterproductive.
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# In Global History, can we rate essay responses in which students wrote about the United States?

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- Many topics in Global and U.S. History are intertwined. (The Cold War, The Middle East, etc.)
  - Not all essays will automatically exclude the use of information on the U.S. as part of an acceptable answer.
  - An example of this can be found on the January 2005 Global History and Geography thematic essay. This can be found online at: <http://www.nysedregents.org/GlobalHistoryGeography/20050127scoringkey.pdf>
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# Your input is important

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- Feedback on State examinations is very important to the test development process. This can be done by completing our online Teacher Evaluation Forms at:  
[www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/teacher/evaluation.html](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/teacher/evaluation.html)
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For questions when scoring an actual exam  
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