

## Writing in the Social Studies Pre-AP\*/AP\* Class

Differences between the regular social studies class and one of the Pre-AP\*/AP\* variety show up in several ways, but perhaps nowhere more vividly than in writing. Being able to express the depth and complexity of ideas in writing is one of the hallmarks of a successful AP student, and a requirement for success on most AP exams. Writing in a Pre-AP/AP social studies class is most closely related to the “persuasive” or “argumentative” paper in an English class; the student not only needs a good narrative but also must think analytically to “prove” the thesis and properly address the question.

The best Pre-AP/AP writing assignments ask students to combine elements of the narrative essay and the analytical essay. A narrative essay calls upon the writer to relate and explain some historical/social event in a clear and coherent manner. In many social studies courses, narrative assignments will take the form of research papers asking students to consult a variety of primary and secondary sources in order to examine a historical event/idea/person/era in detail. For instance, a teacher might ask students to describe how the U.S. was led, from 1914 to 1917, to a decision to enter World War I, directing the students to read a textbook section and a set of primary documents (e.g., a piece of British propaganda about German conduct in Belgium, the Zimmermann Telegram, and Woodrow Wilson’s speech to Congress in April 1917).

What is essential in the Pre-AP/AP class is that, starting early in the course, students be asked regularly to move beyond this purely narrative task to analysis. An analytical essay asks students to look at historical events, phenomena, or sources, and evaluate them in a critical manner. For example, using the same materials described in the preceding paragraph, you might ask students to determine the most important motivating factor behind Woodrow Wilson’s decision to ask Congress to declare war. In grading this prompt, teachers will give a low score to a paper that merely “tells a story.” Even if the paper describes the events accurately and clearly, it will not have done the job if it does not also evaluate the story and make a convincing case for the primacy of one factor over another. By the same token, though, a paper will not be convincing if it is all analysis with no narrative. As you stress the need for analysis, be careful that students do not get the mistaken idea that because these are “opinion” questions they do not really need to know anything. They must ground their analysis in an understanding and clear presentation of the factual context and sequence of events.

There are numerous types of prompts that require students to engage in the necessary combination of narration and analysis. Studying the released AP tests in your subject area is probably the best way to get ideas for types and formats of questions to give your students. The following, though, are some good general suggestions.

- ***Change over time:*** What social, political, economic, or psychological changes happened between two or more points or time, what caused the changes, and what were the effects of these changes?

Examples:

- > How did the U.S. steel industry change between 1870 and 1920 and why?
- > Why did family size among members of the white middle class decline during the 19th century?

- ***Continuity over time:*** The opposite side of the coin—explaining why something did not change over time—also compels good analysis.

Example:

> Why did a patriarchal family structure survive the Industrial Revolution in Europe?

- **Cause and effect:** Good historians continually probe the causes and effects of the events and phenomena they are investigating. In lower grades these questions might be quite broad: “What caused the Civil War?” or “What was the effect of industrialization on the family?” As students move along the Pre-AP path and gain sophistication, questions should be narrowed considerably.

Examples:

> What role did the party system play in the coming of the Civil War?

> How did the gendered division of labor affect the development of the shoe industry in Lynn, Massachusetts?

- **Compare and contrast:** Comparing and contrasting is one of the best ways to develop a historical/philosophical point. The student might compare the current subject of study to predecessors in the same place, or other groups in that society, or to similarly situated people in other societies.

Examples:

> In what ways was the American expansionism of the 1890s similar to and different from that of the 1840s?

> How were the beliefs and situation of the French bourgeoisie in 1789 different from and similar to those of the American colonists who rebelled against Great Britain in 1776?

- **Placement on a spectrum:** An extension of compare-and-contrast analysis involves asking the student to assess a label for an event or movement by comparing it to others and explaining the key differences between them. It also helps students become familiar and comfortable with labels they will encounter regularly in future AP courses.

Example:

> To what extent did the New Deal represent a liberal solution to the problems of the Great Depression?

- **Evaluating success:** Asking students to gauge the success of a program or policy necessitates narration (what problems led up to it, what happened afterward) and analysis (whether the program can be credited with solving the problems).

Example:

> To what extent did the Articles of Confederation provide an effective form of government for the newly independent United States?

## **The Social Studies Essay**

An essay in social studies begins with a thesis. The thesis encompasses the main point(s), or “argument,” that the student intends to prove throughout the essay. Writers must ask themselves: “What do I want my reader to believe about this topic?” This will be their thesis. Without a thesis that is clear and that takes a position, it is very difficult for a student’s subsequent discussion in the essay to be properly analytical. The thesis guides the entire essay, as the student should continually be looking back and asking, “Am I proving my thesis?”

As a Pre-AP teacher, don’t shortchange the task of helping students specifically with thesis writing; if you go on to the bigger task of writing a complete essay before the student is consistently writing good thesis statements, you will find yourself battling a dozen other problems in the essay that all stem from a weak thesis. The biggest step in learning to write a good thesis statement is to completely understand the question. You should take time with your students to teach them how to take a question apart and look at what it is actually asking them to do.

Closely following the thesis should be the essay’s main points, each of which should: (1) clearly answer the question, and (2) clearly be supportive of the thesis. The student should put these main points up front in the essay (preferably in the opening paragraph), to let the reader know what he is going to do in the essay. Each of the major points should have its own paragraph, usually consisting of a topic sentence telling what the paragraph will prove, evidence supporting the main idea, and a conclusion telling the reader what he should have learned from the paragraph.

A good historical essay, therefore, is built on the evidence. While students may have opinions about the subject, they must present factual information to persuade the reader that the thesis is valid and that it answers the question. Properly using evidence from primary and secondary sources is an essential skill for the Pre-AP/AP student. Although at this level students are not expected to discover new knowledge, a good essay will do more than just regurgitate information. Students may be accustomed to simply sticking pieces of information from different sources together and receiving a good grade. In your Pre-AP class, they need to learn that a good essay uses information to support ideas. Teach students not to give information simply because they find it interesting; if it does not help them prove the point of the paragraph, it should not be in the essay.

Each paragraph should flow logically from the preceding one. When moving from one idea to the other, a student should let the reader know how they are related to each other and/or how the next point they are going to make is related to the main thesis.

Good essays always put their subject(s) into context. What was the general situation in that society at that time that helps us better understand why the person or a group of people whom you are studying acted as they did? How are the influences of earlier movements evident in what you are describing?

Finally, students should take contradictory evidence into account in their essays. Historical facts are seldom “cut and dry,” and the essay should demonstrate that the student appreciates this. The writer should acknowledge arguments or information that go against the thesis, and, if possible, should rebut them. In any event, the essay should make the case that, despite the contradictory evidence, the majority of the evidence supports the student’s viewpoint in the thesis. This last point often distinguishes a good essay from an excellent essay.

See the College Board's course description for U.S. history, European history, and world history for descriptions of AP essay tasks (analyze, assess/evaluate, compare, contrast, describe, discuss, explain) in answering free-response questions:

## Essay Writing

# Thesis

Answer – Analyze - Introduce

Topic Sentence  
Supporting Facts  
Clincher/Link

Topic Sentence  
Supporting Facts  
Clincher/Link

## Essay Writing

Fold paper in half lengthwise, then in thirds crosswise to get 2 columns with 3 squares each. Provide students with the instructions for filling in their fold-up essay exercises.

<p><u>Prompt</u> Copy and underline tasks</p>	<p><u>Thesis</u> 1. Answer 2. Interpret/Analyze 3. Introduce topics     A.     B.     C.</p>
<p><u>Body Paragraph 1</u> Topic sentence     Link topic to thesis     Show analysis Supporting Facts:     •     • Link to thesis/clincher</p>	<p><u>Body Paragraph 2</u> Topic sentence     Link topic to thesis     Show analysis Supporting Facts:     •     • Link to thesis/clincher</p>
<p><u>Body Paragraph 3</u> Topic sentence     Link topic to thesis     Show analysis Supporting Facts:     •     • Link to thesis/clincher</p>	<p><u>Conclusion or Paragraph 4</u> Topic sentence     Link topic to thesis     Show analysis Supporting Facts:     •     • Link to thesis/clincher</p>

## Essay Frame

Prompt:

Thesis – Respond to the prompt, demonstrate analysis, introduce major topics

Body Paragraph 1 Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic sentence: must link to thesis, show analysis, state topic.

Supporting factual information

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Clincher/link to thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Body Paragraph 2 Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic sentence: must link to thesis, show analysis, state topic.

Supporting factual information

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Clincher/link to thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Body Paragraph 3 Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic sentence: must link to thesis, show analysis, state topic.

Supporting factual information

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Clincher/link to thesis: \_\_\_\_\_



Suggested Progression of Writing Skills	World Cultures	Texas History	Pre-AP U.S. History	Pre-AP World Geography/APHG	AP World or European History	AP U.S. History	AP Gov/AP Eco/AP Psych
<i>Practice different types of writings such as essays, position papers, case studies, compare/contrast writing, cause/effect topics, and change-over-time essays. All disciplines should write 3-5 paragraph essays.</i>							
<b>Document-Based Question-</b> Number and depth of primary source documents: <b>For strategies see the skills matrix.</b>	2 as a minimum	2-4 of varying types of writing, photographs, or cartoons	4-5 of varying types with greater complexity	4-5 varying types, more complex and to include thematic maps	6-7 with variety and greater complexity	8-12 with greater variety and complexity	8-12 with greater variety and complexity
<b>Application of Knowledge Writing-</b> Introduce and develop strategies necessary to practice higher-level thinking skills to include analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. With the posing of a thoughtful question, students use theories and specific knowledge to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate new ideas</li> <li>• Hypothesize about future</li> <li>• Analyze historical events</li> <li>• Predict trends</li> <li>• Identify cause/effect sequencing</li> <li>• Analyze case studies and current data</li> </ul>						
Suggested number of formal writing assignments-  practice of writing process should be untimed  Timed writing strategies should be practiced as student progresses with skills	2-3 per semester	3-4 per semester	4-5 per semester	5-6 per semester	3-5 per semester using greater depth and complexity in writing skills using specific free-response and DBQ formats	5-7 per semester using specified AP free-response and DBQ formats	6-8 per semester using specified AP free-response formats
<b>Assessment Guidelines-</b> Measure of student progress should be held to a standard that is appropriate to course level and student experience in the writing process. Minimum guidelines should be established and student success ranked from fully accomplishing goals of assignment to not accomplishing goals of assignment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic sentence</li> <li>• Supporting statements/evidence</li> <li>• Addresses all elements of the assignment</li> <li>• Conclusion</li> </ul>	Emphasize point of view/bias	Thesis supported with factual data from multiple sources and demonstration of knowledge of topic; Extension and elaboration of topic; Emphasize conflicting point of view, style and tone, locate and identify primary and secondary sources; Analyze, categorize documents; Emphasize evaluation and synthesis	Cite sources in essay with appropriate documentation	Continue suggested guidelines with a focus on specific course guidelines for AP Exams provided by College Board and "Acorn" book. Refer to College Board Website for further guidelines.	Continue suggested guidelines with a focus on specific course guidelines for AP Exams provided by College Board and "Acorn" book. Refer to College Board Website for further guidelines.	Continue suggested guidelines with a focus on specific course guidelines for AP Exams provided by College Board and "Acorn" book. Refer to College Board Website for further guidelines.
<b>Scoring Guidelines:</b> It is strongly suggested that instructors use a scoring rubric to evaluate student writing. A rubric will allow for subjective assessment without bias and prepare students for the rigor of evaluation on AP Exams.	Demonstrate rubric scoring to students. Initially, rubrics should be simple, allowing for great variety in student response. Structure and factual information presented should be considered.	Demonstrate rubric scoring to students. As student experience increases, greater depth and complexity should be awarded credit.	Demonstrate rubric scoring to students. As student experience increases, great depth and complexity should be awarded credit.	Demonstrate rubric scoring to students. See sample AP exams for scoring guidelines.	Demonstrate rubric scoring to students. See sample AP exams for scoring guidelines.	Demonstrate rubric scoring to students. See sample AP exams for scoring guidelines.	Demonstrate rubric scoring to students. See sample AP exams for scoring guidelines.

## Writing in the Social Studies Pre-AP\*/AP\* Class

<b>Grading Rubric for Pre-AP* Level I:</b> Describe how the Louisiana Purchase affected national unity.	<b>Pre AP* Level II:</b> Describe how the Louisiana Purchase and the Mexican Cession affected national unity.	<b>AP* Level:</b> Discuss the impact of territorial expansion on national unity between 1800-1850.
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear organization within the paragraph</li> <li>• Broad, inclusive topic and concluding sentences</li> <li>• Numerous correct and relevant examples</li> <li>• Age-appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• Thoughtful age-appropriate analysis of how               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May contain minor grammatical/factual errors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear organization between and/or within paragraphs</li> <li>• Excellent structure: introduction, body, conclusion</li> <li>• Clear thesis</li> <li>• Sufficient, accurate, and relevant evidence</li> <li>• Varied and age-appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• Thoughtful age-appropriate analysis of how               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May contain minor grammatical/factual errors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contains a clear, well developed thesis that addresses impact on unity</li> <li>• Understands complexity of question, including clear grasp of impact; addresses both unity and disunity in depth, or one in significant depth</li> <li>• Effectively analyzes the impact of territorial expansion</li> <li>• Supports thesis with substantial, relevant information spanning the time period</li> <li>• May contain minor errors</li> </ul>
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>5-7</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptable organization within paragraph</li> <li>• Acceptable topic and concluding sentences, possibly one too narrow in scope</li> <li>• Some correct and relevant examples</li> <li>• More often than not, age-appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• Acceptable age-appropriate attempt at analysis of how               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May contain grammatical/factual errors that do not weaken overall point</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptable organization between and/or within paragraphs</li> <li>• Acceptable structure</li> <li>• Clear, but not fully developed, thesis</li> <li>• Some accurate and relevant evidence</li> <li>• Age-appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• Acceptable attempt at age-appropriate analysis of how               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May contain grammatical/factual errors that do not undermine overall points</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contains a clear thesis with limited development or insufficient focus on impact</li> <li>• Limited understanding of complexity; some sense of impact on national unity; addresses unity and disunity in a general way, or one in depth               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited analysis; mostly describes territorial expansion</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Supports thesis with some factual information from the time period (1800-1850)</li> <li>• May contain minor errors that do not detract from the overall argument</li> </ul>
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>2-4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some organizational errors within the paragraph</li> <li>• Underdeveloped or absent topic and/or concluding sentences</li> <li>• Few correct and relevant examples</li> <li>• Limited age-appropriate analysis of how; mostly describes</li> <li>• May contain some major grammatical/factual errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization between and/or within paragraphs not entirely clear</li> <li>• Satisfactory structure; one or more elements missing or underdeveloped</li> <li>• Unclear or underdeveloped thesis statement</li> <li>• Limited accurate and relevant evidence</li> <li>• Limited age-appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• Limited age-appropriate analysis of how; mostly describes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May contain some major grammatical/factual errors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacks a thesis, or thesis is confused or undeveloped</li> <li>• Ignores complexity; may merely mention impact; addresses both unity and disunity in a superficial way, or one in a general way</li> <li>• Describes territorial expansion</li> <li>• Information provided is minimal, or lacks supporting information</li> <li>• May contain major errors</li> </ul>
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>0-1</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear organization within the paragraph</li> <li>• Underdeveloped or absent topic and concluding sentence</li> <li>• Minimal, if any, examples</li> <li>• Inappropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• No age-appropriate analysis</li> <li>• Numerous grammatical/factual errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear organization between and/or within paragraphs</li> <li>• Unacceptable structure</li> <li>• No thesis statement</li> <li>• Limited, if any, evidence</li> <li>• Inappropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• No analysis               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous major grammatical/factual errors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incompetent response</li> <li>• May simply paraphrase or restate the question</li> <li>• Shows little or no understanding of either the question or the time period</li> </ul>