

How To Write an A.P. U.S. History Thesis Statement

Almost all APUSH long essay or DBQ statements, no matter how complicated they may initially appear, can almost always be reduced to a single question. Your first step, after you have taken the time to quickly write down all the outside information you remember that concerns the topic presented, is to turn the assignment in to a specific question.

For example, the 2016 DBQ asked the students to “**Explain** the causes of the rise of a woman’s rights movement in the period 1940-1975.” This can easily be turned into a question that starts “**Why** did the woman’s rights movement...”

The 2016 Essay questions asked the students to “**Evaluate** the extent...”. This can easily be turned into a question that starts **Did** the

The answer to the question will become your thesis for your essay or DBQ

A good APUS opening paragraph thesis statement will usually express on main idea, provide an answer upon which people may disagree, and include your position.

SOME IMPORTANT THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND FOR YOUR THESIS

1. Remember that your thesis needs to show your conclusions about a subject.
2. The AP Readers need to be able to see that your essay has one main point.
3. Your thesis statement should indicate exactly what your essay is about, and help keep you on track

A thesis statement in APUSH is the position a student is going to take, the argument that is going to be made. It is therefore the answer to the question being asked. As such, the thesis statement is not a fact; it is an informed interpretation of the facts. Neither is the thesis statement just an opinion. Rather the thesis is the reasoned judgment of the student. Most APUSH questions allow for a range of possible answers. In other words, a continuum exists and students can generally feel free to choose a response along that continuum. However, students should avoid crafting an extreme response at either end of the continuum. Most questions require a response that is not black or white but instead some shade of gray. That does not mean, however, that students should attempt to respond in the middle of the continuum. Such an attempt usually results in a failure to articulate a clear position. Students should also beware of the fallacy of “positive response bias.” Unfortunately, many students are inclined to answer a question in the affirmative. Students always need to carefully weigh all of the historical evidence and then craft a response that best articulates their understanding of the historical record. In other words, students should not feel free to argue any side simply because they can reasonably support it. Instead, they should feel compelled to support the side with the most evidence behind it.

Examples of thesis statements:

Bad: *George Washington set many important precedents as president. This is a fact not a position.*

Good: *The precedents that Washington set as America’s first president greatly benefited the American political system. This is a clear position that can be supported or opposed.*

Weak: *The Revolutionary War brought about change in American society. This is technically a position but it is vague and not really debatable.*

Strong: *The Revolutionary War ushered in a slew of wide-ranging and permanent social changes in American society. This is a clear, strong, and debatable thesis.*

Sample Prompt:

Jacksonian Democrats viewed themselves as the guardians of the United States Constitution, political democracy, individual liberty, and equality of economic opportunity. In light of your knowledge of the following documents and your knowledge of the 1820's and 1830's, to what extent do you agree with the Jacksonians' view of themselves?

Types of Thesis Statements:

1. Direct: This is a straightforward statement that clearly and directly answers the question.

To a remarkable degree Jacksonian democrats succeeded in implementing their vision of American society.

2. Compound: Use this approach when trying to prove two main points. Use the word “and.”

Jacksonian democrats successfully portrayed themselves as guardians of American ideals and did indeed achieve a remarkable degree of success in protecting those ideals.

3. Split: This approach splits the thesis into several categories. In essence it combines the thesis statement with the plan of attack/themes of the essay. This works best when the prompt itself provides the essay categories.

To a large extent Jacksonian democrats were not effective guardians of the United States Constitution, political democracy, individual liberty, and equality of economic opportunity.

4. Complex-Direct: This type of thesis statement acknowledges that contrary evidence exists and addresses the complexity inherent in most essays prompts. A well executed complex thesis offers students the best opportunity to earn a high score. Key words such as “although” are helpful in constructing this type of thesis.

Although Jacksonian Democrats truly believed that they were the guardians of American ideals, their actions betrayed other priorities and rarely lived up to either their rhetoric or intentions.

5. Complex-Split: This approach splits the thesis into several categories, acknowledges that contrary evidence exists and tackles the complexity inherent in most APUSH essays.

Even though Jacksonian Democrats failed in their self-appointed roles as the guardians of the United States Constitution and individual liberty, they achieved great success in strengthening political democracy and the equality of economic opportunity.

OR

Although Jacksonian Democrats occasionally failed to successfully guard the United States Constitution, individual liberty, political democracy and equality of economic opportunity, overall their policies were quite effective in that regard.