

The essay rubric does not change from year to year, so it can be rehearsed. Below: a short-answer set, a long-essay opening scored line by line, and the DBQ components, with italic commentary naming the point each sentence earns.

The short-answer question

Three lettered parts, one point each, scored separately. Label them, answer in one or two sentences, give ONE specific piece of evidence per part.

I (a) Briefly describe ONE specific cause of the Protestant Reformation.

(a) The sale of indulgences by Johann Tetzel in Saxony to fund the rebuilding of St Peter's Basilica provoked Luther's Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, which attacked the claim that papal authority could remit the punishment due for sin.

Commentary: Named person, place, date, document. 'The Church was corrupt' is an assertion, not a described cause.

I (b) Briefly explain ONE way printing affected the spread of the Reformation.

(b) Movable-type printing allowed Luther's vernacular pamphlets to be reproduced in tens of thousands of copies within months, which meant reformist arguments reached literate townspeople directly and could not be suppressed by controlling a small number of manuscript copies.

Commentary: 'Which meant ...' carries the explanation. An EXPLAIN part without a causal clause almost never scores.

I (c) Briefly explain ONE way a European ruler responded to the Reformation.

(c) Charles V responded by summoning the Diet of Worms in 1521 and issuing its edict declaring Luther an outlaw – an attempt to use imperial authority that failed because German princes such as Frederick the Wise sheltered him, exposing the limits of Habsburg power over the territorial states.

Commentary: The response AND its outcome. Stopping at 'he condemned Luther' describes without explaining.

The long essay – opening paragraph

I Evaluate the extent to which the French Revolution transformed European political culture in the period 1789–1815.

The French Revolution transformed European political culture by establishing that sovereignty derived from the nation rather than from dynastic right, a principle that survived the restoration of monarchy in 1815 because it had been carried across the continent by conscript armies and codified law; even where the old rulers returned, they governed populations that had learned to think of themselves as citizens rather than subjects.

Commentary: THESIS: a defensible claim plus the line of reasoning that will organise the essay.

Commentary: The second half concedes the restoration and then explains why the transformation held anyway – that is evaluation, and it seeds the complexity point.

Commentary: Contextualisation is separate and comes before this: describe the ancien régime order briefly, then narrow to the prompt.

The document-based question

Seven points: thesis, contextualisation, three documents used as evidence (rising to six for the second point), evidence beyond the documents, sourcing three documents, and complexity.

I How to source a document for the point.

Document 4 is a memorandum written by Metternich for the Austrian emperor, not for publication. Because its purpose was to persuade a monarch that concession would be fatal, it presents liberal demands in their most threatening form – so it is strong evidence of how conservative statesmen understood the danger, and weak evidence of what liberals actually sought.

Commentary: Purpose, audience and the effect on the evidence. Identifying the author alone is not sourcing.

Commentary: Ending with what the document IS good evidence for is the half candidates leave out.