

Every point on this exam is won or lost on the same rubric, and almost every lost point is evidence that was never connected to an argument. The × line is what students write; the ✓ line is what earns the point.

The rubric – thesis, context, evidence, reasoning

✗ Writing a thesis that rephrases the prompt.

✓ **Take a defensible position that someone could argue against, and establish a line of reasoning.**

The guidelines list restating the prompt among the responses that do not earn the thesis point.

SG 5 years

✗ Splitting the thesis between the introduction and the conclusion.

✓ **Put it in one place – one or more sentences together, in the introduction or the conclusion.**

The rubric requires the thesis to consist of one or more sentences located in ONE place.

SG 3 years

✗ Opening with a sentence of background and calling it contextualisation.

✓ **Describe a broader development before, during or after the prompt's timeframe, in several sentences.**

The guidelines state the context must be more than a phrase or a reference, and reject overgeneralised statements about the period.

SG 5 years

✗ Naming an event and moving on – 'Ottoman armies used cannons'.

✓ **Say what it shows: name the evidence, then explain how it supports your argument.**

The guidelines give exactly this kind of sentence as an example that does NOT earn the point, because there is no reasoning.

SG 4 years

✗ Offering one piece of evidence and developing it.

✓ **Use at least two specific pieces, and more for the higher points.**

Identifying a single piece of evidence is listed among the responses that do not earn points.

SG 4 years

✗ Using evidence from outside the prompt's date range.

✓ **Stay inside the years the prompt names; use earlier or later material only as context.**

The guidelines reject evidence outside the timeframe as irrelevant to an argument about the prompt.

SG 4 years

✗ Adding a final sentence that mentions another perspective.

✓ **Build the complexity into the argument – qualify it, corroborate it, or weigh a counter-view as you go.**

The guidelines state repeatedly that complex understanding must be part of the argument and more than a phrase or reference.

SG 5 years

■ The rubric points are independent: a response can earn evidence without earning the thesis. Never abandon a section because an earlier one went badly.

SG 5 years

The document-based question

✗ Walking through the documents one at a time, in order.

✓ **Group them by the argument they support, and cite them inside your own paragraphs.**

A document-by-document answer offers no reasoning connecting the evidence to an argument, which is what the rubric awards.

SG 4 years

✗ Using two or three documents thoroughly.

✓ **Use at least three for the first point, and attempt all seven for the top one.**

The guidelines state that using fewer than three earns nothing, and that the complexity point requires an attempt to use all seven in support of an argument.

SG 4 years

✗ Quoting a document at length instead of explaining it.

✓ **Say what it shows and why that supports your claim.**

Quoting the content without interpretation is listed among the responses that do not earn the point.

SG 4 years

✗ Naming the author and the date and calling it sourcing.

✓ **Explain how the point of view, purpose, situation or audience affects the document's argument.**

The guidelines reject identification alone: sourcing must explain the relevance of that attribute.

SG 5 years

✗ Sourcing one document well.

✓ **Source at least two, and preferably three.**

Explaining sourcing for fewer than two documents is listed among the responses that do not earn the point.

SG 5 years

✗ Restating what a document says as your outside evidence.

✓ **Bring in something specific and relevant that no document mentions.**

Evidence a document already provides cannot serve as the additional evidence the rubric asks for.

SG 4 years

Reading the prompt

✗ Answering only the change half of a continuity-and-change prompt.

✓ **Address both, explicitly, and say which mattered more.**

A thesis that does not address all parts of the question does not earn the point.

SG 3 years

✗ Describing where the verb was EXPLAIN.

✓ **Give the causal connection: not what happened, but why it followed.**

The task verbs are defined in the rubric, and answering a different one earns nothing.

“ ”

SG 5 years

✗ Treating a label – feudalism, absolutism, modernisation – as an explanation.

✓ **Say what people or institutions actually did, then name the pattern if it helps.**

A model asserted as a fact provides no reasoning connecting evidence to an argument.

SG 3 years

✗ Reusing the same example in two parts of a short-answer question.

✓ **Use a different one for each part.**

The rubric expects distinct evidence for each part, and a repeated example earns only once.

SG 3 years

✗ Inferring cause from sequence – ‘this happened, then that, so it caused it’.

✓ **Name the mechanism by which one development produced the other.**

Asserting the use of a reasoning process without demonstrating it is listed among the responses that do not earn points.

SG 3 years

■ Historical accuracy is required throughout. The rubrics state that the components require students to demonstrate historically defensible content.

SG 5 years

2 · Period 2: 1607–1754

1607–1754

✗ Treating the thirteen colonies as one society with one economy.

✓ **Distinguish them: New England towns and shipping, the mid-Atlantic’s mixed farming and diversity, the Chesapeake and Southern plantation economies.**

A generalisation about the colonies cannot be historically defensible evidence, which the rubric requires.

CED 2.3

✗ Describing the Atlantic slave trade only as forced migration.

✓ **Connect it to the plantation economy it supplied and the racial slave codes that followed.**

Evidence with no reasoning connecting it to an argument is the commonest way a correct fact earns nothing.

CED 2.6

3 • Period 3: 1754–1800

1754–1800

✗ Explaining the Revolution as a reaction to taxes alone.

✓ **Add the constitutional argument about representation and consent, and the ideas colonists took from the Enlightenment.**

A single-cause explanation cannot demonstrate the complex understanding the top point requires.

CED 3.4

✗ Writing about the Constitution without the Articles of Confederation.

✓ **Say what the Articles could not do – tax, regulate trade, put down Shays’s Rebellion – and how the Constitution answered it.**

The causal mechanism is what turns the fact into evidence for an argument.

« »

CED 3.9

5 • Period 5: 1844–1877

1844–1877

✗ Saying the Civil War was caused by states’ rights, without saying rights to do what.

✓ **Name it: the expansion of slavery into the territories was the issue every compromise failed to settle.**

An unqualified label is the kind of assertion the rubric declines to credit as reasoning.

CED 5.4

✗ Ending Reconstruction at 1877 with no account of what changed.

✓ **Weigh the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments against sharecropping, Black Codes and disenfranchisement.**

Considering both the change and its limits is exactly the qualification the complexity point rewards.

CED 5.10

7 • Period 7: 1890–1945

1890–1945

✗ Describing the New Deal as ending the Depression.

✓ **Distinguish relief, recovery and reform, and note that full recovery came with wartime production.**

An overstated claim is not historically defensible, and the qualification is where the complexity point sits.

CED 7.10

✗ Treating the two world wars as the same kind of American involvement.

✓ **Contrast them: late entry and rejection of the League after 1918, against total mobilisation and postwar leadership after 1945.**

A comparison that names the difference is the reasoning process the rubric asks for.

CED 7.12

8 · Period 8: 1945–1980

1945–1980

✗ Describing the civil rights movement as one campaign with one leader.

✓ **Distinguish the legal strategy, mass nonviolent protest, federal legislation, and later Black Power critiques.**

Diverse perspectives within a movement are what the complexity point is looking for.

CED 8.9

✗ Explaining the Cold War only through Soviet actions.

✓ **Give both sides' aims and fears, and how containment shaped domestic policy too.**

Considering alternative views is one of the named routes to the complexity point.

CED 8.2

9 · Period 9: 1980–Present

1980

✗ Writing about recent decades in general terms because the period feels close.

✓ **Use specific evidence – a named act, election, court case or economic shift.**

The evidence point requires specifics whatever the period, and this is the period where responses most often generalise.

CED 9.2

■ Period 1 and Period 9 each carry few questions but appear as context. Knowing one specific development in each is cheap insurance for the contextualisation point.

CED 1.1