

Three answers written so a reader can see each rubric point land: a short-answer set, a long-essay opening, and the document-based question's scored components. The commentary in italics names the point each sentence earns.

The short-answer question

Three lettered parts, each scored separately. Label them (a), (b), (c), answer in one or two sentences, and give ONE specific piece of evidence per part. No thesis, no introduction, no conclusion.

I (a) Briefly describe ONE specific historical development that contributed to the growth of sectional tension between 1820 and 1850.

(a) The Compromise of 1850 admitted California as a free state while enacting a stronger Fugitive Slave Act, which required officials and citizens in free states to assist in returning escaped enslaved people.

Named, dated and specific. 'There were arguments over slavery' describes nothing and earns nothing.

One development, not three. Listing several risks a contradiction and cannot earn more than the one point available.

I (b) Briefly explain ONE way that development increased sectional tension.

(b) The Fugitive Slave Act increased tension because it forced Northerners to participate directly in enforcing slavery, which turned an institution many had regarded as a distant Southern matter into a local legal obligation and drove support for personal liberty laws and the new Republican Party.

The word 'because' is doing the work. An EXPLAIN part with no causal connective almost never earns the point.

The chain runs to a named consequence – personal liberty laws, the Republican Party – rather than stopping at 'people were angry'.

I (c) Briefly explain ONE way that a different group responded to that development.

(c) Free Black communities in Northern cities responded by forming vigilance committees, such as those in Boston and Philadelphia, which warned of slave catchers and physically resisted seizures – a response that made enforcement costly and publicised the law's reach.

A DIFFERENT group from part (b), which is what the prompt asked for. Reusing the same actors loses the point even when the history is right.

The long essay – thesis and contextualization

The essay is scored on thesis, contextualization, evidence and analysis. The first two are earned in the first paragraph, so write it deliberately.

I Evaluate the extent to which the New Deal changed the role of the federal government in American life.

The New Deal fundamentally changed the federal government's role by making it the guarantor of economic security for individuals, a responsibility it had never previously claimed – though its reach remained bounded by racial exclusions and by a federal structure that left administration to the states.

THESIS point: a defensible claim with a line of reasoning, and a qualifier ('though its reach remained bounded') that sets up the complexity point later. A thesis that only restates the prompt earns nothing.

CONTEXTUALIZATION follows in two or three sentences: ‘Before 1933, federal economic intervention had been limited largely to tariffs, currency and antitrust; relief for the unemployed was the work of states, cities and private charity, an arrangement the scale of the Depression had overwhelmed by 1932, when unemployment reached roughly one quarter of the workforce.’

Note what makes that contextualization score: it describes the broader situation BEFORE the topic and connects it to the argument, rather than listing unrelated events of the era.

I How the body paragraphs earn the evidence and analysis points.

Each body paragraph: a claim, at least two specific pieces of evidence, and a sentence explaining how the evidence supports the claim.

EVIDENCE: ‘Social Security (1935) created federal old-age pensions and unemployment insurance; the Wagner Act guaranteed collective bargaining and created the NLRB to enforce it.’ Named acts with dates and what they did.

ANALYSIS: ‘These were permanent entitlements and permanent agencies, not emergency relief – which is why the change outlasted the Depression and why later expansions of federal responsibility were built on this precedent rather than on new constitutional ground.’

COMPLEXITY: earn it by qualifying your own argument with evidence, not by adding a hedging sentence: ‘Yet Social Security’s original exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers left out most Black Southerners, so the new security was real but unevenly distributed – a limit that made the change less transformative for those who most needed it.’

The document-based question

Same thesis and contextualization points as the long essay, plus points for using the documents, for outside evidence, for sourcing, and for complexity. Read all the documents before writing, and group them by the argument they support.

I How to use a document so it scores.

Describe the document accurately, then use it as evidence for YOUR claim: ‘Document 3, a 1937 letter from a Tennessee sharecropper to the Farm Security Administration, requests a loan the writer says no local bank would make – evidence that federal credit reached households the private market had excluded.’

Two things happen in that sentence: the content is described accurately (the DESCRIBE requirement), and it is attached to a claim (the USE requirement). A document merely quoted earns nothing.

SOURCING, a separate point: ‘Because the writer is petitioning the agency for aid, the letter is likely to emphasise hardship and the failure of alternatives, so it is strong evidence of what applicants believed the federal government could do and weaker evidence of how much it actually delivered.’

That is what sourcing means: point of view, purpose, situation or audience, AND why it matters to the argument. Naming the author’s occupation is not sourcing.

I How to earn the outside-evidence point.

Bring in one specific development that appears in NO document and explain its relevance: ‘The Court-packing fight of 1937, absent from these documents, shows the constitutional resistance the expansion provoked and marks the point at which the New Deal’s legislative momentum stalled.’

It must be specific and it must be connected. A general statement about the 1930s is not outside evidence, and an unconnected fact is not either.