AP World History: Modern

Common Mistakes ·

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.

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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

1 · The Global Tapestry

✗ Describing a state as ‘advanced’ or ‘backward’.

✓ **Say what it actually did – how it taxed, recruited officials, or legitimised its rule.**

Value judgements are not historically defensible evidence; the rubric requires specific developments.

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CED 1.1

✗ Treating one region’s pattern as the whole world’s.

✓ **Name the society and the place; a prompt about Afro-Eurasia is not answered from Europe alone.**

An overgeneralised statement about a period or region is listed among the responses that earn no point.

CED 1.4

2 · Networks of Exchange

✗ Describing the Silk Roads only as trade in goods.

✓ **Include what travelled with the goods: religions, technologies, and disease.**

The exchange networks unit is about transfers of all kinds, and the fuller answer supports more arguments.

CED 2.1

✗ Saying the Mongols only destroyed.

✓ **Weigh the destruction against the trade, communication and transfers their empire enabled.**

Corroborating and qualifying an argument is one of the named routes to the complexity point.

CED 2.2

3 · Land-Based Empires

✗ Treating the land-based empires as interchangeable.

✓ **Compare how each legitimised rule and raised revenue – Ottoman devshirme, Safavid Shi’ism, Mughal zamindars, Qing examinations.**

The comparison is the reasoning process this unit is examined on.

CED 3.2

4 · Transoceanic Interconnections

✗ Saying European ships ‘took over’ Indian Ocean trade.

✓ **Europeans taxed and inserted themselves into an existing network they did not displace.**

The overstated claim fails the accuracy requirement, and the qualified version is the stronger argument.

CED 4.5

✗ Describing the Columbian Exchange as crops moving west.

✓ **It went both ways, and its largest effect was demographic – disease, and then forced migration.**

The one-directional account leaves out the evidence most prompts about this period need.

CED 4.3

5 · Revolutions

✗ Treating unfree labour systems as one thing.

✓ **Distinguish chattel slavery, serfdom, indentured servitude and the encomienda – they differ in who was bound and how.**

The distinction is exactly where a general statement stops being historically defensible.

CED 5.4

✗ Explaining a revolution by Enlightenment ideas alone.

✓ **Add the material causes – taxation, war debt, food prices, colonial status.**

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

CED 5.2

6 · Consequences of Industrialization

✗ Writing 'factories used machines to make cloth' as evidence.

✓ **Explain the consequence: rural workers moved to cities, hours were set by the clock, and household production collapsed.**

The guidelines print this exact sentence as an example that earns no point, because it carries no reasoning.

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8 · Cold War and Decolonization

✗ Describing decolonisation as empires simply withdrawing.

✓ **Name the pressures: wartime weakness, nationalist movements, and the Cold War competition for allegiance.**

Naming the mechanism is what turns a fact into evidence for an argument.

CED 8.5

■ For Units 8 and 9, one specific named example per unit – a leader, a treaty, an organisation – is usually enough to satisfy the evidence point.

CED 9.1