

## Paper 1 Document-Based Questions (DBQs) Guide

Paper 1 in your IB History exam will be a document-based assessment. You may be familiar with the “DBQ” (document-based question) essay from other classes. Paper 1, however, consists of multiple pieces – some are short-answer questions, and the final question will require you to write a full essay. This guide will clarify each part and how to successfully answer the four types of questions that make up Paper 1.

*“As historians, our training and discipline is based on documentary evidence.”*

– David Dixon

When you work with sources you are practicing a key component of a historian’s methodology. Paper 1 skills are the skills that historians apply when they are researching a historical question and attempting to reach a conclusion.

In Paper 1 you will:

- **Interpret and analyze** information from a variety of sources
- **Evaluate** sources for their value and limitations
- **Compare and contrast** information between sources
- **Synthesize** evidence from the sources with your own detailed knowledge of the topic

It consists of four questions:

Question #	What does this Q assess?	Possible marks earned
First question, part A	This question will test <b>understanding</b> of one of the sources	3 marks
First question, part B	This question will test <b>understanding</b> of one of the sources (usually a visual source like a cartoon, chart, or photograph)	2 marks
Second question	This question will ask students to <b>analyze the value and limitations</b> of one of the sources. In their analysis of value and limitations, students should refer to the origin, purpose and content of the specified source.	4 marks
Third question	This question will ask students to <b>compare and contrast</b> what two of the sources reveal to a historian studying the particular aspect of the prescribed subject.	6 marks
Fourth question	This will be an evaluative question that asks students to draw on both the sources and their knowledge in their evaluation.	9 marks

## Question 1 (A & B) – Historical Comprehension

This question has two parts, each assessing your understanding, or **comprehension**, of the sources. You do not need to give your own knowledge in your response. This is the only question that asks you to explain **what** the documents say. The other questions require you to **use** the information.

Although you do not need to bring in your “own knowledge”, your **contextual understanding** of the topic and sources is what will enable you to understand the message of the sources more clearly.

### **Part A**

The 3-mark question asks you to comprehend, extract, and possibly infer information. Here are some suggestions for answering this question:

- Write: firstly... secondly... thirdly... to ensure that you make at least **three** separate points. (Try to come up with a fourth, in case one of your answers is incorrect.)
- Do not make the same point more than once.
- Do not overly rely on quotation – make your point **IN YOUR OWN WORDS** and then briefly quote two or three words of the source.

How long should I spend on this question?

Maximum 5 minutes.

How do I write my response?

"The first reason given by the source is .....The second reason given by the source is .....The third reason given by the source is ....."

### **Part B**

For the 2-mark question, give **two** clear (and separate) points about the **message** conveyed in the source, supporting each point with evidence from the source. This is usually a visual source. If it is a cartoon you are analyzing, make sure you have fully understood the key figures and symbols before you start to write about its messages!

- Make two clear points to answer this question.
- Establish the overall message or point made in the source, and then refer to the content of the source to elaborate and further explain its message.

How long should I spend on this question?

Maximum 5 minutes.

How do I write my response?

"One message conveyed by the source is ....., because the source shows ..... A second message conveyed by the source is ....., because the source shows ....."

## Question 2 - Evaluate (OPVL)

Historians need to use and evaluate sources as they research a historical era or event. For question 2, you need to evaluate different sources in terms of the “**value**” and “**limitations**” by examining their **origin**, **purpose**, and **content**:

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>Who</b> wrote it, said it, drew it, etc.? <b>When</b> did they write it, say it, draw it? <b>Where</b> did they write it, say it, draw it? <b>What</b> is the source – a speech, cartoon, textbook, etc.?	<b>Why</b> did they write it, say it, draw it? <b>Who</b> did they write it, say it, draw it <b>for</b> ?	Is the <b>language</b> objective or does it sound exaggerated or one-sided? What is the <b>tone</b> of the source? What <b>information</b> and <b>examples</b> are used to support arguments?

From the information you have on the origins of each source, what you can infer about the document’s purpose and the source’s content, you must explain the value and limitations each source has for historians researching a particular event or period in history. Here are some suggestions for answering this question:

- Before writing your answer read through the source carefully, paying particular attention to the “origin” text above the source.
- Look carefully at what the source is saying and see if there are any signs of emotional language, etc., that might be useful in your response.
- Keep in mind that **value** refers to the **usefulness** of a source to a historian. **Limitation** refers to the point at which the source **ceases to be valuable** to that historian. How valuable the source is always depends on what you are using it for.
- For the purposes of evaluation, a source is not more or less useful just because it is primary or secondary. Always focus on the **specific** origins and purpose of a source – not whether it is primary or secondary. You do not need to give this distinction.
- Ideally you will find two clear values and two clear limitations per source, but it might turn out you find two values but only one limitation. Regardless, you must discuss **both** values and limitations.
- Origin, purpose and content should be used as **supporting evidence** to make relevant comments on the value and limitations. For maximum marks, there must be at least one reference to each of them in either the value or the limitations.
- Comments on the **content** are only valid in the context of an analysis of value and limitations. In other words, do not describe the sources or include any other discussion of the sources that does not answer the question.
- Structure your response in two paragraphs – one discussing the value, the second discussing limitations.

See the **OPVL Handbook** for more guidance on writing about value and limitations.

How long should I spend on this question?

About 12-15 minutes.

How do I write my response?

"The origin of this source is ..... (*what, who, when, where - take from the source details*). The purpose of this source is ..... (*why it was made, for whom*). The source is valuable because ..... (*refer to origin*). The source is also valuable because ..... (*refer to purpose*).

The source is limited because ..... (*refer to origin*). The source is also limited because ..... (*refer to purpose*)."

**DO NOT do this:**

These are common statements about value or limitations in students' answers for this question. They are, however, considered **invalid** by examiners. You must remember to make your responses **specific** to the source and question.

- This source is not useful because the translation could be inaccurate.
- This source is not useful because it doesn't tell us what happened before or after.
- This source is not useful because it is biased.
- This textbook was written over 70 years after the event took place so it is unlikely that the author had first-hand experience. This makes it less useful.
- This is an eyewitness account and so is likely to be reliable.
- This source is only an extract and we don't know what he said next.
- This is a primary source and this makes it very useful.
- As it is an official report, it gives a true representation of what actually happened.

See the OPVL Handbook for more guidance on what you should write instead.

### Question 3 – Compare & Contrast

Question 3 will ask you **compare** and **contrast** two documents. Your aim is to identify similar themes and ideas in two sources and also to identify differences between them.

The key to this question is **linkage**; that is, you are expected to discuss the sources together throughout your response. The examiner is looking for a **running commentary**. At no time should you talk about one source without relating it to the other. “End-on accounts” – where you write about one source followed by the content of the second source – do not score well. (This is descriptive – your writing must be ANALYTICAL.)

You must find **both** similarities and differences. This is best presented as two separate paragraphs – one for comparisons and one for contrasts. Here are some suggestions for answering the question:

- Always be clear about which source you are discussing (for example, refer to Source A and Source B).
- Find the more obvious similarities and differences and then go on to identify more specific comparisons and contrasts.
- Make sure that you focus on answering the terms of the question, i.e. it might be asking you to compare/contrast in relation to a very specific topic, not just the sources in general.
- Deal with similarities in your first paragraph and differences in your second.
- **Briefly** quote from the sources (only two or three words) to support each point.
- Don't write an introduction to your answer or attempt a conclusion. This is not necessary for this question and wastes time.
- Don't waste time explaining what the sources say.
- Write in **full paragraphs** – do not use grids, charts, or bullet points.

You must make **more than one** comparison and **more than one** contrast to achieve the maximum marks in a compare and contrast question. Also, please note that the focus of this question is **how** the sources are similar or different and is asking you to look at the **content** of the sources. The question is NOT asking you about why the sources might be similar or different which would then ask you to consider the origin and purpose of the sources.

How long should I spend on this question?

About 12-15 minutes.

How do I write my response?

"Both sources agree that ..... Source C says that ..... and Source D says that ..... The sources also agree that ..... Source C says that ..... and Source D says that ....."

"The sources contrast in ..... While Source C says ....., Source D says ....."

See the chart on the following page for more “linkage” phrases.

How to draw comparisons and show similarities:	How to draw contrasts and show differences:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both Source A and Source B...</li> <li>• Source A suggests ... Similarly, Source B suggests...</li> <li>• Source A supports Source B in that ....</li> <li>• Like Source B, Source A says...</li> <li>• In the same way that Source B argues..., Source A points out that...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source A suggests... However, Source B says...</li> <li>• Source B disagrees with Source A regarding...</li> <li>• Source A claims ..., as opposed to Source B which asserts...</li> <li>• Source B goes further than Source A in arguing...</li> <li>• Source A highlights..., but Source B does not mention this.</li> </ul>

Here's an example. The exam question prompt is:

*Compare and contrast the views expressed in sources A and C on the reasons for the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan.*

These are the sources:

<p><b>Source A</b>  <i>Carter's address to the US Congress, 8 January 1980.</i>  The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War. It's a sharp escalation in the aggressive history of the Soviet Union. We are the other superpower on earth, and it became my responsibility to take action. Our own nation's security was directly threatened. There is no doubt that the Soviet's move into Afghanistan, if done without adverse consequences, would have resulted in the temptation to move again and again until they reached warm water ports or until they acquired control over a major portion of the world's oil supplies.</p>	<p><b>Source C</b>  <i>Brezhnev's announcement at the 26<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, February 1981.</i>  Imperialism launched the present undeclared war against the Afghan revolution. That created a direct threat and a danger to our southern border. The situation compelled us to provide the armed assistance this friendly country was asking for... As far as the Soviet military contingent is concerned, we will be prepared to withdraw it with the concurrence of the Afghan government. For this to happen, the infiltration of counterrevolutionary bands into Afghanistan must be completely stopped. This must be formalized in accords between Afghanistan and its neighbors. Dependable guarantees that there will be no new intervention are needed. This is the principled position of the Soviet Union, and we will firmly adhere to it!</p>
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Here's what a student wrote. This response earned a full 6 marks.

<p>The sources are similar in that they both indicate that the Soviets have a military presence in Afghanistan. Source A refers to an invasion whereas Source C talks of "armed assistance". Both sources also imply that the situation is a serious one that needs addressing; Carter in Source A calls the situation "the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War" and Brezhnev uses the words "threat" and "danger" in describing the situation.</p> <p>However, these sources contrast significantly on the reasons for the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. Source A says that the reason for Soviet intervention is because of an "escalation" in Soviet "aggression" whereas Brezhnev in Source C says that the Soviets are there not because of any aggression but because they were asked to provide "assistance" by a "friendly" country. Brezhnev further says that they are there for security reasons. However, the United States sees it as the first step in the USSR's attempt to gain "control over a major portion of the world's oil supplies". Brezhnev also implies that Western "imperialism" created the situation which required the USSR to go into Afghanistan whereas this fact is ignored in Source A.</p>
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### Question 3 Rubric

Marks	Level descriptor
5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The response includes clear and valid points of comparison <b>and</b> of contrast.</li></ul>
3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The response includes some valid points of comparison <b>and/or</b> contrast, although these points may lack clarity.</li></ul>
1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The response consists of description of the content of the source(s), and/or general comments about the source(s), rather than valid points of comparison or of contrast.</li></ul>
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The response does not reach a standard described by the descriptors above.</li></ul>

### Question 4 – Mini-Essay

This is the most challenging question, and the one worth the most marks – 9 out of 24. It requires you to write a mini-essay. “Mini” refers to the fact that you have less time to devote to writing this essay than say, Paper 2 or 3. However, it is still an **essay** that is required – not a list of material from each document, or a short-answer response. You are required to **synthesize** material from the documents with your own knowledge into your essay.

Your essay must have an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. It is recommended that you **plan** your answer as you would any essay question. The difference here is that you will use **evidence from the documents** as well as from your **own detailed knowledge** to support your arguments. You must use a **synthesis** of sources and own knowledge to produce a clear response to the question! In this sense, it is just like a full essay: you need to focus on clearly addressing the question, developing a clear argument, and challenging any assumptions in the question if you can

NOTE: You must use both ALL of the sources and your own detailed and specific knowledge in your answer. If you use only the sources (and no knowledge beyond them), or only own knowledge (and no sources), you CANNOT score maximum marks (maximum 5).

Here are some suggestions for how to approach question 4:

- First, make sure you **understand the question** (see Paper 2 & 3 Guide for guidance on “deconstructing” exam questions).
- Make a brief **plan** – see the Outline Templates for suggestions on how to structure a DBQ response. You can create a mini-outline or a chart to plan (take about 3 minutes for this).
- Keep your **introduction** very **brief** – just the thesis statement in response to the question.
- When using the sources, refer to them directly as Source A, Source E and so on.
- Quote briefly from the sources throughout the essay – a quotation of two or three words is sufficient. Overloading your paper with quotes will take up precious time, and will not help to demonstrate to the reader that you understand the topic or the sources.
- Use **all** the sources (you will get four).
- Write a **brief conclusion** to answer the question. (Restate your thesis.)
- Do not use the sources in order and do not simply list the contents of each source. The sources are there to support your **analysis** – resist the temptation to describe the contents of each source.

Please see the General Essay Writing Guide for more information on developing a strong, analytical thesis statement, and for examples on how to integrate source evidence in your paragraphs.

How long should I spend on this question?

20-30 minutes.

### Question 4 Rubric

Marks	Level descriptors		
	Focus	Use of sources	Own knowledge
<b>7-9</b>	The response is focused on the question.	Clear references are made to the sources, and these references are used effectively as evidence to support the analysis.	Accurate and relevant own knowledge is demonstrated. There is effective synthesis of own knowledge and source material.
<b>4-6</b>	The response is generally focused on the question.	References are made to the sources and these references are used as evidence to support the analysis.	Where own knowledge is demonstrated, this lacks relevance or accuracy. There is little or no attempt to synthesize own knowledge and source material.
<b>1-3</b>	The response lacks focus on the question.	References to the sources are made, but at this level these references are likely to consist of descriptors of the content of the sources rather than the sources being used as evidence to support the analysis.	No own knowledge is demonstrated or, where it is demonstrated, it is inaccurate or irrelevant.
<b>0</b>	The response does not reach a standard described by the descriptors above.	The response does not reach a standard described by the descriptors above.	The response does not reach a standard described by the descriptors above.

## Paper 1 Cheat Sheet

<b>First question, part A</b>	<p><i>This question will test understanding of one of the sources.</i></p> <p>“The first reason given by the source is... The second reason by the source is... The third reason given by the source is...”</p>	<b>3 marks</b>	<b>3-5 minutes</b>
<b>First question, part B</b>	<p><i>This question will test understanding of one of the sources.</i></p> <p>“One message conveyed by the source is that..., because the source shows... A second message conveyed by the source is that... because the source shows...”</p>	<b>2 marks</b>	<b>3-5 minutes</b>
<b>Second question</b>	<p><i>This question will ask students to analyze the value and limitations of one of the sources. In their analysis of value and limitations, students should refer to the origin, purpose and content of the specified source.</i></p> <p>“The origin of this source is... The purpose of this source is... The source is valuable because... The source is also valuable because...”</p> <p>The source is limited because... The source is also limited because...”</p>	<b>4 marks</b>	<b>12-15 minutes</b>
<b>Third question</b>	<p><i>This question will ask students to compare and contrast what two of the sources reveal to a historian studying the particular aspect of the prescribed subject.</i></p> <p>“Both sources agree that... Source C says that... and Source D says that... The sources also agree that... Source C says that... and Source D says that...”</p> <p>The sources contrast in... While Source C says..., Source D says...”</p>	<b>6 marks</b>	<b>12-15 minutes</b>
<b>Fourth question</b>	<p><i>This will be an evaluation question that asks students to draw on both the sources and their own knowledge in their evaluation.</i></p> <p>Use all sources, clearly address the question, develop a clear argument, and challenge any assumptions in the question.</p>	<b>9 marks</b>	<b>20-30 minutes</b>