

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF DOCUMENT PACKETS¹

1. **THOU SHALT** read the historical question and introduction/context.

Every document packet opens with a historical question, usually related to a historical thinking skill. Always read that and look at the introduction/context given before beginning. This is the question you're trying to answer.

2. **THOU SHALT** always first read the source information and then answer the *R* in READ.

*BEFORE READING ANY SOURCE YOU ARE TO READ THE SOURCE INFORMATION FIRST. You want to look at the source information first, and use your prior knowledge about the author or subject or context (if available) to give you an edge while reading. Then answer the R in READ. **Note:** When it asks "who" the author is, you cannot just write their name. You must include their profession, background, position in life, perspective, etc. Just a name will get you no credit.*

3. **THOU SHALT** then read the text thoroughly and evaluate the source. *E* in READ.

After that, you shall then read the actual text. The best historians make marks or notes as they read. Underline, circle, or highlight key phrases that reveal the main idea and connect to the historical question. This will be part of your grade. Even if you don't understand the entire text, this can help you get the gist.

4. **THOU SHALT** analyze other documents as you progress. *A* in READ.

*Whether directed by the *A* question or not, you should always keep in mind other documents as you move through the packet. How do they agree and disagree? Which are more trustworthy?*

5. **THOU SHALT NOT** skip any question or part thereof, and **THOU SHALT** write thy answers in complete sentences, unless otherwise told.

This is what usually hurts a student's grade more than anything else. Never skip a question and leave it blank, nor skip a part of the question. Always put an answer.

6. **THOU SHALT** write consistently in past tense, and in other ways keep thy reader firmly anchored in time.

Historical essays and book reviews present special problems. But even the author's act of writing a book took place in the past, even if only a year or two ago. Thus, Hofstadter ARGUED, not "argues", in his Age of Reform. I know English classes want the present tense, but History classes want the past tense.

¹Apologies to the original Author and thanks to Theron Schlabach and Tom Richey for starting this idea.

7. THOU SHALT write thy thesis with specifics not vagueness. *D* in READ.

When a document packet requires it at the end, you will write a thesis. A thesis is your position on an issue, meaning, you create an argument with specific points. A thesis is NOT a description or summary, nor is it a vague argument. This is not a proper thesis:

“_____ was the best _____ group of the early 2000s.” This is a proper thesis:

“_____ was the best _____ group of the 2000s thanks to their complex infusion of gospel, _____, and pop rhythms, along with their intricate lyrical storytelling that told the story of _____ culture in Atlanta around the turn of the millennium.”

8. THOU SHALT briefly quote and properly cite documents.

Any quoted material should be properly introduced and worked into a larger sentence.

Instead of: “Dolphins sleep with one eye open.” (Warren). Try: A startling difference

between humans and dolphins is that the latter sleeps “with one eye open”. (Doc. A)

Quotes are spice, not the beef. The beef is your words. Additionally, the parenthesis you see are how you source said document.

9. THOU SHALT not give the reader thy opinion.

While there are some forms of writing where your opinion may be appropriate, it is extremely rare that this is ever appropriate in academic writing. You should be defending

your thesis presenting conclusions that are based on research and evidence in the documents. For the purposes of your answers your conclusions should be stated as facts.

Hence, avoid this kind of language: “I believe...” “I think...” “In my opinion...” I want you to be (or sound) confident.

10. THOU SHALT strive for clarity above cuteness; thou shalt not use jargon when common language will serve, nor a large word when a small one will serve.

Learn first of all to write lean, tough, logical, precise prose. After you have learned that, you may begin to experiment with metaphors, allusions, and fancily turned phrases. But use these only if they add to communication and do not clutter it up. Never use more words when you can make the point with fewer.² Trying to impress your reader with obscure vocabulary, erudition in foreign or specialized verbiage, and all such pretension, is absolutely out. This also means avoiding modern slang in your formal answers. This is not an excuse, however, to write incomplete answers either. Write simply, but not insufficiently.

²Or as Kevin so wisely told us, “Why waste time when few word do trick.”

Appendix: Sample Thesis - Essay Responses

Note: In certain document packets, you will be required to write out a small thesis - essay response. The following includes a basic and advanced example of what your responses should like in regards to format and diction. As a sidenote, some of this is accurate, and some of this I made up for fun. Don't take this as a wholesale accurate depiction of Japanese culture.

Thesis & Response - Determine the Truth

MQ: To what extent did the concept of the “American Dream” affect Japanese culture in the 20th Century?

Instructions: Answer the main question of the packet, citing evidence from the text and using outside information from the historical context essay, class discussion, or from the textbook. Below include a 1-2 sentence thesis with a specific claim and at least 2 specific historical points. Then, include a 6-8 sentence paragraph that expounds on your thesis. You must cite/reference at least five different documents.

Good Thesis: In the years following World War II, Japanese culture experienced drastic change in their fashion as they adopted American suits and beauty stylings. However, Japan often resisted the concept of the nuclear family, instead valuing work for work's sake over work for familial stability.

Bad Thesis: In the years following World War II, Japanese culture had new fashion and new ways of working.

Basic Response:

The American Dream, which pictured a family of 4-5 with a hard-working husband in an office job, a domestic housewife who took care of the home and yard, and at least 2-3 children who attended school and prepared for life, was the middle class ideal for many Americans during the 1940s and 50s. (Doc. 1) Japan notably adapted differing aspects of this “dream”. Men began to dress like American workers (emulating the suit and tie) and modeled themselves after successful figures, like John D. Rockefeller or Frank Sinatra. (Doc. 2 and 3). Japanese housewives too modeled their hair, makeup, and appearance after American housewives. (Doc. 4). However, as the years went on, Japanese men prized more the “dream” of financial success than the “dream” of a large family. Thus, Japanese men sacrificed time at home, or avoided marriage altogether. (Doc. 5) All in all, the American Dream was adapted in differing degrees by the Japanese populace during the 20th Century, rather than wholesale adopted.

Advanced Response:

The American Dream, described by cultural anthropologist John Medina as a family of 4-5 with a hard-working husband in a stable job, a domestic housewife who took care of the home and yard, and at least 2-3 children who attended school and prepared for life, was the middle class ideal for many

Americans during the mid 20th Century. (Doc. 1) Japan notably adapted differing aspects of this “dream”. Dr. Mikkelsen, a reputable sociologist who lived in Japan for years, noted that in the 1950s men started to dress like American workers (emulating the suit and tie) and modeled themselves after successful figures, like John D. Rockefeller or Frank Sinatra. (Doc. 2 and 3). The fashion editor of the Tokyo Today newspaper, Hiyao Miyazuki, noted that Japanese housewives too patterned their hair, makeup, and appearance after American housewives around the same time. (Doc. 4). However, as the years went on, Japanese men prized more the “dream” of financial success than the “dream” of a large family. Hideo Kojima, the head of one of the largest companies in Japan, recounted how honor was found in its highest form through their careers. Thus, Japanese men sacrificed time at home, or avoided marriage altogether, as they believed that “the reason to live was to work”. (Doc. 5) All in all, the American Dream was adapted in differing degrees by the Japanese populace during the 20th Century, rather than wholesale adopted.

The Difference between Basic and Advanced:

What sets these two responses apart is mainly noting the author, and describing the reliability (or un reliability), point of view, or position of the source. Though “Basic” suffices for this exercise, in the future I will expect the “Advanced” response more.

Hot Tips:

1. Never repeat your thesis in your response section.
2. Always write in the past tense and complete sentences.
3. Always cite your sources parenthetically.
4. Always have a thesis with specific historical points, not vague themes or a general theme. This is different from English class. Historians like specific, historical, physical, real, etc. points, not ideals.
5. Again, don’t quote a source for more than a few words. No sentence long quotations or two lines, etc.