

Lesson 4 — Developing a Thesis Statement

Exercise 1 Choosing Thesis Statements

Your thesis is the main idea or viewpoint you will develop in your DBQ essay. That is, **the thesis is a clear answer to the DBQ or statement of what you hope to prove in your essay**. It should respond directly to the question asked, and it should make a claim you can back up at least in part with evidence from the primary sources provided. You usually state the thesis in the introductory paragraph of the essay.

In the box is a DBQ along with typical instructions often provided with DBQs. This DBQ is based on the primary source documents for this lesson. Below it are **five thesis statements**, all responding to this DBQ. Of these five statements, check the two you think are best. Then complete Exercise 2 for this lesson.

Instructions: Document-based Essay

This question is based on the eleven documents for this lesson. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and any point of view presented in it. Using information from the documents, and your knowledge of United States history, write a well-organized essay answering the following DBQ.

Historical Context

In the 1800s, new production methods and an expanding market system gave Great Britain and other Western nations vast new wealth and power. These industrial nations also enormously expanded colonial empires and other kinds of control over many non-Western societies.

The Question

“During the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, the non-Western world lost all will to resist the West’s power. It also lost any real ability to adapt to industrialism in its own ways and on its own terms.” Assess the validity of this statement.

Check the TWO best thesis statements of the five listed here.

- _____ 1. The Industrial Revolution meant industrial power and energy beyond belief. But it also meant urban slums, child labor and misery in chaotic industrial towns. In the non-Western world all these problems were made even worse by European colonial control.
- _____ 2. The statement is too broad. Non-western societies did not all respond alike. Some were too weak, small or divided to do much to stop the West or to adapt to change on their own. But others did adapt to change on their own terms, either by trying to save traditional ways of life or by seeking to modernize on their own.
- _____ 3. Nothing sums up the point of the statement better than the cartoon on Cecil Rhodes. Rhodes was a British imperialist who dreamed of a mighty British empire that would develop and industrialize Africa “from Cape Town to Cairo,” as the cartoon’s caption puts it.
- _____ 4. The statement is mainly correct. A very few non-Western lands, such as Japan, did adapt to the West’s threat by modernizing quickly. But the vast majority in Asia and Africa were passive pawns at the mercy of Western colonial control and economic power.
- _____ 5. The steam engine, the factory, the railroad gave Great Britain and other Western nations enormous new productive powers. Soon these nations were building railroads in India, constructing canals and telegraph systems in Africa, carving up spheres of influence in China, and controlling trade patterns all over the world.

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Exercise 2 Classifying Thesis Statements

The same five thesis statements you worked with in Exercise 1 are listed on the left below. On the right are five descriptions. Each is a description of one of the thesis statements on the left. In the spaces provided write the number of the thesis statement on the left that matches with its description on the right. Then as a class, discuss the reasons for the choices you make.

The Question

“During the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, the non-Western world lost all will to resist the West’s power. It also lost any real ability to adapt to industrialism in its own ways and on its own terms.” Assess the validity of this statement.

1. The Industrial Revolution meant industrial power and energy beyond belief. But it also meant urban slums, child labor and misery in chaotic industrial towns. In the non-Western world all these problems were made even worse by European colonial control.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 2. The statement is too broad. Non-western societies did not all respond alike. Some were too weak, small or divided to do much to stop the West or to adapt to change on their own. But others did adapt to change on their own terms, either by trying to save traditional ways of life or by seeking to modernize on their own.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 3. Nothing sums up the point of the statement better than the cartoon on Cecil Rhodes. Rhodes was a British imperialist who dreamed of a mighty British empire that would develop and industrialize Africa “from Cape Town to Cairo,” as the cartoon’s caption puts it.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 4. The statement is mainly correct. A very few non-Western lands, such as Japan, did adapt to the West’s threat by modernizing quickly. But the vast majority in Asia and Africa were passive pawns at the mercy of Western colonial control and economic power.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 5. The steam engine, the factory, the railroad gave Great Britain and other Western nations enormous new productive powers. Soon these nations were building railroads in India, constructing canals and telegraph systems in Africa, carving up spheres of influence in China, and controlling trade patterns all over the world.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
- A. One primary source is identified specifically, and details in it are described. But since no thesis is stated, these details are wasted. That is, they are not used as evidence to “assess the validity” of the statement in the DBQ.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 - B. A thesis is stated. But it is about how colonialism added to the harmful effects of industrialism in the non-Western world, not about the ability or will of non-Western societies to control their own industrial development. In other words, the thesis does NOT assess the specific statement in the DBQ.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 - C. A clear thesis is provided. It mainly denies the validity of the statement in the DBQ as too simplistic and too general.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 - D. No clear thesis is given. That is, there is no direct response agreeing or disagreeing with the DBQ statement. Instead a great many facts are listed. These may all be true, but they are not used to support any clear and direct answer to the DBQ.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____
 - E. A clear thesis is provided basically supporting the validity of the statement in the DBQ.
Best Describes Thesis Statement _____

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Exercise 3 The Thesis Statement and the Sources

If your thesis statement is a good one, you will be able to use it to organize your entire essay. It should also help you decide how to use the primary source documents provided along with the DBQ. This exercise gives you a chance to see how a thesis statement can help you in this way.

Below are two of the five thesis statements used in both Exercise 1 and Exercise 2. Your task is to see if these thesis statements do provide a good guide for deciding how to use the primary sources for this lesson. Of the two thesis statements, choose the one you agree with most. Then pick out five primary sources to support this thesis statement, using the primary sources for this lesson. In the spaces provided, identify your choices and write brief explanations of why you chose them. Discuss these choices in class.

A. *The statement is too broad. Non-western societies did not all respond alike. Some were too weak, small or divided to do much to stop the West or to adapt to change on their own. But others did adapt to change on their own terms, either by trying to save traditional ways of life or by seeking to modernize on their own.*

B. *The statement is mainly correct. A very few non-Western lands, such as Japan, did adapt to the West's threat by modernizing quickly. But the vast majority in Asia and Africa were passive pawns at the mercy of Western colonial control and economic power.*

QUESTION A OR B (Circle your choice)

Doc. _____

Doc. _____

Doc. _____

Doc. _____

Doc. _____

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Exercise 4

Write a Three-Paragraph Essay

In this exercise you will write a complete essay using the thesis statement you chose for Exercise 3. Most effective DBQ essays will take more than three paragraphs. But this one is just for practice. And it will start to give you an idea of how a full DBQ essay is organized. On the left are some guidelines for your three paragraphs. Follow these guidelines and use your notes from Exercise 3 to write this brief essay.

Introductory Paragraph

Include the thesis statement and any other ideas needed to clarify it.

Middle Paragraph

Use the most important ideas from your notes in Exercise 3 to back up the thesis statement here with evidence and reasons for your views.

Concluding Paragraph

Sum up the main points you have made and show how they back up the thesis statement you chose to use.