

Contextualization in AP World History

What is Contextualization?

Contextualization is an AP Historical Reasoning Skill that involves the ability to connect events and processes to specific circumstances of time and place as well as broader regional, national, or global processes. It's a skill that is important beyond just "earning the point" in AP. The best essays, books, and papers will all provide background information to "set the stage" for their main arguments.

The College Board says the skill of contextualization involves:

- Describe an accurate historical context for a specific historical development or process.
- Explain how a relevant context influenced a specific historical development or process.
- Use context to explain the relative historical significance of a specific historical development or process.

So how is it done?

Your goal is to "situate" (position or place) your answer to the question (DBQ or LEQ) among historical events, developments, or processes within the broader regional, national, or global context in which they occurred. That means that contextualization is a "lead in." Think about what the reader needs to know to understand the historical significance of this topic and your thesis. This should be in your introduction prior to your thesis. So what will you do?

- Write content or **fact rich, analytical sentences**. (It must include specific details!)
- Describe events or processes that happened before the time period of the question or in another region that are **relevant**.
- Make a **connection to the question** that is asked! Information cannot be random. You may not simply spew out unrelated facts. Why does this matter to the question at hand? How does this lead into your thesis?

Practice!

Let's take a few prompts concerning the Americas, and see if we can provide relevant context for the question at hand. Choose one of the following, and try to think about what your thesis and evidence would be first. Then think about what background information would be necessary to lead into that particular argument that you plan to make, and let's work on creating our first paragraph of an LEQ.

1. *"Evaluate the extent to which state systems in the Americas were similar in their attempts to expand and maintain power in the period ca. 1200-1450."*
2. *"Evaluate the factors responsible for the rise of state systems in the Americas in the period ca. 1200-1450."*