DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION ON KOREA’S RESPONSES TO CONTACT WITH THE WEST FROM 1600 TO 1890

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SUBJECT: World History

TIME REQUIRED: Two class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand that the design of the document-based essay question requires students to read and analyze primary source documents and then use the documents to formulate and argue a thesis in an essay.
2. Distinguish between different points of view concerning the value of and the response to Western ideas.
3. Realize that Korea’s geographical and geopolitical position between China and Japan affected its response to contact with the West.
4. Analyze changes and continuities over time in Korea’s response to exposure to Westerners and their culture.

STANDARDS:

NCSS Standards:
Standard 1: Culture
Standard 2: Time, Continuity and Change
Standard 4: Individual Development and Identity
Standard 9: Global Connections

Common Core Standards:
RH 1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
RH 2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source
RH 6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics
RH 8 Assess the extent to which reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims
WHST 1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content
WHST 2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events….
WHST 4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose, audience.
WHST 5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach….
SL 1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.
MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Loose leaf paper for essay writing.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
This document-based essay activity would fit into a world history unit on native responses to
Western Imperialism in East Asia. More commonly known is the experience of the Chinese and
the Japanese. But what was the experience of the Koreans? Did Koreans respond conservatively
to their first contacts with the West as the Chinese did? Or were they inspired by the example of
the Chinese during the mid-nineteenth century to follow the path of reform as we see in Japan
after 1868?

This exercise should follow lessons on Western imperialism in China and Japan. Important
background should also be given about Korean government and society during the Chosŏn
Kingdom. Important teaching points are included in the “Teacher Background on Chosŏn
Korea” attached to this lesson plan.

This document-based question deals with the period from 1600 to 1890. To continue the story of
Korea’s experience with Imperialism beyond 1890, entails looking at Korea’s transition from
Chinese client state to Japanese protectorate and colony. Ironically Western ideas and ways
come to Korea through Japanese rule. However, the responses dealt with by this document-
based question show this pre-Japanese period of Western incursions as the seed time for later
Korean nationalism.

PROCEDURE:

1. Consult the “Teacher Background on Chosŏn Korea” and be sure that students have
   sufficient background knowledge to understand the context of these primary documents.
   All of the documents in the question come from Lee, Peter H. Sources of Korean
   Tradition, Vol. 2: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries New York: Columbia
2. Remind students that in a document-based question, they are reading documents that are
   excerpts from primary sources. Students are expected to act like historians and to use the
   documents as evidence to argue their thesis in response to the questions set out in the
   “task.”
3. Distribute the document-based question handout and read the task. Ask students to
   explain what the task is asking them to do.
4. Instruct students read each document and to answer the question after each document.
   Students should also be told to look for similarities and differences between documents
   so that they can group them for their essay.
5. After students have finished reading documents and answering the short- answer
   questions, review student responses and check to see that students understand the
   documents and the points of view. Continue the discussion to consider how the
   documents might be grouped.
6. Give out the Document-Based Essay Scoring Rubric. For homework, have students read
   the Document-Based Essay Scoring Rubric and to write their essay on loose leaf paper.
Remind them to use proper essay form with an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph.

7. On day two, do a peer editing exercise in which students pair up, exchange essays, and then read and critique their partner’s essay based on the scoring rubric.

8. Conclude the lesson with a class discussion on the question: What changes and continuities can be seen in Korea’s responses to contact with the West before 1890? Which of these responses is most valuable for Korea’s future? Why?

**EVALUATION:**
Grade students’ Part A short answers on each document based on whether the student answers the question and shows understanding of the document.

Grade student essays based on the Document-Based Essay Scoring Rubric.

**RESOURCES:**


www.chosonkorea.org
TEACHER BACKGROUND ON CHOSŎN KOREA

These teaching points should be included in background lessons on Korea to set the stage for the document-based question on Korea’s responses to contact with the West.

- The Chosŏn Kingdom (1392-1910), one of the longest-lived actively ruling dynasties in East Asia, experienced more than 500 years of internal peace and stable borders.

- Throughout its history, Korea has been influenced by Chinese civilization. Confucianism and other aspects of Chinese civilization have become part of the cultural makeup of Korean society. During the Chosŏn Kingdom, Korea was a client state of China who considered Korea to be its suzerain.

- The Chosŏn Kingdom was known in the West as the “Hermit Kingdom” because there was little official interest in the world beyond Korea and China. Nonetheless, Koreans did have contact with Western scientific and spiritual ideas. In the seventeenth century several Dutchmen were shipwrecked in Korean waters and some spent many years in Korea. One named Hendrik Hamel wrote about his observations of Korea after he escaped from there. Koreans also met Westerners in China when they went to China on diplomatic missions. This is how some Koreans met Catholic missionaries and were given Western books and artifacts which they brought back to Korea. Thus, Koreans first learned about Western mathematics, astronomy, etc. and also about Catholic Christianity.

- The first detailed cultural geography of the West to reach Korea was the *World Geography* written by Fr. Giulio Aleni (1582-1649). This was written by Fr. Aleni to supplement a world map created by Fr. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), a fellow Jesuit missionary in China who sought to impress Confucian scholars with Western scientific knowledge as part of their strategy to spread Christianity in China.

- Chosŏn adopted Neo-Confucianism as the state orthodoxy. The social system was highly stratified with the King and royalty at the top, next the yangban (the scholar-officials), next the “middle people” (a class that served the needs of the yangban and royalty), then the commoners, followed by the low-born. Socio-political stability was achieved by promoting a Confucian based education system. In public and private schools students were trained to pass the civil service exams. Chosŏn was transformed into a model Confucian state. Buddhism, Shamanism, and eventually Catholicism were restricted in their practice.

- The invention of Han’gul in 1443 and the development of *sirhak*, or Practical Learning – a school of thought advocating research and writing on issues indigenous to Korea indicate a desire to develop a “Korean” identity in a culture that emulated Chinese Confucianism.

- Like China and unlike Japan, there was no entrenched military class in Chosŏn. Rather, Koreans put great emphasis on scholarly learning, in the Confucian tradition, and looked down upon military pursuits.

- The early Chosŏn period was also a time of artistic and scientific advances in Korea. The Chosŏn King Sejong promulgated a phonetic writing system for Korean in 1446. Now called Hangul, the Korean alphabet is one of the simplest and most efficient writing systems in the world. But the scholarly yangban class made limited use of Hangul and continued to write most of its literature, philosophy, and official documents in classical Chinese until the twentieth century.
By 1620, Korean intellectuals had carefully considered various aspects of Western civilization. This gave rise to the “Western Learning” school of yangban scholars who had fallen out of favor with the royal court. Yi Sung-hun was the first Korean convert to Catholicism and an enthusiast of Western Learning. When Yi returned to Korea in 1784, he began the Catholic movement in Korea. The first converts to Catholicism were the fallen yangban. However, the popularity of Catholicism also spread to the commoners and the low born.

The last fifty years of the Chosŏn Kingdom was a troubled period for Korea. King Kojong (1864-1907) was chosen to become king at age 12. His natural father, the Taewŏngun served as regent while the king was underage. Korea faced both domestic problems and foreign threats.

By the mid-nineteenth century Korea was one of the last Asian holdouts against Western imperialism, which had conquered much of southern Asia and was making inroads on China. Vietnam, which like Korea was a close tributary state to China, had been conquered by the French in the 1860s.

Following the successful opening of Japan to trade and diplomacy with the West in 1854 through the "gunboat diplomacy" of Commodore Perry of the US Navy, the British, the French, and the Americans all attempted to open Korea in a similar fashion. Korea, however, refused to comply with Western demands, and engaged in naval skirmishes with the French and the Americans in the 1860s and early 1870s.

In 1868 with the Meiji Restoration, Japan began its transformation into a wealthy and powerful nation in the style of Western industrial nations. This process of transformation was a broad reform of Japanese society based on Western models. Japan went from being a “developing nation” to a world power by 1931.

In the end, Korea was forced to open up not by the West, but by Japan itself. The 1876 Treaty of Kanghwa between Japan and Korea, named after the island off the west coast of Korea where it was signed, was a classic "unequal treaty" of the kind Western powers were imposing on Asian countries, including China and Japan, in the nineteenth century. The treaty gave Japan special trading rights and other privileges in Korea that were not reciprocated for Koreans in Japan. The United States and major European countries soon followed with their own treaties of trade and diplomacy with Korea.

By the end of the nineteenth century, rivalry over Korea led to war between Japan and China (1894-95) and, ten years later, between Japan and Russia (1904-5). Japan won both wars, and in 1910 Japan annexed Korea as a colony, ending the Chosŏn Kingdom after more than 500 years of independent rule.
DOCUMENT-BASED ESSAY QUESTION
KOREANS’ RESPONSES TO CONTACT WITH WESTERN CULTURE

Historical Context: During the time of the Chosŏn Kingdom, Korea was known as the “Hermit Kingdom to Western nations. Knowledge of the West and Westerners gradually filtered into Korea beginning in the 1600’s. As Western technology and religion spread in Korea, varied ideas and attitudes toward Western culture developed in Korea. As Western imperialism affected China and Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century, the pressure of Western imperial demands became greater.

Task: Analyze and evaluate the various responses of Koreans to the influx of Western ideas into Korea from the 1600’s to 1890.

Part A: Short-Answer Questions
Read each document. Be careful to note the author and to understand his point of view. Consider similarities and differences between the documents and how each can help to address the task. Answer the short-answer question that follows each document in sentences.

Document 1:

China changed to Western methods of calendrical calculation between 1636 and 1637. Next year the official calendar we receive from China will certainly be quite different from the one we use here in Korea. If the new calendar is really as accurate as reported, we should abandon our old ways of calendrical calculation and accept the new.

(Kim Yuk, leading official of mid-seventeenth-century Chosŏn Kingdom, 1645)

1. According to Kim Yuk, what standard should be applied in deciding whether to adopt the Western calendar and “abandon our old ways”?

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Document 2

There was a time when Westerners, too, did not realize that there were lands beyond the ocean. Then, a little more than a century before Aleni’s (Jesuit who wrote World Geography) time, a man named Columbus found land to the east. After him, another man, called Magellan, sailed from those lands Columbus had found all the way to China and then went completely around the world…On the Western maps, China, Japan, and Korea are all in the Orient. If these missionaries had not seen this with their own eyes as they sailed the seas, how could they have learned of it? From this,
we can infer that what the Western scholars place on their maps is not totally without foundation, though there may be things we have not personally experienced ourselves.”
(Yi Ik, Chosŏn scholar—early Sirhak philosopher, c. 1750)

2. What is Yi Ik’s evaluation of Western geographical knowledge? How did he reach his conclusions?

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Document 3

Ricci (Matteo Ricci, Jesuit missionary in China) and his colleagues are all big-nosed and blue-eyed. They wear the scholar’s headdress and blue robes, and they never marry, remaining chaste…The skill they display in surveying both heaven and earth is like nothing every before seen in China…The scholars of China all respect them and call them their teachers…However, even though they harshly criticize Buddhism, they are not aware that they are just as deluded as they say the Buddhists are.

…the Europeans embrace the miraculous and the mysterious. The more perplexing the evidence, the more easily the ignorant are seduced by it. This being the case, they have no right to complain that only evil spirits delude people. The teachings of their Lord of Heaven do at least as much damage to the hearts and minds of people…

There is no subject these Westerners have not exhaustively explored and nothing too profound for them to understand, so it is really a pity that they have become mixed up with such nonsense.
(Yi Ik, Chosŏn scholar—early Sirhak philosopher, c. 1720)

3. Does Yi Ik respect the Westerners? What about the Westerners’ behavior does he criticize?

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Document 4

...No government that does not base itself on appropriate laws can be a true government. And no law can be appropriate if it is not based on moral principles.

Yet these Europeans treat these three fields as separate and distinct and let students decide for themselves which one of those three they wish to concentrate on. Can they be said to really know theology, law, or government if they only know them in isolation and do not know how those three fields are interrelated?...

The European education system is as different from ours as fire is from water. Our Confucian educational system is based on the decrees of Heaven and the moral rules that hold society together and focuses on giving students a deep understanding of those ethical guidelines so they can apply them in everyday life. How can we even think about comparing the European approach to education with ours?...Europeans do not know how to separate the wheat from the chaff in their curriculum, and they use the words like “moral principles,” “law,” or “government” with no sense of their real meaning. European educational theories are so shallow and simpleminded that they are laughable.

(Sin Hudam, disciple of Yi Ik, c. 1725)

4. What criticisms does Sin Hudam make about the European education system? Why is Korea’s Confucian education system preferable to him?

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Document 5

My questioner continued, “Jesus is the name of the Messiah, the savior of the world. He was just like the sages in that he wanted to promote moral behavior. There is no difference.”

I responded, “How can you say that? When Jesus worked on ‘saving the world,’ he focused on a world after this one. He tantalized people with promises of heaven if they did good and threatened people with hell if they did evil. In promoting moral behavior the (Confucian) sages, however, focus on this world. They illuminate virtue and revitalize the people in order to educate and transform them. Jesus encourages selfishness and the sages foster selflessness. Therein lies a difference.

(An Chŏngbok, disciple of Yi Ik relating a discussion with a Korean convert to Catholicism, 1790)
5. Explain An Chŏngbok’s statement, “Jesus encourages selfishness and the sages foster selflessness.”

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**Document 6**

Rewards and punishments are the basic tools the state has at its disposal to encourage its subjects to do good and warn them against doing evil…European books have been coming into Korea for hundreds of years…what the Europeans said about maintaining an attitude of reverence and recovering their original moral nature was not much different from what Confucians have said…When barbarians introduce strange ideas, there is reason to fear damage to morality…the harm these strange ideas are doing is worse than that wrought by wild beasts or perverse tales. If we want to save our way of life from corruption, there is no better course of action than to clarify the truth. We need a policy that gets the general population working with us to encourage proper behavior and discourage evil.

(King Chŏngjo [1776-1800], Chosŏn Kingdom king talking about how to respond to the spread of Catholicism, 1795)

6. Is King Chŏngjo against all European ideas coming into Korea? Why does he oppose the “strange ideas” of the Europeans? What solution does he suggest?

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**Document 7**

Do Catholics really distort Confucian moral principles? Do Catholics really delude the masses? Of course not. Good Catholics behave the way all of us…should behave in our daily lives. You cannot say that Catholics are a threat to Confucian moral principles or that they sow confusion….Catholicism is the most holy and sagely, the most fair and impartial, the most correct and orthodox, the most genuine and true, the most perfect and complete, and the most singular and unique of all teachings….Why are Catholics denied
the tolerance granted to Buddhism and shamans? Does Catholicism harm the family? Does it harm the state? Look at what we Catholics do, study our behavior, and you will see what kind of people we are and what kind of teachings we follow… (Chŏng Hasan, Catholic convert and Confucian scholar writing to the king. He was martyred in 1839, c. 1839)

7. Summarize Chŏng Hasan argument in favor of tolerance for Catholicism in Korea.

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Document 8

When Chinese civilization encounters a barbarian people, those barbarians are transformed by Chinese ways into a civilized people. Barbarians look up to China and are delighted to receive its civilizing influence. This is the way things are in the natural order of things….Europe has instead been saturated with a lot of misleading notions, and Europeans as a result tend to spout a bunch of nonsense, criticizing the teachings of earlier Confucian sages and condemning the teachings of later Neo-Confucian philosophers….Europeans do have a remarkable talent for technology. They easily surpass the Chinese in that area. But that achievement makes them arrogant, and they think they can convert the whole world to their way of thinking. They need to think again! (Yi Hangno, conservative Neo-Confucian scholar, c. 1845)

8. How would Yi Hangno, a Korean scholar, assess the relationship between Korea and China? How does he evaluate the culture of Europe?

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Document 9

In 1866 two strange looking ships arrived and dropped anchor off the island of P’alma (Korea)….The Taewŏngun directed the governor to inform the [French] envoy that “our
nation guards its shores very strictly and forbids foreign ships from entering.”…The Taewŏngun also ordered the deployment of troops to repel any attempt to enter….Thereupon, the Taewŏngun wrote the following words in big letters on the pillar of the hall: “The ocean barbarians have invaded. Not to fight is to advocate peace. To advocate peace is to sell out the country.”

(Pak Chehyŏng, wrote Korean account of the French naval expedition of 1866, c. 1866)

9. Are the Taewŏngun’s actions in the face of the French expedition in 1866 consistent with the policies vis a vis foreigners during the Chosŏn period? Why or why not?

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Document 10

(It is said) “The Westerners cultivated high ethics, and there is nothing they cannot do. There is no one who can stand before their attacking military power, and even China is being destroyed.” May we not suffer the same fate? Their Way is called the Western Way, their religion Christianity, and their teaching the Heavenly teaching”…I said: “Our Way emphasizes accomplishing things through natural action. If one cultivates his mind, balances his energy, receives the divine teaching, and follows the divine nature, things will be accomplished naturally. But the Westerners have no order in their words and no pure concern for God. They pray really for their flesh, and they have no effective God. In their doctrine there is no real teaching of God….Their way is vain and their doctrine does not really deal with God….I was born in the East and received the truth in the East. Therefore, the Way is the Heavenly Way and the doctrine is the Eastern Learning (Tonghak).

(Ch’oe Cheu, founder of Tonghak [Eastern Learning], c. 1860)

10. Describe Ch’oe Cheu’s evaluation of the “Western Way.” How do his ideas represent both old and new ideas?
Document 11

Although foreign things are of so many varieties that not all of them can be enumerated, the Western commodities are the most obvious. I beg your Majesty to make a firm decision and burn any Western goods that may be found among your clothes, food, and items of daily use. It will serve to show what you like and dislike. It will prove your self-discipline and rectitude. And your lifestyle will conform to the established norms….If personal virtues are cultivated, family life is well ordered, and if the country is properly governed, there will be no need for Western goods and the trade in these goods will cease. Without trade, their novelty and wonder will be unrecognized. If their novelty and wonder are unrecognized, the Westerners will surely stop coming because there will be nothing for them to do.
(Yi Hangno, Neo-Confucian scholar, c. 1866)

11. What incorrect assumptions does Yi Hangno make in this memorial to the king?
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Document 12

Although they call themselves Japanese, they are really Western bandits. Once peace is concluded, books of their wicked religion and images of their God will be mixed in with other trading goods and, passed on by the preacher to the disciples, will be all over the country before long….Once peace is concluded, they will want to enter and travel within the country…If we leave them unchecked, however, they will plunder our property and violate women at will and no one will be able to restrain them. They have the face of human beings but the mind of beasts…The tenets of ethics will disappear, and no living soul will enjoy a day of happiness….It is obvious that the Japanese and the Westerners are one and the same. How can one believe them when they say they are Japanese and not Westerners?...they are different from the Japanese of the past.
(Ch’oe Ikhyŏn, Neo-Confucian scholar in a memorial to the king opposing the Treaty of Kanghwa with Japan, 1876)

12. Why does Ch’oe Ikhyŏn identify the Japanese with the Westerners? What does he mean when he says the Japanese “are different from the Japanese of the past”?
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Document 13

Russia, America, and Japan are all barbarian nations, and it is not easy to distinguish among them...If the Russians demand land, or emigrate and settle in Korea, or ask for trade, following the Japanese example or citing the American treaty, how will your Majesty resist?...In this world, there are many nations comparable to America and Japan. If they have unjust designs and come to us with demands for land and treasure in pursuit of their interests, as Japan has done, what will Your Majesty do to stop them?...Throughout history and everywhere in the world, the barbarian races have been known for their greed. If they join forces and align themselves against our country, how will your Majesty block them?...Ever since the opening of the country...the people have become distressed, and the nation’s fortunes have declined, thereby tempting the Japanese and the barbarians to make plans against our country.
(Yi Manson, Confucian scholar, 1881)

13. What is the tone of this petition from Yi Manson to the Chosŏn king? Does it seem he believes Korea can resist imperialistic pressure from Western nations and Japan?

Document 14

Enlightenment entails not only learning the advanced skills of others but also preserving what is good and admirable in one’s own society....In this process of emulation, the circumstances of the time, one’s own situation, the importance and consequences of the process, all must be assessed and a step-by-step sequence followed. An overzealous person without any discretion may claim that everything about a foreign country is good and nothing about his own country is admirable....He is said to be a progressive....He is really a criminal of enlightenment.

At the other extreme, a person who is insufficiently enlightened lacks judgment about the reality of the case due to his stubborn nature. Such a person claims that the foreigner is a barbarian, that the foreign goods are of no use, that the foreign learning is Catholicism, which he abhors, and that he himself is the best in the world; he may even
seclude himself. He is said to be a conservative….He is really an enemy of enlightenment.
(Yu Kilchun, advocate of reform [“enlightenment”], 1880’s)

14. What principle concerning “enlightenment” does Yu Kilchun emphasize in this excerpt?

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**Part B: Essay**

Write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction with a thesis statement, several paragraphs explaining the thesis, and a conclusion. Analyze the documents. Use evidence from the documents to support your positions. Do not simply repeat the contents of the documents or “laundry-list” documents. Include specific, related outside information.

**Historical Context:** During the time of the Chosŏn Kingdom, Korea was known as the “Hermit Kingdom to Western nations. Knowledge of the West and Westerners gradually filtered into Korea beginning in the 1600’s. As Western technology and religion spread in Korea, varied ideas and attitudes toward Western culture developed in Korea. As Western imperialism affected China and Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century, the pressure of Western imperial demands became greater.

**Task:** Analyze and evaluate the various responses of Koreans to the influx of Western ideas into Korea from the 1600’s to 1890.
DOCUMENT-BASED ESSAY SCORING RUBRIC

—5—
• Thoroughly addresses all aspects of the task by accurately analyzing and interpreting most of the documents.
• Incorporates relevant outside information.
• Richly supports essay with relevant facts, examples and details.
• Writes a well-developed essay, consistently demonstrating a logical and clear plan of organization.
• Uses information from the documents in the body of the essay but does not copy the document.
• Includes a strong introduction and conclusion.

—4—
• Addresses all aspects of the task by accurately analyzing and interpreting most of the documents.
• Incorporates relevant outside information.
• Includes relevant facts, examples and details, but discussion may be more descriptive than analytical.
• Writes a well-developed essay, demonstrating a logical and clear plan of organization.
• Includes a good introduction and conclusion.

—3—
• Addresses most aspects of the task or addresses all aspects in a limited way; uses some of the documents.
• Incorporates limited or no relevant outside information.
• Uses some facts, examples, and details, but discussion is more descriptive than analytical.
• Writes a satisfactorily developed essay, demonstrating a general plan of organization.
• Restates the theme in the introduction and concludes with a simple restatement of the theme.
• Misinterprets at least one of the documents.

—2—
• Attempts to address some aspects of the task, making limited use of the documents.
• Incorporates no relevant outside information.
• Presents few facts, examples, and details; simply restates contents of the documents.
• Writes a poorly organized essay, lacking focus.
• Has vague or missing introduction and/or conclusion.
• Misinterprets two or more of the documents.

—1—
• Shows limited understanding of the task with vague, unclear references to the documents.
• Presents no relevant outside information.
• Attempts to complete the task, but essay demonstrates major weakness in organization.
• Uses little or no accurate or relevant facts, details or examples.
• Has vague or missing introduction and/or conclusion.
• Shows misunderstanding of the documents

—0—
• Fails to address the task.
• Is illegible.
• Has blank paper.

(Source: New York State Department of Education)
see also http://www.p12.nysed.gov/osa/ss/hs/rgsr-b.html