

Context and Contextualization

The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which can be fully understood and assessed. The conditions that formed the setting for an event in history.

According to the College Board, **contextualization** refers to a:

Historical thinking skill that involves the ability to connect **historical** events and processes to specific circumstances of time and place as well as broader regional, national, or global processes.

You have to situate historical events, developments, or processes within the broader regional, national, or global context in which they occurred in order to draw conclusions about their relative significance. In other words, you are asked to provide background before writing the thesis and essay. You have to paint a picture of what is going on at the time of the prompt.

It makes natural sense to place the contextualization in the introduction right before a thesis point. Placing this historical background right at the beginning sets the stage for the argument that will occur in the body of the essay.

Using the example of Star Wars. Before the movie starts, the film begins with “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...” and continues with background information on the characters, events, and other information that is crucial to understanding the film. Without this context, the viewer would not know what is going on, and might miss key events or be lost throughout the film. This is what contextualization aims to do in your essays. It sets the stage for their thesis, evidence, and argument that is to follow.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXDnFYu91vY>

Contextualization refers to putting the entire essay into a broader context (preferably in the introduction). However, when writing your DBQ essay, you are also required to analyze the documents that they utilize by either examining the author’s point of view, describing the intended audience of the source, identifying the author’s purpose or putting the source into historical context. This sounds similar to contextualization (and it is essentially the same skill), but historical context is only focused on the specific document being analyzed, not the entire essay, like the contextualization point.

For example, if a document is a map that shows slavery growing dramatically from 1820 to 1860, you might point out that this growth can be explained in the context of the development of the cotton gin, which made the production of cotton much more profitable and led to the spread of slavery in the Deep South. While essentially the same skill, historical context focuses on one specific document’s background.

The Format for an AP Essay

Context
Thesis
Body Paragraphs
Conclusion

A **thesis statement** focuses your ideas into one or two sentences. It should present the topic of your paper and also make a comment about your position in relation to the topic. Your **thesis statement** should tell your reader what the paper is about and also help guide your writing and keep your argument focused.

The thesis statement is a complicated, inclusive sentence or sentences that links the subject of the essay with the student's proposition (thesis idea) about the subject. The thesis statement must be located after the Context and before the first body paragraph. It is important to differentiate between the subject and the thesis idea. The thesis idea is your thought or point of view about the subject. Note how the example follows a formula.

A thesis statement must contain the first two elements in the formula, and the essay plan to be part of the thesis statement.

Subject of the essay + Thesis idea (student's proposition) + Essay Plan (which is three or four key points that will be developed in your essay)

Example of thesis statement with Essay Plan:

Three ways that a **person** suffering from **Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS)** can overcome the condition and lead a normal life are **receiving psychological treatment, maintaining strong family bonds, and developing a regular routine of accomplishment, such as a job or school.**