

Historical Thinking Skill 6: Develop an argument

Writing claims is often the first argumentation skill that students practice, but claims are difficult to develop without prompting. Giving students prompts to work with can help them as they learn this skill. The prompt should establish parameters that require students to take a position, either by choosing one of two presented alternatives or by assessing the extent to which a given proposition or scenario is valid.

In order to develop a historically defensible claim, students need to know what evidence is available to support that claim. They can practice writing claims using just their knowledge as evidence, as they will in the long essay question. They should also write claims using documents, to practice both evidence and sourcing (a few at first, then build quantity as students gain skills and confidence), as they will in the document-based question.

The reasoning processes, discussed in more depth starting on page 190, will help students develop historical reasoning needed to appropriately connect their evidence to their claims.

There is no simple path to teaching students to develop complex arguments. The tasks/questions and the sample activities in the table below can serve as a roadmap. However, students will also need a mastery of the course content, source analysis, a highly developed understanding of historical context, and the ability to make connections between and among events to demonstrate this skill. In short, it is the culminating skill for an AP World History: Modern student.

Skill	Tasks/Questions	Sample Activity	Instructional Strategies
<p>6.A: <i>Make a historically defensible claim.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you know about the development or processes established the prompt? ▪ What are your options regarding positions to take? ▪ What historical reasoning process is indicated (or best fits the structure of the essay you plan to write)? ▪ Based on the prompt and the evidence (either provided or from your own knowledge), which position will you take? ▪ State in a few words how you will prove your claim. 	<p>Provide students with a practice writing prompt, such as <i>Develop an argument that evaluates how industrialization affected Asia after 1830.</i></p> <p>Have students break down the question into potential positions (industrialization fostered economic growth or industrialization led to imperial domination, or both).</p> <p>Have them identify a historical reasoning process that best fits the essay that they would go on to develop (such as comparison or causation).</p> <p>Ask them to think of evidence that would support all of the identified positions; then, ask them to write a defensible claim that establishes a line of reasoning by stating their chosen position and provides a roadmap for how they are going to prove their claim.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self/Peer Revision

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Skill	Tasks/Questions	Sample Activity	Instructional Strategies
<p>6.B: <i>Support an argument using specific and relevant evidence.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe specific examples of historically relevant evidence. Explain how specific examples of historically relevant evidence support an argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm relevant evidence that relates to the development or process established in the prompt. Hone your initial list of evidence by describing specific examples that support the argument. If practicing a document-based question, evaluate the evidence provided. Determine whether the evidence supports, refutes, or modifies each of the possible positions. 	<p>Provide students with three to four documents* that could be used to support the positions outlined in a sample prompt, such as <i>Evaluate the extent to which European industrialization produced a radical change in the lives of Africans</i>. Ask students to evaluate the evidence using a Venn diagram. They should group the evidence into three categories: evidence that supports the idea that industrialization produced a radical change, evidence that the change was not as radical, and evidence that could be used to support both positions. For each piece of evidence, have students write a statement explaining how the evidence supports the position(s).</p> <p>*Teachers can use this same activity for long essay question practice by asking students to brainstorm relevant evidence instead of providing documents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graphic Organizer
<p>6.C: <i>Use historical reasoning to explain relationships among pieces of historical evidence.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which reasoning process(es) is indicated in the prompt (comparison, causation, continuity and change)? If comparison is indicated, establish relevant categories in which to compare the evidence. If causation is indicated, how does the evidence show a pattern of causes and/or effects? If continuity and change is indicated, identify patterns or developments that indicate change and/or continuity and draw conclusions in support of your claim. 	<p>When practicing for the long essay, have students identify the historical reasoning process indicated in the prompt. Then have them develop and use a graphic organizer (such as a Venn diagram or flow chart) to arrange the evidence in a way that reflects the organizational structure of the historical reasoning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graphic Organizer Self/Peer Revision Debate

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Skill	Tasks/Questions	Sample Activity	Instructional Strategies
<p>6.D: <i>Corroborate, qualify, or modify an argument using diverse and alternative evidence in order to develop a complex argument. This argument might:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain nuance of an issue by analyzing multiple variables. ▪ Explain relevant and insightful connections within and across periods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which categorical variables (such as commercial, political, religious, etc.) have a significant effect on the development or process? ▪ How does the development or process relate to or how was it affected by the categorical variables you identified? ▪ How is this development or process significantly similar to or different from a related development or process? ▪ Is this development or process a significant result of or a major catalyst for a development or process within or across time periods? ▪ Does this development or process represent a significant change or a continuity over time? ▪ Does this development or process provide evidence of a significant pattern in world history? 	<p>In an essay on the effectiveness of state sponsored industrialization, ask students to provide evidence to support various categorical variables and explain their impact on the effectiveness of programs to promote industrialization. Then have them order the categorical variables to show the most to least important in terms of effectiveness.</p> <p>In an essay, ask students to make connections between independence movements.</p> <p>For example, how was the American Revolution of the 18th century similar to other independence movements like the one in India in the 20th century? Do the similarities provide evidence of a broad pattern in world history? In what ways does the later movement show continuity with the original movement? In what ways does it show change? Do these continuities and changes provide evidence of a larger pattern in world history?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create Representations ▪ Graphic Organizer ▪ Think-Pair-Share ▪ Quickwrite ▪ Self/Peer Revision

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Skill	Tasks/Questions	Sample Activity	Instructional Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the relative historical significance of a source's credibility and limitations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How or why is the source's point of view, purpose, historical situation, or audience relevant to the argument? How would this affect the use of the source in developing an argument? 	<p>Provide students with a set of four documents with contradictory perspectives on the debate over the outcome of the settlement of World War I.</p> <p>Ask them to examine each document and weigh the relative historical significance and credibility of each.</p> <p>Then have students establish a position on the effects of the peace negotiations through an evaluation of each source's point of view, purpose, historical situation, or audience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create Representations Graphic Organizer Think-Pair-Share Quickwrite Self/Peer Revision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain how or why a historical claim or argument is or is not effective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the historical claim. How does the evidence support this claim? What evidence goes against this claim? What evidence-based counterarguments exist? Refute the counterargument by using evidence to explain why it is not as effective. 	<p>Using a collection of sources from a released document-based question, ask students to identify the claim of a source and list the evidence presented in a chart. Then ask them to corroborate or refute the claim based on the evidence. Ask them to present disparate, diverse, or contradictory evidence that they glean from the sources. After refuting the claim, ask them why their argument is the most persuasive.</p>	