Thinking Like an Historian.

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS
What are you being asked to do?
The Question

- Document based questions are usually very open-ended, and can be answered in many different ways.
- You will always be given a collection of documents which will help you to answer the question, so DON’T WORRY if you look at a question an initially don’t have an answer. You will. The answers are in the documents.
The Question

- Identify EXACTLY what the question wants you to do. Chances are, you’ll be asked to:
  - Evaluate something
  - Judge something
  - Look for the cause of something
- Identify the time period the question addresses. You need to know WHEN the events you are discussing occurs.
- Identify the location the question addresses.
Reading the Documents

Looking for answers.
Reading the Documents

- As you read each document, you should look for the following:
  - **Speaker**: Who is talking? What sort of person is recording this material?
  - **Occasion**: Was there a specific event or reason why this document was written?
  - **Audience**: Who was this document written for? What sort of person does the author think he/she is writing for?
  - **Purpose**: What is the goal of this document?
  - **Subject**: What is the document about?
  - **TONE**: How does the document sound?
As you read each document, ask yourself:

- “How does this document help me to answer the overall question?”
- “Is this document similar in any way to the other documents I’ve been given?”
Grouping the Documents

One of these things is not like the others....
Grouping the Documents

Once you’ve read all the documents, try to see if you can put them into categories. You’ll need at least two, but no more than four.

You might want to see if you can come up with categories like:

- **Political**: Are there documents about government?
- **Economic**: Are there documents about money?
- **Religious**: Are there documents about faith?
- **Social**: Are there documents about class or gender?
- **Intellectual**: Are there documents about education?
- **Artistic**: Are there documents about art?
Grouping the Documents

- Once you’ve come up with your broad categories, try to figure out which of your documents belong in each.
- REMEMBER: For something to qualify as a group, it must have AT LEAST two documents.
Writing the Thesis

Let’s go back to the initial question.
Writing the Thesis

- Look back at the original question your were given with this assignment. You thesis should ANSWER THAT QUESTION.
- Look at the groups you created of your documents. Chances are, those groups can help you answer your question.
Writing the Thesis

- Let’s work off of the question, “Why did Islam spread so quickly?”
  - If your groups were broadly titled, “Political,” “Social,” and “Economic,” a simple thesis statement might be:
    - *Islam spread quickly due to the political, social, and economic incentives it provided for its converts.*
  - In short, your thesis should restate the question and include the categories you created by grouping.
Analyzing Point of View

You are NOT allowed to use the word “biased.”
Analyzing Point of View

- You must choose at least TWO documents to analyze for point of view during the course of your essay.
  - “Point of view” is not the author’s name, or the author’s argument.
  - Point of view is **how the IDENTITY of the author in their historical context shapes the CONTENT of the document**.
    - Example: “Ibn Battuta indicates that the freedoms given to women in Mali disturb and unsettle him, likely because as a Muslim cleric from a more conservative region, he was unused to seeing women take on such strong social roles (Doc. 4).”
  - Please, for the love of everything: DO NOT USE THE WORD “BIASED.” You rarely use it correctly.
Additional Document

Imagining other sources.
Additional Document

- At least ONCE in your essay, you need to identify a type of source (document, photograph, chart, map, etc.) which would help you to better answer the question.

- Think about what voices have been left out:
  - If there are documents ABOUT a group of people, but not BY a group of people, would it be helpful to have direct documents by them?

- Describe (briefly) why the document is necessary.
Outlining your Essay

Using your thesis, groups, and evidence.
Outlining your Essay

- Depending on the number of groups you have, your essay might be as short as four paragraphs, or as long as six.
- Overall, it should look like this:
  - Introductory Paragraph
    - Background and thesis statement.
  - First Body Paragraph
    - First topic and evidence from documents.
  - Second Body Paragraph
    - Second topic and evidence from documents.
  - Third Body Paragraph
    - Third topic and evidence from documents.
  - Concluding Paragraph
    - Restatement of your thesis.
Outlining your Essay

- For every body paragraph, you should use at least THREE pieces of evidence from the documents in that group. Use evidence that will help you to prove your point.

- Before you write your essay, try to determine which pieces of evidence will be most useful. YOU MUST USE EVERY DOCUMENT IN YOUR ESSAY.

- When you use evidence, make sure that you cite it at the end of the sentence. It should look like this:
  - According to a traveler to Mecca in 1254, the caravan trade system was extremely important (Doc. 2).
Writing your Essay

Stringing it all together.
Writing your Essay

- Use your outline to help keep yourself on task. Remember, if the information doesn’t help you prove your point, it has NO PLACE in your essay.

- Use academic tone. This means:
  - No slang
  - No “I,” no “you,” no “we,” no “y’all,” etc.
  - No conversational tone (“Well, you see….”)
  - No emoticons. D: