

WHAT IS THIS ASKING? INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This quick skill-building activity is intended to help you understand what is being asked of you when you're presented with historical prompts, particularly those you'll encounter in assessment prompts such as document-based questions (DBQs) and long essay questions (LEQs).

Process

In this activity, you're going to learn how to parse a prompt. What is parsing a prompt? It's the process of analyzing a string of words. Or, put more simply, it's trying to figure out what something—in this case a historical prompt—is saying and asking.

For the majority of historical prompts you encounter, you'll be asked to do five things, so a LOT is packed into these sentences. Here are the five things—keep in mind, most if not all of these elements should be included in your thesis statements:

1. **Periodization** – What's the timeframe referred to in the prompt?
2. **Location** – Where in the world this is happening?
3. **Topic** – What is the main topic being explored?
4. **Historical reasoning practice** – Which of these three historical reasoning practices are you being asked to use: comparison, causation, or CCOT?
5. **Composition** – What type of essay are you writing (for example, is it expository or argumentative)?

Note that although there are historical thinking practices in addition to comparison, causation, and CCOT, those other practices are included in every response you'll give to every historical prompt, so there's no need to mention them. (In case you need reminding, those other practices are contextualization, claim testing, and sourcing.)

Now that you have that background, take out the Question Parsing Tool and write down the following prompt: *Analyze continuities and changes in trade networks between Africa and Eurasia from c. 300 CE to 1450 CE.* Walk through the process with your teacher, and fill out the tool as you go. If you get confused, don't hesitate to ask questions—this is a tricky process, but you'll surely master it with a little practice!

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Name:

Date:

Directions: Follow the steps to parse the prompt you are presented with. Use the key at the bottom to help you with the historical reasoning practice and composition questions.

1. **Prompt:**

2. Rewrite the prompt in your own words:

3. **Periodization:** What is the time period you are being asked to consider? Write out the years if you are given something in terms of century (for example, twentieth century = 1900s).

4. **Location:** What areas of the world are included in this prompt?

5. **Topic:** What is the main topic being asked about in this prompt?

6. **Historical reasoning practice:** What historical reasoning practice is this prompt asking you to engage in? Provide justification for why you chose the one you did.

7. **Composition:** What is the prompt stem asking you to do as part of your response? Remember the prompt stem is usually a verb.

Key

| Historical Reasoning Practice | Words/Phrases to Look For |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Causation | Cause, effect, led to, lead to, emergence, resulted, bring about, give rise to, be the cause of, result in, produce, generate, spawn, precipitate, prompt, induce, promote, foster, provoke, trigger |
| Comparison | Similarities, differences, compare, contrast, set side-by-side, juxtapose, differentiate, liken, equate |
| CCOT | Continuities, changes, continuation, persistence, consistent, over time, two points in time |
| Prompt Stem Examples | What It’s Asking in Simpler Language |
| To what extent | Weigh, evaluate, assess |
| Evaluate, assess | How much—needs a quantitative answer/thesis/claim (Note: A quantitative answer is one that includes an amount or a number. For example: a lot, a little) |
| Analyze, develop | Describe and explain |
| Argue, argument | Make a claim |