

## SECTION II, QUESTION 1: DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

The document-based question begins with a mandatory 15-minute reading period. During these 15 minutes, you'll want to (1) come up with some information not included in the given documents (your outside knowledge) to include in your essay; (2) get an overview of what each document means; (3) decide what opinion you are going to argue; and (4) write an outline of your essay.

This DBQ concerns U.S. neutrality prior to World War I. You will have to explore to what extent the United States followed a policy of neutrality between 1914 and 1917. On the following pages, we will talk about how you might successfully explore this topic.

The first thing you want to do, BEFORE YOU LOOK AT THE DOCUMENTS, is brainstorm for a minute or two. Try to list everything you remember about the period leading up to the United States' entry into World War I. This list will serve as your reference to the outside information you must provide in order to earn a top grade.

Next, read over the documents. As you read them, take notes in the margins and underline those passages that you are certain you are going to use in your essay. If a document helps you remember a piece of outside information, add that information to your brainstorming list. If you cannot make sense of a document or it argues strongly against your position, relax! You do not need to mention every document to score well on the DBQ.

### Document 1

This is an excerpt from Wilson's declaration of neutrality. It makes several important points you can use.

Neutrality is defined as "impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned." This standard will enable you to argue that the United States was, or was not, neutral.

The American people come from the different nations at war. The political implication is that even if the U.S. government wanted to enter World War I, the varied national backgrounds of the electorate would make it difficult to rally the nation to one side or the other. Even before Vietnam, American politicians knew the risks of entering an unpopular war.

Wilson envisions a prominent role for the United States resulting from neutrality. He sees the United States as "the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a partisan, but as a friend." This point argues that the United States entered the war as a neutral force, or, at the very least, intended to.

### Document 2

This excerpt is from a letter a respected German-American intellectual wrote to Wilson early in the war. It describes German-American perceptions of U.S. favoritism toward the Allies.

This document persuasively argues that U.S. policies at the time favored the Allies. The details are important, but they are less important than the overall point; the document illustrates that an intelligent critique of U.S. policy, held up to its own definition of neutrality, is possible. In fact, when Wilson received this letter, he sent it to his secretary of state with a note essentially saying, "This letter makes a pretty strong case."

Munsterberg's second point, regarding the detention and searching of Germans and Austrians, is not often mentioned in discussions of the events leading up to World War I, and you are not expected to have heard of this policy. However, it does provide ammunition for those arguing that the United States was never neutral; searching civilians is, at the very least, an act of aggressive mistrust. If Allied travelers were not being treated the same way—and the letter implies they were not—then it indicates favoritism.

The issue of contraband could lead you to discuss the British blockade. (Document 3 provides more evidence of the effect of the British blockade.) Contraband is illegal merchandise. During war, contraband always includes weapons and other supplies necessary to the successful execution of war. The notion that contraband is illegal does not preclude the United States from selling arms to Europe; this same document demonstrates that the United States did just that. It does mean, however, that a country executing a successful blockade has the right to confiscate contraband. Munsterberg is saying that England defined contraband very broadly, including on its list of contraband items supplies that the German civilian population needed to survive. He complains that the United States was not aggressive enough in protesting this practice.

The last paragraph talks about the U.S. sale of arms to belligerents. This information can be interpreted in many ways. You could argue that to sell arms is essentially non-neutral, even if you sell to both sides. To make this argument, you would have to equate neutrality with pacifism (something Wilson does in Document 1) and then assert that arms sales prolong the war, and so they are counterproductive to the goals of neutrality. On the other hand, you could argue that because of the successful British blockade, arms sales were predominantly to the Allies; arms shipments to Germany never made it through the blockade. Again, Document 3 will help bolster this position.

### **Document 3**

This quotation often comes from the memoirs of Robert Lansing, acting secretary of state and, later, secretary of state under Wilson.

Lansing describes the effects of the British blockade. Note that merchants are losing profits, and Americans are being terribly inconvenienced.

You might use this to argue favoritism toward the British. Since the British were interfering with U.S. trade, why didn't we go to war against them? To the contrary, you could point out that as it became clear that U.S. commercial interests were at stake, U.S. involvement in the war became more likely. In other words, the United States started out neutral, but the British blockade and German submarine warfare slowly forced America into the war. (See Documents 5, 6, 7, and 8.) You can also use this document to further discuss the effects of the British blockade on (1) the Allies and (2) the Central Powers. As you do, ask yourself whether the United States' response to the blockade was consistent with its policy of neutrality.

### **Document 4**

This is a report from then-Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan (he would soon resign in protest) to the Senate. It is still early in the war.

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You need to look for the following in each document to get the most out of it:

- the author
- the date
- the audience (for whom was the document intended?)
- the significance

Remember: While they are looking for as much in-depth document analysis as possible, it does help to bring in some outside information. Readers will not be able to give you a high score unless you have both! What readers really don't like is a laundry list of documents: That is, a paper in which the student merely goes through the documents, explaining each one. Those students are often the ones who forget to bring in outside information, because they are so focused on going through the documents.

Here is what you might see in the time you have to look over the documents.

## The Documents

### Document 1

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### Document 2

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This document persuasively argues that U.S. policies at the time favored the Allies. The details are important, but they are less important than the overall point; the document illustrates that an intelligent critique of U.S. policy, held up to its own definition of neutrality, is possible. In fact, when Wilson received this letter, he sent it to his secretary of state with a note essentially saying, "This letter makes a pretty strong case."

Do not be intimidated by the length of this passage! The main point is simple. The government felt that its actions were neutral. This letter can be seen as a response to the complaints voiced in Munsterberg's letter.

Bryan discusses communication, the blockade, arms sales, and perceived hostility toward the governments of the Central Powers. In almost every case, he argues that England's advantages in geographic location and naval power are causing America's perceived breaches of neutrality.

If you are arguing that the United States was neutral, you might mention (if you remember) that Bryan, a pacifist, was committed to neutrality. His feeling that U.S. actions were neutral could be presented as strong evidence for your case.

If you are arguing that the United States was not neutral, you might contend that because Bryan is reporting to the Senate, he paints the rosiest picture he can. You might also mention (if you remember) that Bryan resigned not long after because of his disagreements with U.S. policy.

## Document 5

This advertisement ran in fifty American newspapers just before the *Lusitania* sailed.

This document gives you the opportunity to discuss German submarine warfare. The British blockade was too effective for the Germans to fight it conventionally. The Germans therefore turned to the U-boat, or submarine. Submarines gave the Germans the advantage of surprise, as the British had no means of detecting them. You could argue that because submarine attacks resulted in the deaths of U.S. citizens, the use of submarines constituted a hostile act that ultimately forced the neutral United States into war. You might mention that Wilson regarded submarines as a violation of international law (see Chapter 11) and, as such, repeatedly asked the Germans to curtail their usage.

On the contrary, you might claim that the British blockade forced Germany to use submarines, and that by not opposing the blockade more aggressively, the United States was essentially siding with the Allies.

This document, along with Document 6, also gives you the opportunity to discuss the sinking of the *Lusitania* and its effects, both on U.S. policy and on anti-German sentiments in the general population. The shift in American public opinion away from neutrality is a factor you might mention in your discussion of U.S. entry into the war.

## Document 6

This customs report provides evidence that the *Lusitania* carried weapons.

This document can be paired with Munsterberg's complaint about arms sales (Document 2) to support the argument that the United States was not neutral. Note that the shipment is headed for England. Your outside knowledge that the sinking of the *Lusitania* led to William Jennings Bryan's resignation as secretary of state would also be helpful here. Remember, the United States protested the sinking vigorously and demanded reparations. Bryan pointed out that the ship carried arms and quietly assured the Germans that the United States understood why the ship was sunk. In short, Bryan was at odds with official government policy, and he resigned when he realized that his advice to the president was going

unheeded. His replacement, Robert Lansing, more active in defending American interests than Bryan, was willing to trade a reduction in American commerce for peace.

If you are arguing for neutrality, it is best to mention this document only in passing. Note that in Document 4, Bryan explains how the United States reconciles arms sales and neutrality. His justification, in short, is that international law does not outlaw such sales.

## Document 7

Wilson gave this speech after the Germans sunk the *Sussex*, an unarmed French channel steamer. The document is from 1916, almost a year after the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

Wilson threatens to break off diplomatic relations with Germany—a first step toward war.

Wilson invokes international law. Because Wilson interpreted international law as severely restricting submarine warfare, submarine attacks by Germany particularly angered him. Wilson considered himself and the United States the defenders of international law.

Wilson continues to declare America's international role as a mediator and peacemaker, as he did in his neutrality speech (Document 1). This insistence indicates that Wilson still considers the United States a neutral force.

You might point out that a year after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and that of several other ships, the United States is still not at war. This fact strongly argues for neutrality through early 1916.

## Outside Information

We have already discussed much more than you could possibly include in a 40-minute essay. Do not worry. You will not be expected to mention everything or even most of what we have covered in the section above. You will, however, be expected to include some outside information; that is, information not mentioned directly in the documents.

Here is some outside information you might have used in your essay. The information is divided into two groups: general concepts and specific events.

### General Concepts

- Even before the war the United States relied more on trade with the British than with Germany. After the war began, this dependence became even heavier as the British blockade decreased American trade with Germany. The war effort also resulted in an increase in British orders for American goods. This increase occurred because the war had decreased British productivity. The British had taken men out of factories and put them in the army, and they also had converted some commercial manufacturing to munitions manufacturing.
- When the war started, official U.S. policy stated that American banks should not lend money to any nation at war. However, bankers pressured the administration to change this

policy because Europe did not have the money to pay for the American goods it was ordering. Also, the loans were profitable, and American banks feared losing a lucrative opportunity to banks in other neutral nations. The majority of these loans went to the Allies.

- Wilson hoped the war would end in a draw. He thought a victorious Germany “would change the course of our civilization and make the United States a military nation.” He also felt that an Allied victory would shift the balance of power too favorably toward England and France. Many of Wilson’s advisors, however, were both pro-British and anti-German.
- “Wilsonianism,” Wilson’s idealized vision of the future, included universal, non-exploitative, free market capitalism; universal political constitutionalism, which would lead to the disappearance of empires; and universal cooperation and peace through the offices of the League of Nations. Wilson was also anxious to create a world leadership role for the United States. Many of his actions can be explained as the pursuit of these goals.
- Wilson held very strong views concerning international law, and those views favored the British. According to international law, an attacker had to warn a passenger or merchant ship before attacking. Submarines did not do this, for the obvious reason that it would cancel the greatest advantage submarines had—the element of surprise. Germany argued that submarines provided their only means of breaking British control of shipping channels, but this assertion did not persuade Wilson.

## Specific Events

- The British blockade—From the beginning of the war, the British used their advantage at sea. They blocked shipping channels and confiscated any contraband headed for a Central Power country. Furthermore, England defined contraband very broadly, including some food and commercial products on its contraband list. The United States lodged numerous complaints against the practice, but the British government always paid for what it confiscated. The payment satisfied merchants and took enough pressure off Washington that the U.S. government never forced the issue.
- The sinking of the *Lusitania*, May 7, 1915—You will lose big points if you say that this event caused the United States to enter the war; the United States waited another two years before it started to fight. The *Lusitania* was a luxury liner that sailed from New York to England. When it sank, it took with it 1,198 passengers, among them 128 Americans. As Document 6 illustrates, the *Lusitania* was carrying a considerable amount of contraband, including over 4 million rounds of rifle ammunition. Still, Wilson and most of his advisors considered Germany’s attack on the ship barbaric. As a result of the attack, anti-German sentiments among voters grew stronger and more widespread.
- William Jennings Bryan’s resignation—Bryan resigned in the aftermath of the *Lusitania* incident. An ardent pacifist, Bryan wanted the United States to respond to the incident with a strongly worded letter of protest to both the English and the Germans. Bryan also

suggested that the United States ban American passengers from any ship flying the flag of a belligerent country. Wilson rejected both recommendations. He sent a letter of protest only to the Germans, and he refused to restrict American travel abroad. Bryan resigned in protest. In response to Wilson's letter, the Germans temporarily halted U-boat attacks on passenger ships.

- The sinking of the *Arabic*—In mid-August 1915, the Germans sank another passenger liner. This time only two Americans died, but the government was furious about the breach of etiquette. The Germans pledged again never to attack a passenger liner without advance warning, a promise they did not keep.
- Gore-McLemore resolution—After the sinking of the *Arabic*, Congress began to seriously consider a resolution prohibiting Americans from traveling on armed merchant ships or on ships carting contraband. Wilson fought this Gore-McLemore resolution. Wilson remained adamant that neutral nations should have free access to international waters. The resolution was defeated.
- The sinking of the *Sussex* and the Sussex Agreement—In February 1917, the Germans sank a French channel steamer called the *Sussex*. No Americans died, although four were injured. However, the incident had a big impact because the *Sussex* was neither armed nor was it carrying contraband. In short, its sinking convinced many people that either (1) German submarines could not tell what they were shooting at, or (2) the Germans did not care that they were killing civilians. Either way, it supported the widespread sentiment that submarine warfare was barbaric. Germany again agreed not to attack passenger ships without warning. Wilson was still resolutely determined to stay out of the war, so he accepted the agreement.
- The presidential election of 1916—Despite the many quarrels with England and Germany, most Americans still wanted no part of the European hostilities. All the major candidates campaigned against entry into the war. The Republican, Hughes, courted German-American votes and depicted Wilson as partial to the Allies. Wilson campaigned on the slogan “He kept us out of war.” As the campaign wore on, however, he also began to stress “preparedness” for the possibility of war. Wilson won by a narrow margin.
- More details about the Zimmermann note—By the time this telegram was leaked to the press, Germany had already warned the United States of its plans to resume unrestricted submarine warfare. The reason for the shift in policy is that the Germans realized that without the submarines they would soon lose the war. The resumption of submarine warfare greatly angered Wilson. When the British intercepted the telegram, Wilson had already severed diplomatic ties with Germany and was considering his future options. Wilson received the telegram on February 24, 1917, and the newspapers received it four days later.

The telegram represents a last-ditch effort on Germany's part to keep the United States out of the war. Germany knew that its resumption of submarine warfare would draw the United States into the war. Planning to distract the United States with a border skirmish, Germany hoped to buy enough time to win the war in Europe before U.S. reinforcements could arrive. Because the Mexican Revolution had just replaced a government friendly to the United States with one much more hostile, the U.S. government took the threat of a German-backed Mexican attack in the Southwest very seriously.



It particularly galled the United States that Zimmermann sent the telegram through U.S. State Department channels. The United States had opened those channels to him in hopes of bringing the Germans back to the negotiating table. When he used those same channels to plot war against the United States, it was regarded as an act of extreme hostility and bad manners.

The United States did not immediately declare war. In the weeks that followed, Wilson asked Congress for a policy of “armed neutrality,” which would allow American merchant ships to mount offensive weapons. Debate was fierce, showing how strong anti-war sentiment was even at the time. The United States did not officially declare war until the following month, on April 2, 1917.

- The Nye Commission investigations of 1933—The Nye Commission, investigating American business practices in the years leading up to World War I, revealed that American arms merchants had lobbied intensely for entry into the war. The commission also discovered that these merchants had reaped enormous profit from arms sales, first from whomever they could get them to in Europe and then from the U.S. government.

## Choosing a Side

We have just covered an intimidating amount of material. Do not worry; your essay has to cover only some of the points mentioned above. This review mentions nearly everything you might include in a successful essay, not everything that must be in a successful essay.

Your next task is to choose a position to argue and then construct a strong justification from your notes on the documents and outside information. Document-based questions are written so that there is no one right answer, and there are many different defensible positions to this question. There are also many different ways to argue the same point; that is, there is no one right way to write an essay for any given argument.

Here are some positions you might argue:

- The United States was neutral at the beginning of the war, but a combination of factors—such as economic interests, German transgressions of international law, and America’s predisposition toward England—ultimately drew America into the war.
- The United States was neutral at the beginning of the war but was provoked to fight by German aggression.
- The United States claimed neutrality, and maybe its leaders even convinced themselves that their actions were neutral, but in reality, U.S. actions helped the Allies. Consequently, the United States was never really neutral.
- The United States was correct in claiming neutrality because its policies adhered to its standards of neutrality. However, the Central Powers legitimately accused the United States of acting in a way that assisted the Allies and so were justified in regarding the United States as non-neutral. The question is semantic; whether the United States was neutral depends on how you define neutrality.

The only position you should certainly avoid is the claim that the United States had always sided fully with the Allies and lied about neutrality in order to help them. There is simply too much evidence of Wilson's commitment to neutrality to support that argument.

## Planning Your Essay

Unless you read extremely quickly, you probably will not have time to write a detailed outline for your essay during the 15-minute reading period. However, it is worth taking several minutes to jot down a loose structure of your essay; it will actually save you time when you write. First, decide on your thesis and write it down in the test booklet. (There is usually some blank space below the documents.) Then, take a minute or two to brainstorm all the points you might put in your essay. Choose the strongest points and number them in the order you plan to present them. Lastly, note which documents and outside information you plan to use in conjunction with each point. If you organize your essay before you write, the actual writing process will go much more smoothly. More importantly, you will not write yourself into a corner and suddenly find yourself making a point you cannot support or heading toward a weak conclusion (or worse still, no conclusion at all).

For example, if you are going to argue that the United States was neutral at the start of the war, but a combination of factors eventually forced America's entry, you might write down an abbreviated version of that thesis, such as the following:

*Started neutral, forced into war*

Then you would brainstorm a list of ideas and events you wanted to mention in your essay, such as these.

*Started neutral*  
*British blockade*  
*Business losing money from blockade*  
*Wilson didn't want Germany to win war*  
*U-boats violate international law*  
*U-boats kill U.S. civilians*  
*Zimmermann telegram*  
*Lusitania*  
*Sussex*  
*American people were against war*  
*Americans a little more favorable to war by 1917*

Next, you would want to figure out which of your brainstorm ideas could be the main idea of a paragraph, which could be used as evidence to support a point, and which should be eliminated. You would probably want to begin your first paragraph by stating your thesis and then discussing how the United States was neutral at the start of the war. Your first point, "Started neutral," could be the main idea of that paragraph. That the "American people were against the war" would help explain why the United States was neutral, so you could use that as evidence. At this point, your list might look like this.

*Started neutral*  
*British blockade*

1

*Business losing money from blockade*  
*Wilson didn't want Germany to win war*  
*U-boats violate international law*  
*U-boats kill U.S. civilians*  
*Zimmermann telegram*  
 Lusitania  
 Sussex  
*American people were against war*  
*Americans a little more favorable to war by 1917*

evidence for point 1

What else would you want to mention in this paragraph? Certainly refer to Document 1, Wilson's statement of American neutrality and his definition of neutrality. Use that definition to explain how each of America's ensuing actions was either neutral or favorable to the Allies. You might also mention Wilson's desire to turn the United States into a world power and how he viewed neutrality as a means toward that end. Mentioning this point helps you fulfill the requirement to include outside information.

Next you might want to discuss the British blockade and America's response to it. That would make "British blockade" the subject of paragraph 2; "business losing money from blockade" is something you might want to mention in this paragraph. Now your list might look like this:

*Started neutral*  
*British blockade*  
*Business losing money from blockade*  
*Wilson didn't want Germany to win war*  
*U-boats violate international law*  
*U-boats kill U.S. civilians*  
*Zimmermann telegram*  
 Lusitania  
 Sussex  
*American people were against war*  
*Americans a little more favorable to war by 1917*

1  
 2  
 evidence for point 2

evidence for point 1

In this paragraph you probably also want to mention Documents 2, 3, and 4. Document 4, Bryan's letter to the Senate, gives the strongest evidence of U.S. neutrality. You might want to use Documents 2 and 3 (Munsterberg's complaint to Wilson and Lansing's description of the effects of the blockade) to explain how the United States found itself more involved in Europe's war than it perhaps had expected to be.

Proceed in this way until you have finished planning your strategy. Try to fit as many of the documents into your argument as you can, but do not stretch too far to fit one in. An obvious, desperate stretch will only hurt your grade.

As you write, remember that you do not have to fall entirely on one side or another of this issue. History is complex, and simple explanations are rarely accurate ones. If your essay argues that the United States intended to remain neutral and then discusses the events referred to by the documents in the context of neutrality, you will get a 9 on your DBQ essay, even if it does not characterize each U.S. action as neutral or non-neutral.

## Arguing Against Neutrality

If you choose to argue that the United States was not neutral, you should concentrate on Documents 1, 2, and 3. Use Document 1, Wilson's congressional address, for the definition of neutrality, and then use the other documents and outside knowledge to argue that the United States did not meet its own definition. Document 2, Munsterberg's letter, really helps your position as it points out how U.S. actions appeared non-neutral at the time these events were taking place. Use Document 3, Lansing's criticism of the British blockade, to argue that the United States put up with abuses from the British at the same time they were denouncing Germany for similar abuses. Focus also on Document 6, which describes the substantial arms shipment aboard the *Lusitania*. You might then incorporate the other documents by claiming that Germany responded reasonably to its situation and that the United States, as a neutral nation, should have understood its actions. That position, by the way, is how William Jennings Bryan felt; if you knew that and included it in your essay, you would have gotten major bonus points for outside knowledge.

## What You Should Have Discussed

Regardless of what side of the issue you argued, your essay should have discussed all of the following:

- Wilson's declaration of neutrality and his definition of neutrality
- Munsterberg's letter
- Bryan's response to Munsterberg
- the British blockade
- German submarine warfare
- the sinking of the *Lusitania*
- Zimmermann telegram

Give yourself very high marks for outside knowledge if you mentioned any three of the following:

- Wilsonianism
- U.S. balance of trade with the Allies and the Central Powers
- U.S. loans to England and France
- Wilson's cabinet and its predisposition toward England
- Wilson's interpretation of international law regarding submarine warfare
- Bryan's resignation
- the sinking of the *Sussex*
- the Gore-McLemore resolution
- the sinking of the *Arabic*
- "armed neutrality"
- the Nye Commission