



LEQ Planning Scaffold

A one-page planning organizer that decomposes the College Board long-essay rubric into fields a student fills before writing, built around a three-distance contextualization ladder.

LEVEL	High school, AP World History: Modern, carried into AP United States History
BUILT ON	The College Board long essay question (LEQ) rubric
FORMAT	One page, student-facing, completed before drafting
SCORING	Seven points across five rows, point value stated on each row
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THE PROBLEM IT SOLVES

Contextualization is the most frequently missed point on the AP History rubrics, and the reason is structural rather than a matter of student effort. The rubric asks a student to relate the prompt to broader historical events, developments, or processes occurring before, during, or after the time frame of the question. That instruction tells a seventeen-year-old nothing about how wide, how close, or how many. Every commercial scaffold I have seen repeats the phrase and stops there, which leaves the student exactly where the rubric left them.

THE THREE-DISTANCE CONTEXTUALIZATION LADDER

The scaffold replaces the open instruction with three numbered fields at three stated distances. Each requires a dated event, and each names how far from the prompt that event should sit. A student can check their own work against it, and a teacher can grade it in about ten seconds.

Field	What the student must supply
Historical Event 1 Big history	An event a maximum of 100 years away from the writing prompt. It should relate to the topic and provide dates to support it.
Historical Event 2 Closer history	An event closer to the time frame of the writing prompt. It should be more specific to the events addressed in the thesis or prompt, and include dates to support it.
Historical Event 3 Specific history	An event during the time frame of the writing prompt, or a direct result of it. It should be specific to the event addressed in the thesis or prompt, and include dates to support it.

This is the element I have not seen elsewhere. The rest of the scaffold decomposes rubric language that belongs to the College Board. The ladder is a design decision about what makes an instruction checkable.

THE SCAFFOLD, ROW BY ROW

The organizer opens with name and unit fields, then runs five scored rows. Each row states the rubric requirement in full, gives the student space to fill it, and prints its own point value, so the page doubles as a self-scoring guide.

Row	Points	What the row asks for
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Thesis	/1	Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis or claim that establishes a line of reasoning. The thesis must make a claim that responds to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing it, and must consist of more than one sentence located in one place, either the introduction or the conclusion. Students are prompted to identify the question type and respond correctly: compare and contrast, continuity and change over time, or cause and effect.
Contextualization	/1	Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt, relating the topic to events, developments, or processes occurring before, during, or after the time frame of the question. Not awarded for a phrase or a passing reference. Filled using the three-distance ladder above.
Evidence	/2	Provides specific examples of evidence relevant to the topic. Two fields are supplied. One point for two events that relate to the writing prompt along with description; two points for that plus specific detail, meaning who, what, when, and where.
Analysis	/1	Uses historical reasoning, whether compare and contrast, cause and effect, or continuity and change over time, to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt. Awarded for answering the question correctly.
Reasoning	/2	Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development at the focus of the prompt, using evidence to corroborate, qualify, or modify an argument. Accomplished in a variety of ways: explaining both sides of the prompt, explaining relevant and insightful connections within and across periods, or providing multiple perspectives across themes.

WHY IT IS BUILT THIS WAY

Three design choices carry the page. The point value sits on the row, so a student always knows what a section is worth while they are filling it and can spend their time accordingly. The rubric language appears in full rather than paraphrased, so the scaffold and the scoring guide cannot drift apart. And every field is completed before drafting, which makes the planning visible and gradeable on its own, separately from the prose that follows.

The scaffold is also deliberately shared across both AP History courses. Students who take AP World History and then AP United States History do not learn two vocabularies for the same task, and the second course starts from a structure they already own.

ATTRIBUTION

The rubric requirements reproduced in the rows above are the College Board's, restated in full because the scaffold is meant to sit beside the official scoring guide without diverging from it. The organizer, the field structure, the per-row point display, and the three-distance contextualization ladder are mine.

The evidence row references ACE, the writing protocol my students use across both AP History courses in my adapted form: answer the question directly, cite something specific, explain why it matters. The three-step spine is an established strategy in wide circulation in American secondary instruction and is not my invention. The two qualifiers are mine, and they are the whole point of the adaptation. See the companion document on the protocol for the reasoning.