

Strategies for Essay Responses: AP Timed Writings

Prewriting Strategies

- ❑ Read the question carefully to determine what to look for when you read.
- ❑ Underline keywords in the question as you read it.
- ❑ Underline specific details, relative to the question, as you read. You will not have time to go back and reread.
- ❑ While reading, look for patterns: significant details, words with connotative meanings, reasons, logical structures, notable sentence beginnings and endings, unusual sentence structures, sentences that are noticeably short or long, vivid imagery, figures of speech, and words or phrases that may indicate the author's attitude.

Writing Strategies

- ❑ You have 120 minutes to write 3 short essays (Average of 40 minutes per essay)
- ❑ Essays are graded as first draft responses – you do not have enough time to draft more than once.
- ❑ You have only enough time to prewrite and draft.
- ❑ Follow the following suggestions to draft each essay response:

Allow 5-10 minutes for prewriting.

This includes reading and evaluating the question and the related passage, developing a working thesis, and creating a brief outline of the points you plan on discussing. You will not be graded on the prewriting component, but completion of this activity is essential for success on the essay portion of the exam.

Spend 20 – 25 minutes drafting your response.

First, it is important that you truncate your introduction and conclusion so that you can spend most of your effort on the body of your response. Your opening paragraph should directly address the question and should lead in to your thesis with an economy of expression. A typical five-paragraph essay structure is effective for the amount of time you have to compose your response; however, you should not assume that such an essay structure will work for every response. The organizational pattern of your essay should be defined by the observations you make about the prompt question and/or the related passage(s). You should provide transitions between paragraphs and between ideas/examples within your paragraphs. Stylistic control and sentence variety suggest proficiency, maturity, and competency. It is also important to include specific examples, in the form of quoted passages, to support your observations relative to the prompt. You may have great ideas, but if those ideas become obscured by your inability to compose quickly and clearly, you will not achieve your best score. Finally, your concluding paragraph should offer some succinct observations/realizations about the prompt and/or passage(s) and without a simplistic restatement of the main ideas already evident in the body of your essay. Think of the concluding statement as an extension of the argument you've made or an exploration of the big ideas, whether implicit or explicit, in the text or prompt.

Spend 5 minutes revising and editing each response.

Content counts much more than mechanics, grammar, word choice, or spelling; however, it is rare for an essay with more than few errors to receive a top score, and that is if everything else is perfect. With that written, it is also worth noting that your response is treated as a first draft during the scoring process. Illegible writing will adversely affect your score – take care to write or print clearly. Crossing out and rewording sentences is acceptable, but if your paper becomes too messy, the scorer may dismiss it. When revising, you should look for instances where you stray from the prompt. Your observations and the explanation of your evaluation should consistently reflect the ideas in your thesis. If you stray too far from the objectives outlined in the prompt, your score will suffer for that departure.

Information for this handout was taken directly from REA AP Prep manual pages 75 – 78.

AP Scoring Guide, LRHS

This scoring guide will be applied to all writing in AP Language and Composition.

<p>9 – 8</p> <p><i>(100% - 90%)</i></p> <p>Top Scores</p>	<p>These are well-written essays which respond fully to the question asked. The best essays show a full understanding of the issues and support their points with appropriate textual evidence and examples. Writers of these essays demonstrate stylistic maturity by an effective command of syntax, diction, and organization. The writing need not be without flaws, but it should reveal the writer’s ability to choose from and control a wide range of effective writing.</p> <p><i>These are superior essays.</i></p>
<p>7 – 6</p> <p><i>(89% - 80%)</i></p> <p>Upper Scores</p>	<p>These essays also respond correctly to the questions asked but do so less fully or less effectively than the essays in the top range. Their discussion may be less thorough and less specific. These essays are well-written in an appropriate style but reveal less maturity than the top essays. They do make use of textual evidence to support their points. Some lapses in diction or syntax may appear, but the writing demonstrates sufficient control over the elements of composition to present the writer’s ideas clearly.</p> <p><i>These are excellent essays.</i></p>
<p>5</p> <p><i>(79% - 75%)</i></p> <p>Middle Score</p>	<p>These essays respond to the question, but the comments may be simplistic or imprecise; they may be overly generalized, vague, or inadequately supported. These essays are adequately written, but may demonstrate inconsistent control over the elements of composition. Organization is attempted, but it may not be fully realized or particularly effective.</p> <p><i>These are mediocre, but adequate essays.</i></p>
<p>4 – 3</p> <p><i>(74% - 65%)</i></p> <p>Lower Scores</p>	<p>These essays attempt to deal with the question, but do so either inaccurately or without support or specific evidence. They tend to show some misunderstanding of the prompt or passage, omit pertinent analysis, offer sweeping generalizations, or commit some other fallacy in reasoning. The writing can convey the writer’s ideas, but it reveals weak control over diction, syntax, and organization. These essays may contain excessive and distracting spelling and grammatical errors. Statements are seldom supported with specific or persuasive evidence or may contain lengthy quotations that replace or distract from the essay’s discussion and analysis.</p> <p><i>These are weak essays.</i></p>
<p>2 – 1</p> <p><i>(64 - 59% or lower)</i></p> <p>Lowest Scores</p>	<p>These essays fail to respond adequately to the question. They may reveal misunderstanding or may distort interpretation. They compound the problems of the lower scoring essays. Generally, these essays are unacceptably brief or poorly written. Although some attempts to answer the question may be indicated, the writer’s view has little clarity and only slight, if any, evidence in its support.</p> <p><i>These are poor essays.</i></p>