

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 + 15 min reading period for synthesis essay prep)
- ❑ 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 between 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 can be useful 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 when possible, 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 claim 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.