

AP Essay Tips

Actually, FRQ and not Essay

- Writing for AP Government is different than writing for AP US or AP Euro.
- It is actually a free response question, or FRQ, and not an essay- this means that you do not write an introduction or conclusion- you are not making an argument- but instead you just simply answer the question- hence the 'free' 'response' part of FRQ.

Grading

- All essays are graded using a grading rubric.
- For each piece of correct information supplied, you earn points.
- Keep writing till you get the points.

What to Write

- All essays ask you to display your knowledge of the subject.
- Some ask you to assume a position and defend that position using knowledge.
- Never give your personal opinion- avoid “I think” or “I feel”- you are providing facts and knowledge, not opinion and feelings.

Be Focused

- Address the Question. Be very careful with this- understand what is being asked. Figure out what the prompt is providing to you, what the situation is, and what you should write about- and then do it.

Evidence

- Provide the best and clearest pieces of evidence. Do not pick obscure things to demonstrate your trivia mind- go to the obvious answers and give them to the grader.
- Assume the reader knows very little about the situation and about government. Define your terms, explain concepts, and flesh out ideas.

Guidelines

- Keep sentences simple and pointed.
- Use appropriate political science and government terminology and vocabulary words.
- Write clearly and neatly.
- Use transition words to link ideas together.
- Outline before hand, and stick to the outline.
- Try to get one point per paragraph.
- Back up ideas with examples.
- Short essays will not do well.
- Address the question!

Strategy: Attack!

- Answer the question (ATQ!)- attack the question!
- Don't go after the wrong target- do what the question tells you to do.
- Understand the verb, the subject, the adjectives, etc- do what the question asks you to do and make sure you attack the correct subject matter.

Strategy: Overkill

- Whenever the AP exam asks for a number of responses, if you have time, always give one more than they ask for.
- If the question asks for 2, give them 3
- If it asks for 3, give them 4
- Make sure it isn't an extra bad one, or a further elaboration on an earlier point- give them another fully developed point.
- That way, if one of your points isn't good, you have a backup!

Strategy: Neutral Ideology

- When you write your essay, adopt a neutral ideology.
- Although graders are not supposed to be biased, it is human nature to be so. Don't write your essay as a far-right conservative- don't write it as a left-wing communist- write it as a neutral political scientist analyzing something dispassionately but in very exacting language.

Strategy: No 'I Feel'

- Avoid using the statements “I feel” or “I think” statements.
- You are stating facts, or identifying concepts, or explaining how things work. You are not to be speculating, or guessing, or talking about your personal thoughts on government.
- Don't water down your essay with 'I feel' or 'I think' statements.

Strategy: Paragraph Points

- Structure your essay so that each paragraph is one point, and each paragraph is clearly a separate paragraph.
- This will help you organize your thoughts- if you want to see how many points you earned, count your paragraphs.
- This will also help the grader see where you thought you earned the points- you might convince them to give you another point or two just because of the way you organized your essay.

Strategy: Point Grub

- Identify where the points are and go get them.
- Before writing the essay, try to imagine what the rubric looks like and where the points are in the essay.
- Then go get them.
- If you are just wandering around in your essay, hoping to stumble on points, you're not going to do as well as trying to write for earning points.
- If you are struggling with the essay, at least you'll know where the points are, and can try to at least get a couple here and there- something is always better than nothing.

Strategy: Positive

- Lean towards the positive in your essay.
- The essays are phrased in such a way so that the essays will not be negative- they never ask you bash a branch, or say bad stuff about public officials, or rip into the American public. So don't do that.
- Be positive, avoid being cynical, and rise above tendencies to say bad stuff. Those comments will rarely earn you points, so don't waste time and effort writing them in this context.

Strategy: Agree with AP Test

- Do not argue with the premise of the prompt.
- If the prompt claims something or suggests something, try to understand why this claim or suggestion is true. Whatever you do, don't disagree with the prompt- you are not right, the person who wrote the AP test is.
- Agree with the prompt, accept the premise, and answer the question.

Strategy: Adding Extra

- Most likely you will not run out of time for the essay portion of the test.
- You have 100 minutes to answer 4 essays- that is 25 minutes an essay. In class, you usually only have 20. So you will have extra time.
- When you are totally finished, take a look at how much time you have left. Relax for a moment. Then go back into the essay and add to it.
- This is not about correctly grammar or spelling, although that is nice too. It is about adding to thoughts, elaborating on to your points, or expanding what you were talking about.

Strategy: Rule of Three

- Write at least three (3) sentences for every point you are going after.
- This will force you to fully address the question.
- Force yourself to do this. Even if it feels like you are repeating yourself, just do it.
- Essays that suck usually try to answer questions and earn points with 1 sentence. Essays that are good usually write 3 or more sentences per point. Be like the good essays.

Strategy: Talk the Talk

- Part of doing well in a discipline is acquiring the language of that discipline and talking the talk.
- Talk the talk of AP Government.
- Use appropriate political science and government terminology and vocabulary words.
- Sometimes the rubric will be looking for that particular vocabulary word- if you use it, you'll help yourself out and earn more points.

Strategy: Kid Brother

- If the essay asks you to explain or describe something, do so in a way so that your baby brother can understand what you are talking about.
- You can assume the grader knows something, but don't assume he will make leaps of logic or connect the dots for you- describe the process logically without skipping steps, explain how something works in a way that your baby brother can understand it, etc.

Strategy: Other Viewpoints

- The AP tests ask that students don't just summarize arguments for or against a position, but ask that they evaluate arguments for or against.
- Whenever appropriate, include or acknowledge at least one other viewpoint other than your own in your essay.
- You don't personally have to agree with it, but bring up these other viewpoints to demonstrate your knowledge and maturity.

Strategy: Mind What You Have Learned

- As the great Yoda once said- Mind what you have learned, save you it can.
- If you read an article in one of our supplemental readings, bring it up. If you read something in the textbook, bring it up. If you read something about the subject on the internet, bring it up.
- Include your knowledge in the essay- if you demonstrate that you have in fact read the readings of a college level student in government, it will probably help out your essay in a lot of areas.

Did you use any of these techniques on the essay?

- “overkill” or provide extra points
- have neutral ideology
- avoid I feel or I think statements
- break at paragraphs/points
- identify where the points are and go get them
- “answer the question” focus
- Lean towards positive
- Others?

AP Exam Help

- From the Princeton Review Book...
- On the multiple choice, you need to get...
 - 49-60 correct = 5
 - 40-48 correct = 4
 - 28-39 correct = 3
 - 19-27 correct = 2
 - 0-18 correct = 1
- This is the raw score and does not take into account skipped questions- formula really is
 - correct answers x 1 point MINUS .25 x 1 for each incorrect
- Of course, this is only 50% of the grade.
- The 4 FRQ's count 12.5% each.

AP Gov Exam Help

- There is a .25 penalty for every wrong answer.
- There are 5 possible choices, so you have only a 20% of guessing the correct answer.
- But, if you can eliminate one possible choice, you have a 25%. If you guess on 4 questions, your chances are you'll get 1 right for one point, and 3 wrong for -.75- that's a bonus of +.25.
- If you can eliminate two choices, on 3 questions, it's a bonus of +.50
- If you can narrow it down to 2 possible, over 4 questions, that's a bonus of 1.5 points.
- Moral is- guessing is better than not

AP Exam Structure

- Multiple-choice- 50% of grade, 45 minutes, 60 questions.
- Essay- 50% of grade, 100 minutes, 4 essay questions
- That's about 45 seconds a multiple choice question, and 25 minutes an essay.

AP Multiple Choice Section

- **50% of grade**
- **45 minutes**
- **60 questions.**
- **That's about 45 seconds a multiple choice question.**

Beating Stress

- What causes you the most stress when taking tests? How can you lessen this?
- Do you visualize success? Picture in your mind being successful on the AP test-what does it feel like?
- Mind-body connection is important. What exercise do you plan on doing this weekend?

Morning of the Test

- Eat a good breakfast- nothing too heavy or greasy, but filling (oatmeal is good)
- Don't drink a lot of coffee- bathroom breaks burn time
- Dress in layers- the room may be warm or cold
- Read something- warm up your brain- read the paper or something
- Get there early- plan for delays

Understanding Verbs

AP Essay Tip

- The key to answering the questions is to DO what you are asked to do.
- Let's look at what each verb means.

Understand the Instructions and Action Verbs

- Students may be asked to list, discuss, describe, explain, analyze, etc.; these are not all identical tasks. Also, the question may call for more than one task, such as both to identify and explain. Students should understand that some tasks are more complex than others. For example, composing a list may not even require a complete sentence, but students may need to write several paragraphs for a satisfactory discussion, including well-developed examples as support, in order to adequately explain some phenomenon. Here are some of the most common action words used in past free-response questions:

What does “List” or “Identify” mean?

- Listing or identifying is a task that requires no more than a simple enumeration of some factors or characteristics. A list does not require any causal explanations. For example, a student might be asked to list or identify three factors that increase political legitimacy. Such a list could be bulleted or numbered, and might include such factors as a written constitution, competitive elections, and transparent institutions.

What does “Define” mean?

- A definition requires a student to provide a meaning for a word or concept. Examples may help to demonstrate understanding of the definition. Students may be instructed to note the term's significance as part of the definition.

What does “Describe” mean?

- A description involves providing a depiction or portrayal of a phenomenon or its most significant characteristics. Descriptions most often address "what" questions. For example, if students are asked to describe a political cleavage in Mexico, they must demonstrate knowledge that the cleavage has at least two sides by describing what the two sides are.

What does “Discuss” mean?

- Discussions generally require that students explore relationships between different concepts or phenomena. Identifying, describing, and explaining could be required tasks involved in writing a satisfactory discussion.

What does “Explain” mean?

- An explanation involves the exploration of possible causal relationships. When providing explanations, students should identify and discuss logical connections or causal patterns that exist between or among various political phenomena.

What does “Compare/Contrast ” mean?

- This task requires students to make specific links between two or more concepts, occurrences, or countries. Thus, students cannot simply have a one-paragraph description of how women participate in Iranian politics and a one-paragraph description of how they participate in Nigeria with no connections between the two paragraphs. To correctly compare participation of women in Nigeria and Iran there must be cross paragraph references and development of a comparative structure. The students must provide the connective tissue. They should understand that it is important to note similarities AND differences.

What does “Evaluate/Assess” mean?

- An evaluation or assessment involves considering how well something meets a certain standard, and as such generally requires a thesis. It is important to identify the criteria used in the evaluation. If no criteria are explicitly given in the question, students should take care to clearly identify the ones that they choose to employ. Specific examples may be applied to the criteria to support the student's thesis. Evaluation or assessment requires explicit connections between the thesis or argument and the supporting evidence.

What does “Analyze” mean?

- This task usually requires separating a phenomenon into its component parts or characteristics as a way of understanding the whole. An analysis should yield explicit conclusions that are explained or supported by specific evidence and/or well-reasoned arguments.

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- ☐ Strategy: Positive
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