

Tips for AP Exam Long Response Questions

1. Use your 10 minute reading period to read all questions and decide in which order you will answer them. Begin with the one you feel the most confident about. Make an outline for each. It is much faster to scratch out a quick outline and then make quick additions to it rather than making changes to your completed answer. When making your outline, remember that each part of the question will have an internal maximum.
2. Answer each question on a separate page to make it easy for the reader to find each of your answers. At the top of each page you could even write the question number to avoid any confusion.
3. Pace yourself. You only have about 20 minutes for each response so check the time when you start each question. When the time allotted for that response is over, move on to the next essay no matter how much you feel that a few more minutes would improve the essay that you have just completed. Leaving a few blank lines between parts of the question allows you to come back and add to your answer later if you think of something more.
4. Read the question carefully a couple of times, making special note of bolded or underlined words such as describe, explain, compare, design, *etc.* This will help you avoid leaving out parts of the question. Be careful to answer all parts of the question but answer ONLY the question. Don't waste time adding material which is irrelevant to the question and don't try to pad your answer. When you think you have completely answered it, go back and reread the question, paying close attention to the underlined words again, to be sure.
5. Do not waste time rewriting the question as part of your answer. The reader will have a copy. Don't waste time repeating yourself or with an introduction or conclusion.
6. If the question has several parts, answer the parts in order and label each part clearly, separating and labeling each section. It's easier for the reader to find all your points if they are organized even though you can earn points for answering one part of a question in another part.
7. If you are given choice in a question, do not respond to more than you are asked. If you are asked to choose three of four possibilities, the reader will generally only read the first three.
8. Be specific. The reader will be unable to award points if s/he *thinks* you know what you're saying. The reader can give credit for only very specific points. Although points are not awarded for simply using keywords, sometimes a point can be earned for defining a term and giving an example. If you can't remember the term, define or explain it - that is usually sufficient for the point. Don't overlook the obvious. Sometimes simple facts are worth points.
9. Readers are not looking for specific words or phrases. Don't underline or highlight what you feel are the "key" words that are worth points. You might guess wrong and it just makes your answer harder to read.
10. If your answer continues on the following page, indicate "next page" so the reader knows to turn.
11. Even if you think you know nothing about the question, always write something. Come back to the question and give it some thought - you may get a point or two. Whatever you do - don't leave a question blank. Most points are earned for pretty basic stuff we would have covered in class.
12. If you know your handwriting sucks, try to write neatly and use blue or black ink. If necessary, skip lines to make your essay easier to read. The reader has probably read hundreds of essays when s/he gets to yours. You don't want to frustrate him or her.
13. A diagram that is not labeled earns no points. Use a diagram only as a last resort as it might

not be worth the time it takes to draw and label it.

14. If you're not totally sure of something, go ahead and use it. Although you will not lose points for incorrect information, be careful to not contradict yourself in the same sentence. If you receive credit for a statement and then contradict it, you will lose the point. You won't lose points for incorrect spelling or grammatical errors.

If you are asked to:	Your essay should:
Compare	Show similarities between objects, ideas, phenomena, etc.
Contrast	Show dissimilarities between two objects, ideas, phenomena, etc.
Define	Provide the accepted definition for a word. The response should be given as a complete sentence.
Describe	Provide a list of features that characterize objects, ideas, phenomena, <i>etc.</i>
Discuss	Select a particular viewpoint and support your position with facts, examples, observations, reasoning, and descriptions.
Explain	Provide a series of well-developed and logical statements which give the reason for or cause of an event or events.
List	Provide a simple series of words, sentences, or phrases as requested. Enhance clarity by labelling each word, sentence, or phrase with sequential numbers or letters.
State	In a logical progression, record the facts related to the question. You are not required to provide proof or illustrations.
Trace	Describe the sequence of the process or the evolutionary development of the topic

What If I'm Asked to Design or Describe an Experiment?

1. state the problem
2. write a hypothesis
3. identify independent variable(s) and what treatment(s) you will use
4. identify dependent variable(s) and exactly what you will measure
5. identify several variables to be controlled and eliminated
6. describe the organism/materials/apparatus to be used
7. describe your design
8. describe how you will obtain and record data
9. describe how you will analyze data (graphs, charts). You might have to give some data.
10. state your conclusion, hypothetical or otherwise and compare your results to your hypothesis

What If I Have To Graph Data?

1. Plot the independent variable on the x-axis and the dependent variable on the y-axis.
2. Make sure to use an appropriate scale and label your axes with units.

3. Plot the points and draw the curve of best fit.
4. If more than one data set is being plotted, provide a legend .
5. Write a title for the graph which states the independent and dependent variables.

Five Steps to Follow: Read, Quick Response, Reread, Detailed Response, Reread

One of the most helpful strategies for handling essay questions is a five-step process that involves reading, a quick response, rereading, a detailed response, and rereading. Most people tend to see what they expect to see. In test taking, this can be a counterproductive tendency. Often, students complete an essay, using up their precious time, only to find that they have answered a question that is different from the one requested on the exam. No matter how well written the answer, credit is lost when you misinterpret the directions given in the question. Try the steps outlined below:

During the first 3 to minutes:

1. **Read** the question carefully, slowing down at key words. You may want to underline or circle important terms. Pay careful attention to bolded or underlined words.
2. **Quick Response.** On scrap paper, quickly respond to your first reading of the question in simple terms or short phrases. As you are writing, additional ideas may come to you. Jot those down also. Use this brainstorming exercise to start to shape your essay. You may have done most of this work during your reading period.
3. Try to assign maxima to each part of the question.

During the next 15 minutes:

- 3 . **Reread** the question. Make sure that you are responding to what is requested. If you have underlined or circled terms, do not disregard the rest of the question.
4. **Detailed Response.** Using the question as your guide, incorporate your quick responses (from your scrap paper) into logical and coherent responses. As you write your detailed response, new ideas may come to you. Interrupt your writing for a moment in order to jot these ideas down. Then return to your detailed response. This will help keep your response organized. Write in short sentences without becoming wordy. If the question has multiple parts, gauge your time appropriately. Do not spend too much time on one part of the response. Be mindful of the internal maxima. When you are finished with that response, go back to the ideas you jotted down and shape them into responses.

During the last 4-5 minutes:

5. **Reread.** Take time to quickly reread the question one more time. You may find that you have left out one or more important parts of the question. Quickly proofread your response and add anything that seems appropriate.