**Long Essay Question**

On the AP test, you will have a choice between three questions (over Periods 1-3, 4-6, or 7-9) to answer through essay. You will have 40 minutes to answer the one question you select. Your essay will be scored according to:

1. Argumentation: How well do you develop a thesis or relevant argument that addresses all parts of the question?

2. Use of evidence: How well do you support your thesis with specific, accurate evidence, clearly linked to the thesis?

3. HITS: How well do you use the targeted historical thinking skill?

4. Synthesis: How well does your LEQ extend and apply your argument to other geographical areas, time periods, or areas of study (political, economic, social, intellectual, artistic, cultural, etc.)?

**Steps to Developing a Quality Long Essay Response**

**1. Analyze the question.** Figure out exactly what you need to do, and make marks to help you understand what skill the question requires and what areas of history you need to write about. Keep in mind that every long essay will require argument and analysis, not simple description. If you think you can write an essay without making some judgment that results in a thesis statement, you aren’t properly understanding the question.

*Activity:* For each prompt below, underline the key words that indicate what the writer should do. Circle the words that indicate the specific parts or aspects of content that should be addressed.

**Evaluate the extent to which the Seven Years’ War (French and Indian War, 1754–1763) marked a turning point in American relations with Great Britain, analyzing what changed and what stayed the same from the period before the war to the period after it.**

**Evaluate the extent to which the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) marked a turning point in the debate over slavery in the United States, analyzing what changed and what stayed the same from the period before the war to the period after it.**

**2. Choose one question above to address. Next, begin organizing the evidence.** Make a table, list, or other outline for evidence you can use to make an argument. After you do this, step back and make sure you have enough evidence to support the argument that initially came to your mind. If your evidence points a different way, then you need to modify your argument.

*Activity:* Create a list below of the kinds of relevant information you could use to answer the prompt from the activity above. Group evidence into categories of analysis accordingly.

**3. Develop a thesis.** Do not be afraid of making a mistake by being too certain; AP readers aren’t necessarily looking for the “100% right answer,” because the study of history doesn’t always offer that kind of certitude. Rather, AP readers will look for your ability to interpret evidence and marshal support for your interpretation. A thesis should also be more than a simple restatement of the question. It should focus on taking a position, referring to specific pieces of relevant historical evidence, and using appropriate historical thinking skills. It may be one or more sentences.

*Activity:*A) Write a thesis statement below for the prompt, using your evidence.

B) Exchange thesis statements with a partner. Ask these questions about your partner’s thesis, commenting above as needed:

* Does the thesis take a position?
* Does the thesis offer an interpretation of the question?
* Does the thesis offer controlling or organizing ideas for an essay?

**4. Write the introductory paragraph.** AP doesn’t tell you to use a specific essay format, but it does make recommendations. The standard five-paragraph model is solid; modify it as needed.

Good intro paragraphs usually contain three elements: 1) summary of the background or context for the question and your thesis; 2) the thesis statement; and 3) an introduction to the main arguments for the essay that will be developed in main/body paragraphs (the essay’s “blueprint” or “roadmap sentence”). By the end of the first paragraph, the reader should have a clear idea of your thesis and the main argument that your essay will create.

*Activity*:

A) Write an introductory paragraph for the prompt used above.

B) Next, create an outline of the supporting paragraphs that would follow your introduction. For each paragraph, list historical context, evidence, and pieces of analysis that you’ll link to the thesis. The number of paragraphs will vary depending on the thesis and the amount of historical evidence you’re using (generally, essays will have between three and five main body paragraphs). Address counter-arguments as appropriate; this will greatly strengthen your argument.

* This exercise helps you in two ways: 1) It reinforces the connection of the main points in your intro with the supporting paragraphs. 2) It requires you to think in terms of historical evidence before you start writing a complete essay.
* You will not do this before writing your essay on the AP exam; we’re doing this now to train your brain to think in these terms.

**5. Optional: Write the supporting paragraphs and conclusion on separate paper for practice.** A good general paragraph model to follow is the TSA (Topic sentence—Supporting evidence—Additional evidence) model. To receive the highest possible AP score, you must explain in a clear, precise way how specific historical evidence is linked to your thesis. Aim for quality over quantity with regard to length; be concise and precise, not flowery.

Focus on your thesis in your conclusion. Restate the thesis in a fresh or interesting manner, explain its significance, or demonstrate synthesis. Don’t summarize all your evidence or introduce new material.

**Tips:**

1. Write essays in the third person. Don’t use “I,” “we,” etc.

2. Use specific words. Avoid vague verbs (“it felt like…,” “it says”) or vague references (“they say,” “others think…”). Avoid absolutes as well (“all,” “none”). Exceptions are the norm in history.

3. Anticipate and address counterarguments. Demonstrate that you’re aware of conflicting views. This will only serve to strengthen your own choice of argument.

4. Communicate your awareness of the complexity of history. Distinguish between primary and secondary causes and effects, and between the significant and the least important. Use verbs that communicate judgment and analysis (“reveal,” “exemplify,” “demonstrate,” “imply,” “symbolize”).

5. Remain objective. Avoid rhetoric, judging “good” from “bad,” and slang terms.

6. Communicate the organization and logical development of your argument. Each paragraph should develop a main point that is clearly stated in the first sentence, which is the topic sentence. Provide a few words or a phrase of transition to connect paragraphs.

7. Know that no conclusion is better than a meaningless attempt. If you’re running short on time, but you’ve written a well-organized essay with a clear thesis that is restated in the supporting paragraphs, then you should receive little/no penalty for not having a conclusion.