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For the Classroom

Test Taking Skills: Essay Qs and As Discussion Questions

- Test questions often fall into categories: multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, open-ended and essay questions. Do you have a preference for a type of test question? Why?
- What, if anything, do you like best about essay questions? What do you find most challenging?

Activity: A Practice Essay

Students will review strategies for completing essay test questions.

MATERIALS

Copies to distribute to students of Your Essay Outline and Tips on Completing Essay Questions

PROCEDURE

1. Explain to students that completing an essay can be like creating a mini-paper. It can be best accomplished by organizing your thoughts as follows:

The Essay Introduction

The introduction is the first paragraph of your essay and introduces the essay topic to your reader. The essay introduction presents your topic and tells the reader what supporting points follow within the essay body.

The Essay Body

The body is where you develop the topic that you introduced in your introduction. Start a new paragraph every time you discuss a new point. Make the body "flow" by introducing the next paragraph of your essay at the end of the previous one. When you're satisfied that you have made your points, move on to the essay conclusion.

The Essay Conclusion

Although it's often overlooked, the conclusion is an important part of your essay. It's the last paragraph of your essay and your last chance to drive home your point of view as well as an indicator of how well you've organized your thoughts. Generally the conclusion is a summary of your essay body and/or any closing thoughts or ideas.

Remind students that once you are sure that your essay "makes your point" and that you have caught and corrected any errors in formatting, spelling, punctuation, and grammar, your "first draft" magically becomes your finished essay.



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2. Review the list of suggested Tips on Completing Essay Questions
3. Next, have students practice completing an essay question using a very basic question you create based upon a current unit of study, or using the following SAT practice essay questions:

Sample Essay Questions:

Winston Churchill said, “The price of greatness is responsibility.” Do we expect too much from our public figures?

Many societies believe that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human right. What gives us more pleasure and satisfaction: the pursuit of our desires or the attainment of them?



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Your Essay Outline

Essay Introduction

A short sentence or two to present your topic and tell the reader what supporting points follow within the essay body.

Essay Body

The body is where you develop the topic that you introduced in your introduction. Start a new paragraph every time you discuss a new point.

Essay Body: Point 2

Make the body "flow" by introducing the next paragraph of your essay at the end of the previous one.

Essay Conclusion

Your last chance to drive home your point of view.



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Tips on Completing Test Essay Questions

- Read the directions carefully. Pay close attention to whether you are supposed to answer all the essays or only a specified amount (e.g. "Answer 2 out of the 3 questions).
- Make sure that you understand what the question is asking you. If you're not, ask your teacher.
- Make sure that you write down everything that is asked of you and more. Generally, the more details and facts that you write down, the more complete your answer will be and the higher your grade is going to be.
- Budget your time, don't spend the entire test time on one essay.
- If the question is asking for facts, don't give your personal opinion on the topic.
- When writing your essay, try to be as neat as possible, neater papers usually receive higher marks.
- Make an outline before writing your essay. This way your essay will be more organized and fluid. If you happen to run out of time, most instructors will give you partial credit for the ideas that you have outlined.
- Don't write long introductions and conclusions, the bulk of your time should be spent on answering the question(s) in the body of the essay.
- Focus on one main idea per a paragraph.
- If you have time left at the end, proofread your work and correct any errors.
- Budget your time. If you have an hour to write 3 essays, spend no more than 20 minutes on each essay, then if you have time left over at the end go back and finish any incomplete essays.
- If you aren't sure about an exact date or number, use approximations e.g. "Approximately 5000" or "In the late 17th century."
- If you make a mistake, simply draw a line through it, it is much neater and quicker than erasing it.