

SAQs

Directions and Tips for Answering Short-Answer Questions

What are they?

The short-answer section comes right after the multiple-choice questions on your AP Exam. It involves answering four short-answer questions in 50 minutes. Each question will have multiple parts (typically parts a, b, c) and each part will likely have multiple components (e.g., “identify AND explain...”). You are required to answer all “parts” and “components” of the question. Each SAQ will test at least one of the historical thinking skills and will directly assess one or more of the themes. All of the questions will be tied to a stimulus (e.g., a primary source, a historical argument, data, maps, etc.). To answer each question you will need to interpret the stimulus correctly but also incorporate your own prior knowledge of world history. The stimulus is intended to stimulate your thought memory and thought process, but it will not give you all the information you need to answer the question. Your score on this portion of the exam will count for 20% of your final AP Exam grade.

How are they graded?

- 0 points: Response accomplishes none of the tasks set by the question.
- 1 point: Response accomplishes one of the tasks set by the question.
- 2 points: Response accomplishes two of the tasks set by the question.
- 3 points: Response accomplishes all three of the tasks set by the question.

What makes these questions challenging?

- 1) Time constraints. You have approximately 12 minutes to answer each questions (two minutes to brainstorm and ten minutes to write).
- 2) Quality matters more than quantity. You can't cleverly talk your way around answering the question. If you don't know your stuff, it's obvious.

What makes these questions simple?

- 1) You don't have to include a thesis.
- 2) You can and SHOULD write an answer that is short and to the point.

DO NOT...

- write long, overly complex sentences. Don't try to get fancy with your language. These are historians, not English teachers. They want straightforward CONTENT and ANALYSIS. Leave your symbolism at home.
- write a bulleted response. You MUST word your response in concise complete sentences.
- spend too much time on any one question.
- write outside of the space given.
- forget to use the stimulus material!
- don't be vague to the point of being wrong (see below).

YOU MUST...

- read the question carefully. Make sure you understand all parts of the question.
- ANSWER the question. This sounds silly, but failing to answer the questions asked is the biggest mistake students make.
- write clearly and neatly. If they can't read it, they won't grade it. And if they can but it looks careless, it is always possible that it could have an influence on the grader.
- be as specific as you can even though you are being concise. Use phrases like “for the most part,” “more so than their counterparts in _____” You don't want to make content errors by leaving out a few words that might clarify your explanation.