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# Strategies for the Free-Response Questions

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Chapter  
21

After completing the multiple-choice questions, you will receive a short break. You will then have 100 minutes to complete four free-response questions. Each question is worth a total of 15 points.

## PRACTICE MATERIALS

Practice is key to performing well on the free-response questions. Although practice will not guarantee a perfect score, it will help you earn a high score. The *2009 AP U.S. Government and Politics Released Exam* and the *2002 AP U.S. Government and Politics Released Exam* both include actual free-response questions and scored sample essays. Both booklets can be purchased from the College Board's online store. In addition, you should visit the AP U.S. Government and Politics Course homepage at AP Central ([www.apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com)). You will find a full set of free-response questions and sample essays from 1999 to the present.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Using authentic practice materials is important. Following good test-taking strategies is essential. This section will discuss six strategies that will help you achieve high scores on your free-response questions.

### 1. WATCH YOUR TIME

The free-response section is like a four-part sprint. You must be focused and ready to "hit the ground running" on each question. Remember, you have only 25 minutes for each question. If you have written an SAT or ACT essay, you should have a good sense

of how much you can write in 25 minutes. Do not spend too much time on a single question or on part of a question. As you complete your answers, look at the classroom clock to make sure you are leaving enough time for each question.

## **2. WRITE DIRECT ANSWERS FOR FOCUSED, MULTIPART QUESTIONS**

Students who prepare for the AP United States History, AP European History, and AP World History exams are taught to prepare for questions that require a thesis statement, supporting evidence, and a conclusion. The AP U.S. Government and Politics free-response questions use very focused, multipart questions that do not require the traditional thesis-driven format. Your task is to clearly and directly answer each part of the question.

## **3. BE PREPARED TO DEFINE KEY CONCEPTS**

Many questions include parts that ask you to define key terms. For example, recent exams asked students to define *policy agenda*, *congressional redistricting*, *fiscal policy*, and *monetary policy*. Chapter 2 provides a list of key terms that you need to know for both the multiple-choice questions and the free-response questions.

## **4. BE PREPARED TO LIST, DESCRIBE, DISCUSS, AND EXPLAIN**

Every question includes a part asking you to list, describe, discuss, or explain a concept, political process, governmental institution, or constitutional principle. Carefully read each question to make sure that you understand what it is asking you to do. If you are asked to write an explanation, try to include a "for example" sentence to illustrate your point. For example, you could note that the 2000 presidential election illustrates how the electoral college limits majority rule. Although Al Gore received more popular votes than George W. Bush, he received fewer electoral votes and thus lost the election.

## **5. ADD A SPARE TIRE**

Many questions specifically ask you to discuss "two different ways," "two reasons why," or "two factors that." For example, a recent question asked students to "explain two reasons why the

electoral college has not been abolished." Although you must provide the required two reasons to receive full credit, you can add a third ("spare tire") reason. Your "spare tire" reason will not count against you. AP readers are required to read all three reasons and give you credit for the best two. Unfortunately, you cannot earn extra points.

#### **6. MAKE STUDYING CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENCY A PRIORITY**

The AP U.S. Government and Politics Development Committee works very hard to write a variety of free-response questions that cover key topics from the Course Description curriculum outline. Trying to guess which question will be asked is usually futile. However, we can say that every exam since 1999 has included at least one free-response question on Congress and/or the presidency. As you prepare for the exam, be sure to carefully review these all-important topics.