

## **Ten Quick Tips for Mastering the Essay Test**

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### **1. Use your time well.**

A 20-minute test should give you ample time to plan, write, and review your essay. Decide now that you will take the time to plan your writing--making sure that you understand the assignment, writing, and organizing notes for your essay, and creating a clear thesis statement. Similarly, give yourself two or three minutes at the end of the time to check what you have written. You will probably not have time to rewrite your essay, but you should have time to correct errors and make changes before time is called.

### THE ESSAY INTRODUCTION

### **2. Present a clear thesis statement.**

Your thesis statement will show that you understand the assigned topic and that you have something meaningful to say about it. Give your opinion or idea, phrasing it so that its support will follow naturally.

### **3. Avoid repeating the wording of the assignment.**

If the first sentence of the assignment reads, "Write an essay in which you agree or disagree with this statement," you should not write, "I agree (or disagree) with this statement." Even if the essay question includes a sentence that you think would make a good thesis statement, do not repeat it word for word. Express it in your own words, and present it in a way that is all your own. For example, explain why the topic is problematic; show why you care about the issue and why your readers should care.

### **4. Don't spend too much time on the introduction.**

Trying to get the first few sentences "just right" can steal time from more important tasks. If you budget your time, allowing yourself a few minutes to review your writing, you will have the chance to go back and sharpen your introduction if you wish.

### THE ESSAY BODY

### **5. Create at least two statements that support your thesis.**

As you plan--before you write--reread your thesis statement and add because... at the end. Then come up with at least two "proofs" for your thesis. Ask yourself, "What have I observed or read about that causes me to believe this?" Your answers will be the support for your thesis statement.

### **6. Choose the evidence that best develops each support.**

You are not expected to provide evidence that can only come from library research. Think again about what you have observed or read. Can you recall a TV or newspaper story that relates to this topic? Have you or any people you know experienced the issue firsthand?

Readers will be impressed by support that comes from history, science, literature, and current events. Your experience can be compelling, but you should be sure that it is more than a trivial event or observation.

**7. Keep to the topic.**

Especially because your evidence comes from personal experience, you must resist temptation to follow a memory or other kind of detail into an unrelated subject. If your finished essay strays from the assigned topic, your score will drop. Every sentence counts; so draw from an experience only what you need to support your idea--and then move on.

**8. Organize your ideas logically and connect them smoothly.**

The person who evaluates your essay will pay close attention to its organization, so present your support and evidence in a way that makes sense. Order of importance can be quite effective for this type of essay; in this method of organization, each support takes your argument or position one step further and/or offers even more convincing evidence than the one before it.

However you organize your essay, make the progression of your thoughts easy to follow. Allow each sentence to flow naturally from the one before it. Transitions--words or phrases such as *for example*, *however*, and *therefore*--can reinforce the flow of your ideas.

**THE ESSAY CONCLUSION****9. Give yourself time to stop.**

Few things leave a reader more dissatisfied than an essay that ends abruptly. Allow enough time to write a paragraph that "wraps up" your argument and reminds your readers of the main idea of the essay.

**10. Leave your readers with something to think about.**

The most important thing for readers to think about is your thesis statement, so use your conclusion to restate it. Don't repeat the words that you used to introduce the thesis statement; rather, rephrase it. You also might use your final paragraph to recall the support for your view. If you do so, be sure to be concise.

One way to make your conclusion memorable is to show your readers that they have a personal stake in the topic. If it suits your argument, and if you can do so without adding new information, you might review why you care about the topic and why they should, too.