



Over 500 college professors, AP teachers, and graduate students descend upon Daytona Beach, FL each June. They sit around tables in groups of six and are surrounded by stacks of boxes each filled with hundreds of AP exams. There are enough boxes to hold over half a million free response questions. It is 4:15 in the afternoon on the fifth day of the reading. The readers are exhausted and let out a collective groan when it is announced they are behind schedule and will have to read for an additional 45 minutes. The readers have been grading the same exact essay, eight hours a day, for the past five days. They've already read over one thousand essays and the last thing they want to do is read another. That's when they pick up *your* AP booklet...

You need to do everything in your power to make the readers happy. I've been reading the AP Exam since 2000 and have learned the "insider information" that can help you earn a passing score on the AP exam and make the readers' job a *lot* easier.

READ!

Read the question very carefully. Know your FRQ Verbs so you do what you are supposed to.

WHICH PATH DO I TAKE?

Often FRQs will require you to first come up with several general IDs and then to elaborate on them. Imagine yourself at one side of an unexplored wilderness. Your goal is to get over the river and through the woods to the safety of the other side. Some paths you choose will be wrought with difficulty while others will allow to you travel to the end quickly and easily. Do some brainstorming before you start to write. Instead of writing about the first two things that come to mind, list as many "paths" as you can think of. Examine your list before you select the paths that you believe will be easiest and will provide you with the most opportunities to earn points.

Taking several minutes to plan before you write also gives your hand a little time to rest in the middle of a FRQ marathon. This especially important for the AP US Gov students who already have carpal tunnel syndrome from writing four FRQs in the morning.

DO I NEED AN INTRO?

Does the question require you to take a position? If so, take one. Don't sit on the fence – pick a side. There are points to be won on either side. You will only need a thesis on questions that require you to take a definitive stand on an issue. PLEASE don't write a fluff intro that just restates the question. These intros waste your time during the exam and the readers' time during the grading.

Discuss & Explain

Often include listing + defining + describing. The highest hurdle verbs.

Describe

What are the most significant characteristics of a word or concept? Make sure you include how or why the word or concept is important to the question.

Define

Write the meaning of a word or concept. Adding an example can't hurt.

List

A simple enumeration of some factors or characteristics that are clearly labeled.

High Hurdle Verbs

Low Hurdle Verbs

Most students pay attention to the nouns in a question. Pay attention to the verbs and earn higher FRQ scores.

FORMAT

The format below is a good way to think about answering most FRQs. It is very friendly to the AP Reader who may be on his/her 300th essay of the day. Every little thing you can do to make it easier for the readers is appreciated and may help tip the balance in your favor if a point is on the line. Always write legibly and readers prefer black or blue pens.

Some of you are exceptional writers. If you are more comfortable writing a traditional essay – write an essay. Well written and organized essays that lead the reader from one point to the next are also appreciated (and will guarantee you aren't short-writing).

SAMPLE FROM THE 2005 EXAM

As you read this sample, highlighted words are the sample response
Italicized words are explanations of the thoughts behind the answer.

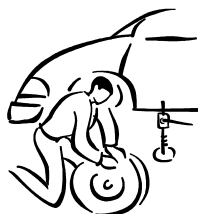
Part A: Explain how two factors keep the US Supreme Court from deviating too far from public opinion.

PART A
Clearly label each section of the FRQ to make it easy for the reader to navigate through it. FRQs with good “signposts” make readers happy.

1. *The question asks for two factors so I'm clearly labeling where my first one begins. Presidents nominate SC justices so they can't deviate too far from public opinion. This does not earn any points. The question asked me to EXPLAIN and all I've done so far is to IDENTIFY a factor. I also need to clearly link how public opinion can constrain the court. Since the president is elected, the general public shares his opinion on a lot of issues. When there is a vacancy on the Court, the President wants to make a choice that the people agree with, especially if he plans to run for re-election. If he nominates a person who deviates too far from public opinion, there will be a backlash in his approval rating and also the Senate might not confirm the justice which would be a major embarrassment which the president wants to avoid. Now I've earned my point because I've clearly linked the President nominating justices to the power of public opinion. Just because to you don't need to write a five-paragraph essay, doesn't mean you can answer the question with just a handful of words.*
2. *I clearly label where my second factor beings. I've left several lines above this so I would have space to edit or add information.*

RE-READ YOUR ANSWERS

Don't be in a rush to turn in your exam. Typically, students leave points on the table because they didn't pay enough attention to the verbs in the question. If you think of an additional point or forgot to reference the question add the information and arrow it into the right spot. You have to remain in the examination room until 100 minutes has passed so you might as well use all your time.



SPARE TIRE?

You are allowed 'spare tires' on your FRQs. For example, if the question asks you to describe **two** main duties of the President in his role as Head of State, you can provide the required two **PLUS a third** (a spare tire). AP Readers are required to read all three and give you credit for the best two (but you can't earn extra credit). This gives you a huge advantage over other students who don't know that this is 'legal.'