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# Strategies for the Free-Response Questions

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After completing the multiple-choice questions, you will receive a short break. You will then have 50 minutes to complete two free-response questions. Each question is worth 25 points for a total of 50 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 to earn a high score. Both the *2007 AP Psychology Released Exam* and the *2004 AP Psychology Released Exam* include actual free-response questions and sample scored essays. Both booklets can be purchased from the College Board's online store. In addition, you should visit the AP Psychology homepage at AP Central ([www.apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com)). There, 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 5 strategies that will help you achieve high scores on your free-response questions.

### 1. WATCH YOUR TIME

The free-response section is a two-part sprint. You must be focused and ready to “hit the ground running” in each section. 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 essay and DBQ questions that require a thesis statement, supporting evidence, and a conclusion. The AP Psychology exam uses a very different format. Its free-response questions are very focused, multi-part questions that do not require a traditional thesis-driven format. Your task is to clearly and directly answer each part of the question.

AP Psychology preparation books offer conflicting, and often confusing, advice on the best essay format. For example, do you need to write an introduction? Is it important to write a conclusion? These questions can be definitively answered by looking at two released essays from the 2007 AP Psychology exam.

The first essay on the 2007 exam presented students with a hypothetical everyday example. Ellie, “a new student at Skinner High School,” attends a psychology club meeting hoping to make friends. The question asks you to illustrate four specific factors that would help Ellie’s “quest for friendship” and four specific factors that would hinder Ellie’s “quest for friendship.”

AP Central provides an excellent sample essay for this question. Labeled “1A,” the essay has a concise introductory paragraph and an excellent concluding paragraph. However, the student received no credit for these fine introductory and concluding paragraphs. Instead, the readers focused entirely on how the student defined and illustrated the 8 key concepts. The student correctly illustrated 7 of the 8 concepts and received a 7.

The student lost one point because he or she did not correctly illustrate the Schachter two-factor theory.

On pages 43–45 in the 2007 AP Psychology Released Exam booklet, you will find another scored essay on the same 2007 topic. Note that this essay does not contain either an introduction or a conclusion. Instead, this essay devotes a paragraph to each of the eight listed concepts. The author's paragraphs are short and to the point. The student defines the required concept and provides a clear illustrative example. The student correctly illustrated all 8 concepts and received an 8.

This comparison of two student essays published by the College Board provides definitive answers to the questions of style and format. Do not waste time writing an introduction and a conclusion. Instead, focus on writing clear, succinct paragraphs that define and illustrate each required part of the question.

### 3. BE PREPARED TO DEFINE AND ILLUSTRATE KEY CONCEPTS

The AP Psychology exam is dominated by key concepts. Free-response questions typically provide a hypothetical situation, and then ask you to define and illustrate 7–8 concepts. For example, a recent free-response question introduced test-takers to a couple learning a new routine for a dance competition. The question asked students to define and give an example of how each of the following seven concepts would affect the couple's performance: extrinsic motivation, punishment, proactive interference, endorphins, vestibular system, divergent thinking, and introversion.

While it is vital that you carefully review the key concepts defined in Chapter 2 and discussed in Chapters 3–16, memorizing definitions is not the best way to score points on free-response questions. The questions also require you to illustrate each concept. This *Crash Course* book contains a large collection of illustrative examples. Don't ignore these examples. Use them as springboards for thought. View your high school as a laboratory for studying human behavior. Try to develop the mental habit of applying the concepts you learn in your AP Psychology class to the patterns of behavior you see in school.

**4. BE CALM IF YOU CAN'T ANSWER PART OF A FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION**

It is very important to remember that each free-response question contains distinctive sub-parts that are independently scored. For example, the 2007 free-response question about Ellie's quest for friendship contained 8 specific concepts. Since the total question was worth 25 points, each concept was actually worth just 3.125 points. If you draw a blank on a concept, don't panic or fixate on trying to remember it. Instead, relax and tell yourself that it is only worth 3 points out of 150 points on the exam. Then move on to the next concept. Remember that you only need about 110 points to score a 5 and about 90 points to score a 4.

**5. MAKE STUDYING RESEARCH METHODS A PRIORITY**

The AP Psychology 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 free-response questions will be asked is usually futile. However, it is true that 10 of the 18 exams from 1992 to 2009 included a free-response question devoted to research methodology. For example, go to AP Central and study the following questions: Question 2, 2000; Question 1, 2003; Question 1, 2004; Question 1, 2006; and Question 2, 2008. Studying these questions is an excellent way to review key research methods, concepts, and statistical measures.