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“Answer the question!”

# Guidelines for Timed Essay Writing

Perspectives of a long time essay reader

* **Read the prompt carefully and *ANSWER THE QUESTION!***
* ***FOCUS ON MEANING! Essay should be controlled by ideas and analysis, NOT just the plot, story or details.***
* STATE THESIS & PROVE YOUR POINT. Establish clear direction and thesis in introduction. ANALYZE & DEVELOP main ideas in depth. SUPPORT your ideas with carefully selected concrete details and evidence. AVOID formulaic writing, such as just following the order of the prompt (“In the first paragraph,” “In the second paragraph” or “Firstly,” “Secondly”, “Lastly”).
* BALANCE analysis and concrete details. ALWAYS provide more interpretation and analysis than supporting details, plot.
* AVOID SIMPLE SUMMARY! Do NOT retell the story or article or simply repeat the prompt. Do NOT just list details and evidence. Analyze, analyze, analyze.
* INTRODUCE and “weave” quotes smoothly into your essay. ALWAYS provide context for quotes (situation, speaker, etc.). EXPLAIN & ANALYZE quotes in depth. DO NOT just throw quotes in and make the reader guess why you included them in your essay.
* SELECT quotes carefully. AVOID long quotes and quotes that give simple plot information; example: “Then, she answered the door.” Do NOT start or end paragraphs with a quote. Do NOT over quote! The purpose of using quotes is to support your ideas. Quotes should not make up more than 10-15% of the essay.
* USE your own HONEST VOICE. English vocabulary usage and syntax are complex. Do NOT extend too far beyond your level of English mastery. Too many SAT-type words used incorrectly may amuse the reader, but they will not help your score.
* HOW LONG SHOULD A TIMED ESSAY BE? There is no set length; however, need to get words onto the page to develop ideas sufficiently. Usual length of higher scoring essays: 20-25 min. essays: One and a half to two plus pages; 40-45 min. essays: Two to five pages