

Essay Advice from Scored Sample Essays

In General

- **Check the verbs.** Do what the question asks, and rely on the concept of What, How, and Why. (WHW).
 - If the verb is **Identify** it requires at least one sentence saying WHAT it is.
 - If the verb is **Describe**, it requires at least two sentences saying WHAT it is and HOW it operates.
 - If the verb is **Explain**, then it requires at least three sentences saying WHAT it is, HOW it operates, and WHY it is done or WHY this is significant.
- Provide examples to illustrate your point. Even hypothetical examples are helpful.
- If the question asks for one strategy or example and you provide two, the grader will accept the one that is correct—unless the points contradict or negate each other. (Think of this as your spare tire.)
- More evidence/more explanation is better than less. The goal is not to answer the question as briefly as possible.
- Provide specific evidence.
- Explain how your evidence supports your assertion.
- Break the answer into paragraphs that correspond to the parts of the question. The first three essays will have Part a), Part b), etc. Mark your paragraphs that way.
- The scoring sometimes seems capricious. Be specific and accurate in your information. Be thorough in your explanation.

Concept Application

- Make a specific reference to the scenario in each section of your answer.
- Be specific in your evidence.
 - No credit—The president can stop a bill.
 - Credit—The president can veto a bill.
- Explain how your evidence answers this question.

Quantitative Analysis

- When the question asks you to describe a pattern or identify a similarity or difference, you don't have to cover all the data. You can just focus on a couple relevant chunks of data.
- When the question asks you to draw a conclusion about that pattern or similarity/difference, it is OK to bring in information from outside the data set to help form that conclusion.
- When the question asks you to draw a conclusion, present a plausible conclusion. Possible wording: "This can be explained by..." "One viable explanation..."
- When the question asks you to draw a conclusion, your conclusion might be either "This pattern is caused by..." or "This pattern results in..."

SCOTUS Comparison

- If Part A says something like "Identify the constitutional clause that is common in the two cases," don't answer in just one sentence.
 - Identify the clause, not the amendment. Example: "In both cases, the Court based its decision on the Equal Protection clause." (not "on the Fourteenth Amendment")
 - Take a second sentence to explain what that clause does, allows, forbids, etc.
 - Note: If you identify the correct clause and then add a second, incorrect clause, no point.

- Even though there are three parts to the question, there are four points the grader will look for. Part B is worth two points.
 - In Part B, provide specific, accurate, and relevant information from the required case. Do **NOT** refer to the Court's decision in stating the facts of the case.
 - Example: "In *Brown*, African-American students were required to attend segregated schools." (not "In *Brown*, the Court ruled that segregated schools were inherently unequal.")
 - For the second point on Part B, present specific facts about the second case. Then explain how the facts in the two cases led the Court to make a similar/different ruling in the two cases. Use wording such as "The similar facts in the two cases led the Court to make a similar ruling."
 - Example: "In *Hernandez*, the defendant was tried by a racially segregated jury. The similar facts in these two cases—segregation—both violated the Equal Protection clause, leading the Court to rule segregation unconstitutional in both *Brown* and *Hernandez*."
- Be sure your answer in Part C is political and specific. Be sure to address the goal of an action.
 - If you are asked, say, what could an interest group do, be sure your response is political, not simply personal, e.g., lobby Congress to pass a law desegregating juries, not stay home and avoid the meeting.
 - Be sure your response is specific. Words such as "point out," "draw attention to," "promote," "object" are too vague. Use political terms such as "lobby Congress," "submit an *amicus curiae* brief," "make hard-money contributions."
 - Address the goal or objective of that action, e.g., "this would provide equal educational opportunities for minority students."

Argument Essay

- Write a **Yes, But thesis** that begins by presenting a reasonable position, but one that is not as strong as your preferred argument.
- The second half of the thesis should include a *because* statement in your main clause, providing two supporting points you will use to support your preferred argument. If you do not have a *because* statement, it is unlikely that you will earn points for your thesis.
 - Although X, the answer is Y because A and B.
- On the AP exam, **if you do not have an acceptable thesis, you cannot earn all of the points for evidence and analysis.**
- The question will tell you where your evidence for your main argument needs to come from—usually a few specified required documents for one piece and other sources for a second piece. Pay attention to those requirements.
- While it is fine to use one of the specified required documents in your concession and refutation (first body paragraph), you need to use at least one of the specified required documents in support of your main argument (in the second and/or third body paragraphs).
- Refutation: An alternative view is X, but this is a weak answer because Y.
- Evidence for your concession, refutation, or rebuttal can come from anywhere.
- You must explain how your evidence supports your assertion. It is fine to use "This shows" or similar constructions.

Concession and Refutation