

## Tips for Writing the AP Environmental Science Exam Essays

### DO

1. The first thing you should do is carefully read the question. The second thing you should do is read the question, and the third thing you should do is read the question. Be sure that you answer the question that is asked and only that question, and that you answer **all** parts of it.
2. Outline the answer to avoid confusion and disorganization. Thinking ahead helps to avoid scratch outs, astrices, skipping around, and rambling.
3. Write an essay. Outlines and diagrams, no matter how elaborate and accurate, are not essays and will not get you much, if any, credit by themselves. Exception: If you are asked as a part of an essay on a lab to calculate a number, this does not require that you write an essay, but be sure to show how you got your answer (show the formulas you are using and the values you have inserted into those formulas). Remember also that calculators are not permitted on the exam.
4. Define your terms. Say something about each of the terms that you use.
5. Answer the question parts in the order called for if possible. It is best not to skip around within the question. The four essay questions do not have to be answered in any particular order, however.
6. Write clearly and neatly. It is foolhardy to antagonize or confuse the reader with lousy penmanship.
7. Go into detail that is on the subject and to the point. Be sure to include the obvious (for example, "light is necessary for photosynthesis"). Answer the question thoroughly.
8. If you cannot remember a word exactly, take a shot-at-it, get as close as you can. If you don't have a name for a concept, describe the concept.
9. Use a ball point pen with black or blue ink.
10. Remember that no detail is too small to be included as long as it is to the point.
11. Carefully label your diagrams (they get no points otherwise) and place them in the text at the appropriate place- not detached at the end. Be sure to refer to the diagram in your essay.
12. Bring a watch to the exam so that you can pace yourself. You have four essays with about 22 minutes for each answer.
13. Understand that the exam is written to be difficult. The national average will be about 50% correct, that is 5 points out of 10 on each essay. It is very likely that you will not know everything. This is expected, so relax and do the best you can. Write thorough answers.
14. Synthesis questions ask you to relate information from different concepts. If you do not know the relationship between the two things, at least tell what you do know about the two concepts individually.

Tips continued

## **DON'T**

1. Don't waste time on background information unless the question calls for historical development or historical significance. Answer the question.
2. Don't ramble- get to the point!
3. Don't shoot the bull- say what you know and go on to the next question. You can always come back if you remember something.
4. Don't use a pencil, and don't use a pen with an ink color other than black. Don't use a felt-tip pen because the ink seeps through the page and makes both sides of the paper hard to read.
5. Don't panic or get angry because you are unfamiliar with the question. You probably have read or heard something about the subject- be calm and think.
6. Don't scratch out excessively. One or two lines through the unwanted word(s) should be sufficient.
7. Don't write more than a very few words in the margin.
8. Don't worry about spelling every word perfectly or using exact grammar. These are not a part of the standards the graders use. It is important for you to know, however, that very poor spelling and grammar will hurt your chances.
9. Don't write sloppily. It is easy for a grader to miss an important word when he/she cannot read your handwriting.
10. Don't leave questions blank. Remember that each point you earn on an essay question is the equivalent of two correct multiple choice questions, and there is no penalty for a wrong guess.

**Make an effort on every question! Don't quit!**