

## **Advanced Placement Biology**

### **Tips for Writing AP Biology Free Response Questions**

- You will have 100 minutes to for the four Free-Response questions. For the first 10 minutes, you will be given the questions and an opportunity to read, think about, organize, and outline the answers. Use this time wisely. Read each question thoroughly, being sure that you understand all parts of it. Then jot down your ideas for your responses on the green question sheet. An outline for each question will help you organize your thoughts and to stay on topic while writing.
- The last 90 minutes are for writing your responses. Since each essay is of equal value (10 points), divide your writing time equally. Plan to use 22 minutes per essay. Divide that time into two segments: approximately 20 minutes to write and 2 minutes to read and edit.
- Write a response that answers the question thoroughly. Go into detail as long as it is relevant to the subject and to the point. You only receive points for sentences that specifically answer the question or provide examples. Do not “shoot the bull” or write innocuous statements about “how wonderful nature is.”
- Outlines are unacceptable substitutes for responses and will receive no credit. Diagrams, however, will receive credit only if they are relevant, if they are well labeled, and if they are described in the text of your essay.
- Write clearly and neatly using a ballpoint pen with black or dark blue ink. Neatly cross out mistakes; there is no need for White-Out. Do not write sloppily. If the grader cannot read what you wrote, you will receive no credit. Do not sloppily write a term you cannot spell or cannot remember. You will not fool the reader. (Use phonetic spelling for a term you think you know. Explain the concept or structure if you do not remember the specific word.)
- Do not worry about perfect spelling, grammar or sentence structure. Although these are important, you will not lose points as long as you get your ideas across.
- Do not panic or get angry if you think you are unfamiliar about a question. Be calm. You will know something about the topic, so write what you know. In any event, do not give up and leave the question blank. (Remember that there is no penalty for a wrong guess and that each point you earn on an essay is equal to two correct multiple-choice questions.)
- If you are given a choice of topics to write about make your choice(s) and stick with them. Do not second-guess yourself halfway through the essay. This is a waste of time.

**If a question asks you to make a relationship between two or more processes or concepts and you are not sure you know, at least tell what you do know about each process or concept individually.**

## ***Additional Tips for Writing Essays***

### DO

1. The first thing that you should do is to 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 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 do you much, if any, credit by themselves.
4. Define your terms. Say something about each of the terms that you use.
5. Answer the question parts in the order called for. 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.

Here are some key direction-words used in essay exams. See if you can write a definition for each word. Then compare your answers with the definitions that follow.

***a. compare f. enumerate***

***b. contrast g. evaluate***

***c. define h. explain***

***d. describe i. interpret***

***e. discuss j. prove or show***

Here are answers to compare with yours.

a. **compare:** show the similarities between two events, periods, ideas, theories, or the like. (Some people use compare to mean showing differences as well as similarities, so be careful.)

b. **contrast:** show the differences between two or more events, periods, ideas, theories, or the like.

c. **define:** state the meaning of a word or phrase. Example: Define science.

d. **describe:** give the characteristics of something. Example: Describe the functions of the ATP/ADP systems.

e. **discuss:** give the pros and cons on an issue, event, process, theory, or technique. Example: Discuss how DNA

f. **enumerate:** list a number of reasons or attributes of something, Example: Enumerate the stages of mitosis.

g. **evaluate:** make a judgment or form an opinion, or supply reasons why something is as it is;

Example: Evaluate the effects of Jenner"s experiments with cowpox.

h. **explain:** support or qualify a given generalization with specific facts and ideas.

Example: Explain

what is meant by the "scientific method."

i. **interpret:** analyze critically or explain something not clear.

j. **prove or show:** demonstrate the truth or a statement. Explain the reasons for events turning out as

they did, or speculate on what might be the effects of certain causes Example: Show with

diagrams how the eye is like a camera.

6. **Write clearly and neatly.** It would be foolhardy to antagonize the reader with lousy penmanship.

7. Go into detail that is on the subject and to the point. Be sure to include the obvious. 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 black ball point pen with dark 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. Widen your margins a little. This will make the essay easier for most readers to read.

13. Bring a watch to the exam so that you can pace yourself. You have four essays with about 22

minutes for each answer.

14. Practice outlining your essay answers on your tests during the year.

15. Understand that the exam is written to be hard. The average will be about 50% correct, or 5 out

of a possible 10 on an essay. It is very likely that you will not know everything. It is expected,

so relax and write thorough answers.

## DON'T

1. *Don't ramble--get to the point!*
2. *Don't waste time on background information unless the question calls for historical development or historical significance. Answer the question.*
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 or a pen with an ink color other than blue. Never 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 readers use. It is important for you to know, however, that very poor spelling and grammar will hurt your chances.*
9. *Don't write sloppy. 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 one point on an essay question is the equivalent of about three of the multiple choice questions, and there is no penalty for a wrong guess. Make an effort on every question!*