

Strategies for Exam Day

Listen closely to the test administrator's instructions. Follow them!

When you receive your topic sheet, read the writing topic very carefully. Look up any unfamiliar words (you may bring a dictionary to the exam), since they could be crucial to understanding the topic.

Respond to and stay focused on the assigned topic. Don't be afraid to spend a few minutes figuring out exactly what the topic is asking of you. Since you will already have made yourself familiar with the test directions (see above), don't waste time reading them again - they don't change. Focus on the topic.

Budget your time. You will have **90 minutes** to write your essay. A time budget might look something like this:

10 minutes: Study Topic, do prewriting (optional), arrive at Thesis
10 minutes: Introduction
50 minutes: Body
10 minutes: Conclusion
10 minutes: Proofread

You may choose not to budget your time this strictly, or in exactly this way, but be sure that you have some plan as to how far along in your essay you want to be after, say, 45 minutes (the half-way point): you don't want to still be writing your introduction!

A two-draft vs. one-draft approach: Some students try to write a rough draft and then rush to write a second, final draft before time expires. For most students, this two-draft approach is a poor strategy for a times writing. Although multiple drafts are desirable when time permits (such as in the case of a take home essay or a paper), time does not permit more than one draft for the WPE for most writers. However, if you are used to writing two drafts, you need to budget your time efficiently and check to make sure that your paper is organized and focused on all sections of the topic.

Decide what position you are going to take on the topic. Even if you don't have a strong opinion about the assigned topic, it will be easier to write your essay and stay focused if you make a firm and definite decision on your thesis and state it clearly in the introductory paragraph. However, some writers might assert their final theses midway through their essay or even toward the end. Whether you take a position at the beginning or later on during the writing process, keep in mind that your essay must be consistent throughout and focused on your main idea.

If you have trouble coming up with ideas, try a prewriting technique like clustering or brainstorming.

You do not have to start with your introductory first. If you have ideas to start the body of your essay, leave a page at the beginning for your introduction and go on to the second page and begin to write your essay. Then you can go back and complete your introduction.

For supporting evidence, use your personal knowledge, things you have heard or read about or experienced yourself. It is very important to support your thesis with such evidence, which you will develop in the body of the essay.

Be sure your essay has an identifiable conclusion. This is important. Don't just stop writing - give the essay a sense of completion.

Remember, you won't be graded on neatness, so it's OK to cross out words, sentences, or even whole paragraphs if necessary. Also, if you decide you need to insert a few words or even a large chunk of text into an already written portion of your essay, just use arrows or some other notation to show the reader what goes where. Don't do any unnecessary rewriting. The grader will make every effort to follow your directions.