

2-1-1

Writing the Thesis Statement

When writing during the AP exam (or any other scholastic writing you do... like college papers, essays, etc.) it is important (and usually part of the criteria for grading) that you have a clear, well developed and thoughtful thesis paragraph. This page doesn't necessarily help you with the "thoughtful" part (that's a different part of this course) but can help you with the writing, development and structure of the essay. The strategy that we'll use is called 2-1-1.

2-1-1 is a simple formula for writing basic and functional thesis statements that logically draw the reader into the essay. The formula is as follows:

1. Begin with **2** background sentences that set the stage for your essay.
2. State **1** sentence that clearly states your thesis and position. This is your overall position or argument.
3. State **1** sentence that will indicate how your essay will be organized. This is the roadmap that your reader will use to understand your main points, arguments or positions.

Lets pretend the question is about baseball. Why? I just loooooove baseball. **The question is: What is the best baseball team in the Majors?** Ooooooh. Nice and vague... what is "best"? Best players? Best record? Most titles? Prettiest uniforms? Whatever... sounds like it's up to me. And I think it's the *Twins*. Lets begin.

The Minnesota Twins are the finest baseball team in the Major Leagues today. There you have it. A thesis statement, but hardly an engaging one. In addition to its lack of engagement, it lacks any sort of organization that helps the reader understand where we're going. Lets start with some background...

In 1905, one of America's 8 original franchises, the Washington Senators, changed its name to the Washington Nationals. It would not be the last change, however, as the moniker "Twins" was adopted when the "Nats" moved to Minnesota during the MLB's 1961 expansion. Whether the name be Senators, Nationals or Twins, the team has turned out to be one of the finest in Major League Baseball. Ooooooh. That's better... I'm listening, but where am I going? Lets add on the roadmap. This is the sentence that gives the reader a brief outline of my arguments. Lets continue...

In 1905, one of America's 8 original franchises, the Washington Senators, changed its name to the Washington Nationals. It would not be the last change, however, as the moniker "Twins" was adopted when the "Nats" moved to Minnesota during the MLB's 1961 expansion. Whether the name be Senators, Nationals or Twins, the team has turned out to be one of the finest in Major League Baseball. Their greatness can best be attributed the wealth of talent the team has possessed, their love of the game and their ability to shoot lasers from their eyes.

Done. #3 is terrible, but entertaining.

Example:

Question:

The debate over the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 revealed bitter controversies on a number of issues. Discuss the issue involved and explain why these controversies developed.

Thesis statement: (opening paragraph)

In 1797 John Adams became the second President of the United States. Unfortunately for the new nation, without Washington's steady hand, the ugly disagreements between the Federalists and the Republicans soon dominated Adams' administration. *In the debates over the politically motivated Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, the argument of strict interpretation versus loose interpretation of the Constitution once again emerged.* Issues that provided the foundation for this division included the assumption of State's debts, the formation of a national bank, an excise tax on Whiskey and protective tariffs.

Practice with these...

Question 1

How did economic, geographic and social factors lead to the emergence of slavery in the southern colonies between 1607 and 1775?

Writing Essay Questions
AP Grading Rubrics

The Document Based Question (DBQ)

	8 – 9	5 – 6 – 7	2 – 3 – 4	0 – 1
Thesis	Contains a well developed thesis that examines all pertinent parts of the question	Contains a thesis that addresses the question	Contains a limited or underdeveloped thesis	Lacks a thesis or restates the question
Analysis	Effective and reasonable analysis provided to answer all parts of the question	Response to the question contains limited analysis	Deals with the question in a general, simplistic or superficial manner	Exhibits inadequate or incorrect understanding of the question
Document Usage	Effectively uses a substantial number of documents	Effectively uses some of the documents	Merely paraphrases, quotes or briefly cites documents	Has little or no understanding of the documents or ignores them completely
Outside Information	Supports thesis with substantial and relevant outside information	Supports thesis with some relevant outside information	Contains little outside information or information that is irrelevant to the question	No outside information is provided
Accuracy	The essay contains few, if any, minor factual errors	May have some errors that do not seriously detract from the quality of the essay	Contains some major errors	May contain substantial factual errors
Writing and Organization	Is clearly organized and well written	Shows acceptable organization and writing; language errors do not interfere with comprehension	Grammatical errors and organization create some difficulty in comprehension	Is poorly organized and or poorly written

The Free Response Question (FRQ)

	8 – 9	5 – 6 – 7	2 – 3 – 4	0 – 1
Thesis	Contains a well developed thesis that examines all pertinent parts of the question	Contains a thesis that addresses the question	Contains a limited or underdeveloped thesis	Lacks a thesis or restates the question
Analysis	Effective and reasonable analysis provided to answer all parts of the question	Response to the question contains limited analysis	Deals with the question in a general, simplistic or superficial manner	Exhibits inadequate or incorrect understanding of the question
Information	Supports thesis with substantial and relevant information	Supports thesis with some relevant information	Contains minimal information or information that is irrelevant	Little or no relevant information is provided regarding the question
Accuracy	The essay contains few, if any, minor factual errors	May have some errors that do not seriously detract from the quality of the essay	Contains some major errors	May contain substantial factual errors
Writing and Organization	Is clearly organized and well written	Shows acceptable organization and writing; language errors do not interfere with comprehension	Grammatical errors and organization create some difficulty in comprehension	Is poorly organized and or poorly written

Polasky's Golden Rules of Writing...

Hints and Tips for writing Historical Essays

Read these over daily until you truly understand them & integrate them into your writing. Each time you have a writing assignment review and reread these hints to assist the professionalism and clarity of your writing. You will need to keep these items in mind as you read... because I do as I grade.

1. **Assume your reader is an idiot...** That's right, a class A imbecile. *In other words, spell things out...* Don't take it for granted that "he/she know what I mean/knows what I'm talking about." You've never met the guy/gal who's going to read & grade your essays.
2. **Things, a lot, & stuff...** NEVER!
3. **Keep your eye on the ball...** Are you answering what is being asked?
4. Are you **staying in or straying from** the time scope of your question?
5. Ditch "**Happily Ever Aftersims.**" To wit, "...and if the pilgrims had never landed here, we could not have become the great, freedom-loving nation that we are today."
6. **Keep conclusions narrow.** Just like the frame of study. You don't have to go from the beginning of time to the year 5000 in six paragraphs.
7. **It's cool to be P.C.** Use "Native Americans" instead of "Indians," and "African-Americans" instead of "Black."
8. **Tenses: Don't shift them!!!** This is the PAST that you are writing about.
9. **Never write conversationally!!!** Don't write like you talk, and don't talk to the reader; NO FIRST PERSON. NO RHETORICAL QUESTIONS.
10. **Spelling & Capitalization, Spelling & Capitalization, Spelling & Capitalization!!**
11. Along the lines of #9. **Stay crisp and professional.** Don't beat around the bush. *Write as an expert in the field.*
12. **Watch out for repetitions...** avoid tendencies in word or phrase usage & sentence structure.
13. **Stream of Consciousness...** unless you're William Faulkner, don't just ramble on. Have a specific mental picture, an intellectual starting point & destination for your work.
14. **Direct is nice, but jumping right in is not.** Give the reader a thesis first—tell the reader what it is you're going to prove/disprove, advocate/reject, agree with/disagree with, etc...
15. **Don't leave hanging points!** JUSTIFY your conclusions. Express facts rather than imply them. In other words, *demonstrate to me why I should believe you/your conclusions.*
16. **Responses should be free-standing;** I should be able to read your work and right away know what the question must have been, *even if I never say it.*
17. **No cuteness**—leave humor and funnies to the Daily Show, Colbert & Letterman. Always display your scholarship, not your wittiness...
18. **Identify your pronouns, and use "Them" sparingly...** It's pretty easy to confuse the daylights out of the reader in no time at all if he/she has to struggle to figure out who "them" is/are/could be...
19. **"LUMPING" is as vague as it is inaccurate.** Be cautious about placing too much unity into the thoughts & actions of the many, i.e. "The colonists felt... The Indians hated... The Europeans wanted..." *Could there be subsets within the groups? Specifically, which groups or sorts of the aforementioned felt, hated or wanted?* It's like saying, "All teens are..."
20. Along the lines of #8. **Don't inject yourself into history** by using "WE" when you really mean, "Americans who have been dead for a long time." WE didn't evict the Cherokees from Georgia, win World War I, give women the right to vote, build the railroads, land on the moon, etc; THEY/ the U.S. did!

How to Interpret Important Terms in Essay Questions

Scholastic Vocabulary

The Following terms frequently appear in essay questions. You should know their meaning and answer accordingly. These are based on C. Bird and D.M. Bird, Learning More by Effective Study (New York: 1945).

<u>Assess the Validity:</u>	Describe or explain the accuracy of a statement or how well something worked.
<u>Compare:</u>	Look for qualities that resemble each other. Emphasize similarities, but in some cases mention the differences.
<u>Contrast:</u>	Stress the Dissimilarities, differences or unlikeness of things, qualities, events or problems.
<u>Criticize:</u>	Express your judgment about the worth or truth of the factors or views. Give the results of your analysis discussing their limitations and good points.
<u>Define:</u>	Give a clear, concise meaning. Don't give details, but make sure you limit the definition. Show the thing that you are defining differs from things in other classes.
<u>Describe:</u>	Recount, characterize, sketch (with words, not artistically) or relate in sequence or story form.
<u>Diagram:</u>	Give a drawing, chart or plan in some graphic manner. Usually you should clearly label these.
<u>Discuss:</u>	Examine, analyze, and give reasons pro and con. Be complete and include details.
<u>Enumerate:</u>	Write in list or outline form, giving points concisely, one by one.
<u>Evaluate:</u>	Carefully appraise the questions, citing both advantages and disadvantages. Emphasize the appraisal of authorities and your personal evaluation.
<u>Interpret:</u>	Give examples of, solve or comment on a subject, usually giving your own judgment about it.
<u>Judge to what degree:</u>	See: Assess the validity
<u>Justify:</u>	Prove or give reasons for conclusions, taking pains to be convincing.
<u>List:</u>	Write an itemized list of statements.
<u>Prove:</u>	Establish that something is true by citing factual evidence and/or giving clear, logical reasons.
<u>Relate:</u>	Show how things are related to or connected with one another and how one thing causes another.
<u>Review:</u>	Examine a topic critically, analyzing and commenting on the important statements to be made about it.
<u>State:</u>	Present the main points in brief, clear sequence, usually omitting details, illustrations or examples.
<u>Summarize:</u>	Give the main points in condensed form, like the summary of a chapter or topic, omitting details and illustrations.
<u>Trace:</u>	In narrative form describe progress, development or historical events from some point of origin to the end in a sequential manner.