

# Writing AP Biology Essays.

1. The first thing that you should do is to carefully read the question. Be sure to answer the question that is being asked and answer all parts of it. This sounds easier than it is! See below for more on this.
2. Outline the answer to avoid confusion and disorganization. Thinking ahead helps to avoid skipping around and rambling. If you do not outline well, list the major areas you will cover in your essay. Check with your outline or list once you've finished writing. Include examples and terms to define in your outline.
3. Write a short answer. The word essay in English is NOT the same in biology. No introductory stuff, don't write what you are going to write about.
4. Define your terms. Say something about each of the terms that you use. Underline these key terms.
5. Answer the question parts in the order called for if possible. It is best to not skip around within the question. Label the parts, a, b, c for example. Skip lines in between the parts. You can add more later.
6. Write clearly and neatly. It would be crazy to antagonize the reader with lousy penmanship. Be certain that your science terms are clearly written.
7. Go into detail that is on the subject and to the point. Be sure to include and DEFINE 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. Provide an example if you can't recall the term.
9. Use a black ballpoint pen with dark ink. NEVER pencil.
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. Explain your diagram in your essay. Typically diagrams alone receive no points unless they are referred to in your essay.
12. Widen your margins a little. This will make the essay easier for most folks to read. You can also add more later if you need to.
13. 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.
14. Don't waste your time on background information unless the question calls for historical development or historical significance. Answer the question.

15. Don't ramble---get to the point. Say what you know and go on to the next question. You can always come back if you remember something later. If you only know a few key facts or points, that's ok!! Your answer should be dense with information.

16. 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.

17. Don't scratch out excessively. One or two lines though the unwanted words is fine.

18. Don't leave questions blank. Remember that each 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!**

19. If you are given a choice of parts (e.g. discuss photosynthesis or respiration), select the one you know the most CONCRETE and SPECIFIC details about.

20. Points are NOT subtracted for wrong answers. Don't be afraid to be wrong but DON'T contradict yourself.

21. Don't restate ANY part of the question. You do not get any points for saying ANYTHING that is already in the question.

22. If you have extra time, check your outline, add a definition, add an example, and underline key words.

### **How to READ the QUESTION**

I. Look for VERBS and write your response accordingly. The people that grade your answer will interpret the question VERY literally. What information to these words ask for?

**Define      Describe      Discuss      Compare      Contrast      Explain      Identify**

II. Look for other clues in the question and interpret correctly. What do these questions want you to talk about?

**What is the structure of...?**

**What is the function of...?**

**What is the role of...?**

**How is it regulated...?**

**What is the composition of...?**

**What is the relationship between...?**

III. Look for numbers, ands and ors. For example, what does this ask for?

**Chose two of the following and for each provide three examples of structure or function...**