

## **Writing AP Government Free Response Questions**

Students frequently panic when confronted with the AP free response questions. They begin writing without properly analyzing the question. Often students write an answer to a question from a previous exam which is similar but not the same as the question on the exam they are facing. On occasion students write on the introductory sentence of the question rather than on the true focus of the question. The biggest problem is not lack of knowledge. It is lack of properly reading the question. The questions on this worksheet are intended as a check list by which you can quickly analyze the question, clarify the topics to be covered, identify the mental processes required by the writers of the question, and compose an answer that meets the requirements of the question. You cannot take a hard copy of these questions into the exam. However, if you master this process and apply it on exam day, you will greatly enhance your chances of doing well on the exam.

1. Which of the units you studied is referred to in the question?
2. Which specific subdivision(s) of that unit(s) is/are the specific focus of the question?
3. Does the question require that you show the relation or interaction of more than one unit?
4. Operative terms: What does the question ask you to do? ( Describe, list, identify, evaluate, compare. explain, justify, other?)
5. Is there more than one operative term in the question?
6. What does that operative term mean? How much detail is required by the operative terms presented in the question?
7. Construct a brief outline of the answer to the question.

List Write an itemized series of concise statements (i.e, concepts, events, laws) without explanation.

Identify Write an itemized series of concise statements (i.e, concepts, events, laws) without explanation. "Can be done quickly with a few words."

Describe/Discuss Give a detailed account. Make a picture with words. Include characteristics, qualities, and parts.

Analyze Break into its component parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.

Explain Make an idea/concept/process/relationship clear. Show the logical relationship between components of the question. Provide reasons for an event or series of events. Often requires a thesis statement. Provide supporting evidence/data (expert testimony, examples, statistics).

"Requires explicit linkage (implying a linkage is not sufficient) between what is being explained and how or why it exists, happens, or whatever the question spells out."

Compare Show the similarities (and sometimes the differences) between two or more things. May involve a variety of factors among which maybe objectives, size, structure, selection process, time, recruitment methods, power, authority, legitimacy.

Contrast Show the differences between two or more things. See compare for incomplete list of factors involved.

Support/refute Provide evidence which proves (supports) or disproves (refutes) a statement or quotation. Requires a thesis and supporting evidence.

Evaluate Make a judgment on a problem, condition, quotation. Provide data on both sides. Pick one side and justify your position with data, expert testimony, examples.

**Hints:**

- Read the entire question and underline key terms (jot down notes here if you would like so you don't forget)
- DO NOT ramble or put in a bunch of extraneous information
- DO NOT make absolute statements that cannot be proven
- Make sure your content is clear. Sometimes whether you get the point or not is determined by whether you are using an example in the right context.
- If you do not know if your definition or answer is great, try to add an example to help the reader understand your point. If the question also asks for an example, make sure the examples are different and as specific as you possibly can.
- If you feel clueless about a part of an essay, whether it is on a unit test or the AP exam, do not despair. Do your best and write something. You might hit on what the rubric asks for. If not, you will not be penalized for trying. Missing one part of the FRQ question will not doom your score on the AP exam.
- Most rubrics will follow a 10 point scale
- Make sure you use an introduction and conclusion!
- Use factual data both historical and current to support your answer – if you are unsure of a name don't use it
- Avoid statements that are implausible, can't be proven, or don't relate to the question
- Avoid unsubstantiated generalizations in the body of your essay
- Avoid imposing your own opinion – readers are looking that you can prove a point or have the factual information to answer the question...they really don't care about your opinion
- Avoid incorrect information or data
- Avoid BS .... the readers are smart people!

"Note: Material enclosed is based on a handout from Chief Faculty Consultant, Student Performance on Q and A: 2001 AP United States Government and Politics Free Response Questions."