Essential Exam Tips

The following strategies for answering the free-response questions will help you on exam day.

Answer the question you’re most confident about first.

It’s a good idea to read through all of the questions to determine which ones you feel most prepared to answer. Then you can start to solve the questions in a sequence that allows you to perform your best.

Think about what each question is asking.

For example, some questions may require you to design an experiment. Others may ask you to develop an argument with examples to support it. Be sure to explain your answer if the question asks you to justify it: don’t just list and identify examples. **Carefully craft your answer in response to what is actually being asked in the question prompt.**

Keep an eye on your time.

Monitor your time carefully. Make sure not to spend too much time on any one question so you’ll have enough time to answer all of them. Don’t waste time restating the question in your answers: that won’t earn points.

Try to solve all parts of a question.

Many free-response questions are divided into parts such as (a), (b), (c), and (d), with each part requiring a different response. Credit for each part is awarded independently, so you should attempt to solve each part. For example, you may receive no credit for your answer to part (a), but still receive full credit for part (b), (c), or (d). If the answer to a later part of a question depends on the answer to an earlier part, you may still be able to receive full credit for the later part, even if that earlier answer is wrong.

Be organized.

You might want to label your answers according to the part, such as (a), (b), (c), etc. This will help you organize your thoughts and also help make sure that you answer all parts of the question.

Show your work.

Show **all** the steps you took to reach your solution on questions involving calculations. If you do work that you think is incorrect, simply put an “X” through it instead of spending time erasing it completely: crossed-out work won’t be graded. Also be sure to clearly and correctly label all graphs and diagrams.

Use proper units.

Include the proper units for each number where appropriate. If you keep track of units as you perform your calculations, it can help ensure that you express answers in terms of the proper units. Depending on the exam question, it is often possible to lose points if the units are wrong or are missing from the answer.

Don’t use the “scattershot” or “laundry list” approach.

Don’t write many equations or lists of terms hoping that the correct one will be among them so that you can get partial credit. For questions that ask for two or three examples, only the first two or three will be scored.

Practice!

Answering free-response questions from previous AP Exams is a great way to practice: it allows you to compare your own responses with those that have already been evaluated and scored. Free-response questions and scoring guidelines are available on the [Exam Practice page](https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/apcourse/ap-environmental-science/exam-practice) for AP Environmental Science.