

Tips for Writing an AP Biology Essay

1. The first thing to do is to carefully **read the question through twice**. Be sure that you answer all parts of the question asked and that you answer only the question that is asked. If you are given a choice of two topics within a question, choose carefully and do **not** answer both.
2. **Pay close attention to the verbs** used in the directions (such as describe, explain, compare, give evidence for, graph, calculate, etc.) – underline them! – and be sure that you follow the directions as stated.
3. Brainstorm about the topic for a moment. (Use your prewriting time wisely!) **Make notes or an outline** in your booklet. The reader won't see these and you won't score points for them, but it may improve the organization of your essay, and that will help the reader to follow your ideas.
4. Write an **essay**. Outlines and diagrams, no matter how elaborate and accurate, are not essays and will not get any credit by themselves. Diagrams, properly labeled, will earn points and may be a quick way to convey what you know, but be sure to refer to them in the text.
5. Don't get cute with poems & stories...get right to the point.
6. Define your terms. Say something about each of the terms you use. If you can't recall a specific term, take a stab at it. If you can't think of the name for a concept, describe the concept. Underline important terms to call attention to them.
7. Answer the parts of the question in the order called for, and label them with "a," "b," etc., as they are labeled in the question. Skipping around within a question may confuse the reader and cause him/her to overlook some of your content.
8. Answer the questions thoroughly. No detail is too small if it is relevant. Examples are always appropriate. **Be sure to include the obvious**; most points are earned for the basics.
9. Understand that the exam is written to be hard...the average will be about 50% correct. It is very likely that you will not know everything, so relax and write thorough answers. Don't panic if you are unfamiliar with a question; be calm and think; you probably know something about the topic. Remember that no points are subtracted for incorrect information but that no points will be awarded for contradictory statements, either.
10. Don't worry about spelling or using perfect grammar. These are not part of the standards the graders use. Graders actually prefer that you **not** write introductory statements and conclusions. Just answer the question.
11. Write as neatly as possible (in ink) and scratch out errors neatly.
12. Make an effort on every question; don't leave essay questions blank.

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