

Core Structure of Essay Writing in APUS History

Always use the following format in organizing your essay. A predictable format will make it easier for the reader to extract information from your essay. Use the question as a logical cue as to how the essay should be organized.

I. Well developed thesis statement that directly answers the question, takes a position (interpretation), and establishes organizational categories. Your thesis statement should NOT be longer than two sentences.

- A. Most important topic sentence which introduces the category to be discussed, directly answers the question, and takes a position on this particular category.
 1. Most important specific factual information (SFI) which demonstrates both knowledge of the material and an understanding of how this information supports the thesis (interpretive commentary).
 2. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 3. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 4. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 5. Clincher sentence which ties the paragraph directly back to the thesis.
- B. Next most important topic sentence which introduces the category to be discussed, directly answers the question, and takes a position on this particular category.
 1. Most important specific factual information (SFI) which demonstrates both knowledge of the material and an understanding of how this information supports your thesis (interpretive commentary).
 2. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 3. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 4. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 5. Clincher sentence which ties the paragraph directly back to the thesis.
- C. Next most important topic sentence which introduces the category to be discussed, directly answers the question, and takes a position on this particular category.
 1. Most important specific factual information (SFI) which demonstrates both knowledge of the material and an understanding of how this information supports your thesis (interpretive commentary).
 2. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 3. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 4. Next most important same as above. Interpretive commentary.
 5. Clincher sentence which ties the paragraph directly back to the thesis.

Repeat A, B, and C as many times as necessary to completely answer the question.

II. Conclusion which restates the thesis in different words.

The following approach is recommended for constructing an essay under pressure of a limited time frame.

Introductory Paragraph (I.)

Make sure you clearly understand the essay prompt then carefully organize your thoughts. Truly diagnose the essay's possible superstructure. (**See "Understanding the Essay Prompt" for more information)

Inclusion of a complete introductory paragraph is a key component often lacking in essays. An introductory paragraph should contain all of the following:

1. Thesis statement (**See "Developing the Thesis Statement" for more information**)
2. Brief explanation of any key theme or complex idea contained in the thesis
3. A quick listing of primary organizational points to be used to structure and present data used in defending the thesis. This list is usually based on one of the following concepts:
 - a. key personalities
 - b. key events
 - c. main Ideas
 - d. overall categories of evidence (political, economic, social, etc.)
 - e. noted contradictions or comparisons.

An important facet of the opening paragraph is inclusion of selected key words/phrases which indicate judgment and/or analysis. Some words/phrases to use for this purpose:

1. "controversial"
2. "turning point"
3. "inevitable"
4. "more importantly"

These indicate a higher degree of sophisticated writing and demonstrate the use of judgment/analysis to present a well developed and supported thesis/interpretation rather than a straight narrative composition that only recites facts. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT!

One way to develop this is to prioritize an organizational list of factors/main ideas and indicate primary v secondary causation, repercussion, or some other aspect of varying degrees of importance for your list. (It is quite rare that something happened/didn't happen due to factors that shared exact degrees of relevance.) A selected list of "buzz words" that clearly show judgment and analysis are:

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1. irony | 6. precarious | 11. provocative |
| 2. key | 7. delicate | 12. predominant |
| 3. significant | 8. deliberate | 13. imperative |
| 4. primary | 9. interwoven | 14. any indicator of degrees of causation, etc |
| 5. secondary | 10. dramatic | |

Avoid absolutes (never, always, completely, etc.)

Supplementary Paragraphs (A, B, C...)

The number, order, and nature of these paragraphs is determined by the organizational list in the introductory paragraph. Paragraphs should have clear and relevant topic sentences that parallel and expand upon the organizational list.

It is imperative to include numerous names, dates, people, bills, pieces of literature, ideas, etc. germane to the thesis. Essays are to be expository – not narrative writings. Telling a story with numerous details is not enough – present details within the context of the thesis.

Demonstrate an appreciation of the complexity of history. Be aware of the multiplicity of events, emotions, ideas, etc. impacting human history. Reveal an appreciation of the fragile and complex nature of history by avoiding overly simplistic comments (e.g. something is "bad" or "good", "great", "fantastic" etc). Stay away from absolute phrases and single causation.

Carefully choose vocabulary and the essay's narrative style. Verbs are critical to presenting a more sophisticated and descriptive essay. In conjunction with adjectives and other descriptive tools, strive to go beyond the mundane. For example:

"The assassination caused the war..."	v	"The assassination provoked the outbreak of war..."
OR		
"The diary showed prejudice..."	v	"The diary vividly illustrates the deep prejudice..."

Note the choice of verb tense. Use past tense for past action. As documents (old and new) currently reveal information and insights – use of present tense is acceptable when referring to documents. Choice of verb reveals judgment and analysis of a document's relevance/merit as well as the nature of a document's information. Verbs will vary in degree of strength (endorsement of the document) e.g. "exemplifies" vs. "implies."

It is important to use a variety of wonderful verbs when referring to documents. See the Power Verbs page for examples.

Employ additional modifiers to enhance the essay's descriptive power. Appropriate adjectives/adverbs are often lacking in AP US exams. Here is an example of expanded use of needed modifiers to increase the descriptive nature of a sentence:

"Smith's letter to Abernathy strongly portrays Jackson's belligerent attitude towards the Bank of the U.S."

Avoid use of first person. It is understood thoughts/ideas within an essay are the author's or those of the source cited.

