

Writing a Timed Essay

Presented to you by the Writing Support Lab

P-602

Today's Seminar

- **Introduction to the Writing Support Lab**
- **Discussion of Pre/Post Tests in ENG 098 and 1101 classes**
- **Walkthrough - How to attack a timed writing**

Introduction to Writing Support Lab

- Open 8 am-8:30 pm
- One-on-one FREE tutoring with a professional writing consultant
- Contact information on book marks
- 706-649-1728
- writing@columbustech.edu

Pre/Post Tests in ENG 098 and 1101

- **Argumentative 5-paragraph essay**
- **Must incorporate quotes from the article provided (usually 2)**
- **Graded on a standard rubric – Your teacher has it and can share – ask her/him!**
- **65 minutes**

Attacking a Timed Writing Assignment – Things we will cover

- **Important things to remember**
- **Organization**
- **Development**
- **Grammar/Punctuation/Spelling**
- **Time Management**
- **Prewriting/Brainstorming/Organizing**
- **Key Words - Thesis Statement**
- **Practice Prompts**

Important things to remember

- Read the prompt carefully (and often several times), circling key words
- Understand what it is asking
- Identify how many parts there are to the question
- Stay focused on a consistent central idea while answering the prompt.

Important things to remember

- **Thesis statement:** In a timed exam, your thesis will generally be your answer to the prompt. You will want to make this answer immediately clear to your reader, so it is best to put your thesis statement, which is your central idea stated in a sentence, in your introductory paragraph.
- **Controlling Idea:** The thesis usually contains a key word or controlling idea that limits its focus and reveals the writer's attitude toward the topic. When you answer the exam prompt, you will be revealing your attitude toward the topic.
- In order to write a focused and unified essay, you must stay directly focused on the topic and controlling idea presented in the thesis statement. Do not stray from your thesis statement.

Organization:

- **Select an appropriate number of supporting points, depending both on your argument and your allotted writing time, and present them in a clear order, so the essay proceeds smoothly and logically from one point to the next.**
- **Be sure to put your main supporting points into separate paragraphs, so there is a clear beginning, middle and end as opposed to a long, uninterrupted block of text. Here are some common methods of organization:**

Development:

- **Generally, each of your body paragraphs should contain a topic sentence which directly supports your thesis statement and also contains a generalization in need of support. In order to provide that support, ask yourself, "How do I know that this is true?" Your answer will suggest how to develop the paragraph.**
- **Evidence: In order to construct a well supported and convincing argument, you will need to flesh out the ideas presented in your topic sentences. Avoid a series of skimpy paragraphs which generally lack development. Provide concrete and specific detail for each supporting point in the form of examples, anecdotes, illustrations, facts, personal knowledge, personal experiences, etc.**

Development:

- Thesis statement: "I enjoy hiking in my spare time because it is both challenging and relaxing."
- Your first supporting point could be that you enjoy the physical challenge hiking provides.
- Topic sentence: "Because I was born with asthma, I've always been afraid of strenuous physical activity, but when I started improving at hiking, I realized that I could overcome this limiting fear."
- Now a strong essay would go on to provide a concrete example of when the writer came to this realization.
- Was it reaching the top of El Capitan for the first time without an asthma attack? Was it after suffering an attack and then carrying on ten miles in the rain to successfully reach his/her destination? Be as specific and detailed as possible in your support. If you can't develop a supporting point with evidence, then it's probably best to replace that point with a stronger one.

Grammar-Punctuation-Spelling:

- In a timed writing situation, you will not have a lot of time to spend worrying over the spelling of a word or the placement of a comma.
- Do not, for example, give yourself writer's block and waste precious time by agonizing over the spelling of "'pterodactyl.'"
- However, you also don't want to turn in a piece of writing that contains excessive grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors. Therefore, set time aside at the end to proofread your essay.

Quick Editing and Revision

Suggestions

- (1) Double space so when you proofread and want to cross out confusing sentences or misspellings or add left out words or examples, you will have room and won't risk confusing your reader.
- (2) Read carefully to catch confusing sentences, errors in subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, run- together- sentences, etc., and look for opportunities to join sentences.
- (3) If you discover a place where more concrete detail is needed, add examples and evidence as needed, using the spaces between lines you left or use the margins.
- (4) If you want to review general grammar principles before a written exam to build your own confidence, come to the Writing Support Lab or consult your teacher or writing handbook (like the Easy Writer).

Time Management

- Since taking a timed writing exam puts you in the situation of having a limited amount of time to create a focused, organized, well supported essay, you better have a clear plan of how you will use your allotted time before beginning the exam.

Suggested breakdown of time for a one-hour exam:

- 10 min. Prewriting:
 - (1) Read the prompt carefully, circling key words.
 - (2) Cluster or list to determine your main supporting points and strongest evidence; be sure you have a working thesis and topic sentences.
- 40 min. Write the essay:
 - (4) Write your essay following the outline.
 - (5) Skip lines in case you want to make some changes when you're proofreading after you complete the essay.
- 10 min. Proofreading:
 - (6) Proofread your essay carefully adding missed evidence, catching misspellings, putting in left out words, revising confusing sentences, joining sentences where appropriate, etc.

Prewriting, Brainstorming, and Organizing

- **Clustering:** One technique to help you generate and organize ideas is called clustering. Clustering provides you a sort of informal map. To cluster your ideas, start out with a topic or question and draw a circle around it. Then connect related ideas to that circle and continue in that way. Clustering provides a mental picture of the ideas you generate. As a result, it can help you organize your material as you think of it. You can also eliminate supporting points that you can't find strong evidence to support.
- **List:** Another method used to organize your ideas is called listing. This is the most informal kind of outline in which you jot down your main points and possible supporting examples and detail. This kind of outline is for you only, and you don't need to worry about making it more comprehensive if it does the job for you. Many students find this kind of outline helpful in taking essay examinations because it is brief enough to occupy a very small space, and it doesn't take much time to produce.

Key Words

- When you read the prompt, pay close attention to how the essay question is phrased. Are you asked to compare and contrast or simply to describe? It is very important to focus on the exact assigned task and to address all parts of the prompt. If you don't answer the question asked, you will probably receive little or no credit for your work. Here are important terms to look for:
- * Describe: Write about the subject so the reader can easily visualize it; tell how it looks or happened. Use adjectives, adverbs and descriptive language to paint a mental image for you reader.
- * Compare: Analyze the similarities and the differences between two or more items.
- * Contrast: Look only at the differences between two or more items.
- * Explain: Give the meaning of something often answering the question "why"?
- * Discuss: A more open-ended approach asking the writer to provide a broader range of possibilities.
- * Argue: (or present a point of view or take a position) Usually requires the writer to take only one point of view (either pro or con) and substantiate that position. Don't be concerned about taking the "right" or "wrong" position; just support a position soundly and consistently.
- * Analyze: Break the subject (an object, event, or concept) down into parts, and explain the various parts.
- * Criticize/Critique: Point out both the positive and negative aspects of the topic.
- * Evaluate: Give your opinion of the value of the subject; discuss its strengths and weaknesses.
- * Illustrate: Make the point or idea by giving examples.
- * Prove: Show that something is true by giving facts or logical reasons.
- * State: Give the main points in a brief, clear form.

Practice Prompts

Here are some practice prompts. These are the types of prompts that you may be asked in an ENG class. Can we come up with a thesis statement for each?

- **Prompt:** Certain things are not taught in the classroom, such as how to get along with others, how to rely on yourself, or how to manage money. Describe something you learned outside of school, how you learned it, and discuss its importance in your life.
- **Prompt:** Should all college courses be specifically related to a future occupation? Explain why or why not.

Practice Prompts

Handouts (article and prompt)

- **Should all high school students be required to take a course in computer science some time during their education? Explain why or why not.**

Questions?

