

AP Human Geography

FREE-RESPONSE

STRATEGIES

A series of horizontal lines in teal and white, extending from the left side of the slide towards the right, positioned below the 'STRATEGIES' header.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- There are three free-response essays on the exam. Each question will be distinct and address a different aspect of the course.
- Each free-response question on the exam is assigned a rubric, which shows the correct responses to all sections of the question prompt. Although each question carries the same weight on the exam, questions are assigned varying point values based on their complexity for scoring purposes. If you answer a certain portion of the question correctly, you will receive a point for that section based on the rubric. Readers are instructed to look for merit in students' answers and to give credit for responses whenever possible, but that does not mean that you will be given points for wayward answers.
- Often, an essay question draws from two or more units in the course. When developing your response, try to give balanced treatment to all aspects of the question, as this will be part of the evaluation criteria.
- There is almost always a map question as well. Geography is the study of spatial interaction, and maps are the form of communication used to relay those ideas. Successful students must be able to interpret maps and infer meaning from the maps' central ideas.

TIPS FOR EARNING POINTS

- Not attempting the question is scored as a dash. Attempting to answer the question but receiving no points is scored as a zero. There is a statistical distinction between a dash and a zero. You should always try to answer the question, even if you do not know the answer entirely. Often, students who start writing without a clear path will end up thinking their way through the question as they write. It is sometimes possible to score the majority of points for the question in the last part of your essay. Stay positive and give it your best effort.
- It is important to note that points cannot be taken away from you. Once you have scored a point, you cannot lose that point. If the point was given to you based on the rubric, the point sticks with you. However, you do not want to contradict yourself in the essay. Get to the point and then move on.

PACE YOURSELF

- Pacing is crucial for writing your essays. You will have 75 minutes for the free-response portion of the exam. You need to get all of your key points down in the test booklet within the allotted time frame. Skipping a question on the exam is a good way to ensure a low score. You do not have the option, as in other AP exams, to choose the questions that you would like to answer.
- When deciding in which order to answer the essay questions, a good approach is to do first the one(s) about which you can present the most concrete information. Remember, all three questions need to be answered. The order in which the free-response questions are answered doesn't matter.
- Be sure to label your questions one, two, and three, depending upon which question you are answer-ing. Also, make sure you write neatly; an unintelligible response can prove challenging to score.
- You do not need to rewrite the question in your answer. By rewriting the question, you waste valuable time. Use your time to answer the question, not to restate it in your answer. Do not waste the readers' time or your time by restating the question.

READ CAREFULLY AND IDENTIFY KEY TERMS

- Make sure to read each question carefully to ensure you have a solid grasp of what it is asking and what you are being asked to do when you respond. Identify any key terms, such as analyze, compare and contrast, etc. Identifying such key words can help you understand exactly what you are being asked to do so you can develop your answer appropriately.
- The following are some commonly used terms:
 - To analyze is to define components, especially in terms of their relationship to each other and to their meaning and importance.
 - Describe is often connected to analyze; you're expected to give an account of some event or situation and, from the description, produce conclusions regarding its importance, relationships, possible consequences, etc.
 - To assess or evaluate means to determine a judgment about something, to appraise positives and/or negatives, to take a stand on an issue.
 - To compare and contrast are opposite instructions frequently used in combination; they ask you to show similarities and differences, respectively.
 - To discuss implies presenting different aspects of something by examining various sides or opinions.
 - To explain means to give clarification by presenting the details.
 - Some questions include the phrase to what extent, which calls for a judgment regarding the scope, depth, or limits of the topic.

ORGANIZING YOUR ESSAY

- Read each free-response question carefully, and make sure you know precisely what the question is asking before you begin to develop your answer. When developing and organizing your responses, remember that a thesis statement is not needed for the exam. This makes geography different from some other AP exams. Students do not have to write in paragraph form (meaning an introductory sentence and supporting sentences), nor must they circle or underline vocabulary words.
- On the test itself, the answer book mentions that only the first or second examples will be used. They mean it! What this means to you, the test taker, is that if your first example is incorrect but your second example is correct and the question only asked for one example, your second example will not be counted. You need to be correct the first time when answering. This is meant to discourage students from guessing in a "laundry list" fashion in the hopes of chancing upon a correct answer.
- It is essential to understand that the free-response questions on the test deal with more than one unit of study. Human geography is more about the process of thinking than the memorization of place names or areas. Questions in the past have connected the course units together through some overarching principle. You should link the units to the best of your ability through the common themes of the topic.
- The best essays do two things: they address all parts of the question, and they support your answer with specific, accurate examples and information. As you plan the essay, jot down evidence you can use as proof of your claims.
- Devote a paragraph to each example and make its connection to some part of the prompt. Organize your evidence in a way that matches the question (e.g., chronologically, by country, etc.). An effective essay response should span over a page—ideally at least two pages. If there is time, proofread. It is all right to make additions if you think of any; you can draw an arrow to where the material is to be inserted.
- As you read the questions and supporting documents, make notes beside each. Pay attention to sources, especially if it is someone you recognize or if you can connect the source to such topics as religion, politics, or agriculture. Try to tie the sources into the question's topic. For example, if the question is asking about the demographic transition model, tie in the economic development aspects of the model along with the population trends in each of the stages of the model. You may write on your test booklet during the exam. This might be a good place to organize your ideas for the question.
- Do a quick rough outline. Then write your response.

POWERFUL BODY PARAGRAPHS

- There is no magic number of body paragraphs to include in your response. The most important aspect of a body paragraph is that it illustrates or proves some part of the prompt with specific information. It is essential to elaborate on all parts of the prompt equally well, if possible. Many prompts will ask for at least two tasks. The highest scores go to essays that are balanced between the tasks, so don't say a lot about half the question and very little about the other half. The material (evidence) should be presented in a way that meets the prompt's directive. If you are asked to "analyze," merely describing the material won't earn you a good score.
- Essays are ranked by the amount and quality of accurate evidence they present. Essays that don't get beyond very broad, general statements will receive lower scores.

STRONG CONCLUSION

- If you have time at the end of your essay, write a short conclusion—three to five sentences are sufficient. A strong conclusion ties together the strands of the essay in a final, compelling way. Do not merely repeat what is stated earlier in the essay—you're better off having no conclusion at all. You will not lose credit for not having a conclusion, but a strong final paragraph can certainly add to the essay's overall effect and, in some cases, add points.

BE NEAT AND CLEAR

- Be as neat as possible when writing your essay. If nobody can read your essay, it may not be scored accurately. You may produce the most poignant essay ever written, but if nobody can read it, you will not receive points. Every attempt will be made to decipher your writing, but the readers will eventually give up after several people have tried to read your paper.
- Have you ever heard the phrase "Say what you mean and mean what you say"? The same principle applies to the AP Human Geography exam. When writing your response, get to the point.

THE SCORING RUBRIC

- The essays are assigned scores from 0 to 14. Points are determined by the rubric set up by the question leader and chief reader prior to the readings. The rubrics may be tweaked prior to the readings, but once the reading starts, the rubric is almost always maintained.
- As mentioned previously, you do not need to state a thesis in the AP Human Geography exam.
- If you quote, which is not a requirement, try to keep the quotations short and few in number. Never quote an entire document; use phrases and sentences to make your point. Never quote without immediately following up with your interpretation of the quoted words.
- Keep your personal opinions out of the essay. The pronoun / should not appear anywhere in your response. Similarly, don't insert any personal bias or judgment of the sources or the information. This is a presentation of the material and opinions of others, not a personal essay.
- Remember, outside information isn't required on the exam. If you do use examples on your exam, use examples that most people will recognize. Although a local example may fit applicably, the readers may not know that particular example and may not offer you points for it. Use examples that are applicable on a state, national, or global scale.