

Common Obstacles to Effective Timed Writes

Timed writing events require a special set of skills and considerations in order to complete the work successfully in whatever time you're given for the task. The most common reasons for not passing timed exams are these:

1. Major flaws in organization of argument, support and paragraphs
2. Lack of a clearly articulated thesis statement
3. Poor or missing development of topic level paragraph arguments
4. Failure to address the assigned topic or subject focus
5. Excessive flaws in grammar and usage
6. No clear beginning, middle or end
7. Failure to follow dictates of assignment (e.g. cited textual references, number of required paragraphs, etc.)



TIPS

Below are some tips to help you manage your work and your time as you write your in-course timed essay. Start with **these four key areas**:

- **FOCUS:** Respond directly to the writing prompt (i.e. circle key words, annotate the source text as you go), staying focused on your thesis formulation on which your analysis will depend
- **ORGANIZATION:** Put points in a logical order, use paragraph breaks and strong topic argument sentences to focus your writing and tie each paragraph discussion back to your thesis formulation
- **DEVELOPMENT:** Lay in specific details for each paragraph (i.e. cited textual references) that directly support, explain and extend the thesis discussion
- **MECHANICS:** Set aside time at the end to read for and correct sentence level errors and clarity issues

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- **Plan out your writing process** before you begin writing an essay: Budget your time well by dividing the writing task equally into prewriting (15%), writing (60%), and proofreading (15%) phases
- **Watch the clock:** Make sure to leave yourself enough time to brainstorm at the front end of the time you're given, and enough time to adequately proofread your work at the end of the time period.
- **Assume an "ignorant audience"** – Introduce and explain everything we need to know about your sources and topics *before* you actually begin discussing them in detail
- **Use academic language** (present tense verbs, 3rd person p.o.v., no slang speech)
- Including a title? Make sure to choose your own, *not* the title of the source essay
- Aim for thesis driven analysis rather than simple summary or agree/disagree work

OPENING PARAGRAPHS

1. Fully introduce your sources: provide titles, the authors, and a brief summary of (each) work
2. Posit your thesis argument: this should be written in the form of a direct and complete answer to critical question(s) you've asked yourself about the relative success or failure of the work(s)
3. Save textual quotes for internal paragraphs: opening paragraphs are just for your words and ideas

MIDDLE PARAGRAPHS

1. Start each body paragraph with a topic argument(s) – an evaluation of the writing, a subjective argument about how well the writing works – before introducing and discussing your textual support
2. Provide adequate discussion to support your topic sentences, and remember to use quotation marks to indicate language you are lifting directly from the source text
3. Follow the 75/25 rule: 75% of each body paragraph is your words and ideas, 25% (maximum) is quoted or paraphrased material

CLOSING PARAGRAPHS

- Concluding statements and closing thoughts should use new language and ideas, not simply reiterate what you've already told us
- Keep your focus on the formal strengths and weaknesses of the writing: Avoid drawing moral lessons from your analysis – Stay with the text, and stay with your analytical responses

Remember what I'm always looking for:

- Adherence to the specific assignment prompt and instructions
- A clear and specific thesis statement
- Error-free language at the sentence level
- Focused, argument driven, well-developed body paragraphs
- Effective use of the text for support and illustration
- Demonstration of how to effectively apply the relevant theory and criticism in your textual examinations and argument analysis