



CHAPTER 5

Tips for Taking the Free-Response Section of the Exam

IN THIS CHAPTER

Summary: Use these strategies to get a higher score on the free-response section of the AP Human Geography exam.



Key Ideas

- ✦ Read the question carefully. Use the strategies in this book to analyze the question.
- ✦ Write just enough to completely answer the question.
- ✦ Time yourself. You have 75 minutes to write three essays.
- ✦ Start with the essay you know most about. Do not spend more than 20 minutes on it, however.
- ✦ Label each part of your answer to correspond with the part of the question you are answering.

Introduction

In Section II of the AP Human Geography exam, you will have 75 minutes to write three free-response essays. This means you have an average of 25 minutes to write each essay. Each essay is worth a certain number of points from 6 to 12, but you will not be told how many points each essay is worth at the time you are taking the test. Every essay is broken down into two or more parts, which are each worth a certain number of points. When the

essays are scored according to the scoring rubric (answer guide), each section of each essay will be awarded points. The total number of points for each essay is based on the sum of the points you earned on each part. When points for each essay are added together, the total is your raw score for Section II of the exam. Your essays are scored according to the rubric. Grammar, spelling, writing style, etc. are not important and do not add or subtract points from your Section II score.

What Types of Questions Are There?



The free-response questions are *not* formal essays! You will not be expected to write a thesis statement, body, and conclusion. In fact, if you do, you probably will not have time to analyze all three questions and write good responses! You will *not* be given points for any pictures, diagrams, or maps you draw so only do so if you need to lay your facts out in order to write a good response. Make a quick outline if it helps you organize your thoughts for the essay. However, information written in the outline will not earn you points either. Only what is written in your actual essay will earn points.

The questions are usually based on stimulus material that could include a map, chart, graph, photograph, or other spatial display of data. Most questions are three-part and require you to analyze, interrelate, and synthesize concepts and knowledge from multiple areas of human geography in your responses.

Develop a Strategy



The following tips will help you do your best on the free-response essay questions of Section II. Some are *Dos* and some are *Don'ts*. Follow them carefully as 10 years of experience writing and scoring AP Human Geography free-response questions have gone into formulating them—and they work! Follow these recommendations and you will have a strategy for success.

1. **Really read the question.** Find the verb (key word asking for action). This will tell you where the points are in the question. Power verbs ask you to perform a very specific action when writing your essay. Below are a list of verbs and an explanation of what they require you to do for the essay. Get to know these verbs and exactly what you are being asked to do when you see them!
 - **Analyze:** Power verb! Find the relationship between two events, concepts, or parts. Tip-off word could be “why?” Write an explanation and a conclusion (or conclusions) based on solid evidence and/or a logical argument. Give details and specifics. You should write *at least* two informative sentences. Use as much AP Human Geography vocabulary as possible.

Example: Analyze the impact of the Green Revolution on China and India and discuss the need for additional food supplies in these regions.
 - **Assess/Evaluate:** Power verb! Discuss the value or merit of something. List the positive and negative traits of a statement, concept, etc. Talk about advantages and disadvantages. Be clear about the criteria, or standards, which you are using to judge or evaluate. Specific examples should be applied to the criteria to support your answer. Evaluation or assessment means you *must* make clear connections between your argument and the supporting evidence you give.

Example: Assess the impact of urban growth on the housing market in the urban area depicted in the graph and evaluate this growth in terms of population density.

- **Compare:** Put the two statements, countries, concepts, ideas, etc. side-by-side and observe similarities and differences between them. *Always note both similarities and differences!* Be specific and remember, the more relevant information you write down, the better your chances of fitting the rubric and earning points.

Example: Compare the obstacles to development faced by Bangladesh and Rwanda.

- **Contrast:** Here you are asked to look for the differences between two concepts, ideas, countries, etc. You will need to look for ways in which they are not the same and write these in detail.

Example: Apply any two urban models to the urban area in the map below and contrast them in relation to the following: population density, housing, socioeconomic factors.

- **Describe:** Power verb! You will need to tell about something or give a picture in words. Write lots of detail in *at least* two sentences. Talk about its most noteworthy characteristics. Tip-off word could be “what?”

Example: Describe the relationship between land rent and residential density depicted in the graph below. *Another example:* What are the sources of cultural dissonance in many European states today?

- **Discuss:** Power verb! This verb is used a lot on AP Human Geography free-response questions. You are asked to debate or write about something taking both points of view. Write about the topic by presenting both sides. The question will usually give a relationship between two different phenomena or concepts. In your response, identify, describe, and/or explain and be sure and supply ample detail. Discussion requires *at least* three sentences. Remember, if you discuss vacation plans with your parents, you talk for more than a minute and you cover lots of details. That is what you need to do here.

Example: Discuss how each of the following factors has contributed to the development of the steel industry in China.

- **Explain:** Another power verb! This is another verb you will likely see on the AP Human Geography exam. Here you are asked to make something plain and to use lots of details. Talk about the logical connections between the geographic phenomena in the question. Discuss the cause-and-effect relationships that exist. What is the meaning of this relationship? Use *at least* two sentences and preferably more to give good details as you describe them.

Example: Explain how boundary disputes between states A and B have led to increasing destabilization of the region in the last three decades.

- **Identify/Define:** You are asked to write down a simple list of characteristics, factors, or give a definition. You do not need to write an explanation. Give a meaning for a word or concept. Always write a good example to ensure points are earned. You will see this verb a lot on the AP Human Geography free-response questions. Usually this part of the question is only worth one or two points, but every point helps! Sometimes it is combined with another verb that requires more thorough analysis as in the first example given below.

Example: Identify and briefly explain ONE factor that was responsible for population increase in Sub-Saharan Africa during the past two decades. *Another example:* Define the following concepts as they are used in urban geography: (1) ghettoization, (2) gentrification, (3) suburbanization.

2. **Really write.** It is not enough to write a sentence or two; you must *thoroughly* discuss or talk about your response. Don't be chintzy! Don't just answer the question as if this was a routine end-of-chapter review question. The people who will be scoring your



essays (readers) really want to give you points, but they are not miracle-workers. If you write two sentences and the essay is worth 8 points, guess what? There cannot possibly be enough facts and good stuff in those two sentences to wring more than three or four points, if that, out of your essay.

Example, one point out of a possible two-point answer: Revitalization of the residential district of US cities stimulates the increase of a population engaged in economic activities.

Example, two points out of a possible two-point answer: Revitalization of the residential district of US cities stimulates the increase of a population engaged in economic activities. The chance of increased market activity in the business sectors of cities promotes improvement of the landscape to attract more consumers. Tourism is an important incentive to revitalize the central city where tourists will be attracted and improve the economy.

3. **Save the fluff.** Don't write a lot of empty words about nothing. If you have absolutely no clue about the question being asked, find the geographic concept in the question and write a definition. *Always* stick with the topic, even if you cannot really answer the question. Use geographic vocabulary you learned in your class. Find some bit of geographic knowledge from your class and apply it somehow to the question. There is a chance that something in your definition or explanation will accidentally hit on the correct response and earn you a point or two, but please, do not waste your time saying the same thing over and over 10 different ways.
4. **Be a clock-watcher.** You have 75 minutes to write three solid essays for Section II of the exam. Try to limit yourself to 20 minutes for each response and keep an eye on the clock. If you have extra time after writing all three essay responses, go back and review, edit, and make sure each part of every question was completely answered.
5. **Don't skip a question.** Attempt to answer all three free-response essay questions. It will be very difficult for you to do well on the exam if you completely skip just one of these essays! If you try and write something pertaining to the question, even if you do not score points, you will be given a zero and will be better off statistically when your total score is computed. If you leave an essay blank, you will receive a "—" score and it will be impossible for you to get a 4 or 5 score on the AP Human Geography exam.
6. **Answer the question you know the most about first.** However, don't forget to save time for the other two. You can start by writing the third essay response if you choose to do so. Just clearly label your essays; put the essay number in the box at the top of each page in your answer booklet. It helps to start each new essay on a clean page and not at the bottom of a previous essay, but this is not required. A high-scoring essay will usually take three to four pages to answer completely and comprehensively.
7. **Don't make a bulleted list.** Bulleted or numbered lists will not be scored for points. While a formal essay is not required, lists of facts are not permitted, and you will not receive credit for any information that is not written in essay form!
8. **Limit examples to the number specified.** If one example is asked for in the question, don't write three or four examples. Only the first example will be read, or examined, for points. If two examples are required, only the first two will be analyzed for points. The reason for this rule is to encourage students to think of the *best* answer and not just write a list of possible guesses.
9. **Label each part of your response identifying the part of the question you are answering.** For example, if you are answering Part B of the first essay, write "1B" at the beginning of the first paragraph for that part of your response. This helps the reader who is scoring your essay locate possible points. The reader can go right to the appropriate part of your response and easily check your answer against the rubric. If the reader has to search throughout your response for each bit of correct information, it greatly increases the chances that it will not be located.



10. **Never re-state the question in your essay.** Don't write an introductory paragraph or conclusion paragraph either. These actions waste valuable time and get you zero points. You will not be assessed points based on using good grammar, correct punctuation and spelling, and excellent essay structure, but you will not lose points for incorrect spelling and poor grammar either.
11. **Write large and legibly with pen only.** Readers are not handwriting experts, but they do try very hard to read poor handwriting. Make sure you write large enough and as carefully as possible so that points are not missed because of messy, illegible handwriting.
12. **Double-space your essays.** This will give you room to add a few details when you go back and re-read your responses. If you have left out an important detail or want to add a supporting fact, you can easily add it in the extra space over or under the sentence.
13. **Review your essays.** Always go back over your essays and make sure that you have:
 - Answered each part of each essay completely. Remember, answer each part of each question with at least two meaningful sentences that *directly* answer the question.
 - Lettered each part of each essay clearly to correspond with the part of the question you are answering.
 - Put the essay number in the small box in the corner of each page of the answer booklet.
 - Referred to the correct region and/or time period referenced in the question.
 - Added specific examples and "for instances" to add more substance and support to your responses.