

TIPS FOR WRITING AP BIOLOGY ESSAYS

1. The first thing to do is to carefully read the question through TWICE. Be sure that you answer ALL PARTS of the question asked and that you answer ONLY the question that is asked. If you are given a choice of two topics within a question, choose carefully and DO NOT answer both.
2. Pay close attention to the verbs used in the directions (such as describe, explain, compare, give evidence for, graph, calculate, etc.) and be sure that you follow the directions as stated.
3. Brainstorm about the topic for a moment. Use your prewriting time wisely! Write down key terms you remember or begin an outline in your booklet. The reader won't see these and you won't score points for them, but it may improve the organization of your essay and that will help the reader to follow your ideas.
4. Write an essay. Outlines and diagrams, no matter how elaborate and accurate, are not essays and will not get any credit by themselves. Diagrams, properly labeled, will earn points and may be a quick way to convey what you know, but be sure to refer to them in the text.
5. Get right to the point. DO NOT write introductory statements and conclusions. Just answer the question.
6. Define your terms. Say something about each of the terms you use. If you can't recall a specific term, take a stab at it. If you can't think of the name for a concept, describe the concept. UNDERLINE important terms to call attention to them.
7. Answer the parts of the question in the order asked; skipping around within a question may confuse the reader and cause him to overlook some of your content.
8. Answer the questions thoroughly. No detail is too small if it is relevant. Examples are always appropriate, but try to limit them to no more than 2 or 3. Be sure to include the obvious; most points are earned for the BASICS.
9. Understand that the exam is written to be hard...the average will be about 50% correct. It is very likely that you will not know everything, so relax and write thorough answers. Don't panic if you are unfamiliar with a question; be calm and think; you probably know something about the topic. Remember that no points are subtracted for incorrect information. Also, do not contradict what you wrote in a previous sentence; no points will be awarded for contradictory statements.
10. Don't worry about spelling or using perfect grammar. These are not part of the standards the graders use.
11. Write as neatly as possible (in ink) and scratch out errors neatly. DO NOT use white-out.
12. Make an effort on every question; DO NOT leave essay questions blank.

ESSAY QUESTION DIRECTION WORDS

The following groups of essay question direction words can help you both to predict good essay questions at home and to thoroughly understand and correctly answer essay questions in the exam room. For the first group, it is often enough to simply memorize and correctly **explain a term**. For the second group, you must be able to see the **relationships** between the ideas and terms. In the third group, you are being asked to **apply** the information in a new situation or critically analyze a situation giving your own opinion.

1. At the definition level:

Describe	Means to write a <u>detailed account</u> in a logical sequence or story form.
Discuss	Means to describe giving the <u>details</u> and explaining the <u>pros and cons</u> of it.
State	Means to describe the <u>main points in precise terms</u> . Be formal. Use <u>brief, clear sentences</u> . Omit details and examples.
Define/ Explain	Means to give the <u>formal meaning</u> by distinguishing it from related terms. This is often a definition to be memorized.
List/ Enumerate	Means to produce a <u>numbered list</u> of words, sentences or comments.
Trace	Means to follow the <u>progress or history</u> of the subject

2. At a deeper, more interpretive level

Compare	Means to show both the <u>similarities and differences</u> .
Contrast	Means to compare by <u>showing the differences</u> .
Diagram	Means to make a <u>graph, chart, or drawing</u> . Be sure to label and add brief explanation if necessary.
Illustrate	Means to explain or make it clear by concrete examples, comparisons, or analogies.
Summarize	Means to give a <u>brief account of the main ideas</u> . Omit details and examples. Means to give a general <u>summary</u> .
Outline	It should contain a series of <u>main ideas</u> supported by secondary ideas. Show <u>organization</u> . Omit details.

3. At the deepest level, you apply and evaluate information

Review	Means to give a <u>summary</u> in which you look at the important parts and criticize where needed.
Prove	Means to show by <u>argument or logic</u> that it is true.
Interpret	Means to use <u>examples and personal comments</u> to make the ideas clear.
Evaluate	Means to give <u>your opinion</u> of the truth or <u>importance</u> of the concept. Tell the advantages and disadvantages.
Justify	Means to give a statement of <u>why you think it is so</u> . <u>Give reasons</u> for your statement or conclusion.