How to Approach a Timed Essay
What to Expect

Day 1
- You will be given two topics. You may choose which one to write about.
- You will have 60 minutes to plan and draft your essay.
- You will be allowed to hand write your work or work on the computer.
- Your essay and planning materials will be collected at the end of the session.

Day 2
- Your essay and planning materials will be returned to you.
- You will have 45 minutes to revise your work.

You will not be allowed to talk or use the internet during either session!
General Advice

- Get comfortable with the computer now – it can help you work more quickly.
- Read the instructions carefully.
- Writing clearly is FAR more important than writing impressively.

- Manage your time.
  - Don’t spend too much time planning.
  - Try to finish your draft in the first session so you have plenty of time to revise.
Remember:

- Your draft does not have to be perfect.
- Writing is a process; you do not have to do everything at once.
- Because you have separate time to revise, you will have the opportunity to review for correct grammar and punctuation.

“We have discovered that writing allows even a stupid person to seem halfway intelligent, if only that person will write the same thought over and over again, improving it just a little bit each time. It is a lot like inflating a blimp with a bicycle pump. Anyone can do it. All it takes is time.”

- Kurt Vonnegut
Day 1: Plan and Draft
Take 5-15 Minutes to Plan
Why You Should Plan

- It avoids writer’s block. Writing a plan gets you started. Once you get started, it is easy to keep writing.
- A plan can keep you focused on the topic.
- It can help you recognize errors in organization.
- When you have a whole hour, you can afford to spend 5 minutes brainstorming.
What You Should Plan

- **Thesis statement**
  - A statement of what you want to discuss or prove in your paper

- **2 or 3 topic sentences**
  - A sentence that expresses the main idea of the paragraph

The grader wants to know that you will answer the question. This keeps you organized, which is part of the grade!
Sample Writing Prompt:
Many people experience an injury at some point in their lives. Although the injury itself may heal, the memory of being injured often lasts. Discuss an injury you have suffered.
How did the experience impact your life?

- The experience of breaking my arm impacted my life because ever since then, I have been too scared to ride a bike.
- Getting hit by a car changed my life because it changed my attitude toward traffic safety.
- Because my tooth was knocked out, I had to spend a lot of money at the dentist, I missed my brother’s graduation, and I lost a friend.
Sample Writing Prompt:
Many people experience an injury at some point in their lives. Although the injury itself may heal, the memory of being injured often lasts. Discuss an injury you have suffered.

How did the experience impact your life?

One day I was riding home from school on my bike and I crashed.

Breaking my arm was gross in many ways.
Writing a Thesis: Address the WHOLE Question

- Sample Writing Prompt:
  Many people experience an injury at some point in their lives. Although the injury itself may heal, the memory of being injured often lasts. Discuss an injury you have suffered.
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- Because my tooth was knocked out, I had to spend a lot of money at the dentist, I missed my brother’s graduation, and I lost a friend.
Writing Topic Sentences

Complete sentences help you remember exactly what point you wanted to make. They also help because having the topic sentence means you have already accomplished the hard part of beginning each paragraph.

Write complete sentences.

Example 1: The experience of breaking my arm impacted my life because ever since then, I have been too scared to ride a bike.
- Story
- Pain
- Scared

Example 2: The experience of breaking my arm impacted my life because ever since then, I have been too scared to ride a bike.
- It happened on the way to school.
- The pain was worse than anything I’d felt before.
- When I try to ride a bicycle now, I get scared.
Try it yourself!

Write a thesis statement and three topic sentences in response to the writing prompt you chose.

- In the course of our childhoods, we all learn new things. Some of these things are taught to us in school, but some of these things are learned outside of school. What is one important lesson from your childhood that you learned from an adult outside of school? How has this lesson impacted your life?

- Delicious foods are available all over the world. There are so many recipes that no one can try them all, but it is possible to try some of the best options. If you had the chance to recommend three meals that everyone should try, what foods would you choose and why?
Check your work.

- Does your thesis statement completely answer the question?
- Are each of your topic sentences about a new topic?
- Does the order of the topic sentences make sense?
Write the Introduction

Let's say you’re writing about brooms...
We make messes every day. Most people do chores to clean up after themselves. **What is one tool you often use to clean?** Discuss how this tool helps make cleaning easier.

Brooms are useful tools for cleaning up messes.

**THESIS**
What is Context?

Your thesis is only one part of the whole introductory paragraph!

Sometimes trash cans fall over. This makes people sad, because no one likes a mess. However, there's something people can use to fix the problem. Brooms are useful tools for cleaning up messes.

THESIS
Your Thesis is **NOT** Context

- If you put the thesis at the beginning of the introduction, it’s like beginning in the middle of the story. Context should always come first.

- If you planned, you’ll already know what your thesis is at this stage, but you don’t want to sound like someone who bursts into the room and immediately begins yelling about a topic.

- **Hint:** The writing prompt often provides introductory information, too. If you’re out of ideas, look there.
Reread your practice thesis.
Write 2-3 sentences of context.
Write your thesis at the end.
For the test...

- Put your thesis at the end of the introduction.
- Remember that your introduction does not need to be long.
- Don’t waste time trying to be creative – that’s part of the revision process.
Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.

- Since you planned this out already, this is easy.

- Use the topic sentence to get you started.
Part of what makes brooms useful is that they make cleaning less painful. If we didn’t use brooms, we would have to crawl around on the floor or bend over to pick up trash. Bending over for a long time can make a person’s back ache. It can bruise your knees to crawl on hard floors. However, the long handles on brooms let us stand up straight as we clean. By using a cleaning tool like a broom, we can avoid these potential injuries.
Choose one of your topic sentences and practice at least one of these suggestions as you write a quick body paragraph.

Your turn.
A concluding paragraph is the last paragraph in an academic essay and generally summarizes the essay, presents the main idea of the essay, or gives an overall solution to a problem or argument given in the essay.
Day 2: Revision
Basic Strategies

- Use the dictionary! If you’re not sure what a word means, look it up.
- Use the thesaurus! Avoid repeating the same word over and over.
- Revision isn’t just about grammar!
  Don’t forget that you should also check to make sure the paper sounds good.
- Take advantage of the computer and copy-paste.
Grammar
Writing correctly

- Go slowly!

- Check your spelling with the dictionary.
- Capitalize correctly.
- Review your punctuation, especially commas!
- Eliminate contractions – your only apostrophes should be possessives!

💡 TIP: Try reading backwards! Start with the last sentence of your piece and read one sentence at a time from the end to the beginning. This prevents you from paying more attention to the sentence’s meaning than to the grammar of the words.
Fluency
Making it sound good

- Add transitions.
  - They belong at the beginning of paragraphs and between sentences.
  - Remember that transitions can be one word or up to a whole sentence.
- Sentence length.
  - Be careful with long sentences.
  - However, not all your sentences should be short.
- Vary your vocabulary.
- Be as clear as possible.

The grader wants to see that you can communicate.
Remember: A.R.M.S.

- **Add**
  - Although our draft may be “complete” at this point, you can still add more sentences and detail as part of your revision.

- **Remove**
  - Don’t hold on to sentences that don’t make sense.

- **Move**
  - It’s okay to put your sentences or paragraphs in a different order if that makes more sense.

- **Substitute**
  - As you read through your essay, you can also rewrite whole sentences if you can think of a better way to communicate your idea.
Don’t Worry!
You will have time to revise.

- If you complete your draft on day 1, you will have at least 45 minutes for revision on day 2.
- After you've had a day to cool off, it will be easier to see your grammar and fluency errors.
The test will tell you exactly what is expected.

- When it comes time to revise, reread the guidelines.
- Use it like a checklist to make sure you’ve done everything you need to do.
You can work in whatever way is most comfortable for you.

- You may hand write your essay.
  - You will have scrap paper to plan.
  - You may use a dictionary and thesaurus.

- You may type your essay on a computer.
  - You will have access to spell check.
  - The computer will give you synonyms for words.

HOWEVER,
- You will **not** have access to the internet!