

# One Page Concept Review: Troubleshooting

## Underdeveloped Essays

**Realistically, you need to write a certain amount in order to achieve a certain score.**

- These guidelines assume average handwriting and average margin sizes. Also, remember the test booklet pages are smaller than a standard notebook paper size.
- If you only fill up half a page, you are almost certainly scoring a one or two.
- If you only fill up one page (or just a little beyond), you are almost certainly scoring a three or four.
- Note that any of the above scores make it difficult for you to pass the test unless you have well above average multiple choice skills.
- If you pass the page and a half threshold, you are potentially scoring a five.
- If you pass the two page threshold, you are potentially scoring a six.
- Upper half essays are usually longer than two and a half pages.
- These essay lengths are just guidelines, but I can tell you from personal experience of having scored these tests for College Board that these lengths correlate with these scores well over 90% of the time.

**If your body paragraph size is less than half a page, you're probably not convincing anyone of anything.**

- Although these essays are analytical, you still must *convince* the reader that your interpretation of the text is correct.
- One sentence after a quote probably isn't enough. Most likely you are simply saying something (*What this shows is ...*) without actually explaining something (*This is how I formed this inference*). In other words, this isn't a worksheet where you get credit for simply being right. It's an essay where you only get credit if you show your work. In fact, the *explaining your thinking* part is going to determine most of your score.
- After you explain your idea, ask yourself: *is this convincing*, and *is this clear*? If not, add another sentence or part of a sentence. At the point where it is convincing and clear, move on.
- Assume the reader thinks you don't really know what you're talking about, and your job is to convince him or her otherwise.
- It is always better to write a lot about a few things than a little about a lot of things. This is true even what you are doing isn't engaging the big picture very effectively.
- An essay that is claim and no warrant will always score a 4 or below. An essay that is very partial in its approach will still typically score a 5 if it is well-developed, even if it really misses the larger point of the text. In terms of your chances of passing the test, there's a huge difference between a 4 and 5. In fact, raising 4s to 5s practically guarantees that most of you would pass the test and receive the college credit.

**Are you establishing context for your examples?**

- If you're not setting up quotes or examples, not only is your argument hard to follow, but your analysis is probably going to be superficial and your paragraphs short.
- Context is key. To write the author uses an image type is confusing unless you establish that the author uses an image type when developing a specific idea. To write a character says something is confusing unless you establish to whom they're speaking and why.

- Context is especially important in Q3 essays. The reader may not know the book you're writing about, so if you don't establish who the person is who did something, where they did it, and at what point in the work it happened: the reader probably isn't following your argument unless s/he happens to be intimately familiar with the same book.

### Are you using enough evidence?

- If you're going to *fully* discuss one example in a body paragraph, that example should be your entire focus for the body paragraph. Other evidence should be in reference to that primary example. The alternative is to only discuss the *most relevant* aspects of two examples in a body paragraph. If you're reading this, though, you're probably not fully discussing anything, so shoot for two reasonably developed examples per body paragraph.
- In Q3 essays, you must discuss specific examples. That means you must describe a few specific episodes in the book. This is going to require a little summary. Good news, though, that's easy to generate if you actually know your book, and it also solves a lot of your length problems.

### Are you doing it right?

- If you're writing about characterization and not discussing why an action shows something important about personality: you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about conflict and not discussing what a character wants and the force that is frustrating this goal: you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about psychology, philosophy, and history and not discussing the background (social, theoretical, and/or historical) that makes your approach make sense: you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about diction or imagery and not discussing connotation or associations (and why the words or images actually connote these things): you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about tone and not discussing the diction, imagery, and connotations that create it: you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about metaphor and not discussing how two dissimilar ideas are really alike: you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about metonym or symbol and not discussing the logic of substituting one thing for another (usually a connotation or association): you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about irony and not discussing the contrast between expectation and reality: you're doing it wrong.
- If you're writing about paradox and not discussing how ideas are being opposed: you're doing it wrong.
- Stop doing it wrong. For most of you, doing things the right way would solve 90% of your problems.

### Have you answered the *So what?* objection?

- If you make a point, it needs to be clear how it connects to the larger argument. If it is not clear, you are vulnerable to the reader asking, "So what?"
- Often restating your point after analysis is enough here (*In other words ...*, etc.).
- Dedicated conclusion sentences at the end of body paragraphs also help to focus your essay.
- The bottom line, though, is that you not only need to be drawing mini-conclusions every time you analyze evidence, but that the *relevance* of your analysis should be clear to the reader. It does no good for you to do all the right things if the reader cannot follow your thinking.