

IMPROVING YOUR ESSAYS

What does my score mean?

How can I improve?

Essays ask you to write a multi-paragraph answer to a complex historical question. Essays are not about “right” and “wrong” - essays are about **constructing an argument** that answers the question and is supported by **your interpretation** of **the evidence**. A good essay is well organized, well written, and answers the question fully while directly supporting the thesis with specific evidence.

This handout walks you through the grading/scoring system for essays and gives some suggestions for how to improve from one test to the next. Combine this with the comments on the essay itself as you consider how to improve. For take-home essays, also refer to the “Guide - Take Home Writing Revisions” handout.

SCORE	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW CAN I IMPROVE?
A (>92.5%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent interpretive essay. • You have a strong interpretive thesis that fully answers the question. • Your points address all of the big ideas inherent in the question and several related ideas. • You provide ample, specific supporting evidence for your claims. • You make clear connections between your evidence and your ideas. • Nothing “stands alone”, everything you mention furthers your thesis. • You use language effectively - your essay is well organized and well written. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're doing a great job - keep it up. • Use this as a model for other essays. Note your strong thesis, your good topic sentences, your clear writing, your organization, the way you made connections, the way you used evidence to illustrate points and support your argument - then repeat that with other essays.
A- (92.5% to 90%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very Strong interpretive essay. • You have an interpretive thesis that fully answers the question. • Your points address all of the big ideas inherent in the question. • You provide specific evidence for your claims. • You have few “stands alone” ideas, most everything you mention furthers your interpretation. • Your language is clear - your essay is well organized and/or well written. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're doing very well already - your opportunities for growth are mostly refining what you're already doing. • Ask yourself what can be improved in your essay: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Could you have gone deeper in your thesis and answered another “level” of why something happened the way it did? ◦ Could you have provided another point or piece of evidence that would have supported your answer more fully? ◦ Could your writing be more clear? Could you explain your argument more explicitly?
B+ (89.9% to 87.5%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good interpretive essay. • You have a solid to strong thesis that answers the question. • Your points cover the main idea of the question. • You provide some specific evidence for some of your claims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your argument fully answer the question? • Is your thesis interpretive? Are you making claims that you know are 100% safe or are you making an argument that could potentially be wrong (even though you're obviously arguing it's right)? • Are you providing specific evidence for every claim? • Are you using “would” or “could” language rather than

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You make some connections, but also have some “stand alone” statements unconnected to either evidence or other ideas. Your writing may have a few unclear passages. 	<p>providing examples of what “did” happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you include a detail, are you letting it stand alone or are you connecting it to other information? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for phrases like “they had”, “there was”, “it had” that indicate simple description. Instead, use language that creates connections: “X influenced the economic classes in the society” as opposed to “They had social classes.”
<p>B (87.49% to 82.51%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solid interpretive essay. It is likely your thesis could be stronger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may not fully answer the question. It may not be an interpretive argument. You have several “stand alone” statements unconnected to either evidence or other ideas. Your points may not be clearly connected to your thesis. You may not be providing specific evidence in support of your points. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can your thesis be stronger? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your argument fully answer the question? Is it an interpretive answer? Are you making claims that you know are 100% safe or are you making an argument that could potentially be wrong (even though you’re obviously arguing it’s right)? Is it a single answer or are the points more like several, unconnected, “mini-answers”? Are you providing specific evidence for every claim? Would providing more evidence make it stronger? Are you using “would” or “could” language rather than providing examples of what “did” happen? Make connections within the material. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for phrases like “they had”, “there was”, “it had” that indicate simple description. Instead, use language that creates connections: “X influenced the economic classes in the society” as opposed to “They had social classes.”
<p>B- (82.5% to 80%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is room for improvement in your essay. Your thesis does not fully answer the question and likely isn’t an interpretive argument. You leave out one or more key ideas. Your sentences are mostly simple descriptive statements. You are not providing supporting evidence for all of your claims. You make few connections between ideas and have many “stand alone” statements. You may be including incorrect information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine your thesis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can you more fully answer the question? Is it a single answer or are the points more like several, unconnected, “mini-answers”? What major ideas can you address more (or at all)? Provide specific evidence for every point/claim. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you using “would” or “could” language rather than providing examples of what “did” happen? Make connections within the material. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for “they had”, “there was”, “it had” sorts of phrases that indicate simple description. Use language that creates connections “X influenced the economic classes in the society” as opposed to “They had social classes” Double check that all of your details are factually accurate.

<p>C+ and lower (< 80%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your essay does not effectively answer the question. • You do not have a clear thesis that answers the question. • You may be leaving out key ideas. • You are not providing supporting evidence for your claims. • Your sentences are simple descriptive statements. • You make few to no connections between ideas. • You may have incorrect information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with your thesis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Does it answer the question clearly? ◦ Does it answer the question fully? ◦ The thesis is the foundation for the entire essay – begin by making it as strong as you can. • Look for the major ideas that are missing. • Base your claims on evidence and provide it in the essay. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Are you using “would” or “could” language rather than discussing examples of what “did” happen? • Double check that any details are factually accurate.
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