

Timed Writing Strategies (for reading responses)

Time management and a planned approach can take a lot of the anxiety out of timed in-class essays. Don't waste energy worrying about whether you'll be able to come up with good ideas—use that energy to develop a plan before you even walk in the door. Plan for four tasks: 1) read & annotate, 2) brainstorm & organize, 3) write, 4) edit & proofread. Start by knowing how much time you have. How you divide your time is up to you; you may need extra time to understand the reading, while someone else may need more time to develop the organization. Here is an example timetable for a two-hour (120 minute) in-class essay:

Read and annotate, 20 minutes

Brainstorm and organize, 25 minutes

Write the essay, 60 minutes

Edit and proofread, 15 minutes

Read & annotate

Read the directions first, and read actively, noting key words such as *explain*, *describe*, or *evaluate*.

Write an essay in which you explain and evaluate Andrew Trees' ideas about romantic love. Also offer your views on this issue. Do you agree with Trees? If so, explain why and offer further support. Do you disagree with Trees? If so, explain why and offer reasoned opinions and examples to support your views.

Now, actively read the article: chunk it into sections, mark topic sentences and main ideas. Write in the margins to summarize, paraphrase, and note your thoughts and reactions. If you need to, look up words you do not know (non-electronic dictionaries are usually allowed). Paraphrase the author's overall main idea and his most important points. Use your reading annotations to summarize the article. Paraphrase the author's main idea(s) starting with a signal phrase:

In "Romeo and Juliet" has led us astray," Andrew Trees says that we shouldn't place so much importance on romance when we choose a life partner. He says some romantic people make terrible spouses, and that arranged marriages are often more likely to succeed than those based on romance.

Brainstorm & organize

Brainstorm what you think about the article's main ideas by making a list. Do you think the author is 100 percent right? Is the author completely wrong? Is he illogical or does he only look at one side of the issue? Is the author right about some things, but wrong about others? In a brainstorming list, some ideas will be stronger than others, so from your list, choose the ideas that most clearly respond to the prompt. Then make another list, right alongside the first. For each of your selected points, make a list of evidence you can use—text evidence and your own experience and reasoning.

| Brainstorm list 1: Why do I agree or disagree? | List 2: What examples, text evidence, or reasoning can I use? |
|--|---|
| Romantic feelings come and go | People often have many partners, they get bored. Spouses may cheat if they don't have loving feelings. Trees "chemical attraction" quote. |
| Shared values are more important | Values come from family, culture, religion. Values are more stable and long lasting than feelings. Stability is good for children |
| Respectful behavior is a decision | Trees "things we take for granted" quote. You can act in a respectful, considerate way even if you don't feel loving. |

Once both lists are complete, decide which point should come first and which ones should follow because your ideas may flow better if you rearrange them. Now that you have spent some time thinking about the article and your response, construct a thesis. It has to respond to the prompt, so use keywords from the prompt to get started. Your thesis statement comes right after the summary. It asserts your opinion or judgment about the topic, and it may or may not list the ideas you intend to develop:

I agree with Trees that romantic feelings don't make a good basis for a marriage; respect and shared values are more important.

Write

Following your summary and thesis, start your body paragraphs. Each of your selected points can become a simple, clear topic sentence for a body paragraph, for example, *Romantic feelings are not a good basis for a relationship because they come and go so unpredictably*. Use the evidence you listed on the right to fully explain your thinking. Start a new paragraph and do the same with each of your subsequent points.

Don't repeat yourself to make your essay longer. Think of your essay as a straight arrow, with a starting point and an ending point, *not* a circle! If you need to develop your ideas more, try asking yourself questions like these: *What are the possible consequences of my opinion? What should people do? How will it make things different?*

For a simple conclusion, you may restate your thesis using different words. However, there are other ways to conclude an essay: you may instead call on people to do something, or point out the consequences of something, or reflect on its significance. If you want to, you can circle back and place an introduction before the summary. However, for an in-class essay it is usually acceptable to just begin with the signal phrase that introduces the summary section.

Edit and proofread

If you have stuck to your plan and kept an eye on the clock, you should still have time left to proofread. To make simple changes, draw a single line through a word or phrase and write in the blank line above it. To make a longer change or addition, use arrows and write on the back side of the paper. Resist the urge to start over or re-write! It doesn't have to be pretty—just clear.

Read your essay slowly once just for the ideas. Then read it several more times for each type of error you typically make. For instance, if you tend to write fragments read your essay once just for fragments, nothing else. If you mistake *there*, *their*, and *they're*, or *were* and *where*, scan slowly again for those words and make a decision about each. Then read it again, imagining you are someone else, to see if you can add any signal phrases or explanations that would smooth out the transitions from one idea to the next. Then read again to see if your changes are working.

Be the last to leave

Use all your time and aim to be the last to leave; an in-class essay is not a race. Don't worry about what other people are doing—there are always a few students who simply give up. The ones who give up may be the ones who came in without a plan. You will not be one of those.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



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