

Timed Writing (The Prompt)

Time is always a limited resource. Sometimes you will write with a time limit because you only have an hour to take a test and there is a short essay section. But the most common timed writing occurs because you can only plan a limited amount of time to work on a paper because of your other commitments. Learning how to manage your time in these assignments will help you to keep a balance between your homework assignments and your personal life.

When you are working with a limited amount of time, it is extra important to organize your time so that you can create a complete response. You do not have time to waste. Sometimes a time limit creates stress (especially in a test environment), so here are some tips to reduce your stress and focus the time you have in a productive way.

The Prompt

One of the challenges of timed writing is making quick decisions about content and organization. The brainstorming stage is limited and requires you to move swiftly into creating your paragraphs. Unlike most writing situations, you don't have weeks of preparation time to research ideas, revise, and get feedback on your essay.

First, you need to be clear on what the prompt is asking you. This is true in any assignment, but it is especially important when you have limited time to make corrections. You need to recognize the type of writing (compare, describe, argue, explain) and create a thesis statement and supporting points that make a clear road map for what you will say. Additionally, you need to check the prompt to make sure that you are addressing all of the points.

Once you have analyzed the prompt, you should be able to start creating your outline so you have all of the necessary pieces.

Make a short list of the parts of the prompt if there are multiple questions. That is a good first step for creating a thesis and topic sentences that cover all of the necessary information.

Understanding and including all of the parts of the prompt is important for two reasons.

The first reason is that the question is specifically designed to get you to write about the topic for a specific reason. A multi-part question signals to you the degree of complexity that the audience expects to find in your response. If you miss information from your response, your reader might assume that this means you don't know the information.

Second, your audience may attribute missing information to a lack of language ability. This is especially true in a standardized test like the TOEFL or the GRE where the reader knows nothing about your ability other than what you show on the test. The reader might think that you chose not to write about part of the question because you do not have the grammar or vocabulary to explain your ideas. This unfortunately might be your college professor's assumption as well, especially if a professor in a large class does not get many opportunities to speak with you one on one.

Therefore, it's in your best interest to carefully read through the prompt and dissect it. Once you know what the reader expects, you can write a stronger response with more purposeful organization.

Outline Ideas

First of all, an outline will *always* benefit you. You may think that the best idea is to immediately start writing because the time is limited, but that could lead to a very disorganized presentation of an answer. Read the prompt carefully and make a brief outline of ideas so that you know all parts of the prompt will be addressed and all of your most important details will be included.

Your outline should include the important basics you will practice throughout this semester:

Timed Outlining

- Read the prompt carefully.
- Brainstorm your ideas for each part of the prompt.
- Organize your ideas into a logical outline.
- Decide on what is the most important to include.
- Write a thesis statement that directly answers the main part of the prompt.
- Write topic sentences for your main points.
- Write a restated thesis statement.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Analyze Timed Writing Prompt

Read the prompts below. Identify the linguistic task. Break the prompt down into the individual parts.

1. Parks are created to protect natural spaces for future generations and for citizens to enjoy the outdoors. Why do you think society values separating these places and controlling them? Do you think that there is equal value in parks in rural areas like Yellowstone and parks in large cities like Central Park in New York? Why or why not?
2. Compare your home city to Provo. What are the similarities and differences? Be careful not to include your opinion about which one is better.
3. What piece of technology do you think has the biggest impact on your everyday life? Why is that technology so important? What features does it have that support your daily activities? Do you think this technology is equally important to others your age? Why or why not?

Exercise 2: Timed Writing Practice

You have 30 minutes to respond to this prompt. Your answer should be around 300 words long. Before you begin, think about how you will use your timer to complete the task

Prompt: Describe an important holiday or tradition that you celebrate. This may be something specific to your family or something celebrated more widely in your country. Be sure to include details about *when*, *why*, and *how* you celebrate.



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