

Timed Writing (Choose a Position)

One of the most common types of timed writing you will encounter is giving your opinion with support. This type of timed essay is used for tests because it requires critical thinking of complex issues and advanced language use. In this section, you will learn strategies for quickly and effectively choosing a position.

Position

The first thing to remember when you are asked to explain your opinion on a topic in a short time is that there is no "wrong" opinion. Your reader is not grading your response based on if you choose the correct position. Think about this on the most basic level. There is no actual correct answer if someone asks you what your favorite season is. This is why you should not use a lot of time choosing the position that is "best."

One strategy for choosing your position is to go with your first thought. Often, it will be easiest for you to explain your ideas when you go with that first reaction. It is likely that you have already gathered information over time to support that position, which is why it is so quick to think of when you read the question.

Another option is to write about the position that is easiest to support. This does not mean to be dishonest. It just means that if you do not have a strong personal belief about the question, the best thing to do is to explain the opinion that you understand or can think of most clearly. For example, maybe you personally do not have strong feelings about transportation in Provo, so you just choose to explain why we need more buses because it was the one you understand the supporting ideas for.

Rather than stressing and losing time thinking about which option to choose or which position to take, decide quickly and focus your time and energy on supporting.

Examples of Choosing a Position

Prompt 1: Describe your ideal job. Why does that job interest you?

- My first thought is to write about being a veterinarian. I don't really know what I want to do after I study at the ELC, and there are many different jobs I could write about. But I am going to start brainstorming and organizing my ideas about this topic so I can begin writing sooner.

Prompt 2: What is something you are afraid of? How could you work to overcome that fear?

- This topic makes me feel uncomfortable. I don't want to write about my actual answer to this question because it feels too personal. Instead, it would be easiest for me to write about a less awkward like being afraid of public speaking. This answer is also true, but it was *not* my immediate thought and will be easier for me to write about comfortably.

Can I use "I" in my response?

This depends on the task for a class. Your teacher/professor might have clear expectations for this, or you may need to ask before writing your first paper for that instructor. You may also need to look at the prompt or examples of writing for that area of study. For example, a biology lab write up would probably be an inappropriate place to use first person pronouns. However, a reflection for a marketing class might allow for that informality.

For academic college writing, many professors will ask you to avoid personal pronouns, so you may need to clarify with your instructor what you should use in your essays for class.

Supporting Ideas

Time is limited. This means you will not be able to include as many supporting details, examples, and explanations as in a drafted essay. It also means you have less time to refine your writing to make sure it is very clear.

When you choose your supporting ideas, make sure that they are the strongest points. You do not have the time or space to include anything unnecessary like a story. Be simple, but be intentional so that your points have an impact on the reader.

Finally, make sure you read the complete prompt and consider the expectations. Do you need to talk about short-term and long-term impacts of your choice? Do you need to acknowledge the opposite point of view? Are there multiple questions in the prompt? As you write, be sure to double-check the prompt to make sure your supporting ideas have addressed everything the reader expects you to explain.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Timed Writing Discussion

Discuss the prompt below with a partner. What position would you choose? What strategy did you use to quickly make that decision? Make a list of 2 topic sentences that could support each of your positions.

Prompt: Do you think that cell phones should be allowed in high school classrooms? Explain why or why not.

Exercise 2: Timed Writing Practice

You have 20 minutes to respond to this prompt. Your answer should be around 200 words long. Make a quick decision and focus your time on supporting your ideas.

Prompt: You have received a gift of \$100. You have the option to save the money or spend it now. What will you do with the money? Why did you choose that option?



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