

Writing an Essay Exam

Pre-Writing: Read, Brainstorm, Organize

Sample Prompt: "Predict the possible consequences for the United States if greenhouse gases continue to increase over the next century."

1. First, you must **read** and understand **the prompt** or question.
 - What is it asking you to do? This means you need to look at the verb. Does it want you to list, explain, analyze, compare and contrast, take a stand, or evaluate?
 - What other limitations or parameters are there in the question? Does it require you to talk about a particular region or place? A particular time span? Deal with certain concepts or specific people?
 - What key vocabulary or technical terms are used?
 - How many parts are there to the question? How many tasks must you accomplish?

Read the prompt:

Verb: Predict. Based on what you know about the subject, explain what the effects of increased greenhouse gases will probably be in 100 years.

Parameters: Time: century means 100 years. Location: the United States

Key Terms: greenhouse gases. Ask yourself, "What does it mean?"

Parts: asks for consequences, plural, so you must talk about more than one (preferably 3-4).

2. Next, quickly jot down what you know about the topic. This should be **brainstorming**—you'll sort out what you need later.

Sample Brainstorming:

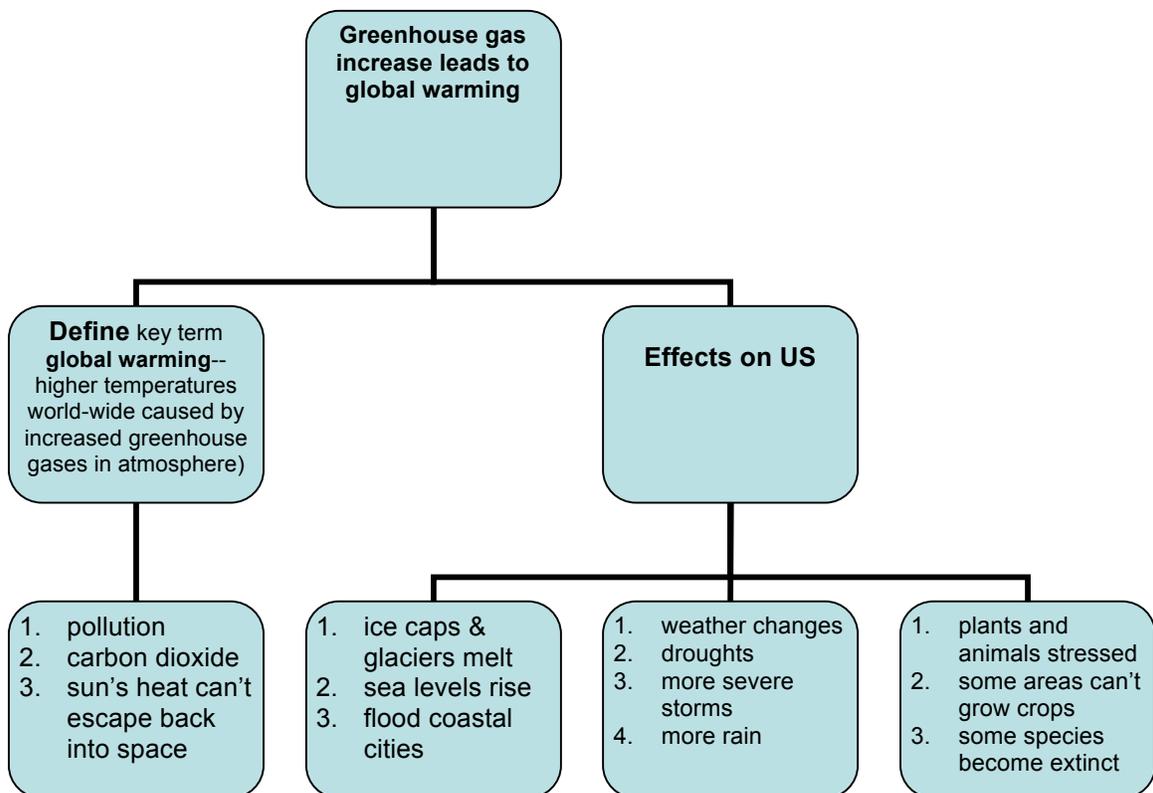
- increased greenhouse gases contribute to global warming
- greenhouses gases caused by humans—pollution
- average temperature goes up world-wide
- flooding in low-lying and coastal areas
- increase in severe storms in some areas
- sea level rises because glaciers and ice caps melt
- most people live near the coasts
- droughts in some areas, more rain in others
- some plants and animals can't survive new conditions

3. Then **organize** your list into a graphic organizer. This will help organize your essay and make sure you complete all parts of the task. Choose which items in your brainstorming list are most important, which are examples or details. Choose the type of organizer that fits your task. For example:

- Describe or explain—List major parts or factors, telling how they fit together
- Comparison-contrast—Venn Diagram or similarities & differences chart
- Analyze (often involves implied cause-effect)—Concept web to show the parts of the main idea or concept
- Explain causes or effects—Flow or sequencing chart, timeline, or cause-effect chart (best choice for more than one cause). Be careful here—chronology is important and causes must occur before effects.
- Take a stand, persuade, evaluate—Outline that lists main points and supporting facts or examples

The time you take in analyzing the question and pre-writing will help ensure you write a good essay. Don't skip this section and go straight to the thesis or topic sentence.

Sample Organizer:



Writing: Introduction, Body, Conclusion

Introduction

1. Write the **thesis** or topic sentence. This is the hardest part, because if your thesis or topic sentence is off-topic, incomplete, or doesn't answer the question, you probably won't be able to write a good essay. Refer to your pre-writing material and then write your thesis. Never use a question as your thesis for an expository essay. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my thesis **answer the question** that is asked? *What kind of impact?*
- Is my thesis complete (**answers all parts of the question**)? *Both US and 100 years from now?*
- Have I **taken a stand**, shown what I will explain or prove, and contributed "value added," or have I just rephrased the question. A thesis never just states the obvious: "Shakespeare was a great writer."
- Does my thesis **preview** or predict the scope or the major parts of my argument? *Flooding, severe storms, drought.*
- Your introduction should also define any key terms.

Sample Introduction: "Although not all scientists agree, global warming is said to occur [**defining key terms**] when levels increase in the earth's atmosphere of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. This gas keeps energy from the sun from bouncing back out into space and helps raise the temperature world wide—just like the glass in a greenhouse. The main source of carbon dioxide comes from pollution and burning fossil fuels. [**Thesis**] In less than a century [**when**], global warming may have a large, negative [**type of impact/stand**] impact on the United States. [**where**] For example, [**preview**] major cities along the coast may be flooded, more severe storms may destroy cities and farms, and drought may leave important food-growing regions unable to grow crops. "

Body

Keeping your thesis in mind, begin writing the **body** sections—whether in the form of a good paragraph or several paragraphs. Make sure you use examples or details to support each supporting example or idea. Stick to your pre-writing plan—don't wander off topic.

Sample Body Paragraph:

“If global warming continues, one **[transition from introduction]** of the biggest effects could be flooding **[topic of this paragraph]**. Some scientists think the ocean levels may rise by 3 feet in 100 years because of the melting of glaciers and ice caps **[example 1]**. Many of the largest cities in the US are close to the coast, including New York, Miami, Houston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles **[detail 1]**. Cities such as New Orleans already have trouble keeping out storm water—imagine if the sea level were three feet higher **[detail 2]**. Higher sea levels would also flood many coastal roads, highways, and bridges **[example 2]**. A rise in only two feet would put most of the docks in major harbors under water **[detail]**. As if that wasn't bad enough, global warming may also mean worse storms **[transition to next paragraph]**.”

Conclusion

Finally, write your **conclusion**. A conclusion isn't just a restatement of your thesis. A good conclusion also may show the relation of your topic to some larger issue, show how it might impact the reader, or relate the topic to some larger issue.

Sample Conclusion: “The continued increase of greenhouse gas and global warming could have a terrible impact on the US in the next century. However, the increase of greenhouse gases was caused by people—and people can take steps to limit the impact.”