Essay Success

1. UNDERLINE KEY TERMS –
   - As you read, underline the key terms that tell you what to do (criticize, trace, discuss); also underline key terms in the content of the question itself.
     - Here is a sample essay question: “In our educational system, we need to return to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Define or refute this statement.” The topic is returning to basics; that is underlined to be certain that you don’t wander from the subject. Defend and refute specify how to approach that subject.

2. JOT DOWN IDEAS –
   - As soon as you have read each essay question, immediately jot down relevant ideas that occur to you. This safeguards you from forgetting anything as you quickly read other essay questions to find the easiest one (the one you’ll want to tackle first). If you write down your ideas as you go, you’ll be ready to write when you decide which question(s) to write about.

3. TAKE THE PLUNGE –
   - Immediately commit yourself to a position in the beginning of your answer. A lucid thesis statement promptly informs the teacher where you stand. This direct approach also helps you keep sharply focused on the question.
   - An example of a thesis statement that applies this approach would be something like the following: “I firmly defend the need to return to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, based on school and college entrance results and my own personal experience.” If the essay is to be brief, this thesis may stand alone as the introduction; however, if the essay is to be extended, this sentence can be included in a longer introductory paragraph.

4. FATTEN UP THE THESIS –
   - How you organize the rest of your ideas should flow logically from the thesis (see example thesis in #3). Clearly state a central thought within each paragraph of the body.
   - Use transitional words and phrases to keep your argument clear and organized, such as “In the first place, the results from reading tests administered to fourth and twelfth graders this year seem to indicate the need for more basic reading instruction.” Beginning the next paragraph with a phrase such as “In the second place” or “In addition” helps the reader see how you are steadily accumulating evidence for your case.

5. CONCLUDE –
   - No cliffhangers, please. After stating your case, wrap it up in a sentence or two with a statement of conviction: “Because of the declining scores on grade school tests and college entrance exams and because of the personal experiences I’ve cited, I staunchly affirm the need to return to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.”

6. PERSEVERE –
   - If you still run short of time despite every effort, never give up. Resort to mapping or outlining to confirm your knowledge of the subject. Teachers do usually give partial credit for such attempts.
Essay Essentials

FOUR THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN TAKING AN ESSAY TEST:
1. How much time is there for taking the test?
2. How many questions must be answered? If you answer more questions than you are asked to answer:
   a. you will probably not receive credit for all your answers.
   b. you will waste time answering questions that will not be graded
   c. your answers might not represent your best effort because you wasted time.
3. What are the point values of the questions?
4. Which question(s) can be answered quickly?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:
1. Organize your answer before you write.
2. Make your introductory statement a summary of your answer.
3. Always include details and examples in your answers.
4. Proofread your answers.
5. Outline answers you do not have time to write out completely.

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<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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SHARPEN YOUR ESSAY WRITING SKILLS

1. Does your essay respond to the question?
2. Is a clear thesis statement present (with an introductory paragraph if the essay is long)?
3. Are specific facts and examples developed in the body to substantiate the thesis?
4. Are transitions used to show thought relationships?
5. Is a clear concluding statement (or paragraph for an extended essay) present and consistent with the introductory thesis?
6. Is your handwriting legible?
7. Other comments: