

Timed Writing (Expectations)

Timed writing can take many forms, but the main requirement of this type of writing is a time limit to complete it. A time limit most commonly occurs in an exam situation. The tester is evaluating how well you understand a topic and/or can explain your thoughts without any help (ex. teacher, peer review, spell check, translator, etc). The amount of time and the expected length of your writing will depend on the instructions.

You could expect to find a timed writing portion of a test or quiz in any subject. It doesn't matter if you plan to study business, engineering, music, or linguistics. Timed essays are used frequently to get you to analyze, argue, or create something with what you have learned. Essays push you to show more than just recognizing a correct answer.

Timed Writing Expectations

The first strategy for timed writing is to fully understand the expectations. This means that when you have a timed writing prompt, you should first think about the context.

Questions to think about for timed writing

- How much time do you have?
- Who will be reading your answer and why are they reading it?
- What length of a response does the teacher expect?
- What about my writing is most important to the teacher?
- Are there other sections of the test (like multiple choice questions) that you need to complete in the time that is given?
- Does the test allow spell check?
- Is this test more focused on language accuracy or comprehension of the topic accuracy?

Usually you will know in advance that there will be a timed writing component to an assessment, so you can think about these questions before you begin. This will help you control your time.

Examples of timed writing prompts & expectations

- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between grocery shopping in the United States and in your home country. Choose at least three aspects in your comparison.
 - Time: 30 minutes
 - Audience: ELC writing teacher; evaluating thesis and topic sentences
 - Length: 4 paragraphs
 - Focus: Organization
 - Other sections: No
 - Help: No spell check, no dictionary/translator, no peer review, no help from teacher
 - Purpose: Accuracy in structure, not accuracy in grammar
- Read this opinion post from social media. Respond to it by agreeing or disagreeing and supporting your position.
 - Time: 10 minutes to read; 20 minutes to write
 - Audience: ELC writing teacher & reading teacher; evaluating supporting details and comprehension of reading
 - Length: 2 paragraphs
 - Focus: Comprehension of information; structure of argument
 - Other sections: Reading passage
 - Help: Peer discussion of article before writing, no additional support
 - Purpose: comprehension of article points and clarity of personal opinion
- Explain the process of applying for a job at BYU. What are the steps you should follow to be successful in getting a job?
 - Time: 40 minutes (not limited by the website, this is limited by the time you have)
 - Audience: online discussion board for other international students
 - Length: 300 words max
 - Focus: Clarity, accuracy
 - Other sections: 3 other essay prompts (separate time for each)
 - Help: You can use support, but it must still be your writing
 - Purpose: clear organization and accuracy that demonstrates readiness for college

Planning your Time

Think about how to use the time as a helper. Think about how you can use the time to keep yourself focused. For example, if the essay is only a small part of the total test grade, control the amount of time you give yourself to write the answer and use more of your time for the other questions. You might do this by answering that writing question first under a stricter time limit before you answer any of the multiple choice questions. Divide the time you have to work with so you can work smarter.

As another example, you may only have 30 minutes to work on an essay. In order to work quickly, you could follow a time schedule like this:

Minutes	Time (Counting down)	Task
3	30:00-27:00	Write your thesis and topic sentences (outline)
7	27:00-20:00	Write your first body paragraph

7	20:00-13:00	Write your second body paragraph
5	13:00-8:00	Write your introduction paragraph
5	8:00-3:00	Write your conclusion paragraph
3	3:00-0:00	Revise and edit your essay

You might wonder why this example starts with the body paragraphs instead of the introduction and conclusion. This is one suggestion of how to focus your time to develop your ideas and create a good organization for the main part of the essay. The introduction and conclusion are usually easier to write after you have the middle. If you run out of time, you would still have at least your thesis statement and restatement as the minimum expectation for the beginning and end of your essay.

There are other approaches to choosing which paragraph to start with:

- Start with the point that is easiest to write, leaving the sections that are hardest for when you have some momentum to your writing. (Note: This may create a challenge if you are still stuck and have no time to revise)
- Start from the beginning and work to the end. (Note: Although this seems like the obvious way to approach writing, it can often lead to disorganized thoughts)

You will obviously need to structure your times differently depending on the length of time you have to work with. It may also be necessary to adjust times depending on what is most important to the teacher. For example, there may be a larger emphasis on accuracy, so you will need to give yourself more time to revise and edit.

Exercises

Exercise 1: LATs Rubric

Take some time to look over the writing rubric used for the Language Acquisition Test used at the ELC

1. What will the test raters be focusing on as they assign a score to your essay?
2. How is this rubric similar or different from the rubrics your AA Writing teacher is using this semester?

Exercise 2: Timed Writing Practice

Before you begin writing, ask your teacher questions about the expectations for this timed writing practice. Listen carefully and decide how you will focus your time to meet those expectations.

- What are three important or interesting things that you think people should know about you?

Set a timer for 20 minutes. Write about the above topic. Your response should be between 250-300 words.



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