



...the first step is to read the question carefully and identify the key words and phrases that are being used. This will help you to understand what the question is asking and what information you need to provide in your answer.

Chapter 2

How to Approach Short-Answer Questions

...the next step is to plan your answer. This involves deciding what points you want to make and in what order. It is important to think about the structure of your answer and to make sure that you have enough time to write it.

...the final step is to write your answer. This should be done in a clear and concise manner, using simple and direct language. It is important to stick to the question and to provide a clear and logical answer.

OVERVIEW

The short-answer part of Section I involves answering four short-answer questions. Two of the four provided questions will have elements of choice, which will allow you to pick the topic or theme you feel most confident writing about. All of the questions will be tied to a primary source, historical argument, data or maps, or general propositions of U.S. history. Since these are short-answer prompts, you are not required to develop and support a thesis statement.

TIME CRUNCH

Probably the biggest challenge you have in answering the short-answer essays is the time allotment. You have a total of 50 minutes to answer 4 short-essay prompts, which means you have about 2 minutes to brainstorm ideas and about 10 minutes in which to write each one. You'll be given up to a page to write on. It is not necessary to fill all the allotted space. Quality matters more than quantity, though a longer essay will look more impressive to the reader. So there is no time to dawdle on the short essays. You must keep brainstorming to a minimum, and keep your pencil moving!

Here are the steps you should follow for each short-answer essay:



1. **Choose.** The fact that you get to choose just two out of the four essays means that you can choose a topic that best fits your knowledge base. Chances are, one of the choices will resonate more with your level of expertise. If not, decide which topic would be most easy to link with the prompt question.
2. **Think.** Write down all the facts and details that you know about the topic. Try to rank them according to their importance in history and their relevance to the prompt question.
3. **Write.** Steps 1 and 2 should not take much more than 2 minutes. Writing is where you will spend the bulk of your time. Each of your essays should be 2–3 paragraphs, though the paragraphs need not be long. You have about 10 minutes of writing time, so don't feel the need to get too bogged down in minutiae.

STRATEGY TO ANSWERING THE SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

The short-answer questions will consist of multiple parts, which center on a key learning objective. For the questions that do not give you the opportunity to pick from a list of choice topics, read the question and each of the parts carefully. Many of these questions will resemble the example shown below.

“Convinced that the Revolution was the work of a full few miscreants who had rallied an armed rabble to their cause, they expected that the revolutionaries would be intimidated.... Then the vast majority of Americans, who were loyal but cowed by the terroristic tactics... would rise up, kick out the rebels, and restore loyal government in each colony.”

Jeremy Black, *Crisis of Empire: Britain and America in the Eighteenth Century* (2008)

- a) Briefly explain ONE example of rebellion during the time period described in Black’s quote.
- b) Briefly explain ONE cause of the rebellion you chose.
- c) Briefly explain ONE effect of the rebellion you chose.

Here’s How to Crack It

1. **Choose.** If you remember all those Revolutionary War notes from the beginning of the year, then this one should be a slam dunk. There were many events during the period of 1754–1775 that prompted anti-British sentiment and ultimately led to the push for independence including the Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Revenue Act (1767), the Sugar Act (1764), and the Tea Act of 1773. Let’s say you don’t remember what the Townshend Revenue Act was (two tax laws imposed on imports of common products into the colonies), but you remember the Stamp Act and the Tea Act. Which one provoked a strong response from the colonists and an even stronger counter-response from the British? I’ll have my tea with lemon and sugar, please!

2. **Think.**

- East India Tea Company
- Boston Tea Party
- Sons of Liberty
- Intolerable Acts
- Closing of Boston Harbor



Apply the 3-step strategy to answer this question!

3. **Write.** Here is a sample essay using some of the ideas outlined above:

Under the principle of mercantilism, Britain frequently put the interests of its corporations ahead of the interests of American colonists. The Tea Act of 1773 was an attempt to force colonists to purchase tea from the East India Company rather than from cheaper sources. This hurt many colonial merchants, so the Sons of Liberty, dressed as Indians, initiated the Boston Tea Party; the protesters boarded Company ships and dumped many pounds of tea into Boston Harbor, thus sending a message to the King that his economic tactics were not welcome.

The King did not ignore the Boston Tea Party. Governor George Grenville implemented the Intolerable Acts, which were designed to punish Massachusetts for its willful spirit and included such harsh measures as closing the port of Boston and required the quartering of soldiers in private homes. Little did Grenville realize that the people of Massachusetts would soon become instrumental in the defeat of British rule in North America.

Other short-answer questions will offer you a choice. This is usually quite beneficial to you. However, with choices, the exam graders will be expecting a better and more complete answer. Consider the following example.

4. Answer a, b, or c.

- a) Briefly explain how ONE of the following increased the borders of the United States and would later contribute to division of the states during the Civil War. Provide at least ONE piece of evidence from the period to support your explanation.
 - Louisiana Purchase (1803)
 - Missouri Compromise (1820)
 - Mexican-American War (1846-1848)
- b) Briefly explain why ONE of the other options is not as persuasive as the one you chose.
- c) Briefly explain one other historical event between 1803 and 1860, not including those above, that contributed to the division that led to the Civil War.

Here's How to Crack It

1. **Choose.** In the question above, you are being asked not only to describe how either the Louisiana Purchase, Missouri Compromise, or Mexican-American War resulted in territorial expansion, but also how it would later play a role in the division of the states in the Civil War. When considering your answer, you should also evaluate the other parts of the question. For instance, you may remember that the Louisiana Purchase resulted in a massive territorial expansion during Jefferson's presidency. Yet, can you make a clear connection to how this would later drive the secession of the South? If not, that sounds like a good candidate for part b). For part a), it may be a far better decision to discuss the Missouri Compromise because it was a compromise to appease both the Northern and Southern states

by admitting both a free state (Maine) and slave state (Missouri), concurrently. (Of course, you could also choose the Mexican-American War. There is no right answer. Choose the topics and perspectives that make sense to you!)

2. **Think.**

Missouri Compromise, 1820

- Established federal power in determining slave vs. free states
- Further divided “North vs. South”
- Perhaps only a short-term solution
- Rise of abolitionist groups in the North
- Extras: Clay, Calhoun, Tallmadge Amendment, 36°30'

Louisiana Purchase, 1803

- Happened 60 years before the Civil War
- Purchase included a vast amount of territory, both slave and free, even parts of Canada
- Various ethnic groups: Spanish, French, Indian
- Purchase of territories, not yet states
- Issue at the time was constitutionality and financing, not slavery or states' rights

3. **Write.** Here is a sample essay using some of the ideas outlined above:

As the United States' territory rapidly expanded in the early part of the nineteenth century, the question of slavery repeatedly reared its ugly head in Congress. A multitude of territories were sparsely populated in the West, but the more developed Missouri sought out statehood with the nagging question: to be slave or free? Cue the Missouri Compromise of 1820, devised by Henry Clay. The Compromise brought Missouri in as a slave state but banned slavery north of the 36°30' parallel, thus creating a sharp division between North and the South. Citizens of these regions tended to identify more with the slavery politics of their states, thus setting the stage for the regional partisanship of the Civil War. One might argue that had it not been for the Missouri Compromise, the issue of slavery would have been more diffuse, not encouraging such sharply divided alliances later on.

Of course the Missouri Compromise was necessary due to the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Some might say that this was the real cause of sectional strife, but this position does not hold up well. After all, the Louisiana Purchase was nearly sixty years before the start of the Civil War, hardly a precursor. The Purchase was a vast tract of land, ranging from Louisiana to Canada. Many different ethnic groups were established there and many residents of these territories played no role in the Civil War.

Summary

- Spend a few minutes reading the questions carefully, and choose a historical event, perspective, or view that addresses the questions completely and for which you have a thorough understanding.
- When you have an option, think carefully about which option would be easiest to write about in reference to all parts of the question.
- Make sure your responses are clear, succinct, and fully address all parts of the questions.
- Be mindful of your time. The first section of the test is shared with the multiple-choice questions. Consider doing the short-answer questions first before attempting the multiple-choice questions.