

## 8 Quick Keys for an AWESOME AP Gov. Essay

1

**TALLY.** Before you even try to comprehend the question you are being asked, tally how many points each part of the question will be worth. Generally an identification earns one point and an explanation gets another. Be sure to notice if you are being asked to identify multiple reasons or examples.

2

**ORGANIZE.** A quick, short jot-list will help you get all of your points together. This way you can be sure to cover all of the required points from the question and explain them in an appropriate manner. Organization is important, but don't spend too long jotting. Just a few quick words to keep the outline of the essay will make a tremendous difference.

3

**BE CONCISE.** You don't need an introduction. You don't need a conclusion. An AP Government essay is like a hamburger on the Atkins diet...no buns on the outside, just the real meat. State your points in as few sentences as possible, without unnecessary babble or explanation, but be sure that you have answered the question completely (including all important vocabulary) before you move on.

4

**FOR EXAMPLE...** Add strength to your main points using a real-life example. Sometimes questions will specify examples from which you must question will say "explain" a topic or show "applications" in history). Nevertheless, every main point should include an example. Examples add validity and clarity to shaky or incomplete explanations. They show the reader that you understand the topic completely enough to apply it to the real world.

5

**BUILD STRUCTURE.** Government essays have a very defined structure. Generally this consists of a **definition, explanation, example, and linkage**. First, define the topic and any vocabulary presented in the prompt. Then explain the definitions' meanings and show how they apply in examples. Examples only receive credit if they are linked back to the original topic or theme of the essay. For instance:

"Identify two ways in which the President is accountable to Congress and explain how each contributes to checks and balances"

**Define:** Budget approval—Congress must approve the proposed budget each year in order that funds be allocated to specified departments of the bureaucracy.

**Explain:** Congress doesn't have to approve exactly what the President suggests. On the contrary, Congress has the final

Say in the federal budget and can withhold or withdraw funds  
From an agency or department at any time it deems necessary.  
**Example:** When President Bush (Sr.) approved the Clean Air Act  
of 1990, Congress did not appropriate any money to the federal  
departments for oversight, instead the money was to be provided  
for by individual states.  
**Linkage:** THEME=checks and balances. Congress' power to  
Approve the federal budget checks the Presidential power over  
federal funds. This ensures that the President will not deny  
or over-provide any one agency or department.

**6** **USE STRICT LANGUAGE.** Avoid unclear phrases using the verb *is*, such as:  
"\_\_\_\_\_ is when..." or "this is where the President..." Instead, use concrete  
verbs showing action: "The President utilizes his power as Commander-in-  
Chief by..." Using clear and strong words will take a 90% essay, which is  
completely correct but very simply explained, to a 100% essay, meaning a  
paper not only correct, but also presented very clearly using proper  
government vocabulary and examples. DON'T use big words to try to sound  
smart. AP readers can see through this. I like the phrase "strict" language  
because Government essays should hit the perfect balance between detailed  
terminology and clear, concise explanation.

**7** **LEAVE YOURSELF OUT OF IT.** Government essays are strictly facts. If  
you include opinions like "this is good because..." or "this really helped the  
public become more knowledgeable..." the graders will simply strike through  
the entire sentence.

And most importantly...

**8** **RELAX!** You **will** get through the essay, and it **will** be a success. If not this  
time, then next time. Everything takes a little practice before you reach  
complete mastery.

Happy writing!