

Timed Writing 1

Timed writing can take many forms, but there is always a limit on the amount of time you have to complete your writing. Timed writings most commonly occur in an exam situation, where the tester is evaluating how well you understand a topic and/or can explain your thoughts without external assistance. The amount of time and the expected length of your writing will vary based on the instructions.

You can expect to find a timed writing portion on a test or quiz in virtually any subject. It doesn't matter whether you plan to study business, engineering, music, or linguistics, Timed essays are used frequently to demonstrate how you analyze, argue, or create something with what you have learned.

Although this section is about timed writing in general, all of the timed writing tips in this textbook will help you with the 30-minute essay on the TOEFL.

Step One: Recognize the constraints

When you encounter a timed writing prompt, you should consider the time restraints and the requirements of the prompt. Ask yourself the questions below before you begin your timed writing.

- How much time do I have?
- What length of a response does the teacher expect?
- What aspect of my writing is most important to the teacher?
- Are there other sections of the test that I need to complete?
- Does the testing format provide spell check?

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

Step Two: Organizing your ideas AND your time

It is common for students to feel a sense of panic when they see a clock counting down the seconds during an exam. Because of this psychological pressure, it is easy to overlook a few important things.

First of all, an outline will *always* benefit you. You may think that the best idea is to immediately start writing because the time is limited, but that could lead to a very disorganized presentation of an answer. Read the prompt carefully and make a brief outline of ideas so that you know all parts of the prompt will be addressed and that all of your most important details will be included.

Second, consider how to use time as your ally. Rather than allowing it to control you, think of how you can use the time to keep yourself on track. For example, if the essay is only a small part of the total grade, control the amount of time you give yourself to write the answer. You might do this by answering the essay in a certain amount of time, leaving yourself enough time to complete the rest of the test. Divide the time you have to work with so you can work smarter.

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

Time (Counting down)	Task
30:00-27:00	Write your thesis and topic sentences (outline)
27:00-20:00	Write your first body paragraph
20:00-13:00	Write your second body paragraph
13:00-8:00	Write your introduction paragraph
8:00-3:00	Write your conclusion paragraph
3:00-0:00	Revise and edit your essay

You will obviously need to structure your time differently depending on the amount of time you have to work with. It may also be necessary to adjust the time you spend on certain aspects of your essay 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.

Example timed writing prompts

- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between Greek and Roman civilizations. Choose at least three aspects in your comparison. (Civilization-History)
- Analyze financial statements. (Intro to Business)
- Analyze the rhetorical devices used in a poem. Be sure to include at least 5 specific terms from the textbook in your analysis. (English Literature)
- Explain the process for prototype design. Include each step and a complete description of each stage of the process. (Engineering)
- Discuss the physiological and psychological changes that occur in humans between the ages of 18-25. (Psychology)

Exercises

Exercise 1: Timed Writing

Set a timer for 20 minutes. Write about one of the following topics. Your response should be between 250-300 words.

- Describe an important person in your life. Why has that person had a significant impact on you?
- Why did you decide to learn English? What specific moments led you to be in this class? How will this decision impact your future?
- Homesickness is a common difficulty that international students face during their first semester living abroad. What can a homesick student do to improve their situation? What (if anything) should schools do to support these students?
- What is one characteristic you think is key to being a good friend? Why do you think that characteristic is so vital? What are the consequences of not developing this characteristic?



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