AP ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

TEST TAKING TIPS AND HINTS

SERIES ONE

1. DO NOT STAY UP LATE STUDYING THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXAM! Have your favorite snack and go to bed early. A clear, rested mind is the most important thing you can take to the AP Exam.

2. Dress comfortably for the room you will be taking the test in and make sure to bring plenty of sharpened pencils and good erasers

3. Start reviewing for the exam about two months before the test date. Go over classroom notes and reread sections of the textbook that you are still unsure about. It is more productive to do short, twenty to thirty minute study sessions several times a week rather than long, multi-hour marathon study sessions once or twice a month.

4. Find a study partner or form a study group. Having other people to study with will usually increase your motivation. They will encourage you to study when you don’t feel like it and vice versa. One of the biggest advantages of studying with other people is that it will widen your knowledge base because other people will point out pieces of information that you overlooked. Each of us tends to focus on different items.

5. Read sections of the textbook that your teacher didn’t cover. Because AP Environmental Science covers such a broad range of topics its nearly impossible to cover everything in class. Topics that may not be covered by your teacher include environmental law, environmental economics, environmental politics, and urban planning. Take time to read these chapters on your own so that you have all the bases covered.

6. By taking good notes throughout the year, it will make it easier on you when the time comes to start studying for the AP exam. Some students like to go through and outline entire chapters while others prefer to distill classroom lectures, and readings from the text. Your teacher may provide you with important points to know from each of the major topics covered.

7. Do not waste time on multiple-choice questions that are extremely difficult. Come back to them later when your thinking juices are really flowing. If you answer the easy questions first, you will build up your confidence and since you will have many of the questions already done, you will be less likely to suffer from time-pressure panic.

8. Read questions completely before answering. Think before you bubble. Don’t make careless mistakes.

9. If you have time left over, double check your answers. This will be the only time you have to prevent a possible oversight from lowering your test score.

10. Go into the testing room with a positive attitude. You have worked hard and owe it to yourself to do the best job you can.

SERIES TWO

1. No points are taken off for wrong or incorrect information, but remember that writing a whole lot will not necessarily earn you any points—you must answer the question being asked. It is not uncommon to see an answer that fills one or two pages but does not earn many points.
2. Students will not receive points for just restating the question. Embellishing and embroidering the question and then writing it down as an answer will receive no credit. Students must show that they have knowledge and understanding.
3. Be careful when you interpret charts and graphs. Many students draw erroneous conclusions because they have misinterpreted a graph or chart.
4. Practice your math! Every AP Environmental Science student should be comfortable working with percentages, decimals, rounding, fractions, algebra, exponents, and scientific notation. When appropriate, make sure that all numbers are properly labeled with the correct unit. ***Students should be able to apply their math skills to setting up and solving word problems.***
5. *If the question asks you to show your work, make sure to write out all the steps clearly so the reader/grader can clearly see your work.* Many, many students lose points because they do their math calculations either in their heads or on a different sheet of paper other than the answer sheet and then fail to transfer the information onto the answer sheet.
6. Outline form and bullets are not acceptable, answers must be written in prose style.
7. Students should have a good understanding of the process of how things work whether it’s a biogeochemical cycle or a solar panel. Just throwing out terms and vocabulary words in not enough. Students should have an in-depth understanding.
8. Do not be too fragmentary in your explanations, everything should fit together logically into a complete answer. Make sure you tie all the “pieces” of your answer together.
9. Make sure, whenever possible, to support your statements with examples. Good examples will let the reader/grader know that you understand what you are talking about. Often, examples are required to earn some of the elaboration points available on a question.
10. If you are going to write down several points or examples, write down the best ones first. Often readers are *required* to grade information in the order that it is written down on the page, only looking at the first or second thing written and ignoring the rest.

SERIES THREE

1. While answering an essay question, leave some space at the end of each section so that if you think of something else you want to say, you can add it on easily later on.
2. Use the same terms used in the original question when compiling your answer. For example, if the question uses the term “exotic” species don’t start using “alien” or “invasive” in your answer, stick with “exotic” to avoid any possible confusion.
3. Be extremely specific and quantitative in describing any experimental design. For example, if you were talking about the duration of exposure to a chemical that a group of test organisms were receiving, you would never say: “…then expose the Daphnia to copper sulfate for about an hour.” More appropriately you would say: “…then expose the Daphnia to copper sulfate for 55 minutes.”
4. You can earn points just by setting up the right math formula even though you may not be able to solve the problem due to lack of time or lack of a calculator (calculators are not allowed on the AP Environmental Science exam)
5. When writing essays, try to avoid sweeping generalizations and develop your arguments in a step-by-step logical sequence without leaving important steps out. For example, if the essay question asks, “Please explain why the clear-cutting of forests can be harmful to freshwater fish populations,” you wouldn’t want to answer, “Because clear-cutting will sometimes kill the fish.” This answer is true, but obviously lacks depth and shows no understanding of ***how*** clear-cutting kills fish. A good answer would discuss the step by step process of how clear-cutting eventually kills fish populations. In this case a good answer would include a discussion of erosion, siltation of waterways, increased water temperature, decreased dissolved oxygen, lack of available food, etc. Remember that the grader cannot read your mind.
6. Be precise when answering the question, making sure to use the proper terminology and the correct concepts and examples for the topic being discussed. One observation that has been made, is that, when students don’t know a specific piece of information, they will dance around there knowledge gap with sweeping generalizations that do not earn points. They often sound like politicians, except, of course, politicians do this on purpose.
7. Connect your answers back to the main theme of the question. For example, if the question is asking about the negative effects of water diversion begin your sentence something like this: “One of the environmental problems associated with water diversion projects is the buildup of sediments due to…” Not: “A big problem is sedimentation due to …”
8. Distribute the 90 minutes you have for the four essay questions somewhat equally (20-25 minutes each). Do not make the mistake of wasting eighty-five percent of your time on one question and then not having adequate time to do the other three.
9. Devote time to answering all the sections (a, b, c, d, etc.) for each essay question. It is more effective (point-wise) to answer ***all*** the sections imperfectly, rather than doing a superb job on one or two sections and then leaving the rest blank. Even if you are not sure of how to answer a section, give it a shot.
10. Take a few moments to think and organize your thoughts before you start to answer the essay questions. Obviously, you don’t have a lot of time to ponder the question, but a bit of mental organization will pay dividends.

SERIES FOUR

1. When answering the essay questions, stay on the topic that is being asked. Adding extraneous information that does not pertain to the question being asked is just a waste of your very limited time.
2. Write as clearly and as large as possible so that the reader will not have to struggle to read your answer. This is difficult when you are under time pressure, but if the reader cannot make out what you have said, he or she can’t possibly give you points for it.
3. If you use diagrams, make sure to label them ***and*** explain them. A diagram without an explanation gets zero points.
4. Contrary to your English composition class, you do not need fancy introductions or conclusions on your essays. Eliminate “fluff” and get right to the point.
5. Write down what you know best, first. Think broadly when you are answering the essay questions, you have more information in your head than you may realize. Don’t forget to add detail and examples to your writing. Be a point sponge. But please, don’t fabricate information that you are not sure about.
6. Make sure you have a good working understanding of environmental science vocabulary and how and when to apply it. For example, students often confuse biomagnification and bioaccumulation.
7. Students should make an attempt to understand both sides of complex environmental issues. Many essay questions ask for the pros and cons of specific issues and topics.
8. Students should practice making good arguments based on solid scientific information. In addition, students should have a clear understanding of the scientific method and how to design sound scientific experiments involving variables and the use of a control.
9. No matter how difficult an essay question may seem, all sections of each essay question should be attempted. Sometimes a section of a question may seem like it is asking for information that is very specific, but when the readers grade it, the rubric may allow giving points for more general information.
10. Never list or outline an answer. Always answer in prose style using complete sentences in paragraph form. When the question asks students to “describe,” “discuss,” or “explain” they should do so as fully as possible.