

Regents' Exam Preparation: Topic, Outline, and Thesis

Choosing the Topic that is Best for You

Here are some sample topics:

- If you were an employer, under what circumstances would you fire an employee? Explain.
- Was giving eighteen-year-olds the right to vote a mistake? Discuss.
- Should both parents assume equal responsibility in child rearing? Explain why or why not.
- What characteristics do you regard as important in a person you would choose as a friend?

Notice that they are all asking for your opinion on a specific subject. On the test, you will be given 4 possible topics, and you choose one on which to write. There is no right or wrong answer to these topics. All the exam requires is that you take a side and argue a point, just as if you were a lawyer arguing a case in court.

It is perfectly fine to use such 1st person phrases as “I believe,” “I think,” “in my opinion,” etc. Alternatively, you can write in 3rd person if you wish. Just don't switch between 1st and 3rd person in your essay. Finally, never use 2nd person (“you”) in the essay. It is bad form and the raters do not like the assumption that you know them.

1. Choose a topic that you can almost immediately think of 3-5 good points to mention (5 points are more than you will need, but it is good to have options so that you can choose the *best* points). Only spend about 5-10 minutes brainstorming, because you will need most of the 60 minutes to actually write the essay. You are given space below the topics to brainstorm and write out ideas.
2. So, if you cannot immediately think of 2-3 solid points to go with a topic, or take a side on an issue, choose a different topic. You do not want to waste valuable time thinking about a topic or writing on a topic that you will not actually use. It is best to try to choose a topic you actually have opinions about or believe in, but you may not be lucky with your topic selection.
3. If all else fails and you hate your topics, choose one you can make up at least 2-3 points and go with it. Your essay does not have to be brilliant or groundbreaking, but it does have to be written and finished in 60 minutes.
4. When you come brainstorm your main points, it is a good idea to also think of sub points and details that will add complexity and length to your paragraphs. These details help to convince the reader that your side of the argument is valid. You do not want to simply

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say you would fire an employee for being tardy and then only be able to say that being tardy is bad. You need to spend some time as you write your paragraphs arguing why your points and details matter to your overall argument.

5. If you give a *why* every time, you will convince your reader.

Organizing Your Outline

1. Once you have your main points, you need to figure out an order/outline.
2. Each essay must have an introductory paragraph, several supportive paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.
3. To have clear organization, there must be a reason why you list the points/supportive paragraphs in a certain order. If you have a more argumentative thesis statement, order those points according to how they make sense. If Point C depends on Point B, which depends on Point A, order the paragraphs A, B, C. Or, if you are discussing events that happened in a certain order, tell them in that order in your essay (make sure to use a transition in the beginning of each paragraph that shows the relationship between the current paragraph and the one before).
4. Finally, if you have three points such as characteristics in a friend, simply have your paragraphs in the same order that you list them in your thesis.
5. Make sure that the first sentence of each paragraph is a topic sentence that directly/explicitly states the subject of the paragraph and the direction the paragraph will take.

Constructing a Thesis Statement

1. The thesis is the argument you are making, the side you are taking. If the reader cannot disagree with you, then you do not have an argument. Make sure you are not straddling the fence.
2. The thesis should be the last sentence of your introduction.
3. The easiest and fastest way to write a thesis for the Regents' is to return to your main points and outline. Simply use those 2-4 points as your thesis, in the order that you will discuss them in the essay. So, let's say you choose the topic "What characteristics do you regard as important in a person you would choose as a friend?" Your main points are loyalty, honesty, and patience. Therefore, a three point thesis would be "To me, the most

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important characteristics in a person I would choose for a friend are loyalty, honesty, and patience.”

4. The three-point thesis is the easiest and fastest way to write a thesis and structure your essay. However, you do not need it for a successful essay. You could write “Although loyalty is an important quality in a friend, too much loyalty can just be flattery. That’s why I look for honesty in a friend.”