Help your students prepare for tests that include writing samples by giving them multiple experiences with the Twenty-Minute Essay.

This experience helps students learn to do several things:
1. analyze an essay question to determine what it requires them to do.
2. take a position on a subject, write a clear thesis statement expressing that position, and generate specific and concrete examples to defend it, and
3. plan and write under the pressure of a strict time limit.

Teach students to:

**PLAN:**
*Do NOT allow students to begin writing until 5-10 minutes have passed. (This teaches them that time spent planning pays off in a clear and well written essay.)*

Study the question or statement. Study its wording and break the question into its natural parts. What are the key words or phrases which must be dealt with?

Exactly what does the question ask the writer to do?
- What kinds of examples and/or evidence is asked for?

Take a position and STICK with it even if other possibilities come to mind.

Create a rough outline and check it against the question. Does it cover everything?

**WRITE:**
State a claim that includes:

- a stance (“I agree/disagree with…”)  
- a generalization/opinion (“because”)

Defend/exemplify the claim (explanation of how and why the writers makes the claim)

Present specific, concrete examples  
AND  
Explain examples and show relationships to claim

A Concluding Statement

**PROOFREAD** (last 2 minutes)  
95% of all student errors are:  
- sentence fragments  
- run-on sentences  
- subject-verb agreement  
- tense consistency  
- pronoun reference
Evaluation Rubric

Reward the essays for what they do well. A poorly written essay MUST be given a score no higher than 3.

This score is for essays which provide an easily understood claim which directly relates to the assignment. The examples selected to defend the claim are well chosen, fully developed, and clearly connected to the thesis. The paper is clearly organized and free of mechanical errors, The paper demonstrates a strong command of language and style.

The four paper, like the five, has a clear statement of its claim which is appropriate for the assignment prompt. The examples are apt but may not be as fully developed as those in a five paper. The examples are clearly connected to the claim. The four paper is basically free of mechanical errors.

These essays adequately fulfill the assignment. The claim is clear and the examples are appropriate. They are clearly written. These essays have one or more of the following weaknesses:

3
- the examples are thin, either in number or development,
- the examples are not clearly connected to the claim statement, and/ or
- the essays are superficial in their treatment of the question.

These essays have one or more of the following characteristics:

2
- they have no claim statement,
- they provide no specific examples to support the claim and attempt development through repeated generalizations,
- one of the examples contradicts the claim,
- at the end, the writer backs down from the claim position and/or
- mechanical errors prevent easy comprehension.

1
This score is for essays that mention the subject briefly, but otherwise have no redeeming features.
Peer Evaluation Form

Score:

General Comment:

Identify and Evaluate:

Title:

Claim Statement (Clear? Direct? Carefully expressed?):

Examples (List and evaluate each one. Are they clear? Concrete? Specific? Appropriate and connected to the claim statement?):
Some Sample Topics

“Fear always springs from ignorance”
- Emerson

“What is defeat? Nothing but education, nothing but the first step to something better.”
- Wendell Phillips

“the only foes that threaten America are the enemies at home, and these are ignorance, superstition, and incompetence.
- Elbert Hubbard

“The time to relax is when you don’t have time for it.”
- Sydney J. Harris

“The impossible is often the untried.”
- Jim Goodwin

Possible Prompts

GENERAL: Defend or refute the truth of this statement, using your readings, study, or observation as the basis of your opinion. Use illustrations to support your opinion.

BASED ON A SPECIFIC TEXT: Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Assume a position and using examples from the text and from your personal experience, write an essay in the next twenty minutes to support it.