Writing timed essays for the APUSH Exam can be stressful. You get only 35 minutes to plan and write the Long Essay Question (LEQ) and only 55 minutes to plan, read the docs, and write your Document Based Question (DBQ). The best preparation is to master the subject matter, but knowing the basic process and structure of a good essay will give you a head start. (This guidance applies to the basic structure of both the LEQ and the DBQ, but it does NOT address the document part of the DBQ. We’ll get to that later.)

* **READ THE PROMPT**. Underline and circle what the prompt is asking you to do. Brainstorm ideas on your paper (t-charts, cause/effect diagrams, venn, webs, whatever works for you). **READ THE PROMPT AGAIN**. Look for potential categories (A,B,C) and determine your argument (Y) and counter (X, if applicable). **READ THE PROMPT AGAIN. ANSWER THE PROMPT***. Really, sometimes students forget what question they are answering over the course of the essay. Stay laser-focused on ANSWERING ALL PARTS OF THE PROMPT. A good thesis statement will help.*
* Begin with a well-developed thesis statement that does three things:
* Directly answers all parts of the question and addresses the **HTS: Causation, Periodization, CCOT, or Compare/Contrast**. Remember, before AND after. Change AND Continuity. Compare AND Contrast.
* Takes a clear position (Y, in our “formula”). Don’t just parrot back the prompt.
* Establishes organizational categories (A, B, C) and perhaps a counter-argument (X).
* Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that does three things:
	+ Directly addresses the question and supports your position (Y) using one of your categories (A, B, C) or your counter (X).
	+ Takes a position. The topic sentence should always give you something to prove in the paragraph – it’s like a sub-thesis. If you don’t have a position to argue, you tend to merely list or describe factual information, losing focus on the specific question you are asked.
* Each paragraph should contain three components (the fourth \*\* is very nice to have but not essential):
	+ Topic sentence (components listed above)
	+ Relevant specific factual information (as much as you can USE – don’t list randomly. Think capital letters & numbers – names, dates, places, events, key terms from the reading guide.)
	+ Interpretative commentary (analysis) that states how and/or why the factual information supports the thesis (this should occur throughout the paragraph)
	+ \*\*Clincher sentence (ties the entire paragraph directly back to the thesis) **or** a transition statement (creates a link between paragraphs). You should fully develop your ideas by making direct connections between the factual information and your thesis throughout the paragraph, not just in its last sentence.
* The number of paragraphs should be dictated by the question and the organizational categories. Essays do not always have to be five paragraphs long. Just organize it somehow.
* A conclusion is not required, but it’s nice to have. Synthesis goes here, if you have time to hunt unicorns.
	+ Pull together the topic sentences of each paragraph (remind me how you proved your point using your categories). This doesn’t have to be long or fancy. DON’T EVER SAY “In conclusion,…” Just conclude.
	+ Directly answer the question (a reiteration of the thesis statement in somewhat different words). If you’ve finally figured out your REAL thesis, try it here. You can even box it and send me there from p.1
	+ Connect your argument (thesis) to an earlier or later development in US history, OR extend your thesis using a completely different theme than the ones in the prompt & your response. To hunt this unicorn successfully, you must EXPLAIN the connection in 2-3 good sentences, not just throw out an analogy. It’s worth 1 of the 6 points on the AP Exam, but **don’t sacrifice any other part of the essay for it**.