Essay Skill

Focus on the Question: What Is It Asking?

Along with the skills discussed in Chapter 1, you should develop a strategy for focusing on the specific issues to be addressed when preparing to write an essay. In most cases on the AP test, the free-response essay prompts are questions about a historical era. On occasion, however, there will be a quote or statement to be evaluated for its validity. If the historical problem is a statement, quickly jot down a series of questions that breaks the statement into its fundamental components. For example:

> "The American Revolution was the culmination of unavoidable mistakes and misunderstandings in England and America from 1763 to 1776."

To address this prompt effectively, you would first ask:
- Was the Revolution unavoidable?
- What were the major mistakes and misunderstandings?
- Were both sides equally responsible for them?

Posing such questions will help you to focus on the specific terms and/or issues that must be addressed to score high on the essay.

If, on the other hand, the prompt is a *question*, you should pose clarifying questions that will help you structure your answer.

For example:

> "How did the American Revolution transform European politics from 1775 to 1783?"

If this were the question to be addressed, you might first ask:
- What European countries were involved?
- What interest did each country pursue?
- How did the Revolution impact any existing European rivalries?
- How did the colonies take advantage of these developments?

Practicing the Skill

Applying the Skill

Look at the following statement and question, and develop a series of clarifying questions about each. Write your clarifying questions in your notebook.

1. British policy from 1763 to 1776 was "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations" designed to establish "an absolute tyranny" over the colonies.

   My clarifying questions are:

2. How was the colonial social and economic structure affected by the Revolution's ideology?

   My clarifying questions are: