The AP Biology Exam

Monday – May 12

Format

 The AP Exam consists of two parts. The first part consists of 63 multiple choice questions and 6 grid-in questions. You have 90 minutes to complete this section. The second part of the exam consists of 2 long free-response, or essay, questions and 6 short free-response questions. You must answer all 8 questions in 90 minutes. Due to the increased emphasis on quantitative skills and application of mathematical methods in the questions on both sections, you will be able to use a simple four-function calculator (with square root) on the entire exam. A formula list will be provided in your test booklet. The multiple-choice section accounts for half of your exam grade, and the free-response section accounts for the other half. The exam is administered on the second Monday in May of each year.

Section I: Multiple-Choice & Grid-in Questions

 Section I, Part A, consists of 63 multiple-choice questions that require you to apply the knowledge and science practices you acquired throughout the course. There will be 4 answer options, A – D. Scores are based on the number of questions answered correctly. Points are not deducted for incorrect answers or unanswered questions. Because points are not deducted for incorrect answers, you are encouraged to answer all multiple-choice questions. If you do not know the answer, you should eliminate as many choices as you can, and then select among the remaining choices.

Part B, includes 6 grid-in questions that require the integration of science and mathematical skills. For the grid-in responses, you will need to calculate the correct answer for each question and enter it in a grid in the grid-in section of your answer sheet as shown below.

Section II: Free-Response Questions

 There will be a mandatory 10 minute reading period in which you get to read the questions, sketch graphs, make notes, and plan your answers. You will not be allowed to write your final drafts until the reading period is over. You will answer 2 long free-response and 6 short free-response questions. It is suggested that you spend about 20 minutes on each long free-response and about 6 minutes on each short free-response. The number of pages available for each response should help you gauge how long your responses should be. Your responses should be in organized, well-balanced, and comprehensive prose form; outline form and unlabeled and unexplained diagrams alone are not acceptable. Do not spend time restating the questions or providing more than the number examples called for. For example, if you are asked to provide two examples, you will only earn credit for the first two examples you provide. Any additional examples will not be graded. You are to write your answers in blue or black ink, not pencil. Cross out any errors; crossed out work will not be scored.

The free-response section is scored by several hundred faculty consultants, including high school teachers and college instructors from all over the country who work in a central location to grade the essays. Each long free-response question is worth 10 points, and each short free-response question is worth 2-4 points. Your performance on any single question is evaluated independently of your other responses. Do not assume that information provided in one question will be considered during the grading of another. You should repeat information from question to question if it is necessary to illustrate your point.

Materials Needed for Test Day

•Sharpened #2 Pencils

•Pens with black or dark blue ink

•Basic 4-function calculator with square root function (one will probably be supplied for you)

•Watch

Grading

 Exams are graded on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best. Most colleges will accept a score of 3 or better as a passing score. If you receive a passing score, colleges may give you college credit (applied toward your bachelor’s degree), advanced placement (you can skip the college’s introductory course in biology and take an advanced course), or both. You should check with the biology departments at the colleges you’re interested in to determine their policy.

5 – Extremely Well Qualified



3 – Qualified

2 – Possibly Qualified

1 – No Recommendation

Tips for Writing AP Biology Free-Response Essays

Do’s

•The first thing that you should do is carefully read the question. Before writing an answer, the second thing you should do is read the question, and the third thing you should do is read the question. This has been made easy for you because there is now a 10 minute reading period included at the start of the Free-Response section of the exam. During this time period, you will be given the questions to read and to start planning/outlining your answers. After the 10 minute reading period you will receive your response booklet where you will record your answers.

•Outline your answers to avoid confusion and disorganization. Pay close attention to the verbs used in the directions (such as “describe”, “explain”, “compare”, “give evidence for”, “graph”, “calculate”, etc.). Thinking ahead helps to avoid scratch outs, asterisks, skipping around, and rambling.

•Write an essay. Outlines and diagrams, no matter how elaborate and accurate, are not essays and will not get you much, if any, credit by themselves. Exceptions: If part of an essay asks you to calculate a number such as a reaction rate, that part does not require an essay. But be sure to show how you got your answer by writing the formulas you are using, the values you have inserted into those formulas and display the proper units on the answer. If you are asked to draw a diagram in the answer, do so, but be sure to annotate it carefully and thoroughly.

•Define and/or explain the terms you use. Say something about each of the important terms you use. The AP Exam will not ask for a list of buzzwords. Use high-level vocabulary but use it in context. If you cannot remember a word exactly, take a shot at it anyways – get as close as you can. If you don’t have a name for the concept, describe the concept.

•Answer the parts of the question in the order called for. It is best not to skip around. Also, use the question’s labels (a, b, c, etc.) to identify the different parts in your answer. It is ok if your response is broken down into Part a, Part b, Part c, etc. This also makes it easier for the grader to follow.

•Write your answers below the actual questions. In your response booklet the questions are reprinted and you are given several lined pages to write your response for each question. If you do not use all of the lined pages for the first question, or any question, be sure to keep flipping the pages in the booklet until you see the next printed question to be answered.

•Write clearly and neatly. Unreadable answers will not receive credit.

•Answer the question thoroughly. Go into detail on the subject but also get right to the point. Be sure to include the obvious. Most points are given for the basics anyways (for example, “light is necessary for photosynthesis”). Address the question or part of a question directly with as much information as you need to appropriately answer the question.

•Use a ballpoint pen with black or dark blue ink. If your ink bleeds through to the other side of the paper, don’t write on the back of that page – go to the next page. It will make it easier for the reader to grade.

•Bring a watch to the exam so that you can pace yourself. You have 90 minutes for each section, pace yourself accordingly.

•Understand that the exam was written to be challenging. It is very likely that you will not know everything, but you will know something so relax and do the best you can. Just remember to write thorough answers.

•If you are asked to design an experiment, you should consider including these things: ◦Hypothesis and/or prediction – call attention to it by calling it by name (“my hypothesis is…”) or by using the “If…Then” structure. Tell what you expect to happen.

◦Identify the independent and dependent variables

◦Explain what data you will collect and how you will measure it

◦List the materials that will be used

◦Describe the procedure you will follow to complete the experiment

◦Describe how the data will be graphed and analyzed

◦Don’t hesitate to use the same experimental designs we used in our labs this year

•If you are asked to draw a graph, include these things: ◦Set up the graph appropriately with the independent variable along the x-axis and the dependent variable along the y-axis.

◦Mark each axis in equal increments

◦Label each axis with a name and units

◦If more than one curve is plotted, be sure to label each or make a legend

◦Give your graph an appropriate title

•Practice outlining and writing essays throughout the year!

Don’ts

•Don’t waste time on background information unless the question calls for historical development or historical significance. Answer the question – do not rewrite it!

•Don’t ramble. Get to the point, and don’t shoot the bull. Say what you know and go on to the next question. You can always come back if you remember something.

•Don’t use pencil, and don’t use pen with an ink color other than black or dark blue.

•Don’t scratch out excessively. One or two lines through the unwanted words is enough.

•Don’t panic or get angry because you are unfamiliar with the question. You probably have read or heard something about the subject, so take a deep breath, be calm, and think. If a question has several parts and you have no clue about one or two, don’t quit! Write whatever you know about the other parts of the question. Remember, every single point helps your grade.

•Don’t worry about spelling every word perfectly or using perfect grammar. These are not part of the standards the graders use. However, poor spelling, lousy grammar, and poor penmanship can prejudice a reader against you when he/she must make a close judgment call on your response.

•If you are given a choice of several topics to write about (for example, “describe 3 of the following 5 topics”), understand that only the first ones you mention will count.

•Don’t write introductory or closing paragraphs. This is not an English essay; it is an answer to a question!

•Don’t leave questions blank. Remember that each point you earn on a response helps your score, and there is no penalty for a wrong guess, baad spelig; or bad grammar.

•Make an effort on every question! And whatever you do, DON’T QUIT!