Advice for Answering Free Response Questions

Most people who take the Biology AP Exam do well on the objective questions. The same is not true of the essay or "free response" questions. Presently there are two long free response and six short free response questions on the Biology AP Exam, you must answer all of these. The essay questions account for 50% of the exam grade. It is generally felt that if a student does well on the essays he or she will do well on the objective questions.

The following is based upon advice given by experienced AP Exam readers.

1. Read the question three times; be sure you understand the question. Do not panic and rush into writing your response. You have a 10 minute pre-reading time to get organized.

2. Underline key parts of the question. Be sure you understand what the question asks. Most responses to AP essay questions are factually correct, however many do not answer the question that is asked. *Answer only what is asked, you won't get any points (even if what you say is correct) for information unrelated to the question.*

3. Organize your answer; use a table, outline or cluster diagram. When creating an organizer, ask yourself "What will I get points for?"

4. Do your best to address all parts of the question, do not spend your time writing a very detailed answer to one part and forget the other parts. (There is a maximum score for each section; you cannot get all possible points by answering only one part of a question. Often you get points for very obvious items such as definitions.)

5. One of the two LFR questions will be about one of the 13 AP labs. This question may involve graphing and/or experimental design.
   a. All graphs need to be labeled correctly (dependent/independent axes)
      * (identify lines & data points, label axes including units, include a graph title).
   b. Experimental design should include:
      * A testable hypothesis
      * A controlled variable(s)
      * An experimental variable(there should only be one experimental variable)
      * A clear description of what will be measured and how it will be measured
      * Description of how often observations will be made
      * Comment on sample size(more is better) and the need to repeat your study

6. Mechanics of writing
   a. Write complete sentences; simple sentences are OK.
      * Do not write an introduction or conclusion.
      * Do not worry about spelling or grammar
      * You get no credit for an outline, your response must be an essay.
      * Write with blue or black pen. Bring an extra pen to the exam.

7 Clearly explain what you know.
   a. Give explanations that show you know the concepts.
   b. Define biology terms and give examples.
   c. Many students know much more than they put down on the paper.