

Fox Curriculum

Curriculum design and instructional research

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WRITING PROTOCOL

ACE, Adapted

Answer. Cite something specific. Explain why it matters. A three-step constructed-response protocol, sharpened at the two steps where student writing actually fails.

LEVEL	High school, AP World History: Modern, AP United States History, AP European History
APPLIES TO	Short answer questions, document-based questions, long essay evidence
STATUS	Adaptation of an established protocol; the two qualifiers are original
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THE PROTOCOL

A · Answer

Answer the question that was asked, directly, in the first sentence. Not a restatement of the prompt and not a windup. If a reader cannot tell what the student's position is without reading further, the step has not been completed.

C · Cite something specific

Name a thing. A person, a date, a document, an event, a number, a place. Not a category, not a gesture at a body of evidence, and not the word evidence itself. If the citation could be dropped into an answer about a different century without changing, it is not specific.

E · Explain why it matters

State what the cited thing does for the claim. Not what it is, which the student has already supplied, and not a restatement of the answer. The step is complete when the sentence would collapse if the evidence were removed.

WHAT IS ADAPTED, AND WHY

The three-step spine is not mine. ACE, and its longer relative RACE, are established strategies in wide circulation in American secondary instruction, and I adopted the structure rather than inventing it. What is mine is the wording of the second and third steps, and that wording is the entire reason the protocol works in my classroom.

Step	Standard wording	Adapted wording, and the failure it fixes
A	Answer	Answer. Unchanged. This step is not where students fail.
C	Cite	Cite something specific. "Cite" reliably produces a gesture at a body of evidence: a period, a movement, a general trend. Naming the requirement as something specific forces a nameable, datable object, which is also what the scoring guides reward.
E	Explain	Explain why it matters. "Explain" reliably produces restatement of the evidence in different words, which earns nothing. Naming the requirement as why it matters forces the student to connect the evidence to the claim, which is the move being scored.

Both alterations attach to the same diagnosis. The standard protocol names three tasks and assumes the student knows what counts as completing them. Two of the three, they do not. The qualifiers are the instruction that was missing.

WHY ONE PROTOCOL ACROSS EVERY COURSE

Students taking more than one AP History course should not have to learn two vocabularies for the same task. The same three steps run across AP World History, AP United States History, and AP European History, so a student arriving in the second course starts from a structure they already own and can spend their attention on content rather than on relearning how to write an answer.

The protocol is deliberately short enough to be recalled under time pressure. A student in the last ten minutes of an exam does not consult a handout. Three steps, two of them carrying their own instruction, is the most that survives that moment.

HOW IT IS WIRED INTO ASSESSMENT

The protocol is not a poster. It is built into the scoring instruments students work from, so the wording of the steps and the wording of the rubric cannot drift apart.

Instrument	How the protocol appears
LEQ planning scaffold	The evidence row awards one point for two events that relate to the prompt with description, and two points for that plus specific detail, meaning who, what, when, and where. That split is the cite-something-specific step expressed as a scoring rule.
Short answer practice	Each part of a multi-part short answer question is planned in three labelled lines before drafting, one per step, so an incomplete answer is visible before it is written rather than after it is scored.

Instrument	How the protocol appears
Feedback	Feedback names the step that failed rather than the sentence that failed. A student is told they cited without specificity, or explained without connecting, which is actionable in a way that a margin comment on prose is not.

ATtribution

ACE and RACE are established strategies in wide circulation in American secondary instruction. The three-step structure is not my invention and I do not claim it. The adapted wording of the second and third steps is mine, as is the decision to carry a single protocol across every AP History course and to build the surrounding scaffolds, rubrics, and planning documents around it rather than leaving it on a wall.