What My Students Taught Me About their Essay Exam Mistakes

(and how to help them make fewer of them)
The Mistakes our Students Make

• In the chat list some of the common ways students lost points answering essay questions on exams besides not knowing the correct answers or grammar mistakes.
Pitfalls to multiple part essay questions

1. Students leave out parts of the question.

2. Students focus too heavily on one part of the question while not giving sufficient time to other parts of the question.

3. Students do not answer what is asked.
Sample Question

Question
Provide five reasons people do not vote. State your opinion of those reasons and provide counterarguments for those reasons.

Write in the chat in what ways you think students lost points on this question.
Where the Students went Wrong

1. Students provided their opinions or counterarguments for only some examples.
2. Students provided something other than their opinion for the second part of the question.
3. Students did not know what was meant by a counterargument.
4. Students left out part of the question.
The Fixes #1

1 Separate questions into their parts

A. Provide five reasons people do not vote.

B. State your opinion of those reasons.

C. Provide counterarguments for those reasons.
The Fixes #2

2. Providing Rubrics with the questions.

A. Provide 5 reasons people do not vote.
   (1 point for each reason for a total of 5 points)

B. State your opinion of those reasons.
   (1 point for your opinion about each reason for a total of 5 points)

C. Provide counterarguments for those reasons.
   (2 points for each counterargument for a total of 10 points)
3 Teach students to answer essay questions.

Provide five reasons people do not vote. State your opinion of those reasons and provide counterarguments for those reasons.
Step 1. Read through the question once.
Step 2 Underline key words in the question
Step 3 create an outline/graphic organizer
Why Students Run Out of Time on Essay Questions

In the chat write why you think your students run out of time on essay questions.
Running out of Time

1. Revising while writing instead of getting a first draft done.
2. Wondering off topic
3. Not being aware of time or having a sense of how to manage it
4. Allowing themselves to be distracted in online tests
Other Success Challenges

1. Not asking the meaning of words or expressions
2. Not understanding how to use online testing software

Fixes

1. Choose language for questions keeping in mind cultural diversity, ELL, and others who have difficulties with idiomatic or figurative language. Tell students they can ask for clarification in questions or look up word.
2. Give a chance to practice with test software.