

2020 AP Environmental Science Updates

Points of Emphasis for Students – Roy Lee

Hey students, hope you are safe and healthy in these unprecedented times. Here's a quick update for you guys taking the AP Environmental Science.

Obvious disclaimers : these are my personal thoughts about the exam. While probably more insightful than most, they are not “official” statements by the Collegeboard, nor should overturn anything stated by your school APES teachers. **Just some friendly tips about the upcoming test.**

<Exam Timing>

>Total of 2 FRQ questions with 25, 15 minutes to respond

For 2020 AP Environmental Science

25 and 15 minutes may go by much quicker than you expect, so manage your time wisely. Stick to short, coherent responses that are neat and tidy. Careful not to ramble on about what YOU want to talk about, but isn't necessarily what the question asks. REREAD the question multiple times (PLEASE!), make sure you are ANSWERING the question, without unnecessary fluff. You don't have time to revise so stick to what you feel confident in.

Unfortunately, the updated APES guidelines on the Collegeboard website doesn't give us much in terms of what to expect. So our best plan of action will be to try solving some questions from the past to formulate an idea about the test in the future. As the guideline suggests, you will probably be best served solving FRQ questions 1 and 2 from previous exams.

<General Thoughts>

> APES FRQ question topics can vary wildly due to the breadth of concepts covered by the course. The challenge of APES has always been managing the width, not necessarily the depth for each topic. Due to the online nature of the test, it is now possible for students to take it “open book”, meaning there is much less pressure on you to remember every tiny detail.

You must use this to your advantage. Make sure you are fully prepared on test day with your lecture notes next to you while reading the question. Before answering, take a couple of minutes to quickly scan and reread relevant chapters in your

lecture notes and organize your thoughts. It might be useful for you to try this strategy with previous FRQ tests. Read the question. Find the lecture notes that cover the topic. Organize your thoughts and write coherently. Double check with my responses to make sure you are on the same page.

A common mistake that I see in students that take APES FRQs is answering in vague, general terms. This has always a problem in previous exams, but will likely be much more exacerbated in this year's test; considering your graders will expect and grade your answers assuming you had all the resources you needed next to you at the time of the exam.

For example, let's say you were given a scenario where a corporation is planning to build a large chicken farm next to a river. When asked to discuss possible environmental problems that can arise, you cannot answer by saying things like "there will be a lot of pollutants that are released in the river."

You must be specific in your answers and go into detail about why this is

problematic. The best answers will incorporate discussions about "nitrogenous wastes from fecal matter" released into the river due to "runoff" leading to "eutrophication".

Additional problems can be discussed, for example, of how "antibiotic use" can lead to "increased resistance of pathogens", resulting in a "treadmill effect" of ever increasing doses of the drugs. General, broad sweeping terms are not scored favorably in APES FRQs.

Finally, students often wonder about how much they have to explain or define terms in their answers. Going back to the previous example, you do not need to define what "runoff" or "eutrophication" means; your graders are fully aware of what they are. **Do not spend**

precious time writing definitions, unless it helps you formulate an argument.

Specifically, the updated guidelines for this year specifies this point, saying "Students will not be asked to provide (nor will be granted points for providing) basic definitions – rather, the question will focus on environmental concepts, processes and models, and how they interrelate and apply to environmental scenarios."

Unit 8 (Aquatic, Terrestrial Pollution) and Unit 9 (Global Change) is excluded this year. This means that a significant chunk of climate change will not be discussed. However, many topics in chapters 1 through 7 have touched upon this idea of atmospheric change and problems with

increasing carbon footprints. So be wary of skipping them altogether. Make sure you have at least a basic understanding of why carbon dioxide release can be problematic in the future.

My advice is to review the topics related to Unit 4 (Populations), Unit 6 (Energy Resources and Consumption), and Unit 7 (Atmospheric Pollutants). Be prepared for possible graphs related to population growth and carrying capacity. Problems related to nonrenewable energy has always been an important topic. Make sure you are aware of the problems and be prepared to discuss alternative energy strategies that reduces environmental impact. You may be asked to tie this in with discussions about how atmospheric pollutants can cause various health problems in humans.

The list is not exhaustive, so your best bet is to solve as many questions (both MCQ and FRQs!) as you can to ensure your foundational knowledge is strong, allowing you to think on the spot. Good luck and have fun!