Writing the Response

The purpose of the SAQ is to test your knowledge over specific historical events and themes. Considering you will be given only one page on which to answer a 3-part question, your response must be precise and accurate, making every word count. Follow the guidelines below in order to successfully write a SAQ response.

1. **Respond to the Prompt**

The grader should be able to know what the question is just by reading the response. **Use as much of the wording from the prompt as possible when crafting the response.** This also helps avoid the very common mistake of writing off-topic.

   If the prompt asks for a continuity over time, use wording that demonstrates the passing of time (ex: "throughout the 19th and 20th centuries;" "during the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties;" etc.).

   If the prompt asks for a change, make sure to use words that indicate change, such as "before" and "after."

   If the prompt asks for a comparison of two topics, make sure to refer to both topics in the response, and use comparative terms such as 'less than,' "more severe," "equally," etc.

   Finally, if the prompt asks about a stimulus (text or image), do not ignore it-refer to the stimulus in the response!

2. **Use Content-Specific Vocabulary**

The purpose of the SAQ response is to demonstrate specific historical knowledge. Therefore, **vague statements or universal truisms must be avoided.** If your answer could be applied to another place and time and still be accurate, the response is too vague and will not earn credit. Your response must feature **specific** historical evidence in order to demonstrate knowledge. Do this by using content-specific vocabulary and as many specific details as possible, including names and dates. For example, instead of writing "visitors bowed before the emperor to show respect," write "foreigners from tributary states kowtowed before the Han emperor as a sign of submission."

3. **Provide a Complete Explanation**

A common mistake students make in writing SAQ responses is not providing a complete explanation and leaving the reader to fill in the gaps. If your response is not a thorough explanation, no credit is earned. When writing the response, **assume the person grading it knows nothing about history.**

So, instead of writing only, "The decline of the Roman Empire in Western Europe led to feudalism," which assumes the grader knows all about the decline of the Roman Empire and what feudalism is, write, "The decline of the Roman Empire in Western Europe led to feudalism as political power became decentralized and peasants turned to local landlords for protection, offering servitude in return."

Also, write your answer using complete sentences---no bullet points or outlines.