

**Strategies for answering Question 26  
on the June 2012  
New York State English Regents**

In this section of the test, the instructions will ask you to write a single paragraph about both passages (excerpt and poem). The instructions will be something like this:

Write a well-developed paragraph in which you use ideas from **both** Passage I (the excerpt) and Passage II (the poem) to establish a controlling idea about **(the exam will tell you the controlling idea)**. Develop your controlling idea using specific examples and details from **both** Passage I and Passage II.

What do they mean by “establish a controlling idea” and if they ask you to establish one, why do they **tell** you what the controlling idea is? If you replace the word “establish” with “**demonstrate**,” or “**show evidence for**,” these instructions make more sense. In either case, they’ve done some of the work for you by telling you what the controlling idea is.

The teachers who grade this paragraph will be looking for several things that you get right so that they can smile, give the paragraph a “2” (full score, the highest you can get) and then move on to grade the next exam. Your paragraph will be read, to be sure, but teachers will be scanning for several key elements that tell them that you understand the texts, the task, and can write a “well-developed” paragraph.

Teachers will be looking for the following elements to give your paragraph a full score of 2:

- Present a well-developed paragraph
  - *Make it make sense. Don't ramble – follow instructions*
- Demonstrates a basic understanding of the texts
  - *It's critical that you read and understand the passages and your paragraph reflects this*
- Establishes an appropriate controlling idea
  - *Show evidence how the controlling idea is communicated in both texts and is the most important idea in both passages*
- Supports the controlling idea with clear and appropriate details from both texts
  - *Teachers will be looking for quotes and line numbers. For example, “In Passage I, the author says that “...many people are frightened by snakes” (line 25).”*
  - *Overall, if you find a sentence or phrase in the text/poem that supports your point, direct the reader (the teacher) to that particular section of the excerpt. This shows the reader that you not only have something to say, but you can back it up with evidence.*

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- Uses language that is appropriate
  - *This is a formal essay, not a text message. Forget about shorthand (cuz, u, LOL, etc.). English teachers are serious about language and will not be impressed with your essay if they read words like these.*
- May exhibit errors in conventions that do not hinder comprehension
  - *A misspelled word is not a “death sentence,” but make every attempt to spell a word correctly or at least spell it so that it won’t be read as a totally different word than what you intend. However, points are **not** taken off automatically if a word is misspelled.*
  - *Bad handwriting, however, **may lower your grade** for a simple reason: Teachers are under a lot of pressure to get through a lot of exams and the clock is ticking, e.g. we need to get all the exams graded by a certain date and time. If a teacher has to re-read a paragraph because of sloppy handwriting, you have already subconsciously antagonized that teacher and that’s not the position you want to be in. Remember – you are trying to **impress** the teacher, **not irritate** him or her! Enough said; write clearly.*

First, some **overall** suggestions (these would also apply to Question 27 as well):

1. Avoid making your paragraph into a personal statement of your own philosophy by using phrases like “...I think that...” or “...In my experience...”.
  - a. Be confident and assertive! You have something to say about a topic, so just say it directly.
    - i. This is your opportunity to show (or at least pretend) that you have extraordinary insight into the human character. Use sentences like “Relationships can be rewarding or devastating, but they are what make us human.” Instead of a sentence like “In my experience, relationships can be rewarding or sometimes not so good, but I think that they are what make us like, you know, human.” Big difference between the two examples; the first one is written by someone who is confident and the second example is wimpy and vague.

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2. Avoid “fillers”. Fillers are words and phrases that are the equivalent of a basketball player bouncing the ball 15 times at the foul line before finally shooting the ball through the hoop! Fillers are easily spotted by the reader and put you at a disadvantage as a writer. Why? It gives the impression that you’re “stalling for time” because you don’t know what to say. Here’s are examples of **how not to start a paragraph**:
  - a. What I’m going to be writing about today is...(no one over the age of 8 would ever start a paragraph with these words).
  - b. I’m going to write a well-developed paragraph in which I will use ideas from **both** Passage I (the excerpt) and Passage II (the poem) to establish a controlling idea...
3. Make your paragraph not too long and not too short.
  - a. You don’t have the time to fill your paragraph with superfluous<sup>1</sup> sentences that don’t propel your ideas along, and teachers certainly don’t want to read your random thoughts (no offense). Make every sentence count and if what you want to write doesn’t directly relate to your idea, leave it out.
4. Don’t waste time and don’t leave early.
  - a. Be focused during the exam. Clear your mind of anything other than your task, which is passing the exam and graduating from high school. Nothing else matters during these three hours (or more). **NOTHING!**
  - b. **Do not**, under any circumstances, think that if you’ve finished the exam and you have time left that it’s OK to leave. You can always make an answer better and you can always check your answers on the multiple choice section.
  - c. It’s natural to feel like you just “have to get out of here or I’m gonna explode!!” It’s OK to have these feelings, just **not** OK to act on them. Accept that it’s not natural for you or any other teenager to sit still and quiet for any length of time, and also accept the fact that, during these 3 hours, **you need to play by someone else’s rules**. Is it fair? No. Is life fair? Hardly. Will it kill you to stay and check your work? I don’t think so, and neither do you. Enough said.

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<sup>1</sup> Being beyond what is required or sufficient

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Here are some guidelines, suggestions, and examples from other students' essays for your Question 26 essay:

1. Start with a statement about the controlling idea, about 1-2 sentences at the most. Do not make reference to either of the passages – you will do this later in the paragraph.
  - a. Examples (the controlling idea is *creativity*):
    - i. Even when the product of a person's creativity is imperfect and artistically unimportant, it still has significance for him or her. The artist, Jade Snow, in Passage I, has a passion for pottery....
    - ii. Creativity isn't so much a skill you are said to be born with, but an adventure you can discover in your life. In both passages, there are stories told about two people and their strong eye for art and its natural beauty. In Passage I, Jade Snow is a college student...
2. Briefly recap the key ideas and events in **Passage I**.
  - a. Examples (the controlling idea is *parting*):
    - i. In Passage I, the narrator is leaving his old life of drudgery for a university education in English. The narrator clearly has consuming dreams about his new life, as support by his statement, "My dream had come true ... My mind had wings and it travelled far away."
    - ii. In the first passage, the narrator is leaving home to become a scholar at a prestigious university. He and his family are excited about his acceptance due to the hard lives they had to live.
3. Continue with Passage I for a few more sentences. Stay focused on what your task is, which is demonstrating how the text relates to the controlling idea. Don't get side-tracked. Focus. When you've finished writing about Passage I, begin the next sentence with a **transition** such as "Similarly..." or "As the author writes in Passage II..."
4. Briefly recap the key ideas and events in **Passage II**.
  - a. Examples
    - i. Similarly, the speaker's daughter in Passage 2 is parting. The speaker still views his girl as a young child that needs to be protected, but he also realizes that it is time for her to leave.
    - ii. In the poem in Passage II, the narrator describes watching his daughter embarking on a new adventure.

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5. Conclude your paragraph by re-phrasing your opening sentence. Tie the two passages together in a well-written sentence that shows you understand what you've just read and what you've just written.

a. Examples:

- i. Parting with a loved one is not a simple task and how one departs helps hold their memory until they can meet again.
- ii. Parents are devastated when their children leave them, but they realize it is for the better and they seek to support their children in this important step in their child's life.
- iii. Although the creations of the people in both the passage and the poem were artistically imperfect, these creations captured a moment or feeling in time and were very special and significant for each of them.