COMMENT MARKS FOR THE FIRST TEST

See also general comments on test taking on page 2

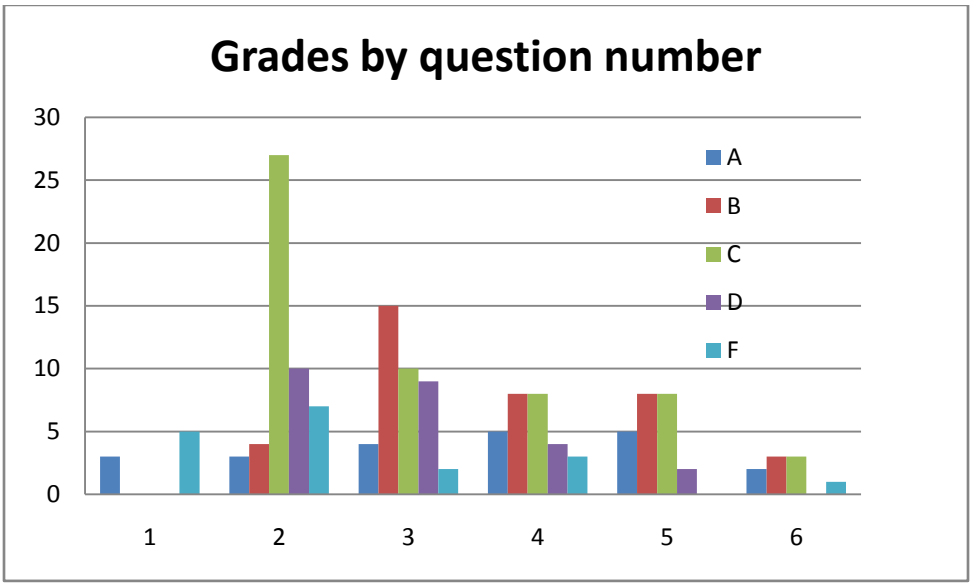
You are going in circles and not advancing your argument; redundant

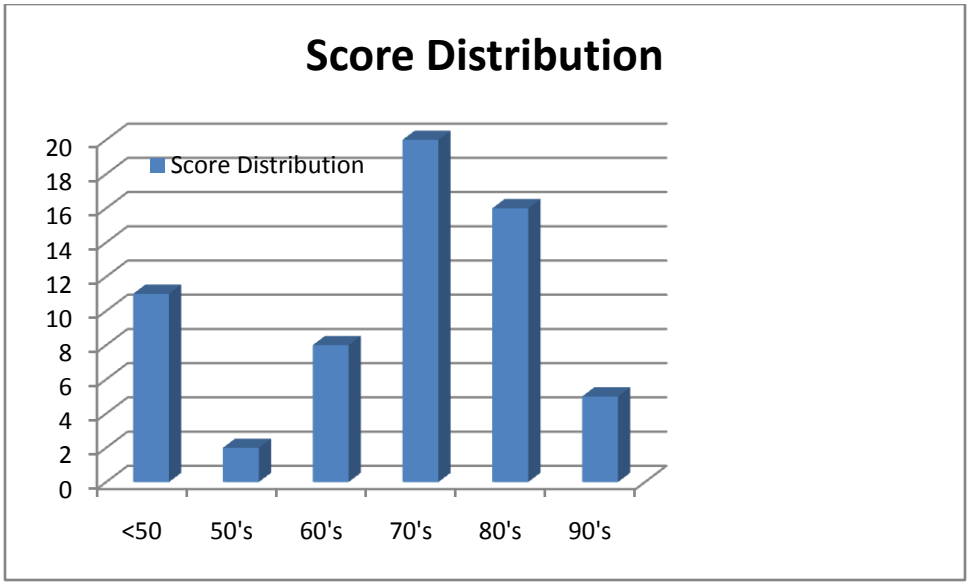
Symbol used by the ancient Minoans to represent their sacred animal (the bull).

1. I need to paint a picture from your words alone
2. Give examples to illustrate your argument (= evidence)
3. What about the 2nd half of the question?
4. You are answering a question, but not the one I asked.
5. I don't see the connection.
6. See graphbook (http://www.lockshinlab.org/graphbook/contents.htm). Which is the controlling variable?
7. What is the logic or mechanism?
8. You are wasting time with an irrelevant introduction.
9. What is the evidence for this argument?
10. You are drifting off the topic.
11. What is an alternative explanation?
12. Be more specific. You are on the right track, but this is vague.
13. You assume what you are trying to prove.

In general, DEFINE YOUR TERMS

#5: The questions asked, "What was the strongest evidence from the biology that Darwin encountered…" It did not say "from the geology".





GENERAL RULES FOR TEST TAKING

1. **Be sure you understand the question being asked.** Most questions have one major point, a principle or mechanism of action that you are asked to explain. Look for what that will be. Don't take the simplest possible interpretation of the question without asking if there is more.
2. **Define your terms.** Many students begin writing without being sure of what they are going to say. They end up drifting around the topic or being very vague. If you define the important terms that you intend to discuss, this will both sharpen your focus on the issue and guide the grader into seeing your focus.
3. **Be precise, clear, and illustrative.** Your examples should illustrate or defend your argument. They must be so clear that I will be able to understand and accept the argument from your statements alone. I cannot read into your answer what you did not say, or add from my own knowledge what you hope I will recognize. I NEED TO BE ABLE TO PAINT A PICTURE (DRAW A GRAPH) FROM YOUR DESCRIPTION ALONE.
4. **Don't waste time with irrelevant introductions.** Ask yourself, are you truly answering the question? See #5 and #6.
5. **Do not lose focus.** If you have started your answer addressing #1 and #2, refer back to your opening sentences to be sure that you are continuing to address the primary issue. Many students meander from the topic. A good answer usually starts by the student's stating the proposition that he or she will defend; progressing in a linear fashion to defend the proposition with appropriate argument or examples; addressing exceptions (see #6) if necessary; and ending with a conclusion or final evaluation of the student's position. I can often assign a tentative grade at the end of the first sentence, because the truly sharp student has stated the essential issue and indicated the direction that he or she will take.
6. **Be sure that you answer all parts of the question.** Most questions come in several parts, asking, for instance, if there are exceptions or alternatives. Students lose credit by answering only the first part of the question and ignoring the alternatives.

These rules are not limited to science courses. They are part of clear thinking and clear exposition. If you apply them you will see improvement in most courses.