

Writing for Exams: Hints

Strategies for Writing Essay Tests

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1. Do not start writing immediately.
2. Analyze the question that you answer by underlining the cue words and key words.
3. Use a writing process as much as possible within the constraints of the time limit. Try to allot time to plan and revise. For a one-hour test of one question, take about 10 minutes to jot down preliminary ideas about content and organization, and save about 10 minutes to reread, revise and edit your answer. If you feel blocked, try free writing to get your hand and your thoughts moving.
4. Support any generalizations with specifics.
5. Beware of "going off the topic". Respond to the cue words and key words in the question, and do not try to reshape the question to conform to what you might prefer to write about. Remember, your reader expects a clear line of presentation and reasoning that answers the given question.

<http://ruby.fgcu.edu/courses/10251/stressay.html>

Six Guidelines for Taking Essay Exams

Six Guidelines for Taking Essay Exams [This is for non-book times exams, but I have included it for your later use. Perhaps it will help you minimize your time spent developing your essay.]

1. Organize around a clear focus, one that is limited enough to cover in the time allotted and that allows inclusion of all the material the teacher will expect to find. This focus should be expressed in a thesis statement.
2. Outline the answer. Know the three or four points to be covered to be sure that they all develop, explain, or prove the thesis statement.
3. Come to the point quickly, perhaps even beginning with the thesis statement.
4. Stick to the subject. Telling everything isn't expected. The test is to select, organize, and analyze major points.
5. Be thorough. Do not leave out anything important to the defense of the thesis statement.
 - A. Support generalities with specific and relevant evidence.

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Guidelines for Essay Questions:

_____ **OUTLINE** - Make an outline of sufficient detail first? Does it follow logically and do the pieces fit together? Have you used it to better organize your essay?

_____ **HEADINGS** - Headings are not required but if you have problems with organization I would strongly suggest them. Are major divisions of the paper clearly identified with headings and subheadings? Do they accurately describe that section of the paper? Use the outline to help you to identify the major areas for the headings.

_____ **ORGANIZATION** - Is there some type of logical progression of thought/theory/material? Are there significant gaps or missing parts? Does the organization help or hinder the readers' flow? Do paragraphs present a coherent theme?

_____ **TRANSITIONS** - Does your introductory paragraph, for the essay and for each section of it, tell the reader what you are up to? Is your ending paragraph concise and clear - are you summarizing the major points of the previous section or passage? Do individual paragraphs exhibit good transition from one thought into another? Are transitions smooth?

_____ **DATA** - How effectively are numbers presented? Are exhibits such as graphs, charts, figures or other visual aids used where they contribute to the readers understanding of the paper? How do they relate to your text? Is the source of the data cited appropriately?

_____ **SPELLING** - "No quarter!" - Enough said... At best, keep a dictionary and thesaurus by your side. At worst, learn to use a spell checker. Don't hand in a paper without using it.

_____ **WORD CHOICE** Words are important! They give the reader a sense of how deeply you know your subject. Are technical terms used or abused? Is your vocabulary varied or boring? Are you using the terminology learned in this course to explain your thoughts? View writing as an opportunity to expand your vocabulary. Use a thesaurus and your text glossary!!!

_____ **GRAMMAR** Are you following the rules of good grammar? Subject-Verb-Object agreement; fragments; run-ons; punctuation; it's/its'; complete sentences; capitalization. Can the reader understand you?

_____ **COVERAGE** - Have you accomplished your objective? Is there evidence that you have read both widely and deeply? Do you discuss all sides of controversial issues? Is the relevant theory used as a framework for your analysis? Do you draw historical comparisons and make predictions as appropriate?

_____ **FOOTNOTES/CITATIONS** - Does your reference scheme work to tie your statement to its attributed source? **NO PLAGIARISM ALLOWED** (no copying); when in doubt, reference.

_____ **WORKS CITED** - Follow the assigned style (Usually either MLA or APA.) Are your references at an appropriate level or are they so technical that you didn't get much out of it? Are your references current? Recent references are usually better than dated ones (except classics).

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_____ MLA or APA or Chicago STYLE - The goal of this requirement is to get you to look up a style and follow it. Are you following the style as required? The St. Martin's Guide to Writing or any good College Handbook should be part of your personal library.

[_____ SUMMARY ABSTRACT Your abstract should provide a brief summation of your research question and your conclusions. It should be labeled as the Summary Abstract, written on a single page, and attached to the front of your paper. Mainly for writing papers]

_____ WRITING STYLE - Does your paper hold the interest of the reader? Is your paper a pleasure to read or a pain to endure? Do your thoughts fit together well? Do your thoughts flow well? Is your writing choppy or smooth? sophisticated or crude? varied or monotonous? provocative or bland? effective or incoherent?

_____ OVERALL IMPRESSION - Good writing is more than the sum of its parts; synergy is everything! A well-written essay is a work of art that deserves global, as well as specific, assessment.

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Cue Words Found in Questions for Essay Tests

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Analyze: means to separate something into parts and then discuss the parts and their meanings.

Clarify: means to make clear, often by giving a definition of a key term and by using examples to illustrate it.

Classify: means to arrange in groups on the basis of shared characteristics.

Compare and Contrast: means to show similarities and differences.

Criticize: means to give your opinion concerning the good points and the bad points of something.

Define: means to give the definition of something and thereby to separate it from similar things.

Describe: means to explain certain features to make clear an object, procedure, or event.

Discuss: means to consider as many elements as possible concerning an issue or event.

Evaluate: means to give your opinion about the value of something.

Explain: means to make clear or intelligible something that needs to be understood or interpreted.

Illustrate: means to give examples of something.

Interpret: means to explain the meaning of something.

Justify: means to show or prove that something is valid or correct.

Prove: means to present evidence that cannot be refuted logically or without other evidence.

Relate: means to show the connections between two or more things.

Review: means to reexamine, summarize, or to reprise something.

Show: means to point out or demonstrate something.

Summarize: means to repeat briefly the major points of something.

Support: means to argue in favor of something.