

Essay Tests

Preparing for Essay Tests:

Long - term Preparation

- ✓ **Read the course description and syllabus.**
 - Write down the course goals and topics and any repeated themes.
 - Write down any assumptions and biases that may be either stated or implied.
 - Note: As you read assignments and listen to lectures and discussions, ask yourself how the ideas presented relate to these themes.
- ✓ Learn as much as you can about the **content and grading criteria** of upcoming tests from your professor.

Short - term Preparation

- ✓ Start a week or two before the test
 - **Look over your notes and the chapter headings of your readings**
 - Gather main ideas from the major topics for the material covered.
 - **Note any relationships among the topics.** These are often good material for essay questions.
 - ❖ Example: In a history course, you may find that two political movements are similar that you might need to compare and contrast on an essay test. It sometimes helps to picture such relationships by creating a chart of the related elements.

TIPS:

- For each major topic, create a summary sheet of all the relevant factual data that relates to that topic.
- Review actively: integrate notes, text, and supplementary information into diagrams, charts, outlines, tables, or simply written paragraph summaries of the information.
- Use your own words: make these summary sheets personally meaningful and show them to your professor to make sure you're on the right track.

Taking Essay Tests:

Before you write ...

- ✓ **Budget your time according to the point value** of each question. Allow time for proofreading after you finish.
- ✓ **Read all essay questions before you start to write.** Underline key words (e.g., compare, explain, justify, define) and make sure you understand what you are being asked. Begin with the question that seems easiest to you. This will help reduce anxiety and facilitate clear thinking.
- ✓ **Make sure you understand what the question is asking.**
- ✓ **Create a rough outline.**
 - List quickly as many ideas and facts as you can remember by recalling your relationship charts and summary sheets.
 - Number your points in the order in which you want to present them, highlighting main issues with supporting details and examples.
 - Note: As you are working on one question, if you think of ideas and examples that you can apply to other questions, jot them down so you won't forget them.

While you write...

- ✓ **Come up with a definite, clear sentence that directly answers the question.**
- ✓ **Follow your outline:** provide specific examples, supportive facts, and relevant details.
- ✓ Use the technical **vocabulary** of the course.
- ✓ **Write legibly.**
- ✓ **If your mind goes blank, relax and brainstorm for a few moments about the topic.** Recall pages from your texts, particular lectures, class discussions to trigger your memory about ideas relevant to the question.

After you write...

- ✓ **Re-read your answers!** Make any additions that are necessary for clarity and completeness.
- ✓ **Check for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.**

Analyzing Returned Essay Tests:

- **Read all comments and suggestions.**
 - Be sure you understand the grader's criticisms/discuss them with your grader so you understand his/her expectations.
- ✓ **Determine your weaknesses.**
 - Evaluate your understanding - Where did most of the information your instructor expected in your essay come from? (Lectures, texts, etc.)
 - Was there any course content tested which you did not anticipate? Did your grader want more detailed information than you had expected?
- ✓ **Evaluate your test-taking procedure .**
 - Did you wait too long to prepare for the test?
 - Did you misread or misunderstand any of the questions?
 - Did you run out of time?
 - Did you organize your ideas before you began to write?
 - Did you proofread?
- ✓ **Evaluate your anxiety level.**
 - Did you have any problems with anxiety or blocking during the test?
 - Were you too anxious to concentrate on the questions and your responses?
 - Did you forget ideas and information which you studied well?
- ✓ **Reorganize your study approach** based on your evaluation of your weaknesses.
 - Ask yourself what you would have had to do: to prepare, to think, to behave, to feel - to do well on this test.
 - Develop a study plan which incorporates these insights.
- ✓ **Get help if you need it.** Arrange to talk to your instructor, hire a tutor, join a study group, visit the writing center...whatever seems most useful to you.