



Essay Exam Strategies



Students who are successful on essay exams usually:

Predict Questions

Anticipate possible questions using the themes and objectives identified on your course outline and in lectures. Think about different ways questions could be asked. For example, could you compare and contrast, analyze, examine, justify, describe, prove, and illustrate each topic?

Practice Writing with Time Constraints

Find out how much time you will have to answer each question, then practice writing essays on the topics you've predicted. If you have a lot of potential questions and limited time, create outlines containing key points and supporting details. Even if the actual exam questions are different, you'll be able to answer similar questions more quickly and easily.

Use Traditional Essay Format

Your essays should have an introductory paragraph which includes a thesis or statement of purpose and an outline of your key points; a body of paragraphs each containing a key idea, supporting statements and examples; and a concluding paragraph to summarize.

Answer All Parts of the Question

Read the question carefully; underline key words and number each part of the question. Successful answering involves understanding the components involved, using vocabulary specific to the discipline, and providing appropriate examples. Stop writing periodically and check to make sure you are staying focused on the question and answering all parts adequately.



Students who are successful on essay exams usually avoid:

Starting to Write Immediately

When the exam begins take time to read the questions carefully. Jot down a few ideas for each question to help decide which you can answer best. Plan a point-form outline for each question you choose. This process could take several minutes. Don't compare yourself to other students who begin writing quickly; a reasonable amount of planning time often produces a more organized, concise, and thorough answer.



Running Out of Time

Budget the amount of time you have to spend on each question based on value. For example, if you have three questions each worth 10 marks, plan to spend equal time per question. Part of your time per question should include drafting an outline and proof-reading your essay.