

Essay Exams

I. Why are Essay Examinations used by College Instructors?

An Essay question challenges students to filter large amounts of information, determine what is important and justify what you think is important. Essay exams force you to analyze, criticize course ideas, and present your findings in a written, logical, and understandable manner.

Your answer should reflect the following:

1. A working knowledge of the concepts presented in the course.
2. An understanding of the connections, comparisons, contrasts, and cause-effect relations.
3. A demonstration of the ability to synthesize information and present it in a logical, Understandable manner.
4. Your own opinions based upon your ability to think critically and analytically about a historical issues.

II. How Does one Prepare to Take an Essay Examination?

To do well on an essay examination, a student must complete all reading assignments, review his/her class notes, and think of questions that you would ask, if you were the instructor. The following are some additional recommendations to try:

1. Do the reading assignments as outlined on your syllabus and integrate your class notes with your textbook reading assignments. This should be done on a regular basis, preferably the same day after the class meets. **DO NOT TRY TO MASTER THE NECESSARY INFORMATION THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXAMINATION.**
2. Attend class, take careful notes, and participate in class discussions.
3. Organize small study groups with other classmates to review course material. Educational research indicates that students teaching students results in effective learning.
4. Do not memorize meaningless facts. Dates are not important. The color of an individual's coat is not important. What is important to know are the concepts in addition, to major issues. Focus on the cause-effect relationships of the important events.

III. The Day of the Examination

- A. Every instructor establishes regulations that are to be followed on exam day.
FOLLOW THEM!
- B. Read the examination in its entirety before you attempt to answer any question.
1. Observe the point value associated with each section of the examination. This is an indication as to how much time you spend on each section. The more a question is worth; the more time you spend with your answer.
 2. Since you have a choice as to which question or questions you wish to answer, read each question carefully; list your ideas for each question before deciding which question to answer. The “easy” question may turn out to be the hardest one to answer. Think out your answer before you begin to write. Under no circumstance, think of the answer as you write. Acknowledge what you know about the question rather on what you do not know.
 3. The following words will afford you the opportunity to focus on the answers for the examination:

a. Information Words

1. These words assist you to identify what know about the question asked (Who, what, when, where, how, and why).
2. Others words to watch for as indicators for information:
 - a. **Define.**
 - b. **Explain:** Why or how something happened.
 - c. **Illustrate:** Describe examples and how they are related to the subject.
 - d. **Summarize:** Explain briefly the major ideas about the subject on which you are writing.
 - e. **Outline:** Trace the events of a given topic.

b. Relation Words

1. These words ask you to demonstrate how things are connected.
2. Some words that you should note:
 - a. **Compare:** Cite the similarities between two or more events

b. Contrast: Cite dissimilarities between two more items.

c. Apply: Demonstrate how an idea or concept relates to a specific event.

d. Cause: Explain how or why a particular event occurs

c. Interpretation Words

1. These words require you to defend your ideas or opinions and support them by concrete examples

2. Definitions, concepts discussed in class, or research are used to substantiate your opinion.

3. Words that you should note:

a. Prove or justify: Require examples to explain how or why an item is valid.

b. Evaluate, respond, assess: Requires that you state your opinion on the subject of the question asked as good or bad. Use examples and the reasons to justify your answer.

c. Support: Requires that you cite reasons or evidence to justify your beliefs.

d. Analyze: Necessitates that you focus on the why or how or what of the question.

e. Argue: Choose a position and defend it against any other.

IV. Planning and Writing Your Answers

A. Manage your time. Do not spend too much on one answer. An instructor designs an examination to be comprehensive. If you should run out of time, list the remaining ideas that you would have incorporated in the answer.

B. **The Identification Section** of the exam require short answers with no more than two sentences. Always try to answer, why or how is the identification term important. Answer the items that you know. Skip over those that you do not immediately recognize or recall. Many times in answering the major essay questions, the identification item that you could not answer may suddenly become recognizable.

C. **The Major Essay Questions.** Before you begin writing the answer, develop a mental outline on what you plan to write. As you proceed with your answer, as new insights develop, do not be afraid to insert them on the left or right margins as well as the top of the page. However, be sure to use some means to alert the reader as to where the data is to be inserted. Many times the outline for an answer can be found in the composition of the question.

1. Do not use “filler” or any irrelevant information to take up space. Be specific and write a comprehensive answer. Stick to the point that you wish to make.
2. Do not take the reader for granted that he knows what you are trying to convey with your answer.
3. Be neat, write legibly and proofread your **Bluebook**. Proofreading your answers could enable you to include additional data that could make a difference with your examination grade.
4. Focus on what you know, not on what you do not. .