



Learn how to prepare for your short answer and essay exams.

LONG-TERM PREPARATION

Read the course syllabus. Make note of any themes or connections you notice. Check with your instructor to see if he or she agrees with the connections you have made. Learn from instructors and other resources about the form and content of upcoming tests, including grading criteria.

SHORT-TERM PREPARATION

Review your notes and reading assignments 1-2 weeks before the test. Make a list of main ideas or themes that your instructor covered in class. Note relationships between ideas; they may be clues to possible essay questions! For each idea or concept, create a summary sheet of relevant data.

Review the topics actively by integrating notes, text, and supplementary information (e.g. diagrams). Show your instructor your review sheets to make sure you are on the right track.

Generate a list of possible questions using your relationship charts and summary sheets. Outline answers to as many of these questions as time permits. Create a chart before tackling comparison and contrast questions that are often found on essay tests.

BEFORE YOU WRITE

Budget your time, spending more on questions that are worth more points. Allow time for reviewing and proofreading at the end. Read carefully, looking at all essay questions before you write. Pay attention to key words such as compare, explain, justify, and define. Ask your instructor for clarification if you don't understand a question. Start off easy. It might seem obvious to answer the easier questions first, but keeping this in mind can help you manage your time.

Make an outline. Quickly list the ideas and facts you want to include. Number the points in the order you want to present them. Be sure to distinguish main topics from supporting examples.

WHILE YOU WRITE

State a definite, clear thesis. Include it within the first few sentences of your answer. Follow your outline. Be specific with examples and details.

When time is up for a given question, move on to the next one. Partially answering all questions is better than fully answering some and not answering others at all. If you're running out of time, write an outline for the rest of the answer. The grader might be able to give you partial credit for what you have written.

AFTER YOU WRITE

Read through your answers. Make any necessary additions. Proofread. Check for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.