

How to Prepare for an Essay Exam

1. **DON'T MERELY MEMORIZE MATERIAL:** Don't study for total recall of names, dates, facts, and figures as you might for a multiple choice test.
2. **MERMORIZE VERBATIM:** At least some key phrases, definitions, or short passages. Also, learn main ideas, key terms, steps in an argument, stages in a process, etc. These will give an authoritative air to your answer.
3. **TAKE NOTES:** As you read write down the main ideas from each section. This will save you a lot of time when you go back to review for the exam.
4. **ANTICIPATE EXAM QUESTIONS:** If, for example, you have studied both the fall of Greece and the fall of Rome since the last test, you can anticipate a question which asks you to compare and contrast these.
5. **PRACTICE WRITING YOUR ANSWER:** As you study, jot down some practice questions. At the end of your reading, pick two or three questions that you wrote down, and answer them in essay format.

How to Take an Essay Exam

1. **READ THE DIRECTIONS:** Remember to read the directions carefully before you begin the exam. It is easy to lose points if you don't follow the directions.
2. **READTHROUGH THE WHOLE TEST FIRST:** Answers will come to mind immediately for some questions. Jot down key words now while they are fresh in mind, but don't start writing your answer.
3. **BUDGET YOUR TIME:** Allow enough time at the end to go back and finish incomplete answers and to proofread your paper. When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. On a six question exam, for example, six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three complete ones, so try not to leave any questions completely unanswered.
4. **ANSWER THE QUESTIONS YOU KNOW BEST FIRST:** Don't panic about the questions you think you don't know. Stay calm. The answer may come to you later during the exam. Sometimes something in one question will trigger the answer for another question.
5. **TAKE THE TIME TO STRUCTURE YOUR ANSWER, EVEN IF YOU ARE IN A HURRY:** Whenever you can, work from a brief outline jotted down on scratch paper before you begin to write. Select what is clearly relevant; try to avoid a rambling effect.
6. **GET TO THE POINT:** Make you're the very first sentence sums up your main point. If you are writing a lengthy answer, summarize the key points you intend to make in an introductory paragraph.
7. **REREAD THE EXAM:** Make sure you have answered ALL parts of the question. You don't want to lose points because you forgot to answer a part of the question.

8. **QUALIFY ANSWERS WHEN IN DOUBT:** It is better to say “Toward the end of the 19th century” than to say in “1884” when you can’t remember whether it’s 1884 or 1894. The approximate time may be all that is necessary, but you may lose credit for an incorrect date.



Common Words Used in Essay Exams

1. **Compare**—Examine qualities, or characteristics, in order to determine resemblances.
2. **Contrast**—Stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikenesses of associated things.
3. **Criticize**—Express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration.
4. **Define**—Write concise, clear, authoritative meanings, keeping in mind the class to which the item belongs, and whatever differentiated it from all other classes.
5. **Discuss**—Examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items.
6. **Enumerate**—A list or outline form of reply. Recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.
7. **Evaluate**—Present a careful appraisal, stressing both advantages and limitations.
8. **Explain**—Clarify, explain, and interpret the material you present.
9. **Illustrate**—Present a figure, diagram, or concrete example.
10. **Interpret**—Translate, exemplify, or comment upon the subject, and, usually, give your judgment or reaction.
11. **Justify**—Prove your thesis or show grounds for decision.
12. **List**—Present an itemized series or tabulation.
13. **Outline**—Give main points and essential supplementary materials in a systematic manner.
14. **Prove**—Establish something with certainty by citing evidence or by logical reasoning.
15. **Relate**—Emphasize connections and associations.
16. **Review**—Analyze and comment briefly, in organized sequence, upon the major points.
17. **State**—Express the high points in brief, clear form.
18. **Summarize**—Give in condensed form the main points or facts.
19. **Trace**—Give a description of progress, sequence, or development from the point of origin.

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