

AN APPROACH TO ESSAY TESTS

Essay tests are tests for which students give long, written answers to test questions. They are sometimes called subjective tests because they are graded on the basis of the judgments, opinions, and preferences of the person who reads them. When you write answers to an essay test, one instructor might think your answers are worth an A, while another might think they are worth a C.

STEPS TO TAKE DURING THE TEST

1. Read through each question once and carefully. Answers for some questions will come to mind immediately. Write down the key words, listings, etc., when they're fresh in mind. This will reduce anxiety which may prevent these ideas from coming to mind when the time comes to write later questions. Many times a single essay question will require you to do more than one thing, and your answers to such questions will not be complete unless you do all the things requested.
2. Before attempting to answer a question, put it in your own words. Compare your version with the original. Do they mean the same thing? If they don't, you've misread the question. You'll be surprised how often they don't agree.
3. Write down as many facts, examples, details, etc. as you can remember that pertain to the question. Having this information out of your head will reduce anxiety and make organization easier.
4. Outline the answer before writing. Rearrange the facts and examples into outline form, discarding material that you think will not be needed. The teacher is greatly influenced by the compactness, completeness and clarity of an organized answer. Present what information you know, and no more, as well as possible. This is more effective than presenting poorly remembered information just to make yourself seem knowledgeable.
5. Take time to write an introduction and summary. The introduction will consist of the main point to be made; it is a summary of your answer. Make your essay a neat bundle with a beginning and end.
 - A. Write a clear introduction. It should indicate to the reader what approach you will take and what support you will provide.
 - B. Support your introduction with details. Make sure that each fact mentioned in the introduction is supported by the following paragraphs. Include details and examples.
 - C. End with a conclusion. The conclusion should restate your answer with strength, reminding the reader of your support while letting him/her know that you have finished.
6. Take time at the end to reread the question and paper. When writing in haste we tend to:
 - A. Misspell words
 - B. Omit words and parts of words
 - C. Omit parts of questions
 - D. Make factual errors
 - E. Miswrite dates and figures (1353 written as 1953; \$.50 as \$50, etc.)

7. Qualify answers when in doubt. It is better to say “Toward the end of the 19th century” than to say “in 1894” when you can’t remember whether it was 1884 or 1894. These kinds of statements, though approximate, help you avoid incorrect definite statements.

HOW TO PLAN TEST-TAKING TIME

One of the problems in doing well on essay tests is that a great deal must be written in a short amount of time. Therefore, when you take an essay test, you need to consider four things in order to make the best use of the available time:

1. How much time is there for taking the test?
2. How many questions must be answered?
3. What are the point values of questions?
4. Which question can be answered most quickly?

Prioritize and answer those questions worth the most points first. If equally weighted, begin with the questions you can easily answer and save the feared ones for last. If it seems that time is running out, write an outline for answers you do not have time to write completely.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN ESSAY EXAMINATIONS

Compare: Discuss qualities or characteristics that are similar to or resemble each other. Show how ___ and ___ are like by emphasizing similarities. Differences may also be mentioned.

Contrast: Stress differences, or unlikeness of things, qualities, events, or problems.

Criticize: Decide on the merits or correctness of something. Discuss the limitations and good points, the strengths and weaknesses.

Define: Provide concise and clear meanings. Details are not required but limitations of the definition should be briefly mentioned.

Describe: In a descriptive answer you should recount, explain, or relate in a visual way.

Diagram: Present a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic representation in your answer. Label the diagram and add a brief explanation or description.

Discuss: Examine, analyze, and present pro and con considerations regarding the problems or items involved. Give a complete and detailed answer with much

Enumerate: The word enumerate specifies a list or outline. You should recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required. Make the major points stand out.

Evaluate: You should present a careful appraisal of the problem, stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and personal appraisal.

- Explain:** Clarify and interpret the material you present. It is best to state the “how” or “why,” explain any differences in opinion or results, and state causes. The goal is to make evident the conditions that give rise to whatever you are examining.
- Illustrate:** Explain or clarify your answer to the problem by representing a figure, picture diagram, or concrete example.
- Interpret:** Similar to “explain”. You are expected to translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually to give your judgments or reaction.
- Justify:** Prove or show grounds for decisions. Evidence as to why something is the case should be presented in convincing form.
- List:** Similar to “enumeration”. Present an itemized series or tabulation. Such answers should always be given in concise form.
- Outline:** An outlined answer is an organized list. You should give main points and essential extra materials and present the information in a systematic arrangement.
- Prove:** A question that requires proof is one that demands confirmation or verification. Establish something with certainty by evaluating evidence or by logical reasoning.
- Relate:** In a question that asks you to show the relationship, or to relate, your answer should emphasize connections and associations in descriptive form.
- Summarize:** Give a condensed form of the main points or focus. All details, illustrations and elaborations are omitted.
- Trace:** Give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin.