

## Before Writing the Essay

- Make notes on the back of the exam sheet. Write ideas, facts, and details that you have memorized on the back of the exam sheet.
- Read the examination directions carefully. Note any time limits and if you need to answer all of the questions or if you can choose. As you read the directions and the questions, underline or circle the key words.
- Read all the questions. If you have a choice among the questions, choose the one you feel most prepared. If a question seems ambiguous, vague, or too broad, ask for clarification or make clear your interpretation of the question before answering it.
- Write notes or develop an outline next to each question you will answer. What is your central argument? How will you support your argument? What key words or phrases in the question will you address? By answering these questions, you will be able to organize your answer before writing.
- Make sure to understand what you have been asked to do with the question. Words like contract, evaluate, discuss require that a certain technique be used. Follow the lead given in the instructions. See a list of terms and type of information to write in the next section.
- Plan your time. After following the above steps, figure out how much time is left. Then decide how much time to give each question, and stick to your plan.

## Writing Style

- Write a complete answer. State your ideas. Do not leave anything to be inferred or concluded by the teacher. Define your terms as you go to show that you know the full meaning of all the words that you are using or the vocabulary/terminology that is part of your course. Show the complete process of your thinking.
- Use facts and logic, not vague impressions or feelings. Teachers are not interested in your personal likes or dislikes, emotions, attitude or feelings. They are concerned with how well you understand the material.
- Avoid using an unsupported opinion, one that doesn't use some kind of logical or factual evidence, even if it is absolutely correct. If a point is true or untrue it must be made on the basis of some convincing evidence or argument.
- Be concise. The most impressive answer is presented in a direct and straight-forward manner.
- Keep it simple. Do not get involved in deep philosophical profundities. Especially avoid vague and fuzzy speculation that cannot be squared with common sense.

## Start Writing

- Start with the easiest question. Don't sit and stare at the first exam question. Take an easy one, number the answer correctly, and start writing. This will help to reduce anxiety and facilitate clearer thinking.
- Organize your thoughts intelligently. Focus on either one central idea, or several main points. In either case, follow the principle of "one idea – one paragraph." Write deductive paragraphs by stating your important idea clearly and precisely, with adequate explanation. Then follow this statement immediately with factual or logical evidence that will support it convincingly.
- Write carefully to Avoid Errors. If you misspell common words, and make clumsy errors in sentence structure, it may be perceived that you are lacking in basic academic ability.
- Proofread your work when you're done. Add additional details, check for misspellings, missing words, etc. Did you follow the directions? Did you answer each question fully?

## Terms Used in Essay Exams

**Compare**: When asked to compare, you should examine qualities, or characteristics, in order to discover or emphasize similarities.

**Contrast**: When instructed to contrast, you should examine dissimilarities, differences or unlikeness of associated things, qualities, events, or problems.

**Criticize**: Express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration. You are expected to give the results of your own analysis and to discuss the limitations and good points or contributions of the plan or work in question.

**Define**: Definitions call for concise, clear, authoritative meanings. In such statements, details are not required but boundaries or limitations of the definition should be briefly cited. Keep in mind the category to which a thing belongs and what makes it different from the others in the category.

**Describe**: In a descriptive answer you should recount, characterize, sketch or relate in narrative form.

**Diagram**: For a question that specifies a diagram you should present a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic representation in your answer. Make sure you label the diagram and, in some cases, add a brief explanation or description.

**Discuss**: Examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations for and against regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and detailed answer.

**Enumerate**: Recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.

**Evaluate**: In an evaluation question, you are expected to present a careful appraisal of the problem, stressing both advantages and limitations.

**Explain**: In explanatory answers it is imperative that you clarify, elucidate, and interpret the material you present. In such an answer, it is best to state the how or why, reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes.

**Illustrate**: A question, which asks you to illustrate usually, requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, picture, diagram, or concrete example.

**Interpret**: Translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually give your judgment or reaction to the problem.

**Justify**: You must prove or show grounds for decisions. Present evidence in a convincing form.

**List**: Listing is similar to enumeration. Present an itemized series or tabulation in a concise form.

**Outline**: Give main points and essential supplementary materials, omitting minor details, and present the information in an organized manner.

**Prove**: Confirm or verify something by evaluating and citing experimental evidence or by logical reasoning.

**Relate**: Emphasize connections and associations in a descriptive form.

**Review**: Analyze and comment briefly upon the major points of the problem in organized manner.

**State**: Express the high points in brief, clear narrative form. Details, illustrations, or examples are usually omitted.

**Summarize**: Give the main points or facts in a condensed form. All details, illustrations and elaborations are to be omitted.

**Trace**: Give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin.