



Essay tests

Learn how to prep for your short answer & 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/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.

below before tackling compare and contrast questions that are typically found on essay tests. *Example:* Compare and contrast President Bush's proposed private accounts for Social Security and the current system.

Issues	Private accounts	Current System
Social	Individual assumes risk	Society assumes risk
Political	Republicans	Democrats
Economic	Potentially gaining higher investment yields	Risks of the marketplace

Review the topics actively by integrating notes, text, and supplementary information (i.e., 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 similar to the one found

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

Write on every other line so you have space for additions to your answer. State a definite, clear thesis. Include it within the first few sentences of your answer. Follow your outline. Be specific with examples and details.

The grader might be able to give you partial credit for what you have written.

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.

Brainstorm if you don't know much about a question. Relax and try to recall your reading, lectures, and discussions; this may trigger memories relevant to the question. If your mind goes blank, don't panic. Think about something pleasant, unrelated to the test and take some deep breaths. If you're still blank, move on to a different question and come back to it later.

After you write

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