

HOW TO ANSWER ESSAY QUESTIONS

Examination writing is a skill that can be improved through practice. The student should follow certain steps in writing an essay exam.

1. **Set up a time schedule.** If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow only seven minutes for each. When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. There will be 15 to 18 minutes remaining when the last question is completed. The incomplete answers can be completed during that time. Six incomplete answers, by the way, will usually receive more credit than three complete ones.
2. **Read through the questions once.** Answers will come to mind immediately for some questions. Write down key words, listings, etc., now when they're fresh in mind. Otherwise these ideas may be blocked (or be unavailable) when the time comes to write the later questions. This will reduce "clutching" or panic (anxiety, fear which disrupts thoughts.)
3. **Before attempting to answer a question,** put it in your own words. Now 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.
4. **Outline the answer before writing.** Whether realized or not, the instructor is greatly influenced by the compactness, completeness and clarity of an organized answer. To begin writing in the hope that the right answer will somehow turn up is time-consuming and usually futile. To know a little and present it well is superior to knowing much and presenting it poorly.
5. **Take time to write an introduction and summary.** The introduction should consist of the main point to be made; the summary is simply a paraphrasing of the introduction. A neat bundle with a beginning and ending is very satisfying to the reader.
6. **Take time at the end to reread the paper.** When writing in haste, we tend to:
 - a. Misspell words
 - b. Omit words and parts of words
 - c. Omit parts of questions
 - d. Incorrectly write 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's 1884 or 1894. In many cases, the approximate time is all that is wanted; unfortunately 1894, though approximate, may be incorrect, and will usually be marked accordingly.

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