

Essay Test Management



AESC
Academic Enrichment
& Support Center

Try following these steps for a more successful essay test experience:

- **Keep calm.** Take 2-3 deep breaths and look at the questions with confidence.
- Skim through *all* the questions and then ***budget your time***. If you have 5 questions worth 10 points each, spend an equal amount of time on each question. A question worth 50 points, however, may need a lot more time than you give to a 10-point question.
- ***Outline***. A well-outlined answer is the key to a successful essay test. The outline offers a structure for you to follow and if you don't finish answering the question, your instructor will be able to see where you were headed. It can also prevent you from "wandering" as you write.

Put your brief outline on the top of your answer sheet in a form like the one below:

- I. Thesis (a brief summary of your answer)
- II. Point A about the thesis (a major argument)
 - A.)
 - B.) supporting details...examples
 - C.)
- III. Point B about the thesis (another major argument)
 - A.)
 - B.) supporting details...examples
 - C.)
- IV. Summary (summarize the points you have made and conclude your thought)

- **Avoid wordiness**--don't clutter your wonderful ideas with empty words:

"danger" words	WEAK	GOOD
"function"	"The function of the trees in the story is symbolic"	"The trees symbolize.."
"that was when"	"That was when Odysseus fell out of the boat"	"Odysseus fell out of the boat"
"these"	"These are the three most important women in history"	"Eve, Jane and Sally are the most important..."
"seem"	"Smith seems to be an important character"	Smith is an important character

- Say what you mean. **Answer the question directly.** Restate the question in your opening sentence.
- **Write legibly in ink.** Print, if your handwriting is illegible.
- **Review what you have written.** Make sure that
 - your answer is clear
 - that you have answered the question the teacher asked--not one of your own

HOW TO DO WELL ON ESSAY TESTS

1. Understand why professors give essay tests, rather than the more “objective” true-false, multiple choice, fill-ins
 - To give students practice in putting their knowledge into clear English
 - To get students to integrate knowledge from diverse sources
 - To demonstrate reasoning and judgment skills
 - To apply knowledge to a practical problem or case
 - To discover “new” knowledge in the process of expressing what one already knows
2. Types of essay test questions and the best responses to them
 - Definitions of major concepts: must be accurate and precise
 - Description: must be clear and complete
 - Critical: judgments must be clear and well founded on evidence
 - Problem-solving: knowledge must be appropriate to the problem and practical in working toward a solution
3. How to prepare for the test
 - Use the proper study habits all through the semester and keep current on reading and lecture notes; most preparation takes place before the night before the exam, for better or worse.
 - Use the course study guide, if provided, to signal the most important things to pay attention to
 - Write out sample answers in advance
 - Identify key words and phrases to fix answers in memory
 - Get help if uncertain how to deal with anything
 - Get a good night sleep before the test
4. How to take the test
 - Read all the questions carefully; determine what kind they are, what is required for each, whether any choice among questions is provided
 - Budget your time: roughly so many minutes for each question; have a watch or clock handy
 - Answer the easier questions first
 - Spend 30 seconds to outline your answer before beginning to write; set priorities for the most important things to cover in the time available
 - Attempt an answer for each question
 - If your memory goes blank on a question, go on and return later
 - Write in complete sentences; use examples where appropriate
 - Use all the time allowed; if you finish early, check back to see if you can add or correct anything
5. Evaluate your answers after they are returned
 - Compare your answers with your information sources
 - Decide how you could improve your answers and methods of preparation on the next exam
 - If uncertain of why a particular grade was given, see the professor