

## Prepare for Short- and Long-Answer Essay Questions on a Major Exam

### What Do Faculty Expect?

Many professors include short-and long-answer essay questions as a part of their major exams. What does the faculty member expect from you?

#### 1. Your answers are completed in the time allotted for the exam.

Most exams will include a variety of exam questions (True/False, Multiple Choice, Matching, Short Answer, Essay Questions, etc.).

In order to assure your completion of the exam in the time allocated, follow these simple steps:

- ✓ Preview the test questions.
- ✓ Decide which question(s) you will answer first.
- ✓ Answer all of the questions on the exam before your short answer or essay question(s).
- ✓ Underline the key word(s) that tell you how to answer the short answer or essay question(s).
- ✓ Decide which type of question is being asked (See Types of Essay Questions . . .) and make sure you have your building blocks outlined. Once these are on scratch paper or in the margins of the exam, write your answer as quickly as you can.
- ✓ Go on to the next short answer or essay question.
- ✓ When you have finished all of your short answer or essay questions, proofread your answer looking for documentation, spelling and language rule errors. Make your corrections.
- ✓ If you have time left, go back to the questions you left unanswered and see if something else in the test has triggered the answer for you.

TIME TIP 1: Answer True/False, Multiple Choice & Matching Questions first.

TIME TIP 2: Skip those questions for which you have no immediate answer.

## 2. Your essay answers the question.

However, in an essay exam, most professors want more than just the facts. Your grade will be determined by how well you demonstrate your knowledge of the facts and your understanding of those facts in a greater context (i.e. *how these facts affected a period of history, how the introduction of this organism into the ecosystem effects the environment, how this sequence of events led to the development of ...*).

## 3. Your answer is well written.

Most professors look for specific elements when reading an essay exam. These are the building blocks of a good exam essay and include:

**FOCUSED:** Your answer should answer all parts of the question without a lot of random ideas which have little or nothing to do with the question. Students often think that adding random facts or ideas will help improve their grade because they know them. The opposite is true – adding random, unrelated ideas or facts almost always result in the reduction of points from your grade.

**STRUCTURED:** You know the answer to the question but your ability to communicate that knowledge to your professor depends on how well you structure your answer. Take the time to make a rough outline of what you want to write and in what order you want to present it. Always begin with a “thesis statement” and end with a “conclusion”. Stream of consciousness writing (putting things on paper as you think of them) will result in a mediocre grade at best.

**DOCUMENTED:** You know the answer; have your opening and closing statements and your outline. The next step is to document or “prove” that what you have written is “true” (i.e. accurate). When combined with a well-structured answer, your documentation or “proof” that supports what you have written can turn an exam grade from a B into an A.

**WELL WRITTEN:** You now have all the “parts” of your answer. The last element you need to pay attention to is the actual composition of your essay. Using correct spelling, good syntax and sentence structure, following the standard rules of English, and using legible handwriting will contribute to your grade and make either a positive or poor impression on your professor.

**CONCENTRATED**  
**PURPOSEFUL**  
**DIRECTED**  
**CENTERED**  
**POINTED**

**ORGANIZED**  
**PLANNED**  
**TIGHT**  
**THOUGHT-OUT**  
**SYSTEMATIC**

**SUPPORTED**  
**EVIDENCE**  
**PROOF**  
**DETAIL**

**SPELLING**  
**SYNTAX**  
**LANGUAGE RULES**  
**HANDWRITING**