



Exam Essay Preparation

When the time comes for midterms or final exams, a professor may warn his/her students about some essay questions that will be on the test. Below are some ways to prepare for the exam.

- 1) **Class Notes:** Taking good notes is beneficial in many different ways. This includes preparation for an exam essay. Make sure to take note of the things that the professor emphasizes in class. It may hinder a student to try to write down everything the professor says, so use discretion when deciding what is and is not important. Review these notes in preparation for the exam and study major points that were addressed.
- 2) Read all of the questions first. This helps with prioritization of the questions, which allows the student to see which questions are the most important and will require the most time.
- 3) Underline key words in the question or essay prompt that tell what kind of essay to write. Review all the types of essays studied thus far before the test to be prepared for anything.
- 4) Outline the answers on some scratch paper or in the margins of the test. Do this as quickly as possible because there may not be enough time to reorganize and recopy the answer.
- 5) Begin the answer with the thesis (*See "Writing a Thesis" handout*). The best thesis may be a simple restatement of the original question, while also including the main points of the response. That not only helps the reader identify the main points of the response, but also assists the writer in organizing his or her ideas first.

Ex: What are the lessons learned by Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird?

Thesis: The lessons learned by Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird are the dangers of racism, the value of kindness, and the power of truth.

- 6) Use support from the notes taken in class that have been studied.
- 7) Proofread to correct spelling and grammar errors.

Key Words in Essay Prompts

- 1) **Argumentation Essay:** Discuss...
Agree or disagree with the following:...
Defend this...
Is this valid?
- 2) **Cause and Effect Essay:** What are the causes of ___?
What are the effects of ___?
Why (did) does ___ occur?
- 3) **Compare and Contrast Essay:** How do these differ?
Compare....
What are the advantages of ___?
What are disadvantages of ___?

- 4) **Process Essay**: How is this accomplished?
List steps...
Explain how...
What is the procedure...?

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