

# Tips on Writing Essay Test Questions

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## **SET UP A TIME SCHEDULE.**

- ↪ If six questions are to be answered in forty-five minutes, allow yourself only five minutes for each.
- ↪ When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. There will be 15 minutes remaining when the last question is completed. The incomplete answers can be completed during the time.
- ↪ Six incomplete answers, by the way, will usually receive more credit than three completed ones. Of course, if one question is worth more points than the others you allow more time to write it.

## **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, actually fear which disrupts thoughts).

## **BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO ANSWER A QUESTION, LOOK AT THE DIRECTIVE WORDS.**

- ↪ Your instructor may give you specific directions how to write your answer. If he/she wants you to evaluate a philosophical theory, you won't get full credit if you describe just the theory. Make sure you know what you are being asked to do.
- ↪ The following words are commonly found in essay test questions.

**Analyze:** Break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.

**Compare:** Examine two or more things. Identify similarities and differences. Comparisons generally ask for similarities more than differences. (See Contrast.)

**Contrast:** Show differences. Set in opposition.

**Criticize:** Make judgments. Evaluate comparative worth. Criticism often involves analysis.

**Define:** Give the meaning; usually a meaning specific to the course of subject. Determine the precise limits of the term to be defined. Explain the exact meaning. Definitions are usually short.

**Describe:** Give a detailed account. Make a picture with words. List characteristics, qualities and parts.

**Discuss:** Consider and debate or argue the pros and cons of an issue. Write about any conflict. Compare and contrast.

**Enumerate:** List several ideas, aspects, events, things, qualities, reasons, etc.

**Evaluate:** Give your opinion or cite the opinion of an expert. Include evidence to support the evaluation.

**Illustrate:** Give concrete examples. Explain clearly by using comparisons or examples.

**Interpret:** Comment upon, give examples, describe relationships. Explain the meaning. Describe, then evaluate.

**Outline:** Describe main ideas, characteristics, or events. (Does not necessarily mean \*write a Roman numeral/letter outline\*.)

**Prove:** Support with facts (especially facts presented in class or in the test).

**State:** Explain precisely.

**Summarize:** Give a brief, condensed account. Include conclusions. Avoid unnecessary details.

**Trace:** Show the order of events or progress of a subject or event.

### **OUTLINE THE ANSWER BEFORE WRITING.**

↳ Whether the instructor realizes it or not, he/she is greatly influenced by the compactness 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 to present that little well is, by and large, superior to knowing much and presenting it poorly-when judged by the grade it receives. Be sure to follow the directive words, and check your outline to see that it is logical.

### **TAKE TIME TO WRITE AN INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.**

↳ The introduction will 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. Be sure that your answer is direct and really answers the question.

**TAKE TIME AT THE END TO RE-READ THE PAPER.**

↪ Misspelled words

↪ Omit words or parts

**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, though approximate, may be incorrect, and will usually be marked accordingly. When possible, avoid very definite statements. A qualified statement connotes a philosophic attitude, the mark of an educated man.

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