

Writing an Essay Exam

An effective essay test answer is well-focused, well-organized, well-supported, and well-packaged.

Well-Focused

Be sure to answer the question that is asked completely; that is, answer all parts of the question. Avoid "padding." While adding a lot of interesting but irrelevant information to your answer may show the grader that you know a lot, it also suggests that you don't know the right answer so are just writing to fill the space. Be sure you understand and answer the question.

Well-Organized

Don't write a haphazard travelogue in a "think-as-you-go" manner. The grader is not going to play detective and unravel clues as to what you might know. Do some planning and be sure that what you write has a clearly marked introduction which both states the point(s) you are going to make and also, if possible, how you are going to proceed. In addition, the essay should have a clearly indicated conclusion which summarizes the material covered and emphasizes your thesis or main points.

Well-Supported

Do not just assert something is true, prove it! What facts, figures, examples, tests, etc. prove your point? You may be intelligent, loveable, etc., but no one is going to believe all your statements just because you say they are true. In many cases, the difference between an A and a B as a grade is due to the effective use of supporting evidence.

Well-Packaged

People who do not use conventions of language are thought of by their readers as less competent and less educated. Reread your essay answer to edit it carefully.

To write an effective exam essay

- Read through all the questions carefully.
- Budget your time and decide which question(s) you will answer first.
- Underline the key word(s) which tell you what to do for each question.
- Choose an organizational pattern appropriate for each key word and plan your answers on scratch paper or in the margins.
- Write your answers as quickly and as legibly as you can; do not take the time to recopy.
- Begin each answer with one or two sentence thesis which summarizes your answer. If possible, phrase the statement so that it rephrases the question's essential terms into a statement (which therefore directly answers the essay question).
- Support your thesis with specific references to the material you have studied.
- Proofread your answer and correct errors in spelling and mechanics.