



School of Liberal Arts

University Writing Center
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Preparing For an Essay Exam

Eeek! My instructor is giving me an essay exam and I don't know what to do first. What am I going to do?

First, stop and take a deep breath. Taking an essay exam can be a great way to show your knowledge about a topic without having to answer ordinary multiple choice questions. Prepare for the essay exam as you would any other exam that tests your knowledge. Do all of the reading assignments and review all the lecture notes. Then start asking questions about the exam and its contents.

Good Questions to Ask:

- How many essay questions are on the test?
- How much time should I devote to one essay question?
- How long or short should the essay be?
- How much emphasis is placed on grammar and correctness?

The key tool to remember is that the more questions you ask of yourself and the instructor before the exam, the more prepared you will be.

Questions about the Content:

- What sorts of topics, concepts, facts, theories or events are likely to be tested on the exam?
- What will need to be explained, described, compared, identified, or evaluated?
- What sorts of support or details are needed to develop the content of the essay?

Practice Writing Before the Test

Once you feel you have all of the answers to these questions, practice writing before the test date. Think of potential questions for the essay and try to answer them beforehand. Time yourself so that you don't spend too much time on one particular essay. Practice writing answers to several essay questions as many times as possible before the exam date.

...If you feel you need further assistance, make use of the *Taking an Essay Exam* handout that can be found in the University Writing Center or call and make an appointment at 274-2049 (Cavanaugh) or 278-8642 (University College).

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