

Writing the Essay-type Examination

The well organized, neat appearing individual will usually get the nod over another, equally capable person who is disorganized and careless in appearance. Although other factors are involved, the analogy to examination writing is not too strained. And it will probably not be seriously contested that examination writing is a skill, which can be improved by instruction. The student would be advised to follow certain steps in writing an essay exam.

Set up a time schedule

If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow yourself only seven minutes for each. When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. There will be 15 to 18 minutes remaining when the last question is completed. The incomplete answers can be completed during that time. Six incomplete answers, by the way, will usually receive more credit than three complete ones.

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 which disrupts thoughts.

Before attempting to answer a question rephrase it in your own words

Now compare your version with the original. Do they mean the same thing? If they do not, you have misread the question. You will be surprised how often they do not agree.

Outline the answer before writing

Whether the teacher realizes it or not, he/she is greatly influenced by the compactness completeness 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 received.

Qualify answers when in doubt (but don't qualify your answers away)

It is better to say "Toward the end of the 19th century" than to say "In 1894" when you can not remember whether it is 1884 or 1894. In many cases, the approximate time is all that is wanted; unfortunately 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 person, provided that it is based on knowledge and not evasion.

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.

Take time at the end to reread the paper

When writing in haste we tend to: (a) misspell words, (b) omit words and parts of words, (c) omit parts of questions and (d) miswrite dates and figures (1353 as 1953 and \$.50 as \$50).