



## The Essay Exam

### **What is an Essay Exam?**

Most college courses require students to write an essay as an exam, often the final exam or as part of an entrance exam. Usually, an essay exam will be written in class, and the essay exam may be in addition to objective questions.

### **Examine the Question of Topic of an Essay Exam Carefully:**

Read the question or prompt thoroughly, more than once if there is a part that seems unclear to you. Pinpoint the main idea of the topic, perhaps jotting down notes as you read the exam. Be aware of what you are assigned to do (describe, evaluate, analyze, discuss, compare, or consider). Look at the directive wording of the exam. If you are asked to describe a typical American 20<sup>th</sup> century wedding, you will not get credit if you enumerate the merits of marriage in general.

### **Use Your Time Wisely:**

If, for instance, you have three questions of three parts of one question to write in one hour, try to devote only fifteen minutes to each section. This allows you an extra block of time to reread your answers and edit. Also, if you have not quite finished with one part, you can go back and add thoughts. Dividing the time you spend on each section prevents you from answering only one or two complete and the third left blank. Note if there is a weight given to the required answers. If one section is to count only a few points while the other section is half the grade, allot more time to the section that counts more.

### **Outline/Brainstorm Your Answers:**

It pays in the long run to quickly write an outline of the essay or write words or phrases to remind you of the ideas that occur to you as you read the exam directive. Keep the main points you plan to make while crossing out any points in your outline or brainstorming that may not add to your essay.

### **Do Not Forget the Introduction and Conclusion:**

Even though there is a time limit for the essay exam, make sure to organize the essay as you would normally do for any other writing required in college. Readers like to know where the essay is headed – the introduction – and when it is complete – the conclusion.

### **Generate a Clear Thesis Statement:**

To write well under pressure, it is most helpful for you to determine your thesis as soon as possible. Having a thesis statement in your introduction (first paragraph) keeps you focused on the main topics you cover in the essay. Incorporate parts of your instructor's question/topic also.