

## Writing Essay Exams

The most important thing to remember in writing for an essay exam is to make sure you question the question. That is, you must know what the question is asking you to do before you can write an effective response.

**First**, look over the entire test and answer the "easy" questions first. If you spend too much time on the difficult questions, you might not have enough time for the easy ones.

### Then

- Read the question quickly for an overall idea and then again slowly for a more detailed understanding.
- Read the question a third time
  - underline or number all of the parts of the question that you should address in your answer.
  - Pay close attention to the verbs used:
    - analyze--break the problem into parts and explain how they work together;
    - defend--give specific details to support your opinion;
    - define--give the meaning, describe the basic characteristics;
    - discuss--present details and reasons leading to a conclusion;
    - evaluate or comment-- examine advantages and disadvantages and then state your position and why you believe that way;
    - identify--give the characteristics of; interpret--explain the significance or meaning
- Outline your response using the underlinings made on the third reading as a guide. Organize your response using the same structure as the question. Don't make the readers hunt for the answers.

Note: If you do not know how to begin, don't waste too much time thinking about it. Grab a scrap sheet of paper and freewrite. Use your creative energy to write whatever comes to mind without stopping. You should be able to get a handle on what you want to say so that you can prepare a working outline and get started.
- When you begin to write, use your outline as a guide. Organization is the key and the outline will provide this. It is better to write a short, direct, and well-organized essay than one that meanders and never comes to a point.
- Remember that although you are being asked to respond in a short amount of time, you should write in the same basic way you would prepare an essay. You still need an introduction (with a thesis statement), a body, and a conclusion.
- Never lose sight of the question being asked. How does every sentence and each paragraph relate to the question? If a thought isn't explicitly relevant, add a sentence to explain or delete the idea. Recheck the verbs (see above) in the question to make sure that your response answers the question. Ask yourself, "How should I answer this question?"
- Think about the "journalist's questions"

- Who? a noun/pronoun or group: Hildegard, Tillich, Jesus
- What? a noun referring to anything other than a person or group: a sacrifice, a staff
- When? an indication of time: now, soon, then, yesterday, first century, 483 BCE
- Where? a location: here/there, nearby, at the temple, in the synagogue, near the church, Jerusalem
- Why? a reason; usually begins with "because...": "Because God so loved the world"
- How? Usually begins with "by..." or "via...": "By the Grace of God"
- How much? a quantity: enough, too little/much, none, a cubit
- How many? A number: 8 denari, 50 shekels of silver
- How long? a length of time: 40 days in the wilderness
- How far? a distance: miles, kilometers, a day's journey

Bear in mind that these are just literal definitions and that often an essay question is asking for a more in-depth discussion. Also remember that each answer needs to be expanded with verification.