



Exam Essay Preparation

When the time comes for midterm or final exams, your professor may warn you about some essay questions that will be on the test. There are some simple ways to prepare for an essay exam.

- 1) Class Notes: Okay, this may be the most obvious method, but it's the best. To succeed in college, you must record and review good notes. Your notes will often have the answers to the essay questions, but it will be up to you to organize them into an essay. Know your notes!
- 2) When you get the test, read all the questions so that you can budget your time. This way you can decide which questions need the most attention.
- 3) Underline key words in the question or essay prompt that tell you what kind of essay to write. You may want to review the other types of essays listed in this chapter. (*see Key Words in Essay Prompts section*)
- 4) Outline your answers on some scratch paper or in the margins of the test. Do this as quickly as possible because you may not have enough time to reorganize and recopy your answer.
- 5) Begin your answer with your thesis. (*see Thesis section for help*) The best thesis may be a simple restatement of the original question, but including your main points. That way, you can be sure to answer the specific essay question.

Ex: What are the lessons learned by Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird?

Thesis: *The lessons learned by Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird are the dangers of racism, the value of kindness, and the power of truth.*

- 7) Use support from the material you have studied. I told you your class notes would come in handy.
- 8) Proofread so you can correct spelling and grammar errors.

Key Words in Essay Prompts

- 1) **Argumentation Essay:** Discuss...
Do you agree or disagree?
Defend this...
Is this valid?
- 2) **Cause and Effect Essay:** What are the causes of ___?
What are the effects of ___?
Why (did) does ___ occur?
- 3) **Compare and Contrast Essay:** How do these differ?
Compare....
What are the advantages of ___?
What are disadvantages of ___?
- 4) **Process Essay:** How is this accomplished?
List steps...
Explain how...
What is the procedure...?