

Essay-based Exam Questions

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Worries about essays in exam conditions?



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Questions to consider

- How much can you reasonably write in a given time?
- What does the exam look like?
- How do you plan an essay answer?
- What are some potential pitfalls?
- How can using other students help?



How much can you reasonably write?

- Choose a topic you are very comfortable and familiar with.
- Set an alarm on your watch or phone for 15 minutes.
- Now write solidly for 15 minutes on this topic, then take a word-count.



How much can you reasonably write?

- This is your 15 minute word count.
- Multiply by 4 for hourly rate.
- Divide your hourly word count by 10 (roughly the number of paragraphs you want to write per hour).
- This should give you the average word count per paragraph you can reasonably produce per hour.



What does the exam look like?

- Find past paper(s).
- If unavailable, ask for example format.
- How many questions are there?
 - How many essay-style?
 - How many shorter questions?
 - How long do you have?



What does the exam look like?

- Based on your writing speed, divide the allotted time between questions.
- Make sure to include planning time. How much?



How do you plan an essay-answer?

- Get some index cards.
- Find essay-style questions from past paper archive.
- Write questions on index cards – one per card.
- Make variations of questions – different task verbs or varying subject matter.
- Make LOTS of these with subtle variations, creating a bank of questions.



How do you plan an essay-answer?

- Turn over index cards and draw a question at random.
- Select appropriate materials from notes.
- Form arguments (claim + premises) relevant to the question.
- Arrange claims with supporting material on reverse of card.



How do you plan an essay-answer?

- Infer conclusion based on supported claims.
- Check and establish relevance of conclusion.
- Draft introduction to answer, including thesis statement and road-map.
- Repeat for other questions.
- TIME YOURSELF – use a realistic timeframe for accomplishing this.



How do you plan an essay-answer?

- Infer conclusion based on supported claims.
- Check and establish relevance of conclusion.
- Draft introduction to answer, including thesis statement and road-map.
- Repeat for other questions.



How do you plan an essay-answer?

1. IS IT RELEVANT?

Reread the question and check that your list of proposed paragraphs is ALL relevant to the question selected. If not, then review these.

2. ARE THERE GAPS?

Look quickly through your set of reduced notes to check you haven't missed any key reasons that are relevant to your argument. If so, add these to your list.

3. HUNT FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you're unsure whether you've covered all essential angles, you should look back to your full set of notes. If you still require further information, check text books, using the index to quickly locate information.

4. AMEND THE PARAGRAPHS LIST

As you gather more information, you should amend your list of proposed paragraphs and check that they are all still relevant to the question you have chosen.



How do you plan an essay-answer?

- Expand essay plans in controlled exam conditions.
- Record yourself verbally explaining your answer, then listen again a few days later. Do you agree with yourself?



Food for Thought:

You could briefly plan all of your answers at the start of your exam, before writing any of them.

This would ensure that you can answer them all and give you chance to see any connections between them.

It might also boost your confidence and make you feel more in control of your exam, knowing you have ideas for all the required questions.



What are some potential pitfalls?

- No clear structure/thread running through your answers
- Not being clear and concise enough



How can using other students help?

- Form study groups
- Set each other tasks
- Verbally explain responses to questions
- Attack and question each others' answers
- Defend and adapt ideas



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