

Essay Test Strategies

- Prepare before the test.
- Anticipate test questions.
 - Color code class and text notes if possible.
 - Make note of how much time the instructor devoted to each concept. The longer the time emphasis, the more probability there will be a question or two about this concept on the test.
 - Be sure to study definitions and lists.
 - Pay attention to handouts, study guides, and review materials from the teacher.
- Map out answers.
 - For each question that you think will be on the test:
 - ▲ Construct a brief outline (see *Essay Answer Format* on page 248).
 - ▲ Make a graphic organizer/mind map (see *Creating a Graphic Organizer* on page 119).
 - Be sure to include all main ideas and supporting details.
- Provide details and examples.
 - Key words/phrases (check spelling)
 - Accurate dates, names, facts, etc.
 - Relationships/connections with other concepts stressed in class
- Memorize your graphic organizer.
 - Practice reproducing it from memory so that you can reproduce it accurately and quickly on the test or blank paper at the beginning of the test.
- Make sure you have the three main ingredients of a successful essay:
 - Knowledge of the subject
 - Organization of ideas
 - Writing skills



ESSAY TESTS (continued)

- Third, check for mechanics. Are there any:
 - Omitted words
 - Spelling errors
 - Grammatical errors
 - Punctuation errors
 - Awkward phrases
 - Transitional statements to move smoothly from one paragraph to another, such as *first*, *second*, *third*, *then*, *however*, *finally*, etc.

STEP 9: 🖐 Be sure to express what you really mean to say.

- Be concise—don't ramble.
- Be certain to answer the question.
- Demonstrate relationships between/among main points.
- Include examples whenever possible and appropriate.
- If in doubt, let your answer be more general than specific. (e.g. "In the 1920s . . ." rather than "In 1923 . . .")
- Use the asterisk system to add additional information when enough space has not been left. However, avoid using this too many times.

STEP 10: 🖐 If you run out of time, write "This is where I ran out of time" on your paper and include your outline.

STEP 11: 🖐 What to do if you don't know the answer/topic:

- Look for "overlap" in what you do know.
- Look for ambiguous questions.
- Try to find relationships between what you studied and the question.
- Look through other parts of the test for clues.

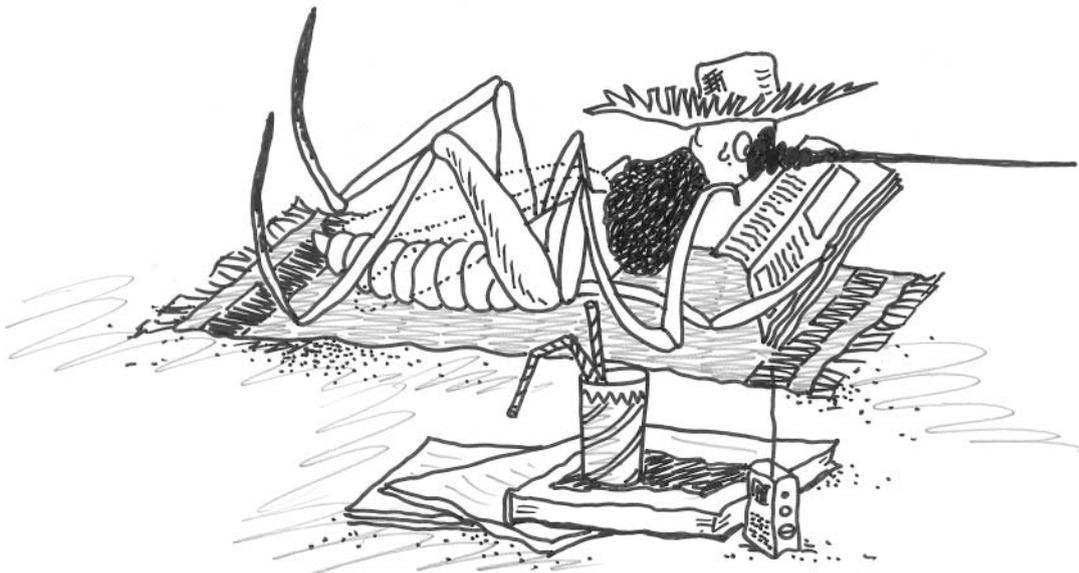


- Find out in advance who is grading the essays and promote ideas that appeal to the grader.
- During the test, always listen carefully to all directions given by the teacher before beginning.

STEP 1: 🖱️ Read any general/specific directions the essay section provides. Do you have a choice of questions to answer or must all questions be answered?

STEP 2: 🖱️ Read all of the questions before you begin.

- Note how many points each essay question is worth and start with the one that is worth the most points.
- Jot down a few phrases about each question as you read through the test.
- This helps when you want to begin writing or choose the one you want to answer (if applicable).
- It jogs your memory.
- Reading all of the questions will keep you from repeating information.



ESSAY TESTS (continued)

STEP 3:  Decide on a time limit for each question.

- Divide your time among the questions accordingly.
- Go to the next question if your time runs out.
- Four partially answered questions will give you more credit than two completed questions and two blank questions.
- Budget your time for each question.
 - 50% outlining
 - 50% writing
- Write your time estimates in the margin.

STEP 4:  Reread the directions.

STEP 5:  Reread the question and circle important words concerning what and how to write the answer (see *Essay Direction Words* on page 245).

STEP 6:  Always organize your essay first by recreating your graphic organizer or outline.

STEP 7:  Write methodically.

- Get involved with your answer—express your emotion.
- Leave a space between lines, if possible, so that you can add more information later if you choose; use appropriate left and right margins.
- Define any terms you use; do not use non-standard language or abbreviations.
- Use concrete examples.
- Introduction:
 - Begin by restating the question in your own words.
 - Establish tone and attitude.
 - Be sure all following sentences relate to the thesis.

- Use a good thesis statement that includes:
 - a specific subject
 - a specific condition, feeling, or your position on the topic
- Body:
 - Use transitional words or statements.
 - State main ideas clearly.
 - Reinforce these ideas with supporting details.
 - Support the details with examples whenever possible.
 - Be sure to stay on track with the topic—answer the question.
- Conclusion:
 - Use a summary sentence.
 - Restate the main idea and point of view, but do not use examples.
 - State how you proved, supported, or defended your original idea.
 - Give the reader a sense of conclusion.

STEP 8:  Check your work.

- First, check for content.
 - Did you answer the key words directly and precisely?
 - Did you stick to your main point of view?
 - Did you include enough details to support a clear statement?
- Second, check for organization. (Everything should tie together closely.)
 - Introduction
 - Body
 - Conclusion

