

Essay Exams

Studying for the Exam

Memorizing:

- Do not memorize aimlessly.
- Figure out important themes and topics of the course, and use these to focus your understanding of specific facts and particular readings.

Organizing:

- Organize important information (fundamental ideas, themes, central concerns, etc.) into patterns/broad categories.
 - **E.g.** postmodern theories; religion and the state; modern South Asian culture; 21st century health concerns etc.
- Think about how certain categories relate to each other.
 - **E.g.** how do modern cultural patterns affect health in South Asia?
 - **E.g.** do religious values influence state policy?

Anticipating:

- For each theme or issue, anticipate a few questions that could be on the exam.
- Think about how you would answer those questions and write very brief answer outlines.
 - **Note:** Even though you won't be able to guess the exact questions, writing brief answer outlines will give you some structured information going into the exam. On the actual exam there may be a few questions that have similar themes to the ones you anticipated, and you might only have to adapt your prepared outline, rather than thinking of every point on the spot.

Writing the Essay

Time:

- Allocate your time wisely; do not spend too much time on one answer.
- Before beginning, decide what questions you will be tackling.
 - Sometimes writing on one question eliminates your other options, so familiarize yourself with all the questions before starting to write.
- Focus only on questions that you will be able to answer and explain thoroughly.

Overview:

- Plan the essay with an outline of possible points.
- When answering your questions, write only relevant information; do not include irrelevant info simply to fill up your pages.
- Make sure your essay is 1) focused; 2) organized; and 3) supported.
- Don't say something is true unless you can prove it by giving examples.

Structure:

- Introduction
 - Get right to the point and state your thesis in the first sentence or two.

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- Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of the essay, i.e. your main points and argument(s).
- Body
 - Begin each paragraph with a key point from the introduction; topic sentences allow your reader to understand what you'll be discussing in each paragraph.
 - Develop each point thoroughly within your paragraph.
 - Use transitions to connect your points:
 - **E.g.** Additionally; as a result; first, second, third; therefore; because...
 - Avoid absolute statements (e.g. always, never, everyone, everywhere):
 - A qualified statement usually conveys a more educated attitude.
 - Avoid guessing at exact details:
 - If you are not sure of an exact date, it is better to write: "toward the end of the 19th century", than to incorrectly write: "in 1894".
- Conclusion
 - Summarize your thesis and main points in a sentence or two.

Writing Tips

Grammar:

- While it is understandable that your grammar may not be perfect during an exam, your paper must still be comprehensible. Furthermore, some professors may take off marks for spelling and grammar mistakes, so be careful. Legibility is also important.
- As far as possible, ensure that you are using proper conventions of language.

New Sub points:

- As you write, you may think of new sub points or ideas to include in the essay. If these are relevant to a section you've already written, write them neatly in the margin, at the top of the page, or on the last page, with arrows or marks to alert the reader to where they fit in your answer.
- Double-space your answer to leave room for these additions.
- Stop briefly to make a note of these on your original outline.
- Be as neat and clear as possible.

Not enough time?

- **Do not** write "Ran out of time".
 - During that time, you could have been writing another point.
 - Constructing an outline of how the essay would continue may also be worth partial points.