

ESSAY EXAM STRATEGIES

Essay Questions

Anticipating the Questions

- Essay questions will be more broad and will ask for concepts and ideas that span the entire course. They will have to be questions that you can write several pages on, so try to think of the larger topics, or think of two topics that can be compared and contrasted against each other.

How to Study

- While studying for essay questions, either write out or outline mock exam answers for the anticipated essay questions. This is useful because you are both studying for your exam and reviewing key course concepts in depth. While preparing your mock exam answers, remember to include terms and definitions from the course for examples and arguments. The more specific answers you can give on an essay question, usually the better marks you will receive.

Group Studying

- As a group you should determine what will be the most likely essay questions. Discuss the question and collectively plan out what would be the best response. Compare what each of the members of the group thinks is important and test out your arguments against each other. Remember to always ask your group members to prove what they are saying--they will have to do the same on the exam.

Answering the Questions

- While answering essay questions always write a brief outline on the exam itself. This outline allows you to keep track of what you are trying to argue, and gives you something to refer back to as you are writing your answers. As well, the outline gives your Instructor a reference to refer to if they lose the track of what you are saying in your answer. If your instructor isn't sure of the point you are making in your actual essay, he or she may look at your outline and decide that you know what you are talking about and still give you some marks.

Another important fact to remember about writing essay exam questions is to include specific examples. Use quotations from important scholars or academics or figures from your course material. It is more work to memorize quotations, but inserting them into an essay on an exam demonstrates a high level of learning and commitment to the material. If you can't memorize quotations, try to paraphrase the quotation. Don't forget to make reference back to the author though.