

Writing Essays for Exams

What is a well written answer to an essay question?

It is:

- Well focused
- Well organized
- Well supported

How do you write an effective essay exam?

1. Read through all the questions carefully.
2. Budget your time and decide which question[s] you will answer first.
3. Underline the key word[s] which tell you what to do for each question.

For example:

Analyze: Explain, step by step or point by point while writing. Pay attention to who, what, where, when, why, and how in the answer. Include strengths, weakness, pros and cons, research for and against.

Discuss: Present significant characteristics, pros and cons, pertinent research, and the significance of each. Develop the arguments for and against or analyze the advantages disadvantages, or problems.

Examples: Use brief stories, analogies, relevant events, or similar instance to support general statements and main ideas.

Justify: Present rational, reasons for conclusions, recommendations, or results. Use proof, research, examples, or quotes to support justifications.

Outline: Present your answer in terms of major points followed by clarifying details or facts. No elaboration is usually necessary. It is wise to find out if your instructors wish for you to outline by listing only main and subordinate points in short numbered phrases or if they want you to use the narrative format with complete sentences and paragraphs.

Summarize: List major ideas, concepts, and consequences in a short paragraph or a sentence. Could also mean present a brief abstract of main ideas, compose a concise resume covering only the highlights and relevant details. Little elaborations is necessary.

4. Choose an organizational pattern appropriate for each key word and plan your answers on scratch paper or in the margins.
5. Write your answers as quickly and as legibly as you can, do not take the time to recopy.
6. Begin each answer with a one or two sentence thesis which summarizes your answer. If possible, phrase the statement so that it rephrases the question's essential terms into a statement [which therefore directly answers the essay question.]
7. Support your thesis with specific references to the material you have studied.
8. Proofread your answer and correct errors in spelling and mechanics.