

Tips for Taking Essay Tests

- Read all directions carefully and re-read anything that is not clear. Ask for clarification, if necessary.
- Read the entire examination first. This allows you to have more time for any blocked information to appear, as well as to write answers that do not overlap.
- Before starting to write, sketch an outline.
- Begin with the easiest question. Ideas about more difficult questions may occur to you as you write.
- Spend a few minutes jotting down key words or phrases for each question; this will serve to stimulate other ideas.
- Be sure you know what is meant by directional words, such as name, define, compare, or discuss.
- Decide what kind of answer the question requires before you begin writing.
- As ideas about other questions occur to you, immediately jot them down on the back of the test before they slip away.
- Get right to the point:
 - Begin with a strong first sentence. State your main point.
 - Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of your essay.
 - Use the rest of your essay to discuss these points in more detail.
 - Back up your points with specific information, examples, or quotations from your readings, notes or professor.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, try to reason it out. If you cannot, skip it and return to it once you've completed the rest of the test.
- DO NOT PAD your answers. Strength is more important than length in determining the grade. Include as many specific facts as you can to support your answer.
- Be sure to leave enough space between answers so you can add to them, if necessary. Give the major points and leave space for later elaboration, as time permits.
- Strive toward making your first draft your final one; time is usually too short for recopying.
- Check your answers thoroughly before turning it in. (Consider theme, careless mistakes, punctuation, grammar and spelling).

Adapted from: The Study Guides and Strategies web site was created and is maintained by Joe Landsberger, academic web site developer at the University of St. Thomas (UST), St. Paul, Minnesota. <http://www.studygs.net/lrnstudy.htm>.