

STRATEGIES FOR WRITING ESSAY EXAMS

Be sure to read all the questions before beginning, and make sure you know what your professor is asking. Most essay test items are not presented in the form of a question. Instead, they are often presented as a statement that includes a direction word. The direction word tells you what you should do when you write your answer to the item. Look for the direction word and be sure to do what it tells you to do.

LOOK FOR KEY TERMS and answer the easiest questions first. This will allow you to build some confidence and help you to relax.

- ~ Jot down ideas which come to mind immediately.
- ~ Make a simple outline of what you will write about.
- ~ Keep track of the time. You should always spend more time on questions which are worth more points.
- ~ Try to write as neatly as possible and leave some space for added ideas or corrections.
- ~ Before turning in your test, read your answers a final time in order to check for grammatical errors and misspellings.

WORDS TO WATCH FOR IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

The following words are commonly found in essay test questions. Understanding them is essential for success on such questions. If you want to do well on essay tests, make sure you know what the questions are asking.

Analyze -> Break into separate parts and discuss, examine or interpret each part.

Explain -> Make an idea clear. Show logically how a concept is developed. Give the reasons for an event.

Trace -> Show the order of events or progress of a subject of event.

Evaluate -> Give your opinion or cite the opinion of an Expert. Include evidence to support the evaluation.

Compare -> Compare tells you to show how two or more things are BOTH similar and different.

Contrast -> Contrast tells you to show how two or more things are different.

Define -> Define tells you to explain the meaning of something in a brief, specific manner.



Describe -> Describe tells you to present a full and detailed picture of something in words to include important characteristics and qualities.

Diagram -> Diagram tells you to illustrate something by drawing a picture of it and labeling its parts.

Justify -> Justify tells you to provide reasons and facts in support of something.

List -> List tells you to present information about something as a series of brief numbered points.

Outline -> Outline tells you to present the most important information about something in a carefully organized manner.

Summarize -> Summarize tells you to present the main points about something in a brief form.

