

ANSWERING ESSAY QUESTIONS

Essay test questions are designed to provide students with the opportunity to present information that displays their understanding of the topic as well as their clear thinking and effectiveness with the written language. This type of test question can have positive results if you are familiar with several stages of the writing process.

Stage One: Be Familiar with Direction Terms Used in Essay Questions

Define	Explain the meaning and (often) provide an appropriate example or two
List/Enumerate/ Identify/Outline	Write a list of the main points with brief explanation
Trace	State the main points in chronological or logical order
Summarize	Briefly state the main ideas in an organized way
Describe/Illustrate	Present the main points with clear examples that enhance the discussion
Discuss/Explain	Present the main points, facts, and details of a topic/give reasons
Compare	Present similarities and differences
Contrast	Present only the differences
Differentiate/ Distinguish	Present the differences between two things
Criticize/Evaluate disadvantages	Judge the strengths and weaknesses/pros and cons/advantages and
Argue	Present your opinion and, through reasoning, defend it with examples
Interpret	Present your analysis of the topic using facts and reasoning
Justify/Prove	Present evidence and reasons supporting the topic

Stage Two: Read and Understand the Question—Read each question carefully. Pay particular attention to the direction word (or words) used in the question. You may find it helpful to circle or underline them to clarify your thinking.

Stage Three: Jot Down Notes—When you have read the question and understand what it requires, take a minute to write a brief outline of the answer. Be sure to write down all pertinent information. Then put the information in a logical order.

Stage Four: Restate the Question—To begin writing the answer to the question, rephrase the question in your opening sentence. It is important to repeat many of the words found in the question to show your instructor that your answer is clear and on target.

Stage Five: Use Transitional Words—As you proceed to write the rest of your answer, help the instructor follow your answer by providing clues to your pattern of organization. Use words such as *first, second, next, finally, on the other hand, consequently, furthermore, in conclusion*. A handout with a more detailed listing of transitional words and their uses is available in the Troy State University Writing Center.

Stage Six: Proofread Your Answer—Because an essay test is also a test of your writing ability, be sure to spend time at the end of the exam period to review and proofread your answer. Look for careless mistakes, check for misspelled or illegible words, and make sure your subjects and verbs

agree. The fewer writing errors you make, the more your instructor can concentrate on the content of your answer.