

## Essay exams: plan before you answer

### 1. Read the exam directions carefully

Do you need to answer all the questions? Can you choose between questions?  
Are there any time limits?

### 2. Make summary notes on the back of the exam sheet.

Before reading any exam questions, unburden your mind by quickly jotting down on the back of your exam booklet ideas, details, formulae, sequences, etc. that you have memorized but think you might forget. This is almost like making a summary of your summary sheets! Aside from getting down your ideas, this is a positive action that gets you involved in the exam and, thereby, builds self-confidence.

### 3. Plan your time.

How much time should you allot to each question?  
Plan the number of minutes per question and stick to it.

### 4. Read all the questions.

Before you start writing anything, read ALL the questions. If you can choose between questions, select those for which you are best prepared. As you read the instructions to the question, underline or circle key words or 'instruction' words. For a list of instruction words, go to Instruction Words for Essays & Examination Questions.

### 5. Jot cues alongside each question.

While reading each question, quickly note a few words or phrases that immediately come to your mind. Later, when you begin writing, use these jottings and those on the back of the exam sheet to organize your answer.

### 6. Start with the easiest questions.

Starting with something you know at the beginning will inspire self-confidence, help you relax, and think clearly. Success begets success!

### 7. Leave time at end.

Leave about 10-20 minutes at the end to read over your exam. Correct any glaring errors and misplaced ideas or words which would hamper comprehension of your answer and potentially lose you marks.

Adapted from: Wauk, P. (1989). *How to Study in College*. 4th edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. p. 293.

## More on essay exams

### Overview

1. Generate possible essay topics
2. Write thesis statements
3. Write 3-4 main points
4. Organize evidence for each main point
5. Write a few mock essay exams

### 1. Generate topics

Look at topics given for the course. Look at old exams questions. Look over your lecture notes and predict possible topics. Focus on areas that were given emphasis and/or repeated themes.

### 2. Write thesis statements

The thesis statement is your purpose, aim or 'argument' in the paper. Identify the **instruction word** first, e.g. analyze, compare, etc. This will help focus your thesis statement, e.g.

Topic: Effects of globalization on the Canadian textile industry

Instruction Word: Discuss (argue pros/cons)

Thesis: Due to globalization, Canadians can now buy cheap clothing, mostly produced in developing countries. However, buying cheap clothing does not mitigate the dire consequences [Argument- Against] of globalization to our local textile industry.

### 3. Add main points to each thesis statement

Identify 3-4 main points which defend the thesis statement. Using the example above, 3 negative effects might be: 1. Canadian job losses 2. local manufacturers must keep costs down 3. export market suffers

Write these main points into topic sentences. A topic sentence has two parts: topic and purpose. Usually a topic sentence appears at the beginning of a paragraph.

Determine the order for each main point.

- a) Random order: any order will do.
- b) Chronological order: there is a time line. Used for describing a process, history, etc.
- c) Logical order: one idea needs to be explained before the next can be understood.
- d) Concession order: argument or strongest points go at the end where the reader is more likely to remember them.

An example of a topic sentence on 'Canadian job losses': Our textile industries' closure led to massive job loss [TOPIC], with workers now facing poor employment prospects [PURPOSE].

#### 4. Organize evidence for each main point

After stating your topic sentence, add evidence/facts to your main idea. Go over your lecture notes, readings, research on the topic as if you were doing research for a term paper.

Under each topic sentence list your evidence. Listing allows you to memorize your evidence in chunks. Use memory devices to assist in retaining this information.

Types of evidence include statistics, examples, case studies, anecdotal information (use sparingly), observational notes, expert quotes, illustrations, graphs.

Here's some evidence for our example on job loss:

- In Ontario 82% factories closed since 1980's
- 0,000+ jobs lost
- only half have full-time jobs
- Bob Owens, CTWA representative—many long-term unemployed; not retrained

#### 5. Write a 'mock' essay exam

See how long it takes you to put it all together. Time yourself.

Spend most of your time on the BODY. That's where the majority of the marks lie. Therefore, do NOT write the conclusion first (as some would argue). Leave 5-10 minutes to proofread your writing for careless mistakes.

When finished the mock exam, self-assess the essay. Do you think it would pass?

#### **The job losses example: Putting it all together**

Due to globalization, Canadians can now buy cheap clothing, mostly manufactured in developing countries. However, buying cheap clothing does not mitigate the dire consequences of globalization to our local textile industry. Globalization has produced three significant negative effects on our Canadian economy: massive job losses; struggling local manufacturers with poor bottom lines; and poor export sales due to high costs of Canadian made goods.

Firstly, the closing of our textile industries has created massive job loss with many workers now facing poor employment prospects: unemployment, casual, or part time work. In Ontario since the early 1980s, 72% of textile factories have closed representing over 50,000 job losses. Moreover, of these 50,000 workers, only half have found full-time, permanent jobs. Bob Owens, CTWA representative, reported that many of these workers face long-term unemployment with little hope of retraining due to age, language, and education issues. Without jobs, a cheap sweater from China is meaningless.

Secondly, in order to compete globally our remaining Canadian textile business...