EXAM ESSAYS

Writing an essay in an exam can be daunting but the following tips will help you face up to the challenge.

Planning is essential.

Before the exam

1. Make sure you know where the exam is being held.
2. Get clear about how long the exam is.
3. Know how many questions you will have to answer.
4. Determine how much time you will spend on each question.

Exam essays test your ability to
- answer the questions appropriately
- develop an argument
- use evidence to support your claims
- articulate your critical voice
- write clearly and correctly.

They provide the chance to show what you know about a number of topics.

Write neatly

Legible handwriting helps the examiner understand your points easily.

Did you know?

It compulsory to bring your campus card to all examinations.

If you do not have your campus card, you will not be permitted to do your exam.

During the exam

1. Choose the essay question(s) you intend to answer.
2. Analyse each question and identify what your main focus will be.
3. Decide on your thesis statement, i.e. the position you are going to argue for.
4. Jot down the points you will use to develop your argument.
5. Prioritize these dot points. They will be the focus of your paragraphs.
6. Write your essay following all the “rules” of writing a good essay, include an introduction.
7. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence, develop one main idea in each paragraph, tie ideas together in the conclusion.
8. Do a quick spelling and grammar check if you have time at the end.

Practise writing essays under exam conditions
To make the most of your exam time, go into the exam well prepared.

Before each exam
- Organize your notes so that you have information and examples which could answer a number of related questions.
- Prepare at least one “extra” topic in case you can’t answer your “favourite” question or it hasn’t been included in the exam.
- Practise writing succinct, clear answers.

Prepare “model” answers only if you know in advance exactly what the exam essay questions are.

Use dot points in exam essays only if you have run out of time (which you won’t if you follow your exam plan and the tips in this handout!).

Use your time efficiently in the exam room

Choose question | Analyse question | Plan main points | Write about each main point | Review and edit

Good preparation is likely to lead to good exam results
1. Practise using past exam papers or questions you have prepared if past papers are not available.

Writing practice essays under exam conditions does the following.
1. Helps you realise how much you can write in a specific time frame.
2. Works as a form of overlearning and so helps move information into your long term memory.
3. Boosts your confidence that you can write what you need to in the given time.

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