

Tips for Taking Essay Tests

So you've been assigned an essay exam? Fear not, the Meijer Center for Writing has your back.

If you know you will be given an essay exam at some point during the semester...

- › Attend class regularly
- › Take high-quality notes during class meetings and while you read
- › Think about what kinds of essay questions you would ask if you were the professor

Some Things to Keep in Mind

- › Reread all of the relevant information before beginning the exam
- › Ask yourself what your instructor is looking for in your essay? Some good questions to ask him or her include what citation system (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) is preferred, what the format of the paper (double-spaced, font, font size etc.) should be, and suggested length.
- › Carefully read all the questions before beginning. If you have a choice of which questions to answer, mark the ones you feel most comfortable answering. You may change your mind, especially because a later question might remind you of information useful for an early question.
- › If you do not understand a question on the exam, ask your instructor. He or she will probably be glad for the opportunity to clarify. If you do not understand a question, it is likely that someone else in the class will not understand it either.
- › Note the instructor's directions for how you should write your essay, specifically the use of words such as compare, summarize, and evaluate.
- › Take notes in the margins of points you want to address in your response to the question. Try to plan how long you want to spend answering each question.
- › Summarize only what is necessary to prove your point.
- › Try to connect the information you have learned in class with any background knowledge you may have, including things you have experienced, or know about from other sources (TV, movies, magazines etc.).
- › Leave room for last minute additions to your essay.
- › Use facts (dates, author's background) and details (plot points) to support argument.

Note: If you wish to bring an in-progress essay exam to the Meijer Center for Writing, the professor must give permission first.