



Steps for Planning and Writing Essay Exams

Too many students make the error of thinking the best way to answer an essay question is to write down everything and anything about the topic as fast as they can. You need to think about the essay test question and organize an appropriate answer. **The first step** is to read the question several times until you are sure you know what the question asks. Below are some steps for writing a good essay.

- **Read** the question several times until you **clearly understand** what is being asked for. (Pay specific attention to the "key word" being used in the question- *see additional handout*)
- **Rephrase** the question into a statement, which can serve as the **thesis statement** for your essay answer or the topic sentence for a one-paragraph answer.
- **Outline** the main points you plan to cover in your answer.
- **Write your essay.** Your opening sentence will be your thesis statement (the **reworded question**). Follow this with any background information and examples, which are necessary for a complete understanding of your answer.

Important Points to Remember

- **Planning**
 - A few minutes of careful planning are crucial to a good essay answer.
 - Budget your time for planning, writing, and editing.
 - Read the question carefully; be sure you understand what the question is asking you to do, and what all parts of the answer should be.
 - Make notes, then organize them and check to see that your outline contains everything it should.
- **Writing**
 - The most important thing in writing the essay is to stay on track and still explain your points adequately. Keep in mind any special instructions your instructor gave.
 - Keep introductions and conclusions short.
 - Say what you are going to say in the introduction, then say it in the body, restate what you have just said in your conclusion.
 - Stick to your outline.
 - Note any new ideas in the margin; don't just stick them in when you think of them.
 - Try not to start over if you get off track; just get back to your outline.
 - Don't save important points for conclusion.
 - Ask yourself:
 1. Do I need to reread the question?
 2. Does it answer the question?
 3. Are any points left out?
 4. Are there words or phrases that I skipped writing fast?
 5. Did I spell important words (relevant to the subject) correctly?

Adapted from <https://pennstatelearning.psu.edu/test-taking-tips#essay> Penn State Learning, 2014 Penn State University, USA

