

# How to Ace Essay Tests

## BEFORE YOU WRITE

- 📖 Budget your time—plan to spend the most time on the highest-point questions. Allow time for reviewing your answers and any unexpected emergencies (such as taking longer than you expected on one question, or drawing a blank on a question).
- 📖 Read all essay questions before you start to write. Underline key words (compare, explain, justify, define). Make sure you understand what you are being asked.
- 📖 Begin with the question that seems easiest to you.
- 📖 Simplify the relationship implied by the question. If you were given the question, "The Progressive Movement was a direct response to the problems of industrialization. Discuss.", narrow your response to a more specific cause and effect relationship such as, "What were the problems of industrialization that caused a response that we label the Progressive Movement?"
- 📖 Before actually writing, do a brain dump an outline. Write down as many ideas and facts as you can remember by recalling your relationship charts and summary sheets. Outline the structure of your answer, numbering your points in the order you want to present them.
- 📖 While writing this answer, if you think of ideas and examples that you can apply to other questions, jot them down on the test answer sheet so you won't forget.

## WHILE YOU WRITE

- 📖 Come up with a definite, clear sentence that directly answers the question. Put this sentence in the first part of your answer.
- 📖 Leave space for additions to your answer by writing on every other line and on only one side of each page.
- 📖 Follow your outline: provide specific examples, supporting facts, and relevant details.
- 📖 Use the technical vocabulary of the course.
- 📖 Write legibly.

- 📖 When you reach the end of your allotted time period for a given question, move on. Partially answering all questions is better than fully answering some but not others. The instructor can't give you any credit for a question you haven't attempted.
- 📖 If you find yourself out of time on a question but with more to say, quickly write on your test answer sheet an outline of what you would write if you had time; you might get partial credit for it.
- 📖 If you don't know much about a question, relax and brainstorm for a few moments about the topic. Recall pages from your texts, particular lectures, and class discussions to trigger your memory for relevant ideas. Write these ideas down as coherently as you can.
- 📖 If your mind goes blank, relax: take some slow deep breaths and, just for a moment, think about something pleasant that's unrelated to the test. Then, let your mind recall through association or redirect your attention to a different question.

## AFTER YOU WRITE

- 📖 Re-read your answers and make any additions that are necessary for clarity and completeness.
- 📖 Check your response for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.