

# Writing Essay Exams

A well written answer to an essay question is:

- 1. Focused:** Be sure to answer the question completely; that is, all parts of the question. Avoid “padding”.
- 2. Organized:** Do some planning and be sure that what you write has a clear introduction (which states the points you are going to make and how you are going to proceed) and conclusion (which summarizes the material covered and your main points)
- 3. Supported:** You need to provide evidence for your assertions (facts, figures, examples, etc)
- 4. Well packaged:** Uses standard language, a good structure and grammatical conventions

## How do you write an effective essay exam?

1. Read through all the questions carefully
2. Budget your time and decide which question(s) you will answer first
3. Underline the key words which tell you what to do for each question
4. Plan your answers on spare paper
5. Write your answers as quickly and legibly as possible
6. Begin with one or two sentence thesis which summarizes the essay. If possible, phrase the statement so that it rephrases the question’s essential terms into a statement.
7. Support your thesis with specific references to the material you have studied.
8. Proofread your answer and correct errors in spelling and mechanics

## Specific organizational patterns and “key words”

Typical Questions		Tools you can use
<b>Definition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define X</li> <li>• What is an X</li> <li>• Choose N terms from the following list and define them</li> <li>• State the term to be defined</li> <li>• State the class of objects or concepts to which the term belongs</li> <li>• Differentiate the term from other members of the class by listing the term’s distinguishing characteristics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details which describe the term</li> <li>• Examples and incidents</li> <li>• Comparisons to familiar terms</li> <li>• State what the term is not</li> <li>• Classification (i.e. break it down into parts)</li> <li>• Examination of origins/causes</li> <li>• Examination of results, effects or uses</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b> Involves breaking something down into its components.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze X.</li> <li>• What are the components of X?</li> <li>• What are the five different kinds of X?</li> <li>• Discuss the different types of X.</li> </ul>	<b>Useful connecting words:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, second, third, etc</li> <li>• Next</li> <li>• Another</li> <li>• In addition</li> <li>• Moreover</li> </ul>

<p><b>Cause and Effect</b> Involves tracing probable or known effects of a certain cause or examining one or more effects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the causes of X?</li> <li>• What led to X?</li> <li>• Why did X occur?</li> <li>• Why does X happen?</li> <li>• What would be the effects of X?</li> </ul> <p><b>Example</b> “Define recession and discuss the probable effects a recession would have on today’s society.”</p>	<p><b>Useful transition words</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because</li> <li>• Consequently</li> <li>• Therefore</li> <li>• For this reason</li> <li>• As a result</li> </ul>
<p><b>Comparison-Contrast</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does X differ from Y?</li> <li>• Compare X and Y.</li> <li>• What are the advantages and disadvantages of X and Y?</li> </ul> <p><b>Example</b> “Which would you rather own – a compact car or a full-sized car?”</p>	<p><b>Useful transition words</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the other hand</li> <li>• Similarly, in the same way</li> <li>• Yet</li> <li>• Unlike A, B...</li> <li>• But, on the contrary</li> <li>• While both A and B are..., only B...</li> <li>• Nevertheless</li> <li>• Though, despite</li> <li>• However</li> <li>• Conversely</li> <li>• While A is..., B is...</li> </ul>
<p><b>Process</b> Involves giving directions or telling the reader how to do something</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how X is accomplished</li> <li>• List the steps involved in X</li> <li>• Explain what happened in X</li> <li>• What is the procedure involved in X?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Useful Transition words</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, second, third, etc</li> <li>• After, afterwards, after this</li> <li>• Next, then, following this</li> <li>• Subsequently</li> <li>• Simultaneously, concurrently</li> <li>• Finally</li> </ul>
<p><b>Thesis and Support</b> Involves stating an opinion and then defending it with data, examples, facts</p>		<p><b>Useful transition words</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therefore</li> <li>• For this reason</li> <li>• It follows that, As a result</li> <li>• Because</li> <li>• However, Consequently</li> </ul>