

*Different test-types can benefit from different strategies. Read on for ways to prepare for, engage in, and reflect upon your essay-exam(s) and the techniques that you might use leading up to, during, and after the test.*

### Before the exam:

- **Practice!** Find practice questions that you can write about, or make them up yourself, or get together with others from your class to draft and exchange. Whatever you choose, just be sure that you practice. And, try to do so in as close to the environment/test-experience as possible:
  - Around the same time you'll be taking the exam
  - In a classroom you can sit in
  - With the same time-constraints.
  - Using the entire process you'll engage in:
    - ⇒ Will you know what questions you might be asked beforehand, or will the questions be a surprise?
    - ⇒ Will you want to dump information down so you don't forget it (dates, names, articles of reference, etc.)?
    - ⇒ What else?
- **Rest well/hydrate/replenish energy.** This goes for any test. Be sure that you're taking care of yourself, drinking enough water, and getting nutritious meals to help you keep your energy up and concentration focused.

### During the exam:

- **Create a schedule for yourself.** If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow yourself seven minutes each (assuming questions are equally weighted). When the time is up, move to the next question. After you've finished all six of the 7-minute sessions, take the time that remains (it's not a lot, but can be used effectively) to finish any answers you weren't able to in the moment. If it comes to it, and you're close to the end of your time, leaving an outline of what you planned to do/compare/critique/conclude can help your instructor have an idea of your next steps, and may provide you with partial credit (something you can ask about before the exam).
- **Before you start working on the exam, read through all of the questions.** Jot down whatever comes to mind when you read the prompts, and dump any dates or names or articles that you don't want to forget. Doing this up front can free up your head to focus completely on the question at hand. And, this strategy can help to reduce anxiety by reminding you how much you know.
- **Be sure you understand the question.** Before you start writing, be clear on what's being asked. If you're not, ask for clarification. Underline key wording of the question, like "name three" or "compare and contrast," to be sure that you're responding to all the requested elements/details of the question completely.

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### During the exam (cont.):

- **Outline the answer before writing.** Taking a bit of time (nothing too long!) to think about the structure of your response can lead to an essay answer that's well-organized, compact, complete and clear, and that's great!
- **Don't forget to include an introduction *and* conclusion.** Ultimately, the introduction may simply be a rewording of the question, turning it into a statement that contains your main point/thesis. Then, of course, you'll write the body of your answer. And finally, work to deliver a compact conclusion that highlights the main points and ties the main ideas into a neat bundle. While important elements of your overall answer, both the introduction and the conclusion should be concise.
- **Reread the paper before turning it in.** When we rush, and when it's high stakes, we may have a tendency to accidentally
  - misspell words
  - omit words and parts of sentences
  - omit parts of questions
  - miswrite dates and figures (1353 as 1953; \$.50 as \$50, etc.)Leave time at the end (remember that schedule you've created at the beginning) to go back and reread, and try to leave enough time that the rereading itself isn't rushed.
- **If you're not sure, offer approximates rather than specifics.** Naming a date incorrectly could throw your entire answer off. If you aren't 100% sure, it's a good idea to write something like "During the early years of Impressionism" rather than "In 1864" if you're not entirely sure that it really is in 1864. More often than not, and unless otherwise noted, approximation is perfectly acceptable.

### After the exam:

- **Go over your answers.**
  - Take note of what went well/was answered correctly
  - Take note of what was missed and spend time considering/naming whyEngaging in this kind of active review gives you an action once you've received your grade/feedback and helps prepare you for the next test. Analysis and reflection on the test and your answers helps increase your awareness of challenge-points and also reaffirms your strengths.
- **Ask questions and seek answers.** If you don't understand the grading/feedback, or you're not sure why your answer was incorrect, talk to your instructor. Got questions? Ask! Having that conversation can help you identify more effective strategies, find gaps in knowledge, and lets your instructor know that you're invested in the class and your learning.