

Taking Exams (Essays)

I. Introduction – Earlier we discussed pointers for taking objective tests. Today I'd like to discuss subjective tests which include short answer essay and Fill-in-the-Blank.

A. Go over Advantages & Disadvantages.

Subjective Tests

Advantages:

- Tests knowledge.
- Easier for teacher to write.
- Part Credit for part knowledge.
- Bluffing possible.

Disadvantages:

- Recall.
- Difficult & time consuming to grade.
- Grade based on more than subject knowledge.
- Time limit.
- Writing is tiring.
- Guessing is harder.

B. There are three main areas to know when answering essay or subjective tests:

1. The vocabulary used in testing situations.
2. Test mechanics – how to plan the test and actually write the answers. This includes knowledge of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
3. Content knowledge specific to that test—i.e.—math, geography, etc.

II. Test Vocabulary.

A. Understanding Test Words. Learning the meanings of these words often found in test questions can save points as they usually can't be interchanged! You must know what the instructor is asking you to do before you can do it! Some words are very similar in meaning; if in doubt, ask the instructor.

| Key Words | Example | Information to Include |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Comprehension | | |
| Discuss | Discuss Laetrile as a treatment for cancer. | Consider important characteristics and main points. |
| Enumerate | Enumerate the reasons for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. | List or discuss one by one. |
| Define | Define thermal pollution and include several examples. | Give an accurate meaning of the term with enough detail to show that you really understand it. |
| Application | | |
| Illustrate | State Boyle's law and illustrate its use. | Explain, using examples that demonstrate or clarify a point or idea. |
| Analysis | | |
| Compare | Compare the causes of air pollution with those of water pollution. | Show how items are similar as well as different; include details or examples. |
| Contrast | Contrast the health care systems in the United States with those in England. | Show how items are different; include details or examples. |
| Explain | Explain why black Americans are primarily city dwellers. | Give facts, details, or reasons that make the idea or concept clear and understandable. |
| Describe | Describe the experimentation that tests whether plants are sensitive to music. | Tell how something looks or happened, including how, who where, and why. |
| Justify | Justify former President Carter's attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran. | Give reasons that support an action, event, or policy. |
| Synthesis | | |
| Trace | Trace the history of legalized prostitution in Nevada. | Describe the development or progress of a particular trend, event, or process in chronological order. |
| Summarize | Summarize the arguments for and those against offering sex education courses in public schools. | Cover the major points in brief form; use a sentence-and-paragraph form |
| Evaluation | | |
| Evaluate | Evaluate the strategies our society has used to treat mental illness. | React to the topic in a logical way. Discuss the merits, strengths, weaknesses, advantages, or limitations of the topic. |
| Criticize | Criticize the current environmental controls to combat air pollution. | Make judgments about quality or worth; include both positive & negative aspects. |
| Prove | Prove that ice is a better cooling agent than water when both are at the same temperature. | Demonstrate or establish that a concept or theory is correct, logical, or valid. |

B. Specific Examples

1. List and enumerate mean just that 1 – 2 – 3. Example: List 3 foods you like. It's best to use a complete sentence and enter the numbers. The numbers help the teacher and make it easier for you to double check that you've given the number asked for. Many times students may know 6 reasons, but lose track in the process of writing and only put 4 or 5, thus losing points needlessly.

I like 1. Apples

2. Pizza

and 3. Chocolate. Listed down is easier to grade.

Also, if you can't think of a fifth answer & you have left an open space & numbers, it is an easy flag to come back to when you are rechecking your test.

2. Compare – includes both pros and cons.

- C. Mark and address every verb mentioned. A major problem for many students is to answer all parts of one question. They get involved writing the first part and forget to include or come back to the second (or third etc.) part. Often the teacher may actually put more worth on the latter part – explain, give reasons why, justify your answers – than on the first part which may be a list. If you can write on your test, try underlining the verbs or putting * to alert you to several parts. For example – Enumerate 3 foods you like and explain why. Note that this is really two questions – List and Explain. 1. I like ¹ apples because of their sweetness and crunchiness, ² pizza because of its cheese and tomatoes, and ³ chocolate because of its creaminess and sweetness.

- D. After learning the meanings of test vocabulary, if you still are in doubt, ask the professor to clarify. An appropriate question might be, “By discuss, do you mean to talk about?” Always answer the question that was asked. It does you no good to write a beautiful description of something when the professor really wanted the pros and cons of using that item.

III. Mechanics of writing essay tests. Let's look at the mechanics of writing on the handout. Discuss:

A. Short Answer.

- B. Essay Pointers – include LABBOWL. Stress bring out the COPS at the end of the test. COPS – Capitals, Organization, Punctuation, and Spelling.

Test Taking Strategies, Part II

SUBJECTIVE TESTS

Short answers

1. Think before you write.
2. Use simple, concise answers and sentences; write legibly.
3. If unsure of an answer, write as much as you can recall.
4. Answer the question that is asked.

Essay tests

1. Graders often don't just count points made. They also grade on reasoning ability, factual accuracy, relevance to questions, organization, complete answers, and clarity. Messiness and incorrect spelling may have a negative effect on the grader.
2. Use the acronym LABBOWL (Dr. Genny Cramer) to help remember steps to take.
 - L Look over the entire exam before beginning.
 - A Ask for point allotment if it isn't given.
 - B Budget time according to the point allotment. (Spend more time on questions worth most points.)
 - B Begin with the question you know best to build confidence and momentum.
 - O Outline each question before writing. Turn in outline with test as you may get partial credit if ideas are outlined on questions you ran out of time on.
 - W Watch key words (such as justify, explain, trace); answer questions asked.
 - L Look over the exam when finished to correct errors and omissions. Bring out the COPS (Capitals, Organization, Punctuation, & Spelling).
3. Suggested usage of 45 minutes in class – 10 minutes planning, 30 minutes writing, & 5 minutes COPS.
4. Organize intelligently. Give a statement then explain in more detail. One idea per paragraph. Include the best reasons in first few lines. End with a summary sentence.
5. Avoid unsupported opinions or statements. Give facts, details, reasons or examples to support your statement. Whatever the specific subject of the essay question may be, think of your essay as a way to convince the reader of the correctness of your answer.
6. Use complete sentences and transition words like next, first, last, consequently, on the other hand.
7. Number your responses.
8. Incorporate subject specific vocabulary used by the instructor and textbook.
9. If time permits, don't leave a question blank. Try for partial credit by putting something that is close or your interpretation of the question. Bluffing sometimes helps, and what you thought was not right, may actually be correct.
10. Leave wide margins and several blank lines between questions to allow for inserting information.
11. If the instructor gives you a study guide, have answers for every question listed. If no study guide is given, make up your own sample questions.

“Remember grader’s tired eyes when taking tests” – THE SOUTHWEST STANDARD – 2/28/98

College Press Service – If you have the opportunity to work for a professor, go for it. Professors are a great source of knowledge, professional contacts and career help.

And you'll learn a big lesson about test-taking.

Here's how: Working for a professor, you'll end up grading exams. That's when you'll learn the lesson—it's boring and exhausting work. Answers run together, coffee disappears. So what's the moral?

Write for tired eyes. People with tired eyes. People with tired eyes faced with a big stack of blue books tend to skim. So make it easy for your grader to award points. Remember, you start with a blank piece of paper and zero points. Only by showing what you know do you earn points. The more you show, the more you score.

Start with vocabulary. Use terms from the book and especially from in-class lectures. Underline key words in your response and use lists every chance you get.

When in doubt, the key word is quantity. The more facts you deliver, the better. Just remember those tired eyes.

IV. Graphic Organizer – You should always use a graphic organizer unless you're just asked to list. For lists it sometimes takes as much to make an organizer as it does to just make the list.

A. Advantages of organizers. What are some advantages to using a few minutes of test time on an organizer?

1. Needs short time but well worth it.
2. Brain storming.
3. Orders & organizes. It's best to put best or strongest point first. You can quickly eliminate ideas that are not appropriate or ones you can't justify.
4. Helps one get focused.
5. It helps keep you on the topic rather than wandering onto a tangent.
6. Sometimes your brain will forget future points when you are writing the first paragraph. If this happens, you can quickly refer back to the organizer to refresh your memory. Without it, you must spend time rethinking your ideas. On tests, you not have this luxury.
7. You may get partial credit if you run out of time.
8. It can help the teacher follow your logic or though when your words ramble. It helps me know where one item starts & stops.

B. Kinds of graphic organizers include.

1. Formal Outline – This is easiest for those who are left-brained.

I.

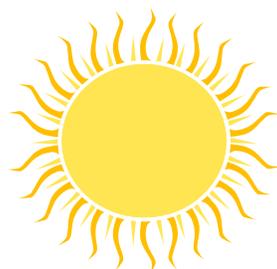
A.

1.

2. Chart –

| Pros | Cons |
|------|------|
| | |
| | |

3. Web/Mind map – Easiest for right-brained and visual learners. Do in color, draw pictures.



Organize thoughts Brainstorm

4. List of key words & ideas.

C. How to use one for an essay test for a question: List 3 kinds of stress you face & give examples. Go through steps in using an organizer.

V. Guided Practice – On paper, have students answer the following questions. Stop after the first and discuss.

A. Enumerate (list) 3 kinds of question formats on subjective tests.

B. What are some advantages of subjective tests?

C. What are the steps of LABBOWL & give an example of how to use?

VI. Study Guide for Essay Test

A. Discuss upcoming essay test and study guide provided. Remind students they are to submit a blank blue book to me the day before the test for me to check.

Essay Tests

- ❖ **Content covered**
- ❖ **Vocabulary used in testing**
- ❖ **Test Mechanics**

