

Exam Writing Tips

To do well on any exam you need to know the material and be prepared. Using a few simple strategies can help you become more confident when writing exams.

Get off to a good start

- Prepare all of the materials that you will need for the exam in advance, such as pencils, pens, eraser, calculator, etc.
- Get a good night's sleep and eat a nutritious breakfast.
- Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early to your exam room.
- Avoid agitated classmates.
- Stay focused and calm, and use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing.
- Before you start your exam, listen to verbal instructions carefully.

Develop a strategy

- When you receive your exam, write down any information that is important to remember such as formulas, dates, names, concepts, definitions, etc.
- Before you begin answering questions, read the instructions carefully. Look over the entire exam to see the content and the types of questions that are on the exam, e.g., multiple choice, true/false, short answer, essay, etc.
- Spend a few minutes planning how much time you want to spend on each section or question and allocate your time accordingly. For example, if a two-hour exam has 30 multiple choice and 2 essay questions, you might plan to spend 30 minutes on the multiple choice section, 35-40 minutes on each essay, and 10-20 minutes for review.

Mark questions you want to return to

- Don't panic if you encounter a difficult question you can't answer right away; mark it with a question mark and move on to another question.
- When you have finished answering all the questions you know, return to the ones you had difficulty with.
- If you are still unsure about an answer, go with your first instinct.

Check your answers

- Review your exam to see if you made any careless mistakes such as circling an unintended answer or a calculation error.
- Use all the time you're given in an exam.

Types of Exam Questions

Multiple Choice

1. Cover the answers.
2. Read each question (or stem) carefully.
3. Try to answer each question **before** looking at the choices.
4. Uncover the answers one at a time and use a systematic process of elimination.
5. If you are unsure, go with your hunch.

For more detailed information, see the “Multiple Choice Exams” handout.

True/False

1. Read the entire question carefully; one word may determine if the statement is true or false.
2. Look for qualifiers, including words such as *all*, *most*, *sometimes*, or *rarely*.
3. Watch for negatives such as *not* and *cannot*.

Essay

1. Read each question carefully and start with the easiest one.
2. Make a brief outline including key words, ideas, and points you want to include.
3. Follow a basic essay format including brief introductory paragraph with thesis statement, three-paragraph body, and brief concluding paragraph.
4. Get right to the point, use your strongest points first, and keep to the point.
5. Make clear that you understand the material, and use examples to illustrate your points.
6. Write legibly and double-space; difficult to read handwriting might lower your mark.
7. If you run out of time, use point form to get your remaining ideas on paper, which is better than nothing at all.

For more detailed information, see the “Essay Exam Questions” handout.

Open Book

1. Carefully organize your notes, readings, and any other material you will need.
2. Write down any formulas you will need on a separate sheet of paper.
3. Bookmark important tables and indexes.
4. Highlight areas that you know will be covered on the exam.

For additional assistance, make an appointment to see a Study Skills Tutor in the Academic Success Centre.