Exam Taking Tips and Techniques

**Taking the Multiple Choice Exam**

- Before you begin taking the test, look at the number of questions. If you have 50 minutes and 50 items, you have about 1 minute for each question. Some students find it helpful to mark the halfway time and the halfway question at the top of the exam to help them keep track of the time.
- Complete the items you know for sure first! You won’t miss any easy questions by running out of time. It builds confidence. And, later questions sometimes help to answer earlier questions. After completing all of the answers you know for sure, go back and work through the rest of the test. Be aware of how many questions you have left and how much time you have to do them.
- Beware of grey terms such as “sometimes, frequently, often, many, generally, on the average, or usually.” Beware of absolute terms such as “all, none, always, must, never, or best.” Statements containing them may be incorrect because few things in life meet the requirements of “all, none, always, never, best.” **Read carefully so you don’t miss terms like “not” and “except.”**
- Read ALL choices. Cross out the letter of obvious incorrect choices. Select the best one. If two or more choices are correct, choose the most specific one. For example, “a triangle has three sides” is better than “a triangle has more than two sides.”
- Don’t pay attention to how many a’s, b’s, c’s, or d’s you’ve marked.

**Taking the True/False Exam**

- Read the directions – Do you have to write explanations as to why the statements are true or false?
- Be careful of statements with two clauses. If the statement contains “and,” then BOTH clauses have to be true for the statement to be true. If the statement contains “or,” then only one clause has to be true for the statement to be true.

**Taking the Essay Exam**

- Before an essay exam, you may want to ask your professor: long or short essay questions? How many essay questions? Will there be a choice of questions?
- Remember, essay exams are more than “spitting back information.” They require application and evaluation of concepts, critical thinking and analysis. Read the directions carefully and make sure you know what you’re being asked to do. For example, if your professor wants you to evaluate philosophical theory, then you won’t get full credit if you just describe the theory.
- Note the weight of each question. Are all questions weighted equally? Budget your time according to the weight of each question.
- Once you fully understand what the question is asking you, create a logical outline, question chart, or key word diagram. This will give your essay direction. Your professors are definitely influenced by well organized, clear and compact thought patterns.
- Begin with a simple and clear thesis statement that reflects your understanding of the whole question. Then, systematically support your thesis and do not stray from your thesis or outline. Avoid “fat,” “fluff,” and “filler.” Remember to include some specific details and examples if applicable. Finish it up with a summary. The summary is simply a paraphrasing of your introduction.
- Qualify answers when in doubt. It is better to say, “towards the end of the 19th century” than to say “in 1894” when you can’t remember the exact date.
- Review the common terms on page 6 in your workbook. They are commonly found in essay exam questions. Know these words! An understanding of these terms will enable you to give your professor what s/he is requesting.
- Last, but not least, proof read your essay!
Exercise on Taking an Essay Exam

Directions: Read each of the following essay questions. In each question, underline the TOPIC, circle the LIMITING WORD, and place a box around the KEY WORD.

* A KEY WORD tells what type of details are required / what you are going to do.
* A LIMITING WORD gives the specific details required / you are going to do what.

1. Discuss the long-term effects of the trend towards smaller, more self-contained family structures.

2. Trace the development of monopolies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America.

3. Explain one effect of the Industrial Revolution upon each of three of the following:
   a.) transportation  
   b.) capitalism  
   c.) population growth  
   d.) socialism  
   e.) communication  
   d.) scientific research

4. Discuss the reasons why, although tropical plants have very large leaves and most desert plants have very small leaves, cactus grows equally well in both habitats.

5. Describe the events leading up to the War of 1812.

6. Compare and contrast the therapeutic techniques used in Gestalt and Person-Centered therapy.

7. Define a society and name three aspects of behavior that are usually found within a society.

8. Contrast the Malthusian view and the Cornucopian view towards non-renewable resource supplies.

9. Distinguish between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research and give some of the key advantages and limitations of each approach.

10. Illustrate how metaphor and simile are used in both Carl Sandberg’s “Chicago” and Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall.”