

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY FOR TESTS

DEFINITION OF AN ESSAY:

An essay is an analytical or interpretive composition which deals with a subject from a personal point of view. The writer of an essay must convince the reader that his/her viewpoint makes sense. The heart of good essay writing is the quality of your argument and the level of analysis. The essay must go beyond description and narrative. It should represent your considered perspective and your informed thoughts on the issue.

WHAT DO ESSAY QUESTIONS ASK FOR?

When writing an essay you must first have a firm understanding of the subject matter. You must acquire a grasp of the factual material, and then you must be informed on various scholarly perspectives, arguments, and debates with regard to the topic; finally you must be aware of different interpretations among scholars. After all of this you can then formulate your own point of view.

- Essay questions ask you to:
- o present or defend a point of view;
 - o show the relationship between events or people or concepts;
 - o compare or contrast people, events, doctrines, or ideas;
 - o illustrate similarities and differences between people, ideas, time periods, or cultures.

HOW CAN YOU PREPARE TO WRITE A GOOD ESSAY?

Think about the essay question you are answering, what it means and what you're being asked to do. Be sure of your point of view. You cannot cover every aspect of a topic, but, once you select your point of view, you can find relevant facts to back it up. Stick with your thesis until the end.

You can memorize some key words and phrases in advance such as "with respect to" "the most important element", "with the exception of". You must become familiar with vocabulary and specific terminology related to the subject. And you can learn some famous maxims or adages such as "I am a citizen, not of Athens, nor of Greece, but of the world, (Socrates), "Ars longa, vita breva" or "Man doesn't live by bread alone" and use them to make your point in your essay.

HOW SHOULD THE ESSAY BE STRUCTURED?

The essay should contain 4-5 paragraphs, that is, an introductory paragraph, 2-3 supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. Paragraph structure is the key to a great essay. A paragraph is a cluster of sentences revolving around one topic, thought, or idea. You

use paragraphs to show where one group of thoughts ends and where another group of thoughts begins.

HOW SHOULD THE INTRODUCTION BE WRITTEN?

Attract the attention of your reader by making a provocative opening statement. For example for the essay question "Based on what we have studied we have seen that independent of each other, in different parts of the world, people developed many of the same patterns of life. What are some of these same patterns of life and similar characteristics which many human beings share?" a provocative opening statement would be: "As world history unfolded and as human beings reached new thresholds of knowledge they tended to develop in similar ways in entirely separate areas of the world. For example, unbeknownst to the others, human beings created cave art in prehistoric times in Africa, Europe, Brazil and Australia; in the Neolithic era human beings learned to domesticate plants independently on all continents of the world; and, at the beginning of civilization, women became subordinated in all cultures and civilizations on earth. In this essay, I wish to explain how this occurred and show that independent, or parallel development, provides strong evidence of the unity of the human family at a very deep level."

HOW SHOULD THE SUPPORTING PARAGRAPHS BE WRITTEN?

The supporting paragraphs should contain specific details and facts which support your main point.

HOW SHOULD THE CONCLUSION BE WRITTEN?

The conclusion should restate the main point, summarize highlights, and perhaps include a quote or generalization which pertains to the main point. "While the study of world history certainly shows how people have learned from each other through cultural diffusion, one of the most fascinating revelations of world history is how people developed certain practices and insights independently in different parts of the world. This independent development clearly illustrates the common humanity of all homo sapiens sapiens and is strong evidence of the unity of the human family at a very deep level. In fact, it even confirms and reinforces the Hindu belief in the unity of all life asserted in the Upanishads which claims "This whole world is Brahman. Whatever it is, whether tiger, lion, wolf, or worm, it becomes its essence and the whole world has Brahman as its soul."

WHAT WILL DIFFERENTIATE AN "A" ESSAY FROM A "C" ESSAY?

Your thesis must be supported by empirical evidence or logical inference. The quality of your thesis will be measured by how persuasive it is and persuasiveness will be a function of the skill with which you have constructed your argument. The more complex the argument, provided it is

clearly outlined, the more you will exhibit the necessary analytical skill and creativity to obtain an "A".