

Reading and Planning for Essay Tests

Writing time-limited essays involves the same process as writing a longer essay, but the process is condensed.

Stage I: Planning. *READ THE QUESTION!* Mark the important directions. Briefly plan what you want to write, and make a note of the order in which you want to cover your points.

Stages II and III: Drafting and Revising. Time-limited essays combine these steps. What you write the first time is essentially what you will turn in. It's always a good idea to double space your writing. Follow your plan carefully, because you won't get a chance to go back and re-arrange.

You need only answer the question. You do not need to put down everything you learned or everything you know about the subject. Follow the essential three- or five-paragraph essay format:

Introduction: Say what you are going to write about

Development: One topic per paragraph, using specifics as much as possible.

Conclusion: Summarize what you just said.

The in-between stage: When you write a longer essay, you build in breaks. You can't do this in 30 or 40 minutes, but you can create an oasis for yourself. When your essay is finished, put your head down on the desk and take a quick trip to Bermuda. Spend two minutes basking in the sun, snorkeling, sailing, or beachcombing. Come back to the final stages and read as though you've never seen this piece of writing before.

Stages IV and V: Editing and Proofreading

You get one chance to be sure you've said what you thought you said. Did you accidentally say that Napoleon was a great moral leader, when you meant to say that he was NOT a great moral leader? Did you misspell the one word you know your teacher will not forgive?

STOP. Many students think they gain extra points if they continue writing frantically until the exam is wrested from their grasp. These people merely leave a mess. On the other hand, the assignment is intended to take up at least 90% of the time allotted. If you finish way too early, you probably haven't developed your ideas sufficiently.