Exam Prep and Writing Workshop

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Strategies for Exam Preparation-Things to know

- Be informed
  - Know when and where your exam is
    - Wrong location=extra stress, chances of forgetting and losing precious time.
    - Wrong time=well, the outcome most likely won’t be that great (some profs may be nice and let you write your exams while other may not).
  - Know what the format of the exam is; is it multiple choice, short answers, essay, etc.
    - Each one of these may require a slightly or significantly different study strategy.
    - M/C=recognition, but very specific VS essay exams=more memorization but partial marks.
Be informed Continued...

- What material was covered? Textbook, notes, supplementary readings, labs, tutorials, etc.
- Is the exam cumulative or does it only cover material post-midterm?
- Are previous exams available?
  - Help center in the Arts tunnel.
  - Ask a friend who has taken the course for suggestions.
- “Give-away” questions- Did the professor give any hints/ suggestions during lectures? Or does he/ she have any specific interests?
  - If yes, it is most likely there will be questions from those sections of the material. Make sure that you know those topics so you can get those questions right on the exam.
Short and Long Questions

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https://mrdanbaird.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/wpid-3293117576_05f43d8305_b.jpg?w=1024
Strategies to Study for Short/Long Questions

- Start studying in advance. In case you encounter any problems, you have time to clarify it.

- Organize your notes in headings and sub headings.
  - Allows you to see how much content is under each heading and gives a visual way to remember information.
  - You can also use mind maps (but these are more rare).

- Once organized, make concise notes under each topic.

- Once everything is organized, start memorizing information.
  - Try to remember how many points are under each topic. This will prevent you from missing important points in an exam.
• Predict essay questions that may appear on the exam.
  • If you know how many marks the essay question is worth, try to find topics with at least that many points.
    • This is a good indication that the topic might be an essay question.
  • Also, look for topics the prof spent a lot of time on. Those are also good exam question topics.

• Once you have figured out possible exam questions, outline your answers to see if you have enough content memorized.

• Practice writing essays
  • Watch out for time limits as well as word limits.
    • You have a limited amount of time to write the exam so avoid including unnecessary details and wasting time.
Tips for Writing Essay exams

- Apart from content/knowledge, many professors claim that students lose marks on essay exams due to the following reasons:
  - Lack of clear thesis
  - Lack of organization
  - Insufficient support for ideas
  - Lack of unity.
• So, even though you may know your content, you can lose marks for grammatical and structural errors. So practicing writing an essay is really important in addition to knowing the material. SO PRACTICE!

• Also, try to time yourself to make sure you can write an essay in the given amount of time.
Rule of Thumb

REMEMBER: Quality over Quantity

- Do not aim to fill up the page with irrelevant information.
- Add information relevant to the question being asked.
- Professors are looking for your understanding of the concept and NOT how much you can write. So practice writing concisely.
Tips for Writing Long Answer/ Essay Exams

1) Read through the instructions and all the exam questions first.
   i. Find out if you can choose questions and how many essays you are required to write.
   ii. Look for key terms
       • Analyze, argue, apply, compare/ contrast, evaluate, explain, etc.
   iii. Jot down any key words or spontaneous ideas that come to your mind while reading.
       • Write them while they are fresh.
       • Helps you feel more confident and reduces anxiety.
       • Tells you which questions you feel more confident about.
2) Assess time constrains and plan your time accordingly!

- Obvious fact: the more marks a question is worth, the more time you should designate to it.

- Rule of thumb: the number of marks should correspond to the number of relevant points you have in your answer.
  - In other words: 1 mark = 1 relevant point.
  - It is safe to include 1-2 extra relevant points just to be safe.

- Allocate times for each question and move to the next question as soon as the time is up. Save time to come back to it later.
  - For example, if there are 3 questions and you have 60 minutes to write an exam, allot each question 15 minutes.
  - Once 15 minutes is up, leave the question and move on to the next one.
  - Once 45 minutes is up and you have written something for each question, use the last 15 minutes to finish up any incomplete answers and proofread.
3) Start with an easy question or the one you are the most confident about.

- This will help build your confidence.
- It also sets the mood and gets you in the flow of writing.
- It may also trigger more ideas as you write.
4) Write a thesis with a simple outline

- Often, a thesis can just be rewording of the question along with your main points because of time constraints.
  - Example: What is the impact of internet on post-secondary education?
  - Thesis: The impact of internet on post-secondary education is ______, ______ and ______.

- Jot down all the points you have and start assembling them into headings, with supporting points for each heading. (Create an outline.)

- Helps you organize ideas and gives your essay a great structure.

- Prevents you from rambling and being redundant when you start writing your essay.

- Do not worry about grammar and spelling at this point.
  - Use short hand notation to save time.
  - You can polish the information when you actually start writing the essay.
5) Begin writing your answer.

- Use each category/idea from your outline in each paragraph.

- Use correct paragraph format. Some reminders:
  - First and last sentences should be powerful points. They usually state the same idea in different words.
  - Make sure each paragraph is actually answering the question being asked.
  - Connect each paragraph to your thesis/central question.
  - Make sure to explain and exemplify your point using concrete evidence.
    - Follow the basic rule: State, explain, exemplify!
  - Make use of transition words such as: in addition, also, moreover, furthermore, etc. This makes your essay look less choppy!
  - Always summarize at the end (restate the opening sentence in different words).
    - This helps you tie the paragraph together in a nice little package.
    - Tells your reader that you are done discussing one argument.
6) Go back and proofread

- Once you are done writing your essay, use the left over time to proofread.

- Use this time to fix any grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.

- Add more evidence or explanation if something seems to be lacking.

- Check whether you made your point obvious in each paragraph
  - In case it does not look obvious, sometimes simply adding a sentence at the end of the paragraph helps tie it all up and connects it back to the thesis.
Things to remember!

- When writing essays, remember:
  1. Everything has to be tied to your thesis.
  2. And the thesis should be answering the question that was being asked.
  3. Do not personalize unless the prof asks you to.
  4. Write legibly. I know it sounds simple, but if your marker cannot read it, you will not get the marks.
Emergency Situations

- Regardless of all the planning, it is possible that you may run out of time for maybe one question. In this case, you can do the following:
  - Write down your the major ideas in point form.
    - Split them into headings to indicate that these are your different arguments.
  - If do not have time for that, just rewrite your outline on the exam sheet.

- Never leave the paper blank!!! Write whatever you can write. Most markers will give you partial credit for such a response.
  - On the other hand, if there is no response, your marker has nothing to mark so, you will get a zero.
Last Tip!

- BREATHE!
  - Before, during and after exam.
  - Helps fight nervousness and calms you down.
Summary

- General Study Tips
- Study and writing tips for Short/long question exams
- Tips for emergency situations
THE END
&
GOOD LUCK!
Citation

- University of Saskatchewan, Student Learning Services “Exam Preparation & Writing” handout
- University of Saskatchewan, Student Learning Services “Studying for Essay Exams” handout
- University of Saskatchewan, Student Learning Services “Tips for Different Kinds of Exam Questions” handout
- University of Manitoba, Academic Learning center handout “Writing Essay exams”
- City College of San Francisco “Prepare for Essay Exams” handout
- University of Guelph, Learning Commons Fastfacts Series 2006 “Preparing for Midterm & Exams” handout
- University of Guelph, Learning Commons Fastfacts Series 2006 “Essay Exams” handout
- UNBC, Academic Success Centre “Multiple Choice Exams” handout