Timed Exam Writing

Writing under pressure is more difficult than having plenty of time to formulate ideas and try them out through a number of drafts before the final is completed. Here are a few tips to relieve the pressure and give your writing a boost when you have a limited time to spin your knowledge onto a piece of paper.

The Keys to Preparation

- Once the test has been announced, ask if it will include notes and textbook materials. Find out the format of the test and determine the number of essay questions that must be answered in the allotted time period.
- Participate in a study group where each person should come with an answer to a major question that he/she thinks will be asked by the instructor.
- Come to class well-prepared. Study all relevant textbooks and your notes, including highlighted, bolded, or underscored terms.

Timed In-Class Essay Questions

- Read each question over twice. Notice how many points the question is worth and budget your time based on that number. If a question is worth half of the total points, give yourself half the test time to complete it.
- For each question, be sure you understand the type of answer the question is looking for. Understanding this important point up front will prevent answering the question improperly. Professors are usually happy to explain what they want for each question.
- Compose your answer based on key words within the question. For example, if the question asks you to explain the similarities of a bus and taxicab, your first sentence might begin like this: Buses and taxicabs are similar in that ... Use these key words in your thesis statement. This strategy helps initiate the physical process of writing, which is sometimes the hardest part of an essay.
- Answer the question by stating your basic point and then backing it up with two or three specific details.
- Be sure you answer each part of the question.

Frequently used terms in essay questions:

**Define.** When an essay asks for a definition, it usually means an extended definition, which includes the precise meaning of the word or term as well as examples or illustrations.

**Compare and Contrast.** This requires you to look at two or more people and/or things and determine the similarities and differences in them.

**Narrate.** This tells a story. The sequence of events is important and should follow in chronological order.

**Summarize.** You cover the main points of a longer piece of writing very briefly.

**Discuss.** You should analyze a subject at length and give appropriate examples in your writing to support your analysis.

**Classify.** You group items or issues that are similar together so that the reader can quickly identify them.

**Show.** You show the results of cause and effect. Causes deal with the question why. Effects show results or consequences.