

Test Preparation

BEFORE THE TEST

- **Start preparing for your exams the first day of class.** You can do this by reading your syllabus carefully to find out when your exams will be, how many there will be, and how much they are weighed into your grade.
- **Plan reviews as part of your regularly weekly study schedule;** consequently, you review over the whole quarter rather than just at exam time.
- **Read over your lecture notes and ask yourself questions** on the material you don't know well. You may want to create a study group for these reviews to reinforce your learning.
- **Review previous tests/quizzes** graded by the instructor (if available)
- **Estimate the time you'll need for study.** Review for several short periods rather than one long period. You will find that you retain information better and get less fatigued.
- **Ask the instructor what to anticipate on the test** if he/she does not volunteer the information
- **Pay particular attention to clues** that indicate an instructor might test for a particular idea, as when an instructor:
 - says something more than once
 - writes material on the board
 - pauses to review notes
 - asks questions of the class
 - says, "This will be on the test!"
- **Turn the main points of each topic or heading into questions** and check to see if the answers come to you quickly and correctly. Try to predict examination questions; then outline your answers.
- **Flashcards or concept maps may be a helpful way to review** in courses that have many unfamiliar terms or ideas.

DURING THE TEST

- First, **read the directions carefully!!** Many points have been lost because students didn't follow the directions.
- Remember to **preview the test** to see how much time you need to allot for each section. If the test is all multiple choice questions, it is good to know that immediately.
- Work on the **"easiest" parts first.** If your strength is essay questions, answer those first to get the maximum points. Pace yourself to allow time for the more difficult parts.
- **Find out if you are penalized for incorrect responses.** (This is probably covered in the directions. If not, make educated guesses. If there is a penalty, avoid guessing.
- When answering essay questions, **try to make an outline** in the margin before you begin writing. Organization, clear thinking, and good writing are important, but so is neatness. Be sure to make your writing legible.
- **Save time at the end of the exam to review** your test and make sure you haven't left out any answers or parts of answers. This is difficult to do under the stress of exams, but it often keeps you from making needless errors.

AFTER THE TEST

- If the instructor reviews the exam in class, make sure you attend. Many students choose to skip class of the day of the review because "nothing is happening" that day. On the contrary, this is an important class to attend because it helps reinforce the information one more time in long term memory. Even if you aren't interested in the "learning" aspect of the class, it is an opportunity to hear what the instructor was looking for in the answers. This can help you on the **NEXT** exam.

Multiple choice questions usually include a phrase or stem followed by three to five options:

Test strategies:

- **Read the directions carefully**
Know if each question has one or more correct option
Know if you are penalized for guessing
Know how much time is allowed (this governs your strategy)
- **Preview the test**
Read through the test quickly and answer the easiest questions first
Mark those you think you know in some way that is appropriate
- Read through the test a second time and **answer more difficult questions**
You may pick up cues for answers from the first reading, or become more comfortable in the testing situation
- If time allows, **review both questions and answers**
It is possible you mis-read questions the first time

Strategies to answer difficult questions:

- **Eliminate options you know to be incorrect**
If allowed, mark words or alternatives in questions that eliminate the option
- **Give each option of a question the "true-false test:"**
This may reduce your selection to the best answer
- **Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem**
- **Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you**
- **Question options that contain negative or absolute words.**
Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one, like *frequently* for *always*; or *typical* for *every* to see if you can eliminate it
- **"All of the above:"**
If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility
- **"Look alike options"**
probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out
- **Double negatives:**
Create the equivalent positive statement and consider
- **Echo options:**
If two options are opposite each other, chances are one of them is correct
- **If two alternatives seem correct,**
compare them for differences, then refer to the stem to find your best answer

Essay Exams

Before writing out the exam:

Set up a time schedule to answer each question and to review/edit all questions

- If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow yourself only seven minutes for each
- If questions are "weighted", prioritize that into your time allocation for each question
- When the time is up for one question, stop writing, leave space, and begin the next question. The incomplete answers can be completed during the review time
- Six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three, complete ones

Read through the questions once and note if you have any choice in answering questions

- Pay attention to how the question is phrased, or to the "directives", or words such as "compare", "contrast", "criticize", etc.
- If answers will come to mind immediately for some questions, **write down key words**, listings, etc, as they are fresh in mind. Otherwise these ideas may be blocked (or be unavailable) when the time comes to write the later questions. This will reduce "clutching" or panic (anxiety, actually fear which disrupts thoughts).

Before attempting to answer a question, put it in your own words

- Now compare your version with the original. Do they mean the same thing? If they don't, you've misread the question. You'll be surprised how often they don't agree.

Make a brief outline for each question (Number the items in the order you will discuss them)

- **Get right to the point**
State your main point in the first sentence
Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of your essay.
Use the rest of your essay to discuss these points in more detail.
Back up your points with specific information, examples, or quotations from your readings and notes
- Teachers are influenced by compactness, completeness and clarity of an organized answer
- Writing in the hope that the right answer will somehow turn up is time-consuming and usually futile
- To know a little and to present that little well is, by and large, superior to knowing much and presenting it poorly--when judged by the grade received.

Writing & answering:

Begin with a strong first sentence

that states the main idea of your essay.

Continue this first paragraph by presenting key points

Develop your argument

- **Begin each paragraph** with a key point from the introduction
- **Develop each point** in a complete paragraph
- **Use transitions**, or enumerate, to connect your points
- **Hold to your time** allocation and organization
- **Avoid very definite statements** when possible; a qualified statement connotes a philosophic attitude, the mark of an educated person
- **Qualify answers when in doubt.** It is better to say "toward the end of the 19th century" than to say "in 1894" when you can't remember, whether it's 1884 or 1894. In many cases, the approximate time is all that is wanted; unfortunately 1894, though approximate, may be incorrect, and will usually be marked accordingly.

Summarize in your last paragraph

Restate your central idea and indicate why it is important.

Review:

Complete questions left incomplete, but allow time to review all questions

Review, edit, correct misspellings, incomplete words and sentences, miswritten dates and numbers.

Not enough time? ...Outline your answers

Sample Essay Questions:

Outline the research done by Bahrick and Hall, 1991 and discuss its implications for the study of memory.

From Widener Application:

Discuss some issue of personal, local, or national concern and its importance to you.

Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.

(see Sample History Exam)

A Sample Essay Test Answer (History)

Adapted from J. Millman and W. Pauk, *How to Take Tests*
McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1969

FIRST, ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS:

2. *Competition bet. countries led to nationalism*
3. *No need for other countries for trade*
- 2b. *Minerals (coffee, spices, etc.)*
- 2a. *Wanted money and land*
1. *War*
- 2c. *Cortez and Aztecs*

QUESTION: The fifteenth and sixteenth century voyages of exploration produced lasting changes in the political and social structures of Western Europe. Would you say that these voyages tended to hasten or to delay the growth of national states? Explain.

A GOOD ANSWER

Often starts with a direct answer to the question

The exploration of the 15th and 16th centuries hastened the growth of national states. The reasons have to do with war, money, danger, wealth, trade and pride.

Pre-outlines the topics and order

One of the prime ingredients for the beginning of national states was a common danger from the outside. Because countries went to war over the right to control certain colonies and trade routes, they had to unite within in order to fight off an aggressor.

States one of the reasons

Transition

Other forms of competition between one country and another contributed to the growth of national states. Competition for land and wealth was fierce. The resources of the new lands such as coffee, spices, and minerals were considered valuable. Each country was eager to gain land because the products of the land meant more wealth, as when Cortez conquered the Aztecs. A united country could best succeed in the form of competition.

Specifics given

Phrase added here to show relevance of the point to the question

These resources, brought about by new discoveries, increased the power of mercantilism. With the opening of new trade routes, the Northern and Western European states were able to break the Venetian-Arab trade monopoly with the Indies. The colonization led to a system involving a state-controlled market between the colony and the mother country. This permitted the nations of Europe to become economically separate units with no common market existing between them

Adds an afterthought to make sure the relation of the point to the question is clear

-- a condition which fostered nationalism. It is interesting to note that Italy, which did little exploration, took longer to become a united nation than did the other countries of Europe.

Amplifies with an example

Transition

Another feature in producing national states was the national pride of these voyages tended to produce. (The voyages were financed by a national government. Any new discovery was associated with the sponsoring government, and added to the spirit of nationalism.)

A new point which came to mind during the writing of this answer

A POOR ANSWER
(Teacher's Comments)

*Interesting, but what
relevance does this have to
the question?*

The voyages of exploration is a rather ambiguous term because actually there was no sudden burst of interest in exploring the world around them - they just were looking for easier trade routes to the Orient. This so-called age of exploration if it was indeed exploring was quite by accident.

Irrelevant

When the first countries colonized the "New World" every other country now wanted to get in on it. However, to make voyages in the first place, knowledge was needed in ship-building and navigation. Henry the Navigator bettered the conditions of European states by contributing to navigation, maps, etc. He also began a school for navigation. Great effort was now put forth to build more and more ships and for each country to go and colonize for itself. An example of this would be when Spain started some colonies in the "New World," France, England, Holland, etc., started sending explorers and colonizers out.

*No reasons given. Only a
conclusion is being
stated.*

So, the voyages of exploration didn't delay the growth of the national states. The voyages were all a part of the national states. The explorers who reached other lands claimed their find for their countries. These many voyages induced the growth of national states.

*Competition, wealth, trade,
and pride are all suggested,
but their relation to the
development of nationalism
is hard to see.*

I think these voyages of exploration bound a nation together. The reason for this is that anything a group of people do together, and this was done by a whole country not just its leaders, tends to unite them. Many times newly discovered lands brought great wealth to the mother country and new places for people to settle and raise families. Then when trading was carried out with the newly found places this again helped to unite the nation. People were also united in a common cause, this being to beat other countries to these places, for trade and colonization. The lands that were claimed, and the prestige and trade that followed these voyages affected all the people of the country and made it stronger and richer.

<http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/lrnres/handouts/1419.html>