



# Test Taking

## Essay Test Tips

Philip Larkin once wrote that modern novels consist of a beginning, a **'muddle'** and an end. As do many student essays! So, beware of the common pitfalls.

### Essay Test Taking Tips

Preview the test	Note the total number of items. Identify point values. Judge the amount of time you should spend on each item. Spend the most time on questions that receive the most credit.
Read directions carefully	It is a mistake to ignore test directions. Directions provide information you need to get full credit and to mark answers correctly. Underline key terms and number steps in the directions.
Determine what the question is asking	Answer the question, the whole question and nothing but the question. Look for multiple tasks. Identify key words (see list on back).
Outline or map your response	Jot down key information you know about the topic in a skeleton outline or concept map. Make sure to cross through it when you are finished using it.
Define your thesis statement	Based on what the question is asking. Be direct and explicit: that means giving a clear and relevant argument. I am writing about _____ and I am going to show _____. Refine this statement into a finished product
Introduction	The first paragraph is vital. Do 4 things: 1. Analyze the question, define its meaning and establish its parameters; 2. Sub-divide question into smaller areas (for which you will subsequently have a paragraph); 3. Outline your argument 4. Create a dramatic first sentence to interest the reader.
Body	In the middle paragraphs, deal with one relevant issue per paragraph. Each middle paragraph should have an argument, interpretation, or generalization supported by evidence. You must always give both. Try to give the argument in the first sentence(s) and then 'prove' it with the best details
Conclusion	The final paragraph is also vital. Return to the actual wording of the question and answer it as directly and succinctly as possible – and make sure it's consistent with what you've written earlier. Analyze what you said in your essay. Writing the conclusion to an essay first you can know exactly where you are heading.
Use real facts	Provide evidence and not just opinions.
Use Good Writing	Don't use slang or abbreviations in your writing and proofread your answers. Use transitional words such as next, finally, meanwhile, soon, in addition, also, too, as well as, in comparison, comparatively, etc.
Use Space Wisely	Give most space to the most important issues Don't skip lines between sentences or only use the fronts of pages.
Provide References	Never try to pass off other people's work as your own: plagiarism even of phrases is unacceptable. (Ask your professor if these are required).

Adapted from Pearce, Robert from History Review, a journal for English students reading the History A-level



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#### Determining what is Being Asked on an Essay Question

Many of the writing assignments will fall into one of the following categories, or combine two or more of these strategies.

##### 1. ANALYSIS

The goal of this strategy is to separate and explain parts of an idea, work, or character for the purpose of better understanding of the whole. An Analysis paper usually involves discussion of a single text. Consult the providing reference section for help in quoting and paraphrasing textual material.

##### 2. COMPARE/CONTRAST

This writing strategy shows similarities and differences between two or more things. Your first task is to identify how the two things—authors, topics, ideas- (x and y) differ, or how they are similar. This identification should form the basis of your thesis statement in a comparison/contrast paper.

##### 3. ARGUMENTATION

Identify the basic premises of your argument. Which premise will begin your paper (i.e. your thesis statement). Which premises need support? What textual evidence will serve as such supporting evidence? Avoid emotional appeals in this type of writing, and test the logical sequence of your thoughts.

#### KEY WORDS

**Analyze:** to break down or put together aspects of a whole in order to determine its nature.

**Classify:** to place similar persons or things together in a group.

**Compare:** to bring out points of similarity and difference, with emphasis on similarities.

**Contrast:** to stress differences.

**Criticize:** to point out the good points and bad points of a situation or idea.

**Define:** to give a clear, concise identification of the class to which a term belongs and how it differs from other things in that class.

**Describe:** to recount or create a word picture in sequence or story form.

**Discuss:** to examine and talk about an issue from all sides.

**Evaluate:** to make a statement of negative and / or positive worth and to back the statement with evidence.

**Explain:** to bring out in the open, to make clear, and to clarify.

**Illustrate:** to call forth specific examples, which create a verbal picture of a situation, rule or principle.

**Interpret:** to explain, translate, or show a specific application of a given fact or principal that is beyond previously cited examples or instances.

**Justify:** to tell, in a positive form, why a position or point of view is proper.

**List:** to provide information in a sequenced order.

**Outline:** to organize a set of facts or ideas in terms of main points and sub points.

**Prove:** to give logical evidence as a base for clear, forthright argumentation.

**Review:** to examine or to summarize in chronological order key characteristics or reasons.

**State:** to present a concise statement of a position, fact, or point of view.

**Summarize:** to present the main points of an issue in condensed form.

**Synthesize:** to put together parts to form a whole.

This list of terms is condensed from Writers, Inc.: A Guide to Writing, Thinking & Learning.

Adapted from the Humanities and Western Civilization Writing Guide from the University of Kansas