

Essay Tests

(Adapted from Keys for Writers: A Brief Handbook, by Ann Raimes, published by Houghton Mifflin Company)

Essay Tests – Writing

In an examination setting, you have to write quickly and on an assigned topic. You need to pare down the process to the minimum. Generating and organizing ideas are still important, but now you will work within a time frame.

How to Approach an Essay Test

1. Prepare carefully: review assigned materials and notes, underline, annotate, summarize, predict questions, draft some answers. Arrive early in the examination room and get settled.
2. Underline key terms in the assigned questions. Ask for clarification if necessary.
3. Think positively about what you know. Work out how to highlight details you know most about. Stretch and relax.
4. Plan your time. Jot down a rough schedule, allowing enough time for writing, checking, and editing your response to each question, but more time for questions that are worth more points. To increase your confidence, answer the easiest questions first.
5. Make a scratch outline to organize your thoughts.
6. Read over your essay, checking for content, logic, and clarity. Make sure that you have answered the question.

Essay Tests – Key Terms

analyze:	divide into parts and discuss each part
argue:	express an opinion and point out your reasons
classify:	organize people, objects, or concepts into groups
compare:	point out similarities
contrast:	point out differences
define:	give the meaning of
discuss:	state important characteristics and main points
evaluate:	define criteria for judgement and examine good and bad points, strengths and weaknesses
explain:	give reasons or make clear by analyzing, defining, contrasting, illustrating, and so on
illustrate:	give examples from experience and reading
relate:	point out and discuss connections