

Getting Good Grades: Writing Exams

For all kinds of exams, **arrive early** at the exam site; leave yourself some time to quickly review flash cards or silently rehearse formulae, if needed. When you start the exam, **read the directions carefully**, quickly skim the entire exam and **figure out how much time to allot for each section**. Do the easy (or familiar) questions first. **Work on one at a time** and don't leave early -- use the extra time to go over your answers.

FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING:

-  Work quickly and carefully.
-  Read all questions carefully.
-  Budget time according to marks for each.
-  If requested, show all work.
-  Leave time to look over answers thoroughly.

FOR SHORT ANSWERS:

-  Be sure to write enough significant points (to get sufficient marks).
-  Start out by defining all terms in the question.
-  Think MACRO: relate the terms to the general ideas presented in the course.
-  Think MICRO: add supporting examples.

FOR ESSAY QUESTIONS:

-  Most essays are graded on information, organization and style.
-  Read all questions carefully; once you have decided on one, don't change your mind.
-  Write a strong introduction that contains your subject, thesis statement, and your main points listed in the order in which you are going to write about them. (*Visit the Writing Centre beforehand for strategies on how to structure essays*).
-  Start writing; generally speaking, the more you write the better; include as many specific references (names, dates, direct quotations) as possible.
-  If there is more than one essay question on the exam, leave a couple pages after each so that you can add more if you have time.

FOR OBJECTIVE TESTS:

(Multiple choice, true/false and matching):

-  Read every word of the question carefully. Then re-read it!
-  Watch out for qualifying words; statements that use absolute terms (never, always, only, necessary, must, etc.) are rarely true; statements that use relative terms (like, often, seldom, perhaps, generally, etc.) are often true.
-  Cover up answers for multiple choice and anticipate correct answers.
-  Watch out for double negatives (There is no time when this is not true).
-  Don't be misled by jargon or familiar phrases used in an incorrect statement.
-  Always choose the "best" answer; this is often the answer that uses a word or phrase specific to the course.
-  When in doubt, eliminate all wrong answers and then guess (unless there is a penalty for wrong answers).

FOR TAKE-HOME EXAMS:

Treat them like essays. Provide carefully researched and well-constructed answers; if appropriate, type or word-process your answers.