

Writing Under Pressure: Exam Essay

Writing an exam essay usually means that you will have a limited time to develop and organize your thoughts and to revise and edit your paper. Having a clear idea of what to do during the exam and how to approach responding to a writing prompt may help lower your anxiety and may also help you stay focused and organized.



Before the exam, practice.

Use the planning strategy below to practice writing an essay. Time yourself and see how much you can write within the given time limit. Schedule an appointment in the Richard Wright Center to meet with a tutor to receive feedback on your essay.

During the exam, prepare to write.

- Read the instructions: Underline each thing you must do. [1-2 minutes]
- Read each prompt: Choose the one that you know, that you have experience with. [2-3 minutes]
- Once you choose a prompt, **make a plan**. [5-8 minutes]
- Check the clock: Use it to plan equal time for each point AND 5 minutes to edit and recheck the instructions.

Plan your essay on scratch paper.

1. Use the language of the prompt to write out your **thesis statement** in a complete sentence. Make sure to respond to all parts of the prompt and list two or three reasons. In other words, “map” out your essay.
2. **Outline** your essay: Organization is crucial, so follow your map.

Point 1: Write out your first reason in a complete sentence. Include a transition like “first.”

Evidence: What brief example can you give? Use details as evidence.

Point 2: Write out your second reason in a complete sentence. Include a transition like “second.”

Evidence: What brief example can you give? Use details as evidence.

Point 3: Write out your third reason in a complete sentence. Include a transition like “finally.”

Evidence: What brief example can you give? Use details as evidence.

Consider: Who may disagree with you? In one of your points, you may want to say what you would say to those who might disagree with you.

3. Write your **conclusion**: Summarize your essay. Emphasize the importance of your position, using a one-sentence example to end your essay.
4. Now write your **introduction**. Begin by describing the example you thought of in your conclusion. End with your thesis statement.

Sample Topics

1. What do you consider the most important event of the last decade? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with clearly articulated reasons and specific examples.
2. More and more students are interested in taking online classes because of the convenience. If you have taken an online class, compare and contrast the experience with traditional classroom learning. Be sure to use specific examples to illustrate your discussion. State clearly in the essay whether or not online learning is equal to or better than traditional learning.
3. Invention and technology have always been an important part of changing the way one lives. Things that did not exist when your parents or grandparents were young now have changed the way most people in this country live. Some of those inventions are large and others are small. No matter what their size, they have altered the lives of the average person today. Write about how one such invention that came about in the last hundred years or so has caused a significant change in the way people live their lives on a daily basis.