

Figure 1: Steps to Effectively Answering Essay Questions

Anticipate the test questions

Long before you sit down to take an essay test, you should begin the process of preparing. Don't let a class conclude without ensuring that you understand what the teacher has been communicating. Ask questions to get the information you need to know.

If you understand the course material, you will also know which information is the most important. The instructor's essay questions will assess your knowledge of the most important material covered in the course. Focus your study on this key information. Don't stop studying until you can create outlines of solid answers to the questions you anticipate being asked.

Jot and organize notes about the test questions

At the beginning of the test, as soon as you see the test questions, jot notes of important information you surely want in your brief written answer. Organize these notes into a rough outline of your answer. These notes are actually time-savers. You will save more time by jotting notes and outlines than it will take you to do this prewriting. Because you've thought through your answer before you began to write, it will probably look neater, too. There will be fewer words crossed out or erased.

Begin your essay answer with a thesis or topic sentence

Right at the beginning of your answer, state the point that you are asserting. Jennifer made it plain that she was going to describe how Solveiga moved easily from one word recognition strategy to another: **As Solveiga reads *Angela's Airplane*, she smoothly moves from one word recognition procedure to another.** Don't waste your instructor's time: Get right to your main point.

Support your contention

Once you've clearly stated your point or the way you will organize your answer, provide the detail that will convince your reader you know what you're writing about. Note the way Jennifer described the specific procedures that Solveiga followed as she attempted to read the word *okay*. Writing convincing detail will earn you a good mark.

Restate your contention or main points

When you briefly recapitulate the main ideas in your answer, your reader is reminded that you comprehensively answered the question. Jennifer reminded her reader that Solveiga read most words in the book automatically, but moved smoothly to phonic analysis and sensible guessing when she could not immediately read a word. The effect of Jennifer's restatement of the main points of the answer is to leave the instructor with the sense that Jennifer has included all the pertinent information in her answer. This recapitulation influences the instructor to give full marks when you deserve them.

Proofread and edit your answer

Try to leave time to proofread your answer. Your reader will more easily concentrate on your message if you can eliminate distracting misspellings or punctuation errors.