

## TIPS FOR TAKING ESSAY TESTS

1. Read all questions before you begin, and budget your time
2. Read all questions carefully
  - Underline key words and determine what is being asked
  - Answer all parts of the question as directly as possible; do not include information that is not asked for
3. Organize your thoughts before you begin to write
  - Choose a title; it helps you focus your thoughts and narrow your subject
  - Create an informal outline of the main ideas and supporting details
4. Strive for a well organized, focused essay with a beginning, middle, and end
5. Document (support) your assumptions or opinions with examples or facts as well as you can. Be as specific as possible
6. Develop your ideas completely – remember you are trying to communicate with a reader
7. Avoid making major errors in sentence construction or spelling – the best ideas are sometimes lost in the confusion of poor structure
8. Write neatly – don't make the instructor try to decipher your answer
9. Allow room to expand
  - Leave space between answers to add new ideas or information you may think of while writing
10. Write a strong conclusion to the essay that concisely states your position
11. Proofread your essay for sense – make sure you've answered the question completely
12. Do the hard questions last – but don't leave them unanswered
13. If a question confuses you, write any thoughts you have about the topic on the back of your paper – this helps you focus your attention and increases recall
14. Try to answer all of the questions
  - If you run out of time, outline the remaining questions – this will show you have some knowledge of the content, and you might receive partial credit
  - For questions you don't know the answer to, write as much as you can about the subject, even if the answer is sketchy

## ESSAY QUESTION WORDS AND GUIDES FOR WRITING ANSWERS

<i>If you are asked to ...</i>	<i>Then ...</i>	<i>By using transitional words such as...</i>
COMPARE or match	Identify similarities and differences	Similarly, in addition, also, too, as well as, both, in comparison, likewise
CONTRAST or distinguish	Identify differences	However, but, similarly, oppositely, conversely, on one hand, on the other hand, on the contrary, in contrast, yet, even though
DISCUSS or describe	Provide details or features that clarify your main idea	To begin with, then, first, second, third
ENUMERATE, name, list, outline	Identify major points	Next, finally, outline, or, meanwhile, more, another, soon, now, while, later, at last
TRACE, arrange, sequence, or rank	List information in order; discuss a series of events and their relationship to one another	Furthermore, later, before, after, during
DEMONSTRATE or show	Provide examples	For example, for instance, in other words, in addition, too, as an illustration, to illustrate, also
RELATE or associate	Show associations	As a result, because, this lead to, if...then, in order that, unless, since, so that, thus, therefore, accordingly, so, yet, consequently
SUMMARIZE, survey, list, outline	Provide a short synopsis; give only the important points	Any of the above transition words
APPLY	Show use for	Any of the above transition words
CONSTRUCT, develop, or devise	Create	Any of the above transition words
EXPLAIN, defend, or document	Give reasons for support; answer "why?"	Any of the above transition words
ANALYZE, examine, evaluate	Review or evaluate features of components; express a point of view	Any of the above transition words
DEFINE	Give short, concise answer; present the term's major characteristics	Any of the above transition words

## SAMPLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. List the major stages in the development of the human fetus.
  - *List each step in the fetal development of the child. You should then briefly comment on each stage, but you do not need to discuss the relationship of one stage to another or the importance of any of these stages.*
2. Discuss four reasons for the entry of the United States into World War II.
  - *You need to choose those examples that account for the United State's entry into World War II. If the ideas are your own, be sure to include qualifiers such as "may," "might," "likely," or simply state, "in my opinion."*
3. Define prejudice as it's used in sociology.
  - *Explain prejudice from a sociological perspective. You aren't being asked to list its various meanings or to explain its history.*
4. Compare and contrast the attitudes of Presidents Reagan and Carter regarding social welfare programs.
  - *You need to cite programs and legislation from both administrations that show similarities and differences.*
5. Analyze the major characters in Dicken's *Great Expectations*. Are these characters successful?
  - *Choose characters in the novel whose actions and traits make them believable. You need to choose carefully those details that demonstrate Dicken's success or failure in rendering the character.*
6. Defend the premise that nuclear arms will one day lead to nuclear holocaust.
  - *You should discuss only how nuclear arms are a threat to peace.*
7. Trace the development of labor unions in the United States from 1900 to the present.
  - *You need to choose the important figures and events that led to the formation of unions in the United States; you also need to show how events or individuals influenced other events or individuals.*
8. Discuss three key factors that led to the Great Depression in the United States.
  - *Even if ten factors were discussed, you need to determine which three have priority.*