

Essay Tests

PURPOSE

Many standardized tests such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and the Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators (GACE) include a section that evaluates writing skills, and essays are often an important part of class tests. Essay tests differ from essays written outside class in several ways that make them more intimidating: they are timed, the questions/prompts are not known before the test begins, and help or advice is not permitted.

Following the steps below will help you prepare to write a successful essay under these conditions. But let us help you do even more: Attempt a timed practice essay at home and then bring it to the KSU Writing Center to discuss how you can improve before your exam.

READ THE DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY

Determine what type of writing you are being asked to do: interpretive, relational, or informative.

- Interpretative writing supports thinking using evidence.
Keywords: *assess, evaluate, analyze, support, argue, consider*
- Relational writing finds connections or explains relationships among concepts.
Keywords: *compare, use, apply, distinguish, contrast*
- Informative writing presents facts and/or demonstrates knowledge. It also can include performing informative or relational tasks.
Keywords: *describe, illustrate, explain, demonstrate, define, summarize*

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who will be reading your essay (your instructor or test reviewers)?
- Should you use first person (*I, my, etc.*)?
 - If the prompt or question asks you to state your opinion and/or requires you to provide your own observations or experience as evidence, then you should use first person.
 - If you do use first person, write with confidence: avoid phrases like *I think* or *in my opinion*.
- How will you manage your time?
 - Before you begin writing, note how much time you plan to spend on individual tasks or sections of your essay.

DEVELOP A THESIS STATEMENT

Your thesis statement provides your claim; it must directly answer or respond to the exam question or prompt.

PLAN YOUR ESSAY

Create a brief outline to ensure you won't forget to include essential information.

- List the main points you will use to support your thesis. (Each main point will become a body paragraph as explained in next section.)
- Determine an order for your main points. Consider organizing by . . .
 - Importance: most to least or least to most important
 - Complexity: most to least or least to most complex
 - Chronology: order of occurrence
 - Question and answer: problem/question, then proposed solution/answer

Sample outline:
Introduction
Thesis statement
Body paragraph 1
Main point
Evidence
Body paragraph 2
Main point
Evidence
Conclusion
Final reflection

BEFORE YOU START WRITING, REVIEW YOUR OUTLINE AND THE EXAM DIRECTIONS

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your thesis provide a clear answer/response to the question or prompt?
- Does the main idea and evidence of each body paragraph support the thesis?
- Do you need to re-order your outline?

WRITE YOUR BODY PARAGRAPHS

Use the “MEAL plan” to organize body paragraphs.

Main idea: Typically, the main idea is expressed in a topic sentence.

Evidence: Support the main idea. Depending on the question’s instructions, this may mean citing course materials; explaining key terms, concepts, or events; or providing examples from experience or research.

Analysis: Clarify the *how*, *why*, or *who cares* of your evidence.

Link: Connect the paragraph (your main point) to your thesis.

For more detailed information, see our handout “Organizing Body Paragraphs with the MEAL Plan.”

WRITE YOUR INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION LAST

Introduction

In your introduction paragraph, begin with the general and end with the specific. Your introduction should provide the following:

- key aspects of the prompt and relevant background information
- the thesis statement – your clear answer/response to the question or prompt

Conclusion

Your conclusion should wrap up your essay and reiterate (in different words) your thesis. In your conclusion paragraph, begin with the specific and end with the general.

REVIEW AND PROOFREAD

- Read your entire essay once from start to finish to make sure everything makes sense.
- Read your entire essay again, starting with your *last* sentence. This helps you focus on sentence-level errors instead of content.
- Think of common errors you’ve made in the past and look at each sentence specifically for those issues.

VISIT WRITINGCENTER.KENNESAW.EDU TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR ONE-ON-ONE ASSISTANCE.
THE KSU WRITING CENTER: NOT BECAUSE YOU CAN’T WRITE . . . BUT BECAUSE YOU DO.