

Analyze – examine critically to show essential features

Criticize – point out strong and weak points (evaluate)

Compare – show difference and similarities between two or more things

Define – give a clear, detailed, and precise meaning (who or what, never when or where)

Describe – list characteristics. Can also mean discuss, explain, identify, or give account of.

Discuss – present essentials and their relationships (comment)

Elaborate – develop theme or idea in greater detail

Evaluate – appraise carefully, giving positive and negative aspects (critique)

Explain – clarify and interpret details of the problem, theory, etc. Present a step-by-step account of or analysis (how and why).

Illustrate – explain or clarify by giving clear, pertinent examples

List – set down under each other a series of facts, names, dates, etc. Write a series of numbered items.

Outline – organize facts by arranging them in a series of headings and subheadings to show relationships

Rev 07/12

ESSAY EXAMINATIONS

*from the
Effective Study Series*

provided by
GCSU Counseling Services

(478) 445-5331
210 Wellness and Recreation Center
www.gcsu.edu/studentlife/counseling

Essay examinations require effort to be well-constructed and properly answered. They require you to recall material (rather than simply recognizing a correct answer), organize it, and effectively express your thoughts in written form. On the other hand, they also allow for independent thinking and your unique expression of ideas.

Regardless of whether you fear them or love them, the **following hints** should help to improve your performance on essay exams.

Spend a few minutes getting organized. Find out what task is before you and how you are going to approach it.

- Briefly look over the entire test.
- If you have a choice as to which questions to answer, make your decision quickly.
- Allot your time based on the point value of the questions. If one question is worth half of the total points, plan to spend half of the total time on that question. Don't get caught with questions left, but no time to answer them!

Begin a "memory dump" for the questions you plan to answer. On a separate piece of paper, jot down facts, ideas, concepts, etc. related to each question. No need to be organized at this point – you can do that when you begin actually writing. Add to these lists whenever additional material pops into your mind – even while answering another question. If you don't write it down, you might not remember it when you need it.

Answer the easiest questions first if you have that option. This will give you confidence, help you relax, trigger your mind to begin working more efficiently, and help to bring back more of the total course content.

Read the directions carefully. Ask questions if you are unsure of content or procedure.

Read each question carefully and respond according to what is asked.

Before you begin writing, prepare a short outline of the points you intend to cover (from your memory dump). This will keep you from rambling and help to ensure a complete answer.

Write as coherently as possible, using proper English grammar, one main idea per paragraph, etc.

Make your papers neat and writing legible, using the terminology of the course.

Don't leave any essay question blank. Even if you are unsure of an answer, write something. If you can't recall specifics, give a general answer. Most instructors will give some credit if you try, but will be forced to give a zero if you write nothing.

Try to save a little time for proofreading when you've finished. If you omit an important word, it could change the whole meaning of your answer.

If time runs out before you've finished, use your outline and expand on it as much as you are able. Even if it is not well written, it will tell the instructor that you know more than you were able to write about in the time allotted. You could receive at least partial credit.

If you would like to discuss these and other strategies, a counselor can help you with an individualized plan. Call (478) 445-5331 for an appointment.